

## Where Are We Now?

*A look at current events and Seventh-day Adventist eschatology from four experts with unique perspectives.*

*Just glance at today's headlines — or, most likely, tomorrow's — and you can tell we are living in perilous times. But, how close are we to the end, the "eschaton" of Jesus' return? And, what can we do to prepare for this momentous event?*

*Four Adventists with unique perspectives — **Tim H. Aka**, a Chartered Financial Analyst and Associate Treasurer and Investment Manager for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; **Jon Paulien**, veteran Bible scholar and chairman of the department of religion at Loma Linda University; **Gerhard Pfandl**, retired associated director of the Biblical Research Institute; and **Rick Remmers**, a pastor and president of the Chesapeake Conference in the USA's Columbia Union — share their answers to some vital questions. (Answers may have been edited for length and/or clarity.)*

**Question: Where do you personally believe the Adventist Church is in the stream of Bible prophecy?**

**Tim H. Aka:** I believe we are at the **cusp of the outpouring of the Latter Rain**. In accordance to the book of [Joel](#), we are in the middle of a **financial crisis that precedes and prepares God's people to receive the outpouring** of the Holy Spirit. God is working to 'cure' his people of their Laodicean and materialistic state. God has always used an economic crisis to awaken His people to help them remember the purpose for which they were chosen.

**Jon Paulien:** There is no question that the times we now live in have a special, momentous feel. There is a sense that things are getting out of control and that the fate of the planet and all who live in it is at risk. Having said this, when it comes to eschatology Adventist memories are often short. We forget the massive horrors of World War II and the Holocaust. We forget the 1970s, when many scientists felt the environment had fifteen or twenty years left at the most, and we were all facing Mutually Assured Destruction in the Cold War. More recently, many have forgotten [Y2K](#) and how doomed many of us felt shortly after [the terror attacks of] September 11, 2001. When looking at current events in relation to Bible prophecy, one must weigh the present in light of a long-term perspective. There is nothing going on in the world at this moment that guarantees the imminent return of Jesus, though we certainly might wish there were such.

One reason many Adventist people are so enamored of conspiracy theories is that a plain reading of Bible prophecy gives us general guidelines for our times, but often does not speak directly to the specific situations we face now. Great creativity is expended, therefore, in re-reading both the prophecies and current reality to find dubious intersections. Like the New Testament church, we are in a time of waiting, and the delay can be painful.

**Gerhard Pfandl:** According to prophecy we are between [Revelation 6:13 and 14](#).

**Rick Remmers:** We, as Seventh-day Adventists, often refer to living in the last days. I believe this is an accurate understanding of Bible prophecy. The Lord raised up this church at the closing of the 2300 days prophecy in 1844. This concluded the last time prophecy in the Scriptures and brought us into the final period of earth's history. The image from Nebuchadnezzar's dream in [Daniel 2](#) and the historical progression of the

seven churches in [Revelation 2 and 3](#) culminating with the church of Laodicea, along with numerous other lines of prophecy, indicate we are living just prior to the second coming. In addition to the timing we should also pay attention to the mission and purpose God had in establishing this last day church. The three angel's messages of [Revelation 14](#) provide a compelling message and appeal especially needed during this time in history. This includes the everlasting gospel, a mission to all people, the hour of judgment, worship of our Creator, a fallen Babylon, and warnings about worship of the beast and receiving his mark. We have a great privilege in proclaiming this around the world.

### **Q. Is the eschaton to happen soon? If so, why? If not, why not?**

**Pfandl:** If "soon" means in the next 1-2 years, I don't think so. The last day events outlined in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy will need a bit more time than 1-2 years, but can it happen within the next 10-20 years? Yes!

**Aka:** Yes, we are at the beginning stages of the eschaton. Events have started that cannot be reversed. **Economic meltdown is inevitable.** It has been delayed slightly by extraordinary action by governments, but this only makes the collapse more severe and rapid when it does finally take hold. This paves the way for the Latter Rain. Once it begins there is no turning back.

**Remmers:** Jesus Himself addresses this question so well in response to the question from His disciples in [Matthew 24](#). He outlines the various signs indicating His coming is near: wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, false prophets, false christs, lawlessness, etc. Each time we see these happen it is a reminder we are approaching Jesus' return. As I write, the headlines in [USA Today](#) include the following: "ISIS Fighter Executes His Own Mother, Stocks Close Our Week with Worst Start to Year Ever," and "Wintertime Floods Among Costliest Ever – and Price Tag Still Rising." We see the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies on a daily basis.

But Jesus anticipated our desire to know more precisely the timing and cautions us in [verse 36](#), "of that day and hour no one knows." We need to hold specific speculation in check. The signs of His return should be a source of assurance, not of mental torment. Instead, Jesus counsels us to watch ([verse 42](#)). We need to be vigilant and aware of what is taking place so that we are prepared and can be responsive to needs. In [verse 44](#) Jesus tells us, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." When we take Jesus' counsel and live in an ongoing state of readiness the specifics of the when are no longer a difficulty. Our focus is on a daily walk with Jesus where we are always ready to meet Him. And while we wait we are actively engaged in telling others and serving the "least of these." Jesus follows His account of the signs in Matthew 24 with a trilogy of parables in [chapter 25](#) where He describes the active ministry and stewardship of those who are ready and waiting.

Taking Jesus at His word shifts our focus from the question of precisely how soon He will return to being ready every day and actively waiting.

**Paulien:** I truly hope Jesus comes soon. While there is much that is beautiful in this life, at least for some, the acceleration of tragedy and injustice is painful to watch and even more painful to experience (I was a less than a kilometer away when the recent shootings took place in San Bernardino). But more than forty years of pastoral experience has taught me to balance my eager expectation of Jesus' return with a strong focus on the mission that lies before me every day. Like Jesus ([Matt. 24:36](#)), we must ultimately leave the timing to God.

**Q. Was your perspective the same at the beginning of your Adventist experience, or has it changed over time? How have your views changed since the year 2000?**

**Paulien:** I distinctly remember a sermon I preached in 1972, where I gave multiple evidences from science and current events that earth's history had less than twenty years to go. I am also distinctly aware of how wrong I was. Even worse, continually hyping the End without an outcome can kill people's interest in eschatology. That's where things are in most of the Western world. In the United States, Bible prophecy can serve as an "entering wedge" for maybe ten percent of the general population. The rest are turned off by it. In Europe the lack of interest is even more dramatic. People are interested in end of the world issues, but they no longer think Christians have relevant answers. You can only cry "wolf" so many times and people turn you off.

Careful Bible study over many decades has taught me that Bible prophecy was not given to satisfy our curiosity about the future, it was given to teach us how to live as we approach the End. When we experience the eschatological Kingdom Jesus introduced, we are motivated to lay large plans for building up that Kingdom while at the same time living as if He was coming today. That tension is not easy to balance, but it is at the core of preparation for the Second Coming.

**Aka:** The year 2000 marked a major change in geo-political and global economic situation. **It marked a turning point towards the very last days.** Economic winter has arrived. Subsequent events since 2000 have sharpened my understanding of end time prophecies.

**Remmers:** Over the years, my perspective has not substantially changed. As world events unfold there is more detail and many more examples of signs fulfilled that we can look at. Every day that goes by brings us one day closer to the culmination of all things.

The disciples discovered on the Sea of Galilee that when they were with Jesus it did not matter how severe the storm was or how long it would last. They were safe with Him. The storms in our personal lives and around the world will be increasingly fierce. But with Jesus we can always be ready and at peace.

**Q. What events will signal to you that we have reached the last moments of earth's history?**

**Paulien:** In a way, I think this is the wrong question. This is the kind of question the disciples asked in [Matthew 24](#) and its parallels in [Mark 13](#) and [Luke 21](#). To paraphrase them: "What event will signal us that you are about to come and we have reached the last moments of earth's history?" ([Matt. 24:3](#)) Jesus spends the rest of the chapter telling them that wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, persecution and deception are all signs of reality, but not useful for timing the end ([Matt. 24:6-8](#)). The only "sign" of His return that Jesus gives them is the actual coming itself ([Matt. 24:30 – Matt. 24:14](#) is not called a sign and is data that we will not be able to perceive when the time comes). Along the same lines, Ellen White saw that end-time believers will know the time of Jesus' return, but it will only be revealed to them a few hours before the event actually occurs (*Early Writings*, [285-286](#)).

**Aka:** We are entering the final stages of a massive financial crisis that will bring chaos and turmoil into this world. **An economic collapse will signal that we are indeed in the last moments** of earth's history. A stock market crash may be the triggering event that ultimately makes the façade of the economic status quo crumble. Eyes will be opened. Most importantly, **complacency will not be an option.** Choices will have to be made.

**Pfandl:** "When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with Spiritualism, when, under the influence of this threefold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and Republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan, and that the end is near."--

[Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 451.](#)

**Remmers:** The signs given by Jesus will continue and increase in intensity. Increasingly larger geographic areas and population centers will be impacted.

Ultimately **The Great Controversy** ([page 615](#)) explains "a decree will finally be issued against those who hallow the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, denouncing them as deserving of the severest punishment and giving the people liberty, after a certain time, to put them to death.' It goes on to describe Jacob's night of wrestling with a stranger but coming out an overcomer. God's people will go through a similar experience of learning to trust completely in the Lord. His coming rescue is assured and He will come quickly.