

## DOES GOD HAVE A CALENDAR?

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Most of us, I am sure, remember the approach of the millennial marker, more than a decade ago.

We remember how there were many who feared that New Year's Eve 1999 would be heralded by crashing computers, disrupted services, and civilization as we know it grinding to a chaotic halt.

But aside from a few Italian jails, some orbiting commercial satellites, a woman in Maine who had her video store bill mysteriously increased by \$91,000, and a man in Germany who I understand found his bank account increased by six million Deutschmarks—aside from these anomalies, the so-called Y2K catastrophe turned out to be one of history's biggest false alarms.

Early in 1999 Time magazine featured an article, as did many news publications during those months, on the apocalyptic interest being generated by the coming turn of the millennium.

And soon thereafter, a letter to the editor—perhaps seeking to calm the paranoia and speculation of certain ones—offered this response:

“Relax. God does not have a calendar.”

Or does He?

Today we are going to address in depth, in four meetings, what the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy writings teach regarding the delay of Jesus' coming.

We will have questions and answers following the final meeting this afternoon, and I hope you can all stay and participate.

The title of our seminar is, “Last Generation Theology: Is It Biblical?”

If you follow contemporary Adventist theological discussions, perhaps you have noticed how—at least in some circles—the term Last Generation Theology is becoming an epithet.

Punctuated with quotation marks, dismissive scorn, and the taint of implied extremism, this expression is being fingered by various ones among us as one of those belief systems which a balanced, informed Adventist needs to shun.

More recently, considering the tone and emphasis set in Atlanta by our current General Conference President, this tide may be in the process of turning.

Some of you may have noted how one of the prominent Ellen White quotations used by Elder Wilson in his inaugural sermon on July 3 was the famed passage in COL 69:

“Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”

“It is the privilege of the Christian not only to look for, but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. II Peter 3:12.”

In a subsequent statement published by the Adventist News Network, Elder Wilson declared:

“The belief that Christians cannot ‘hasten or delay’ the Second Coming is a misconception.”

“New Adventist president envisions a church marked by prayer, revival,”  
Adventist News Network, Aug. 2, 2010

It has been a long time since any General Conference leader, in particular a General Conference President, made such a statement.

Now what is Last Generation Theology?

Well, they’re a number of premises and conclusions associated with it, but we’re going to focus on the three most important ones, for the purpose of today’s seminar:

That at the opening of the great controversy, Satan declared that the law of God could not be obeyed—and that ever since, the ability of God’s creatures to keep that law (whether in their fallen or unfallen state), has been the central issue of this conflict.

That Jesus came to this earth to demonstrate that even those with a fallen human nature—with its rebellious bent, urges, and desires—can still, through heaven’s imparted strength, live a life of perfect obedience.

That the coming of Jesus has been delayed because God is waiting for an entire generation of faithful Christians to demonstrate how the obedience Christ rendered can be accomplished even in the worst of circumstances, and in the darkest hour, of time and eternity.

Now we’re not going to review these points in their precise order, because they are all so interconnected.

But in this first meeting we are going to examine what the Bible says about the delay of Jesus’ coming, and establish that as the foundation for what we present in the meetings to follow.

One reason we're going to do this—and we're going to talk about this at greater length this afternoon—is because there are those among us who believe that what is called Last Generation Theology is based primarily on a few Ellen White statements—one in particular.

COL 69

“Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”

Well, let's open our Bibles, shall we?

Rev. 7:1-3:

“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the winds should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

“And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,

“Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.”

Now how, according to the Bible, does this sealing process work?

II Cor. 1:21-22:

“Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, in God;  
“Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

Eph. 1:13:

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.”

Eph. 4:30:

“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”

And what, according to this same author in this same context, does the work of the Holy Spirit accomplish in Christian lives?

Eph. 3:16-21:

“That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man;

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith: that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

“May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

“And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that ye ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

“To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen.”

Notice how this passage tells us that the power of the Holy Spirit, whereby the next chapter says we are sealed, enables us to be “filled with all the fullness of God.”

No wonder Ellen White declares in EW 71:

“Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble, must reflect the image of Jesus fully.”

Notice also how this passage from Ephesians declares: “To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus.”

To Him be glory where? In the church.

Now what, according to the Bible, is God’s glory? His character.

Ex. 33:18-19:

“And he (Moses) said, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory.

“And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee.”

Ex. 34:6-7:

“And the Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth,

“Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.”

Now let us consider two of the most dramatic prophecies anywhere to be found in all of Scripture. Both of them are about God’s glory.

Num. 14:21:

“But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.”

Isa. 40:5:

“And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

Notice these guarantees—“as truly as I live,” and “the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

You know, folks, your insurance policy may let you down. Elected officials may let you down. Church pastors may let you down. Even a husband or a wife may let you down.

But when the mouth of the Lord declares something—count on it!!

The Bible is telling us here in these verses that one day the whole world is going to be filled with the glory of God, and all humanity will see it.

Elsewhere the same book describes the contrast which will at last be witnessed between God's glory and the darkness of evil:

Isa. 60:1-2:

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

“For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.”

Now we've already established what God's glory is.

Where is God's glory—His character—going to be revealed?

We already saw how the apostle Paul says, in Ephesians 3:21, that this glory is to be revealed through the church.

Let's listen to another such passage from Paul's writings:

Rom. 8:18-19:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.”

Do you think the world is waiting for Christians to reveal God's character?

Think of all the hypocrisies, all the cruelties, all the injustices, perpetuated by so-called Christians.

Come with me to Manhattan's Upper East Side and hear thoughtful men and women speak of such things.

And through all their cynical and sarcastic words you hear the silent anguish, the cry of the heart for a consistent demonstration of self-sacrificing holiness.

So when we come again to the book of Revelation, and encounter the first angel's message, with its summons to "fear God and give glory to Him," we can safely conclude that this refers to a demonstration of godly character through God's people.

Rev. 10:7:

"But in the days of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished."

Notice how it says "in the days of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound."

It is very important that we understand this. This verse is not speaking about a specific, brief moment in time, like when Jesus comes in the clouds.

"In the days of the seventh angel" implies a period of time, not a moment of time.

This is similar to the statement we find in Daniel 2:44, speaking of the time when the ten powers which conquered imperial Rome would be reigning:

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed."

The words in both these passages speak of a period of time, not a moment of time. This is a process we are looking at here.

Revelation chapter 10, verse 7 declares that "in the days of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished."

What is the mystery of God?

Col. 1:26-29:

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints:

"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

"Whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily."

Three points stand out in this passage:

The mystery of God the apostle is speaking of is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Verse 29 is clear that this is a reference to Christ working in the believer, not merely among believers as certain ones have alleged.

The task of presenting every man “perfect in Christ Jesus” does not refer to a mere declaration of righteousness while people continue sinning. This is clear, once again, from verse 29, where Paul says he is laboring toward the goal of perfection in Christ, “striving”—in his words—“according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.”

This is also clearly something additional to Paul’s work for others.

After speaking of his goal of presenting everyone perfect in Christ Jesus, he says, “whereunto I also labor.”

In other words, the work he’s talking about in verse 28 is different from the work he’s talking about in verse 29.

In verse 28 he is talking about his work for others. In verse 29 he is talking about his personal striving for a perfect character.

This, brothers and sisters, is the mystery of God which the book of Revelation says will be finished in the days of the seventh angel, when he begins to sound with his trumpet.

The character of Christ, worked out within the hearts and lives of His people, will at last be complete.

And then, as Rev. 11:15 assures us:

Rev. 11:15:

“The kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever.”

So, does God have a calendar? Yes He does. He has a character calendar.

And according to the Bible, it is this calendar that is presently holding up the coming of Jesus.

Years ago I read a very sad book by a former Pentecostal minister named Austin Miles, titled Don’t Call Me Brother.

This man, for a time, had been associated with the work of the infamous PTL ministry of Jim and Tammy Bakker.

And because of the rampant hypocrisy, financial corruption, and blatant sexual immorality Miles had encountered in that ministry and throughout the Pentecostal movement, he had ended up leaving the pulpit, giving up Christianity, and returning to his career as a circus ringmaster.

I understand that Miles has since returned to the church and has started preaching again.

But I believe some of his final comments in this book—this memoir of spiritual dissolution—speak pointedly both to the Christian dilemma and to the “earnest expectation of the creature” which we read earlier in Romans chapter 8, waiting for a time when Christian deeds will finally match Christian words.

As I quote from the final chapter of Miles’ book, please bear in mind that this man has probably never heard of Ellen White.

And I doubt seriously he has ever heard of Last Generation Theology, M.L. Andreasen, or any Adventist luminaries of recent or past decades.

But listen to what he says:

“The Bible says that when Christ returns, He will come for the church, ‘that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish’ (Eph. 5:27). This would explain why Christ has consistently been a no-show.

“At the moment, the church of Jesus Christ sits on a rotting foundation. All other churches built on the existing foundations will crumble as well. . . . God may see that as necessary, while He waits for a new generation to emerge, young people He can work through, a generation that will bring back honesty and integrity. As a new breed of ministers rise up, we may finally be able to hear what Christ really wanted to say, in a church ‘without spot or blemish.’”

Austin Miles, *Don’t Call Me Brother* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), pp. 311,315-316.

We have seen how Scripture predicts the very demonstration of character for which Austin Miles waits.

And Ellen White echoes these Biblical predictions in the following statement:

COL 415-416:

“The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

“The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness.”