

Why The Urgency?

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INTRODUCTION

It was February 2008, and the time for the arrival of our second child was drawing near. That year, February, and the eight months leading up to it had been a particularly busy season for me. I was part of a team trying to develop the curriculum for a new missions program. During this time, it seemed like I was always in meetings. My life would have made for good Dr. Seuss material. Meetings in the morning, meetings at night, meetings in the office, meetings in flight; meetings in the coffee shops, meetings in the mall, meetings at Starbucks, would you like your latte Grande or Tall? Meetings... meetings...meetings.

In between meetings, I fed and watered horses, changed dirty diapers, mowed the grass, and tried hard to actually get out of bed in the morning without hitting the snooze button ten times. In late January, we made a move from one house to another. Yes, life was busy. Of course, during this season we never completely forgot that a baby was on the way very soon. My wife's beautiful stomach, growing daily with newness of life, made sure of that.

However, there were many stretches of time when the routine and rigor of life simply dulled us to the reality that our culture as a family was about to shift radically—and soon. Soon the number of dirty diapers to be changed in a day was about to double. Soon there would be two baths to give at night instead of one. Soon there would be two children to load up in car seats instead of one. Soon we would be vacuuming up twice as many cheerios in the living room as before. Little did we realize then that before long we would find ourselves spending much of our time simply trying to keep our children from mutual destruction over the weightiest of issues: teddy bears, which books to read, and who gets to have cereal in the pink bowl instead of the green. What began as a subtle whisper in the first trimester – “change is coming” – became a blaring trumpet by the third: “change is upon you!” Nevertheless, even as we progressed deeper into the “preggy-hug” stage, the hustle and the bustle, *meetings*, still had a sly way of driving the impending changes to the back of our consciousness.

It was February 27, and everything was business as usual. As I walked out of a meeting that had just finished, the call came: “Honey, my water just broke.” Suddenly, the labor pains were upon us. Just over twelve hours later, we welcomed our second little girl into the world.

BIRTH PANGS AND THE END OF THE AGE

Birth stands in a category of its own. Few events in life so dramatically display such a wide range of emotions; at such climactic levels; from such a broad assortment of people; in such a short amount of time. I have now observed my wife bring three children into the world. The tears from her eyes – a mixture of joyful expectation and pain – during the birth of our third daughter tells the story that every

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mother understands by experience: the process of labor is intense, rigorous, and hard work. It requires a great deal of perseverance. And yet, the end for which it exists is glorious. The joy of holding a child for the first time quickly eclipses the memory of the labor pains. Or so I am told.

It is little wonder, then, that Jesus seizes the “labor pains” metaphor (*Mt. 24:8*) to describe the most difficult time in history, when the earth will be so “thoroughly shaken” that it will “reel like a drunkard” (*Is. 24:19-20*): the years leading up to His Second Coming at the end of the age (*Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 17, 21*). The “present evil age,” as Paul describes it (*Gal. 1:4*), is on its way out, and the righteous “age to come” (*Mt. 12:32*) draws closer and closer. When Jesus returns, the baby conceived in the heart of God – the earth coming under the righteous dominion of Jesus (*Rev. 11:15*) – will have finally arrived into the world. When Jesus returns, He will speak the word of life (*Jn. 5:25; 1 Th. 4:13-18*) and the saints will come forth from the womb of the earth (*Is. 26:19*) with brand new bodies (*Rom. 8:23*) as resurrected sons and daughters (*Lk. 20:34-36*). The hour of greatest pain for the people of God will, suddenly and climactically, become their hour of greatest exuberance as Jesus parts the sky in glory (*Mt. 24:30-31*). This is the “blessed hope” that we wait for patiently: “the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (*Tit. 2:13*).

HOW CLOSE ARE WE?

The Scriptures are clear that Jesus will return at a time that the Father has sovereignly set by His own authority (*Ac. 1:7; 1 Tim. 6:15*). The crucial question is: How close might we actually be to that appointed time? Do we have solid grounds for believing that Jesus will actually return in our lifetime or that of our children? Are we at the Daniel Institute simply another bunch of “end-times crazies”? After all, life seems to be going on “business as usual,” doesn’t it? What reasons do we have to believe that Jesus might be on the verge of disrupting our “meetings,” and that the age to come is about to be born? Why should we believe with any real conviction that this generation is any different from those that have preceded it the last two thousand years? Why should we adjust our priorities? There really are no big changes coming, right?

The Daniel Institute has been founded on the conviction that we are actually living in the last generation of this present evil age, and that Jesus’ bodily return and the “restoration of all things” (*Ac. 3:21*) is actually at hand. In other words, we are convinced that the “baby” of the Messianic age is about to be born. We do not know exact timelines. However, we do believe the Day of the Lord is at hand, and that at the very least, many of our children will see Jesus’ return.

There are many different segments and streams of the Body of Christ who believe and teach on some level that we are in the last days and that Jesus’ return is near. Sometimes their case is presented in a coherent way, sometimes not. In what follows, we want to highlight four points whose cumulative weight should cause all of us in the Body of Christ to live with great urgency and

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dramatically readjust our priorities. In the words of the apostle Peter: “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.” (1 Pt. 4:7, ESV).

A. Every Generation Should Live with Urgency in Light of the Coming Judgment

The first point is that in every generation the church should live with urgency in light of the Day of the Lord, irrespective of its actual historical proximity to Jesus’ return. The Bible is clear that as soon as the gospel was proclaimed to Eve in its earliest embryonic form in *Genesis 3:15*, the saints have always been urgent and expectant about the Day of the Lord and the coming of the Messiah. In Genesis, the Messiah is identified and promised as God’s divinely-ordained instrument for issuing the fatal blow that would “crush the head” of Satan and purge his wicked influence from the created order forever (*Gn. 3:14–15*). This Messianic “Seed” would first suffer a minor wound at the hands of the serpent, but as God’s conqueror and champion this Seed would ultimately have the final victory, conquering the evil one and squelching mankind’s rebellion, and reinstating the glory of the Garden—the kingdom of God—on the earth now cursed because of man’s disobedience (*Gn. 3:14–15*).

The earliest saints had no reason to believe that the promised Seed would not come in their lifetime. Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser’s exegesis of Genesis 4:1 indicates that Eve may have named Cain because of her hope that he might be the promised Seed who would crush the serpent’s head and overturn the order of death on the earth. [1]

Enoch proclaimed the Day of the Lord and the Messiah’s eschatological coming with great conviction:

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” *Jd. 14-15, emphasis mine*

Enoch’s conviction of the Day of the Lord is what motivated his righteous life that was pleasing before God (*Heb. 11:5*). Like Eve, he had no reason to believe that he would not see the Day of Judgment in his lifetime. If Enoch, the seventh from Adam (!), lived with urgency concerning the Day of the Lord in his lifetime, what about the saints in this generation? Was Enoch simply an “end-time nut” because of his conviction and proclamation of the Day of the Lord? Not at all. His life was a sweet aroma to God.

It also seems that Noah received his name, which sounds like the Hebrew word for “comfort,” because his father Lamech believed that Noah might be the promised Messianic Seed who would reverse the curse of the Fall:

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When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, “He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.” *Gn. 5:28-29*

Lamech’s hope was not that his son would turn out to be a skilled boat-maker! He shared the same hope that his grandfather Enoch had passed on to his own father Methuselah, and which Methuselah had passed on to him. His hope was that Noah might be the One that God had promised to send to restore everything that had been lost in the Fall.

Moses sang about the overturning of death in the Day of the Lord (*Ps. 90*). David sang with passion and conviction about the Day of the Lord (*e.g. Ps. 1, 5, 37, 91, etc.*), and knew that only the Messiah’s return would result in Israel’s permanent inheritance of the land (*Ps. 95; Heb. 4*). Several hundred years even before the Messiah showed up on the scene the first time, the prophets Isaiah (*Is. 13:6, 7*), Ezekial (*Ezek. 30:3*), Joel (*Joel 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14*), Obadiah (*Obad. 15*), Zephaniah (*Zeph. 1:14*), boldly proclaimed the nearness of the Day of the Lord. Unlike Daniel, who later received understanding that the Messiah’s eschatological coming still awaited in the distant future (*cf. Dan. 9, 12*), David and these prophets in their day did not have this information. They had no reason to doubt that the promised Seed might come in their lifetime.

What about the New Testament? Jesus knew from Daniel (*Dan. 2, 7, 9, 12*) that the eschatological kingdom of God would not be established on the earth until the Messiah came in power at the end of the age. Nevertheless, what did He do? Just like the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament, He called people to repent because the kingdom of God was “near” or “at hand” (*Mt. 4:17*). *Luke 10* makes it clear that in Jesus’ mind “the kingdom of God is at hand” meant the Messianic Kingdom to be established eschatologically in the Day of the Lord:

When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. *Lk. 10:8-12, emphasis mine*

Was Jesus an “end-times nut” because he proclaimed the Day of the Lord with urgency and boldness, knowing that the establishment of his kingdom on the earth on that Day still awaited a future generation?

Although Daniel prophesied a gap between the Messiah’s first and second coming (*Dan. 9:26-27*), it was not made known to him precisely how long that gap would last. Hence, once Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, His apostles, like the saints of the Old Testament, had no reason to doubt that Jesus would return and set up His kingdom on the earth in their lifetime. Consequently, they too

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proclaimed with sincerity and boldness that Jesus' return and the Day of the Lord were at hand. Even a cursory reading of the epistles reveals that the New Testament church not only believed that Jesus was going to return in their lifetime, but lived with that strong conviction. John assures readers of his first epistle that "... the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining" (*1 Jn. 2:8*), and that readers of the book of Revelation should take its message to heart "because the time is near" (*Rev. 1:3*). James warned his readers "to be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near" (*Ja. 5:8*). Paul told the Romans to love one another because "the night is nearly over; the day is almost here" (*Rom. 13:12*). The author of Hebrews tells readers to "encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (*Heb. 10:25*).

Paul's belief that he was living in the generation of the Lord's return is expressed perhaps most clearly in *1 Corinthians 7*:

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of this world, as if not engrossed in them. For the world in its present form is passing away. (*1 Cor. 7:29-31, emphasis mine*)

This conviction that Jesus would return in their generation dramatically affected the lifestyle of the early church: the way they lived, loved, worked, and prayed (Luke 21:36; Rom. 13:8–14; 1 Cor. 7:29). It also engendered the poignant sense of urgency that fueled the rapid expansion of the church in the first century.

Eve had urgency about the Day of the Lord; Enoch had urgency about the Day of the Lord; Lamech had urgency about the Day of the Lord; Moses had urgency about the Day of the Lord; David had urgency about the Day of the Lord; the prophets had urgency about the Day of the Lord; Jesus had urgency about the Day of the Lord; the apostles had urgency about the Day of the Lord. All of these people had urgency even though God knew the whole time that the kingdom's establishment and the coming judgment still awaited the distant future. Was God displeased with them because of their urgency? If these guys were "end-times crazies," I want to be on their team. So here is the question: Did they miss it? The answer is no: they *got* it, and we today are the ones who have missed it. Irrespective of where a generation actually is in terms of its historical proximity to the Day of the Lord and the Second Coming, the church is mandated by God to proclaim that the kingdom of God, the Day of the Lord, and the Messiah's return – concepts that are inextricably bound to one another – are at hand. Every church and every disciple of Messiah Jesus is mandated by God to pray, proclaim, and live as if the intense events of *Matthew 24* could begin unfolding tomorrow. The Day of the Lord is at hand.

B. Several Unfulfilled Bible Prophecies Require Jews in the Land of Israel

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This leads us to the next point: there are a significant number of unfulfilled Bible passages that presuppose the following conditions for their fulfillment:

- 1) a substantial number of Jewish people living in the actual land of Israel and in the actual historical city of Jerusalem
- 2) the city of Jerusalem being the center of the world's attention
- 3) the existence of a functioning Jewish temple in the city of Jerusalem

These passages include but are not limited to: *Isaiah 1:21-31, 29, 33, 40, 52, 59; Daniel 8, 9, 11:40-45, 12; Zephaniah 1:14-2:3; Zechariah 12-14; and possibly Ezekiel 38-39*, depending how one interprets the timing of the Gog/Magog war; *Malachi 3; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 17, 21; and 2 Thessalonians 2*. These passages, moreover, presuppose Jews in the land of Israel primarily in a state of unbelief, and primarily relate to God's plan to discipline the nation and draw her to repentance by means of the pressures she will face in the last days.

In 70 AD, armies led by the soon-to-be Roman Emperor Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and once again most of the Jews in Israel were scattered throughout the four corners of the earth. Peter and Paul died three years before Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus. Hence, Paul's teaching in *2 Thessalonians 2* presupposes the existence of the Jewish Temple, which still existed when he wrote that epistle. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD is likely the main reason the church began to experience a decline in eschatological urgency following the death of the apostles in the first century. The historical and contextual conditions for the above mentioned prophecies related to Israel at the end of the age were no longer in place. In reality, this should never have been an excuse for the church to retreat from its proclamation of the Day of the Lord and the Messiah's Second Coming. The reason for the delay in Jesus' coming was because God was flinging open a door for the gospel to go forth to the Gentiles. Gentiles, too, needed to hear the only message that could save them from the coming wrath and provide a way for their inclusion in the resurrection of the righteous and the coming Messianic Kingdom. If anything, urgency in the church concerning the Day of the Lord should have increased simply by virtue of the fact that "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (*Rom. 13:11*).

Whatever excuses we may have used in the past, however, are certainly no longer valid today. The formation of the state of Israel in 1948 and Israel's recovery of Jerusalem in 1967 means that the prerequisite conditions for the signs Jesus and Paul mentioned are almost once again in place. Only those who do not read the newspaper would deny that Israel is once again at the center stage of the world's attention. All that remains is for the Jewish temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Will the temple be rebuilt? This is a controversial question, especially in light of the tense political climate of the Middle East today. However, if we hold to the inerrancy, infallibility, and integrity of the Scriptures, then the answer to this question must be yes, because Paul's argument in *2 Thessalonians 2*, which

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is based primarily on his exegesis of passages in Daniel, presupposes the existence of a literal temple in Jerusalem.

Before closing this section, something important deserves to briefly be mentioned here. To say that there are a significant number of unfulfilled Bible passages that presuppose Jews in the land of Israel for their fulfillment, is *not* to say that God supports everything that the modern nation-state of Israel does. Nor is it so say that the mass immigration of Jews to the land over the last century is the fulfillment of the prophecies that relate to Israel's eschatological return from exile. The vast majority of the passages that relate to Jews being re-gathered to the land in the last days, recount the Jews returning to the land 1) *in a state of righteousness* (i.e. they have repented and believed the gospel); and 2) in context to the Messiah's return and the establishment of His kingdom (e.g. *Deut. 4, 30, 32; Ps. 14, 147; Is. 11, 27, 35, 40-43, 49, 54, 60, 66; Jer. 30-33; Ezek. 11, 20, 36-37; Am. 9; Mic. 2*). This has sobering implications: God has not brought Jews back to the land of Israel as the primary fulfillment of the re-gathering passages, but to *set the stage* for the fulfillment of those passages. In other words, God has gathered Jews to the land to discipline and humble the nation with the intention of making her worthy – on *His* terms through the gospel – of inheriting a position of worldwide leadership under the Messiah in the coming Kingdom of God.

In light of this, “replacement theologians” are horrendously off the mark when they claim that God no longer has a place in His plan of redemption for ethnic Israel. At the same time, there are many Christian Zionists and dispensationalists who support Israel in ways that – despite their sincere intentions – are diametrically opposed to what God is actually doing with the nation of Israel according to the Scriptures. Paul centered his prayers for Israel on the salvation of Jews through the proclamation of the gospel (*Rom. 10:1*). His focus was not on financially propping up a secular nation state that still hates God. Ironically enough, much of the money that Christians give to the secular state of Israel goes toward the persecution of Messianic Jews who are trying to share the gospel in Israel! We must “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (*Ps. 122:6*) in a way that agrees with God's definition of peace for Jerusalem. That means praying for the salvation of Jews, because their salvation is linked to the restoration not only of Jerusalem but that of the entire earth (*Is. 40-66; Rom. 9-11; etc.*).

The fact that Jews now control the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, and the fact that they are surrounded by nations that hate her intensely, are a *major* signpost that God is getting ready to fulfill the prophecies that relate to her final chastisement just before the Messiah returns. The urgency of the hour must burn in the hearts of Jesus' disciples now more than ever. The Day of the Lord is at hand.

C. The Earliest Christian Writers after the Apostles Taught the Concept of the “Millennial Sabbath”

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Another reason the church should have urgency concerning the return of Jesus and the Day of the Lord, is that a significant number of the earliest Christian writers following the death of the apostles taught the concept of the "Millennial Sabbath." In the words of Tim Warner,

The early Church also closely linked the six day creation week with eschatology. In fact, their whole eschatological system, called "Chiliasm" (millennialism), was based on the creation week. God made everything in six days, and rested on the Sabbath. The creation week is not only historic, but also prophetic of mankind's toil under the curse for six millennia. Man will find "rest" in the seventh millennium, when Jesus Christ returns to rule the nations from Jerusalem and rid the earth of its curse. The earliest post-Apostolic Christian writers, whose eschatology can be determined with any certainty, consistently held to Chiliasm. These are the writers who lived contiguous with the age of the Apostles, some of whom knew the Apostles personally.

Early Chiliast writers appealed to Scripture and Apostolic tradition to support their Chiliasm. However, later writers began appealing to philosophy instead of the traditions handed down by the churches the Apostles founded. They increasingly employed allegorical interpretation in their bid to overturn Chiliasm and replace it with a more sophisticated eschatology, palatable to the Greek philosophical mind....

The basic principle on which Chiliasm was based is that a prophetic "Day" in certain contexts means a thousand years. That is, the literal meaning of the word "day" can be either a twenty-four hour period, or in some cases it may be a "millennium." This is not the same as interpreting the word "day" in a non-literal way. Rather, it adds another literal meaning to the word, "day," when viewed from God's perspective.

Here we will let some of these early church voices speak for themselves:

Epistle of Barnabas (Late 1st Century):

"And God made in six days the works of His hands, and made an end on the seventh day, and rested on it, and sanctified it." Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, "He finished in six days." This implieth that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years. And He Himself testifieth, saying, "Behold, to-day will be as a thousand years." Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished. "And He rested on the seventh day." This meaneth: when His Son, coming [again], shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the-sun, and the moon, and the stars, then shall He truly rest on the seventh day." (Epistle of Barnabas, XV) [\[2\]](#)

Irenaeus (AD. 120-202):

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"[He gives this] as a summing up of the whole of that apostasy which has taken place during six thousand years.* "For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded. And for this reason the Scripture says: "Thus the heaven and the earth were finished, and all their adornment. And God brought to a conclusion upon the sixth day the works that He had made; and God rested upon the seventh day from all His works." This is an account of the things formerly created, as also it is a prophecy of what is to come. For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years; and in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousand year." ... the whole apostasy of six thousand years, and unrighteousness, and wickedness, and false prophecy, and deception;* for which things' sake a cataclysm of fire shall also come [upon the earth]. (Against Heresies V. XXVIII, 3) [\[3\]](#)

Commodianus (AD. 240):

"This has pleased Christ, that the dead should rise again, yea, with their bodies; and those, too, whom in this world the fire has burned [martyrs], when six thousand years are completed,..." (Instructions of Commodianus, LXXIX) [\[4\]](#)

Methodius (AD. 260-312):

"For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing that is past as a watch in the night." For when a thousand years are reckoned as one day in the sight of God, and from the creation of the world to His rest is six days, so also to our time, six days are defined, as those say who are clever arithmeticians. Therefore, they say that an age of six thousand years extends from Adam to our time. For they say that the judgment will come on the seventh day, that is in the seventh thousand years." (Extracts From The Work on Things Created. IX) [\[5\]](#)

Lactantius (AD. 260-330):

"Therefore let the philosophers, who enumerate thousands of ages from the beginning of the world, know that the six thousandth year is not yet completed, and that when this number is completed the consummation must take place, and the condition of human affairs be remodeled for the better ... Therefore, since all the works of God were completed in six days, the world must continue in its present state through six ages, that is, six thousand years. ... And again, since God, having finished His works, rested the seventh day and blessed it, at the end of the six thousandth year all wickedness must be abolished from the earth,* and righteousness reign for a thousand years; and there must be tranquility and rest from the labors which the world now has long endured. ... "For six thousand years have not yet been completed, and when this number shall be made up, then at length all evil will be taken away, that justice alone may reign." (The Epitome of the Divine Institutes, Chapter 70) [\[6\]](#)

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The exegetical basis of the Millennial Sabbath as taught by the early church was rooted in passages such as *Genesis 2:16-17*, *2 Pet. 3:1-9*, *Psalms 90:4*, *Psalms 95:8-11*, *Romans 8:18-25*, *Hebrews 3:1-4:13*, and *Revelation 20:1-4*. For an excellent exegesis of these passages as they related to the idea of the Millennial Sabbath in the early church, please see the following article at <http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/chiliasm.pdf>.

This brings us to the following question: How do we reconcile the early church's teaching on the Millennial Sabbath – which they seemingly attributed to apostolic tradition – with the picture portrayed by the New Testament, where we see the apostles' conviction and hope that Jesus would return in their lifetime (see point A above)? Did the apostles teach that Jesus was coming back in their generation, or did the apostles teach that Jesus would return two thousand years after His first coming? The most plausible explanation in my mind revolves around point B above and the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70AD.

In *Hebrews 3-4*, we see the author of Hebrews laying out the concept of a "Sabbath rest for the people of God" (*Heb. 4:9*) being the Messianic Kingdom to be established at Jesus' return. However, there is no reference in Hebrews to the precise amount of time each "day" would last. Hebrews seems to have been written while the Jewish sacrificial system was still in place. It was most likely written sometime in the 60s AD. [7] Paul and Peter were killed three years before the temple was destroyed in 70AD. When the Temple was destroyed and the conditions for the prophecies mentioned in Point B above were no longer in place, the early church would have been forced to conclude on some level that Jesus' return most likely awaited a date beyond their lifetime. The amount of time between the first and second coming would have been a huge question burning on the hearts of many believers after 70AD.

However, God did not leave them in a state of guessing for long. In *John 16:12-13*, Jesus told the apostles:

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Here we see Jesus telling the apostles that some of the revelation and understanding that He wanted them to receive would not come directly from Him, but through the Holy Spirit at a later time.

During the persecutions instigated against Christians by the Roman Emperor Domitian in the 90s AD, the apostle John received the contents of the Book of Revelation through the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus had promised, John was now learning something new through the Spirit. While there are many passages in the Scriptures that speak of the Messiah's kingdom at the end of age, only in *Revelation 20* do we learn how long the "Sabbath rest" of the kingdom, or the "seventh day," actually lasts before the Final Judgment: one thousand years. The logical inference of this information is that as the

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“Sabbath rest” of the coming kingdom will be a thousand years in duration, so too each “day” leading up to it would also be one thousand years in duration. As a Jew familiar with the Old Testament, Peter knew the truth of *Psalms 90:4* quite well: “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (*2 Pt. 3:8*). However, at the time Peter wrote *2 Peter*, he obviously knew that time in general is relative to God, but he may not have known that on God’s timeline a “day” was prophetic for an actual one thousand years. It seems reasonable to surmise that when this revelation came to the apostle John through the Spirit, it then became part of the apostolic tradition that John handed down to his disciples, who then passed it down to others until it ultimately found its way into the early writings of people like Irenaeus, Commodianus, Methodius, and others.

If we accept this early church teaching on the Millennial Sabbath, the next question becomes: Where are we today located on the timeline of the Sabbath “week”? On this issue, I encourage readers to read an article by Tim Warner called “The Coming Millennial Sabbath Part II: Biblical Chronology from Creation to the Second Coming” at <http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/chronology.pdf>. It is by far the best, most Bible-honoring, and most well-thought-through biblical chronology I have ever read. I will end this section with Warner’s own sobering remarks:

The whole period of mankind’s struggle under the curse must run for 6000 years. It was 2000 years from the Creation to Abraham’s birth. It was 2000 more years to Christ’s crucifixion. And it will be 2000 more years until the 2nd coming.

What remains less certain is precisely how to connect this timeline to the Gregorian calendar. The crucifixion is commonly dated anywhere from AD 27 – AD 33. Assuming this range to be correct, adding the 2000 years of Hosea’s prophecy, the 7th Millennium should begin somewhere between AD2027 – AD2033, and the seven years of tribulation somewhere between AD2020 – AD2027. However, after examining the discrepancies between secular dates for the Persian kings and the Biblical data, I don’t have a lot of confidence in secular dates, even those given for Jesus’ crucifixion. I would not be surprised if they also turn out to be wrong.

My intention in this paper is not to set a date for the second coming, but to show that the biblical chronology is internally consistent, and it strongly supports the chiliasm (millennialism) of the early Church. If some, who are confident about the date of the crucifixion, wish to link this chronology to the Gregorian calendar and establish some date for the second coming, that is their business. I neither support nor deny any such date. I will only say that Jesus is coming very soon. This is the last generation. He will come on Yom Kippur, most likely within the next couple of decades. It’s time to disengage from our pursuits of this age, rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, and prepare for the age to come. Jesus said there will be “great tribulation” before He

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returns. And we know from both Daniel and Revelation that the world will be in turmoil for the last 7 years of this age. That doesn't give us much time.

Brothers and sisters, if Irenaus as a representative of our ancient spiritual ancestors were sitting in our pews today, he would be shouting one message to the church every Sunday morning: "Wake up! The Day of the Lord is at hand!"

D. What the Spirit is Saying

The final point I want to highlight relates to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church. In *John 10*, Jesus says,

The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice ... *My sheep listen to my voice*; I know them, and they follow me. *Jn. 10:3–5, 27, emphasis mine*

As He has always done, the Holy Spirit speaks to Jesus' people today in many different ways. Just as He did with the saints in the Bible, sometimes He speaks to us through dreams, visions, sermons, the "still small voice," circumstances, the created order, other people, and many other ways. Of course, the most important way God speaks to us today is through the Scriptures, and if any of these more subjective types of experiences ever go against anything taught in Scripture, they must immediately be discarded. The Bible is our supreme, infallible authority. Every subjective experience must be tested and measured by the Scriptures. Having said that, the fact that we have the Bible does not mean that God has stopped speaking in the same ways that we see in the Bible! It is beyond the scope of this paper to get bogged down in arguments pertaining to cessationism – the idea that the Spirit stopped talking to Jesus' sheep or doing anything miraculous with the death of the apostles. Anyone who has been exposed to Christianity outside of the Western world knows the hollowness of such arguments. Try telling most members of the underground church in China that God does not speak through the Holy Spirit and do miracles today, and see what kind of looks you get!

The truth is, the Holy Spirit *is* speaking to the church today in many ways, and His voice on one subject in particular seems to be getting louder and louder: the Second Coming of Jesus and the biblically prophesied events surrounding it. For example, in recent years I have heard a number of stories about how God is speaking to different parts of the Chinese church about both the Gentile harvest among Muslims as well as His heart for Israel (*cf. Rom. 11:25-26*). In 2008, I met with a woman who does ministry in Uganda, and she told me that many Ugandan believers, too, have been hearing from the Holy Spirit about God's heart and plan for the Jewish people. If you talk to Egyptian

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Christians, many of them will tell you about how the Holy Spirit has been speaking to them about preparing for the end-times events outlined in *Isaiah 19*.

If we do not believe what the Holy Spirit is speaking to adults in the church from different cultures and backgrounds, perhaps we might be more convinced by what He has been saying to children. Consider the following testimony sent to me by a friend:

The dream happened in early 2007. A four year old girl (who was the daughter of a prominent youth pastor) had a dream where Jesus appeared to her and said that she was going to be a prophetic voice in the future and that when she needed to say something, He was going to always give her the words to use. He then said that she also never needed to fear for her life because He was coming back soon and was going to meet her in the sky. She was never going to experience death because she would meet him in the clouds. Her parents are pastors at a church that does not emphasize end times or Jesus coming back. This was language that only could have come from Jesus. Her parents were "rocked" by this because they did not think this was true themselves (that Jesus was coming back anytime soon) until their little girl told them.

This is not some story randomly found on the internet, but my friend knows this family personally.

I personally know a significant number of people from different denominational backgrounds who have had some kind of vivid, "that-could-not-have-been-pizza" (!) dreams that on various levels could easily be dubbed "end-times related." This should not surprise us. Did not the prophet Joel tell us that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit, and that this would result in dreams and visions being poured out not only a special class of "big-P" prophets, but even on our "sons," "daughters," "old men," and "young men" (*Joel 2:28; cf. Ac. 2:17*)? God knew that the church would need all the help it could get in light of the coming difficulties.

On a personal level, in 2006, my wife had a dream one night in which she saw Jesus beginning to break through the sky just before she woke up. Just last month, I personally woke up from a dead sleep after a dream in which I heard the most incredibly intense sound of joy I have ever heard, immediately followed by the most incredibly intense sound of terror I have ever heard. In the dream, though I did not see Jesus coming back through the sky, I did briefly see the face of one of my believing friends as he was in the process of being raised from the dead at the Second Coming. He was screaming with joy as this was happening to him. His shout of joy was then immediately followed by a shout of terror. I knew in the dream that the shout of terror was the wicked of the earth being punished also in context to the Second Coming. I woke up from this dream in the middle of the night gasping and with my heart leaping from my chest. For whatever it is worth, both my wife and I are originally from church traditions and backgrounds that are not known for their openness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

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Friends, I have one question: When do we start trusting the Holy Spirit's ability to speak to common people like us despite our weakness? How many dreams must He give before we stop giving all the credit to pizza, and to how many people must He speak before we actually start paying attention? When do we start listening? God is merciful and patient with us. But it is time for the church to wake up. The Day of the Lord is at hand.

CONCLUSION

Many people in the Body of Christ today feel offense arise in their hearts when they hear others talk about the last days with any kind of real conviction. I know that I used to be that way. Formerly, my impression of people who talked about the "Day of the Lord" or studied the end times was similar to my impression of Star Wars fans who stand in long lines for movies dressed like Yoda or C-3PO: they were amusing to watch and listen to, but were not to be taken very seriously. I had seen just enough poor-quality end-times films to be turned off by the whole discussion. I was satisfied in my belief that "Jesus will come back whenever He comes back." Until then, I was going to be "pragmatic" and focus on the Great Commission. However, the more I studied the Scriptures, the more I began to realize that eschatology not only forms one Bible study topic to be discussed among others, but constitutes the interpretive framework presupposed by the *entire* New Testament. This was because the New Testament assumes the gospel of the Old Testament, which is eschatological in orientation from beginning to end.

Here is a question that might put this issue in perspective: If you were Satan and knew that your demise was linked to the Second Coming of Jesus (*Rev. 20:1-3*), what would be the one issue you would spend most of your time and effort trying to create disillusionment over in peoples' minds? Perhaps you would try to foster a scoffing spirit through movies and television? Perhaps you would try to create a trivial spirit over the entire topic, so that people tune out as soon as they hear someone bring it up? Perhaps you would sow seeds of relativism in a culture so that people actually begin believing and acting as if God were not actually going to hold them accountable for their motives and actions one day? Perhaps you would try to discredit the church's witness concerning the Day of the Lord by inciting groups that call themselves "Christian" to do un-Christian things in the name of the end times? Perhaps you would subtly try to keep people so busy – always going from one meeting to the next – that they never stop to think or pray about what it would mean for them and their families if the "end-time crazies" actually turn out to be right after all?

Saints of the Most High God: When did Noah stop feeling foolish for building an ark? We must guard our hearts against the scoffing spirit that Peter said would surface in the last days:

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation..."

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But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. *2 Pt. 3:3-4, 8-9*

In this passage, Peter attributes a scoffing and unwatchful spirit to “evil desires” and a failure to remember God’s mercy toward sinners. God has been restraining from the Day of Wrath because of His great love for human beings, and because He burns with a deep desire for people to repent of their sins. However, at some point, the curtain must close. God will not let the wicked devastate and pillage His creation forever. The Day of the Lord is at hand.

In light of the cumulative weight of the four points mentioned above – not to mention the noticeable increase in earthquakes, wars, and famines throughout the world over the last century (*Mt. 24:6-8*) – we at the Daniel Institute of Prayer and Missions burn with a deep sense of urgency on a number of levels.

First, we ache for the Body of Christ to be braced and prepared more immediately for the “beginning of birth pains” (*Mt. 24:8*), and ultimately for what Jesus calls a time of distress “unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again” (*Mt. 24:21*).

Second, we long for the biblical gospel to go forth in power to those who have never heard it. Jesus promised that the “gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations” before the close of this age (*Mt. 24:14*). Time is running out, and the lost must hear the good news of the kingdom of God before it is too late.

Third, we yearn for the Body of Christ to have biblical clarity as to how God is administrating His purposes among both Jew and Gentile. God is going to draw the wayward nation of Israel back to Himself once and for all in context to a time of unprecedented difficulty for that nation. The Bride of Christ, both Jew and Gentile, has a dynamic role to play in God’s climactic dealings with Jacob’s biological descendants (*Rom. 9-11*). The resurrection of the dead, the earth’s restoration, and Jesus’ Second Coming are ultimately linked to the fullness of the Gentile harvest coming in and Israel’s national repentance (*Rom. 11*). In order for each part of the Body of Christ to faithfully walk out its assignment in this hour, right understanding of what God is doing with and between Jew and Gentile is crucial.

Why the urgency? The Day of the Lord is at hand.

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[1] See Walter Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 37–42.

[2] Epistle of Barnabas, quoted in Tim Warner, *The Coming Millennial Sabbath Part I: Eschatology of the Creation Week* (July, 2009), <<http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/chiliasm.pdf>>, accessed March 2010.

[3] Irenaeus, quoted in Tim Warner, *The Coming Millennial Sabbath Part I: Eschatology of the Creation Week* (July, 2009), <<http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/chiliasm.pdf>>, accessed March 2010.

[4] Commodianus, quoted in Tim Warner, *The Coming Millennial Sabbath Part I: Eschatology of the Creation Week* (July, 2009), <<http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/chiliasm.pdf>>, accessed March 2010.

[5] Methodius, quoted in Tim Warner, *The Coming Millennial Sabbath Part I: Eschatology of the Creation Week* (July, 2009), <<http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/chiliasm.pdf>>, accessed March 2010.

[6] Lactantius, quoted in Tim Warner, *The Coming Millennial Sabbath Part I: Eschatology of the Creation Week* (July, 2009), <<http://www.oasischristianchurch.org/air/chiliasm.pdf>>, accessed March 2010.

[7] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary*. Rev. ed. of: *New Bible companion*. 1990.; Includes index. The Tyndale reference library (659). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.