

Leader's/User's guide
for the Video Program

The Midnight Cry!

William Miller and the End of the World

Gateway Films
VISION  VIDEO

Supplement to
The Midnight Cry!
 William Miller and the End of the World

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Introduction

The year 200 rapidly approaches. A millennial observance is a big event! It provides a rare landmark for reflection, evaluation and assessing prospects for the future.

In that our counting of years uses the birth of Jesus Christ as the benchmark (AD—*anno domine*—*in the year of the Lord*), it is not surprising that many Christians attach great importance to the close of a millennial period. But dating history from the birth of Christ was based on calculation made in the sixth century by Scythian monk named Dionysius Exiguus, who lived in Rome. It is generally agreed that he did not get it exactly correct and that Jesus was actually born sometime between 4-7 BC.

But you can be sure that as our year 2,000 approaches there will be many predictions setting the time for the return of Jesus Christ in connection with this millennial observance. It also happened when the year 1,000 approached.

The Midnight Cry is a carefully researched and documented program about another time when devout believers felt confident that they were able to discern and proclaim the time of Christ's return and the consummation of history.

For all who are concerned about the Bible's teaching on this subject, we offer the video program and this companion guide as a resource for study, reflection and discussion.

A.K. Curtis

Sampling of Observations on the Second Coming Over the Centuries

From the time of the earliest Christmas, believers have looked forward to the return of Jesus Christ. Here are examples from various ages.

Early Christian Times:

The Didache (2nd Cent. AD) *Watch over your life: let your lamps be not quenched and your loins be not ungirded, but be ready, for ye know not the hour in which Our Lord cometh.*¹

Middle Ages:

Joachim of Fiore (c.1132-1202), monk of Calabria, mystic, visionary and post-millennialist. He established a historical method which began a new era in prophetic interpretation and in the whole religious and philosophical outlook of Europe.²

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), nun, writer, and visionary, described in her book *Scivias* a renewal of the church after Antichrist's death.

Jean de Roquetaillade (c.1310-c.1365), Franciscan friar imprisoned for his views, wrote at least three books on the last days while incarcerated.

Reformation:

Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote: *There are rumors that the world will end in 1532. I hope it won't be long. The last decade seems like a new century,³ and The world cannot last much longer, perhaps a hundred years at the most.⁴*

Michael Stifel, a contemporary of Luther, computed that the end of the world would arrive at 8:00AM, October 19, 1533.

Philipp Melancthon (1497-1560) wrote: *It is settled that Christ died about the close of the fourth millennium, and now 1545 years have passed. Therefore we are not far from the end.⁵* Luther, Melancthon and Napier held to the Augustinian theory that the binding of Satan began in 300 AD.

James Ussher (1581-1656) Anglican Bishop of Armagh, developed a theory of the prophetic seventy weeks.

Thomas Parker (1595-1677): said the present world would end in 1860 and be followed by the New Jerusalem.

18th Century:

John Wesley's (1703-1791) computations projected the end in 1836.

John William Fletcher/John Guillaume de la Flechere (1729-1785), assoc. of Wesley, wrote *We are come to the last Time, the grand catastrophe of God's drama draws apace.⁶*

Increase Mather (1639-1723) (called a connecting link between the 17th & 18th centuries) *Antichrist has in all but Twelve Hundred and Sixty Years allowed him to reign in.....and we shall find that those years are almost finished.⁷*

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), a post-millennialist, subscribed to the belief of other Protestant thinkers that the "papal beast" would be destroyed in 1866. Most Protestant thinkers in this period were pre-millennialists.

William Linn (1752-1808) (Queens College/Rutgers) identified the 1260 years mentioned in Daniel and Revelation as possibly from 553-1813.

19th Century:

Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), evangelical preacher and founder of the Moody Bible Institute, believed in and preached the Rapture.

Vladimir Soloviev, (1853-1900), the Russian theologian wrote: *The approaching end of the world strikes me like some obvious but quite subtle scent—just as a traveler nearing the sea feels the sea breeze before he sees the sea.⁸*

20th Century:

Hal Lindsey and **John F. Walvoord** of Dallas, sold millions of books about the end of the world. Lindsey is known for the book and film titled, *Late Great Planet Earth*.

Edger C. Whisenant, a retired NASA engineer published a pamphlet in 1988 claiming the end of the world would come in May of 1992.

Pat Robinson, the television evangelist *cum* politician, announced in 1980 that the Antichrist was then about twenty-seven years of age.⁹

Some Key Terms

Millenarianism/Chiliasm (a thousand years—the Greek name for Millenarianism) The Belief in a thousand year period of blessedness and righteousness. Chiliasm (also held by early church heretical groups known as Gnostics and Montanists) was condemned at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381. Both Calvin and Luther were opposed to Chiliasm.

Pre-millennialists hold that the Millennium will follow the Second coming of Christ and before the Final Judgment.

Post-millennialists believe that the thousand years will be a time of righteousness on earth preceding and preparing for the coming of Christ. **Justin Martyr** (c.100-c.165) a Chiliast, wrote: “*But I and others are right-minded Christians in all points and are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged.*” He adds: “*I signify to you that many who belong to the pure pious faith and are true Christians think otherwise.*”¹⁰ Many of the Westminster Divines who formulated the **Westminster Confession of Faith** (1647) confessed (and preached) Millennialism, and the belief also was supported by the **Baptist Confession of 1660**.

Amillennialists believe that the thousand years of Satan’s binding is now (he will be unleashed for the brief “time of troubles”) and that following the final persecution, Christ will come in glory to preside at the Last Judgment.

Rapture: The time when Christ will return and believers will be caught to meet Christ. (I Thessalonians 4:16-17)

The Midnight Cry! William Miller and the End of the World

Midnight is the End of the World, before the morning pf the Resurrection. The Cry is an Angelical Voice: as soon as the clock strikes Twelve, then the Angel sets his Trumpet to his mouth and proclaimeth so.

Samuel Lee (1625-1691)

A summons or warning to the Great Day of Judgment

For Christians the greatest event in human history is waiting to happen - the return in glory of the Savior of the World, the Lord Jesus Christ. The sure and certain knowledge that this will happen one day, but in an unknown future, remains the great and compelling mystery for all Christians. What actually did Jesus tell us?

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to another. Matthew 24: 29-31.

Jesus adds, “for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Matthew 24:36) Since these words were spoken rumor, conjecture, theory and hope have sparked numerous predictions of the return of Jesus and the end of the world.

Mass Predictions

Catclysms, such as the eruptions of Vesuvius (Italy, 79 AD) and of Krakatoa (Java, 1883) sparked renewed fears, and the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 produced terror in Europe, a general fast day in England and a flood of newspaper articles and sermons on both sides of the Atlantic. Historical events like the French revolution sparked more interest in apocalyptic studies.

The conclusion of significant time periods also encourages new predictions. The year 1,000 was a time of concern for medieval man, and we can expect to hear many new prophecies as we approach the year 2,000. Over the centuries millions of people have expected and do expect the return at precise time which they have deduced from their interpretation of Scripture and the “signs of the times.” One such individual in the United States was William Miller—the subject of the video program.

About William Miller

Miller was born in Pittsfield Mass, February 15, 1782. He was self-taught, and earned his living as a farmer. Miller became a Deist and a Mason, and although a skeptic, he longed to believe. “*Come blest religion with thy angel-face,*” he wrote. The War of 1812 gave him a sense of involvement in a great cause, and he wrote with martial enthusiasm about the thrill of battle. Returned home, he prospered, became sheriff and justice of the peace. He attended church, but did not officially join. He was converted in 1816, after which he formally became a member of the Baptist Church at Low Hampton, New York.

Because he read well, Miller was asked to read printed sermons when the minister was away. This was his first pulpit experience. He became a diligent student of the Bible and became interested in the Book of Daniel. In 1831, Miller came to the conclusion from the prophesy of the four empires that 2300 days (See Daniel 8:14) would lead to 1843. He equated the “cleansing of the temple” with the burning of the earth.

Miller’s Reputation Spreads

Believing himself called to share his Millennial views, but reluctant to take on the life of a preacher, Miller decided he would do so only if a congregation were to invite him to preach. In August of 1831, he received an invitation through his nephew to preach at a church while the minister was away. Miller went, and the congregation was so impressed with his message that they asked him to stay for a week. A revival ensued. When he returned home, more invitations arrived to present his Millenarist views. In 1833, Miller’s Baptist church licensed him to preach. He continued his policy of preaching only upon invitation, but soon became a full-time occupation.

A statement of support was signed by 42 Baptist ministers, and in 1838, Miller published a booklet about his predictions: *Evidence From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ*.

Help from Himes

Joshua Himes, a Boston minister, made a career of promoting William Miller. He was highly successful. Miller's writings were spread widely, and his preaching opportunities were numerous, taking him through New England and even into New York State and New Jersey. Thousands attended his lectures in Philadelphia, New York, Washington, Buffalo and Cleveland. Himes managed to have a chapel built in Boston for the Adventists, as Miller's followers called themselves. A conference of his followers was called in that city in 1842 chaired by the Episcopalian Henry Dana Ward.

Miller was treated with respect until 1841, when the secular press began accusing him of promoting his cause for personal gain. Many religious leaders began to criticize Miller, including Alexander Campbell, the founder of the Disciples of Christ.

The Designated Dates Come and Go

April 4, 1843 was announced as the date of the Second Coming, although, he had never before been precise, having insisted upon "about 1843."¹¹ When the date passed without incident, many Millerites separated from his company of followers. New calculations developed a new date: March 21, 1844. March 21 came and went. The new slogan came from Habakkuk 2:3: *Through it tarry, wait for it.* Again new calculations, this time based on Samuel Snow's "seventh month of the Jewish calendar," and a new date was set of October 22, 1844. This, too, passed. In 1845 an emergency general conference was called by Himes where a variety of explanations were given. It now came down to three primary theories:

1. The event was right, but the day was wrong
2. The event had occurred, but not physically.
3. The hearts of believers were touched.

According to the third, something did indeed happen—"the cleansing of the sanctuary"—a preliminary stage of the Second Coming (See: *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, on page 15 in this guide.)

Miller went back to his farm where he died December 20, 1894. Joshua Himes, while remaining supportive of Miller, eventually returned to the church of his childhood and was ordained an Episcopal priest.

Enter Ellen White

In August of 1844, Ellen Harmon, the youthful visionary, and supporter of the Millerite movement, married James White. He became a lecturer with Ellen at his side to report her ongoing visions. They were convinced that while Jesus has not appeared in glory, He had indeed entered upon a second phase leading to the "midnight cry." With others they helped to organize the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Ellen wrote twenty-five books and became the world's fourth most translated writer. Today the Seventh Day Adventists report over 8 million members world-wide, and 850,000 members in the United States. They have missions in almost every country.

William Miller did not see the fulfillment of his prophesy, but he continued to hope in the Second Coming and told his followers to “Hold fast — Let no man take your crown.”

What then do these recurring fears and prophecies mean? Perhaps, as some believe, each one was true, each a warning of a real and impending possibility. Why were these prophecies unfulfilled? Did conversion a change of heart, some miraculous moment in time stay God’s hand and give the world another day and another opportunity to turn to Him?

Questions for Discussion After Viewing the Film

1. How did William Miller reflect the times in which he lived?
2. Why was he at first reluctant to preach his message?
3. Do you think his intense preaching was wasted?
4. If you could meet Miller today, what questions would you put to him?
5. What can we learn from the way the secular press turned against Miller?
6. Can you think of other prophetic time periods and what they mean to us today?
7. How do you see the church reacting to the coming turn of the millennium to the year 2000? How do you think secular society sees it?
8. What does the return of the Lord mean to you? Does it have meaning in your life and for your future?
9. Some in our day are setting dates and making dramatic predictions regarding the time of Christ’s return. Do you find any scriptural warrant for such date setting activity?
10. Discuss the meaning of Acts 17.
11. What do we learn from the history and experience of those who thought they could determine and announce the time of Christ’s return?
12. Look at some of the pertinent Bible passages listed at the end of this section, and other favorite Bible passages of yours related to the second coming of Jesus. From the context of passage what do you think was the scriptural intent of this material? Do you see any practical applications for daily living and attitudes that are set forth in the context of the passage?
13. How should each of us prepare for the day of Christ’s return, even though it may not happen in our lifetime?

14. Imagine the trumpet had sounded. How do you think you will feel?

15. See the two boxed articles (Pages 14 and 15). They give Seventh-day Adventist explanations regarding the 1844 predictions. What do you think of their interpretations? Are they:

- (a) Rationalizations and fanciful pushing of scripture beyond its original intent?
- (b) Valuable insight into the true Biblical teaching and a helpful explanation regarding 1844?
- (c) Not sure?
- (d) Other? Explain.
(Give reasons for your choice)

Pertinent Bible Passages:

Matt. 24:14-15, 27, 36

Mark 13:14-20, 35-37

Luke 21:24, 25-28

Acts 1:11

Rom. 8:18-23

Gal. 4:26

I Thess. 5:1-6

II Thess. 2:15, 4:1

II Peter 3:3-7

II Peter 3:10-14

**Toward A Fuller Understanding
of Christ's Ministry**

During the early part of the 19th century many Christians — including Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Disciples of Christ — gave intensive study to the prophecy of Daniel 8. All these Bible students expected some very significant events to take place at the end of the 2300 years. Depending on their understanding of the little horn power and the sanctuary, they anticipated this prophetic period to terminate in the purification of the church, the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem, the return of the Jews, the fall of the Turkish or Muslim power, the destruction of the papacy, the restoration of true worship, the beginning of the earthly millennium, the day of judgment, the cleansing of the earth by fire, or the Second Advent.

None of these predictions materialized, and all who believed them were disappointed...As a result of their disappointment, many gave up the study of prophecy, or turned from the historicist method of interpreting prophecy, which had led to those conclusions. Some, however, continued to study this prophecy and the subject of the sanctuary with much prayer and intensity, continuing to look to Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary on their behalf. Rich new insights into the ministry rewarded their efforts. They discovered that the historic prophetic faith of the early church and of the Reformation was still valid. The prophetic time

calculations were indeed correct. The 2300 years had ended in 1844. Their mistake—and that of all interpreters of that time — was in their understanding of what event was to take place at the end of the prophetic period. New light from Christ’s sanctuary ministry turned their disappointment into hope and joy.

Their study on the Bible teachings on the sanctuary revealed that in 1844 Christ came to the Ancient of Days and began the final phase of His high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. This ministry was the antitype of the Day of Atonement cleansing of the sanctuary that Daniel 7 depicts as the pre-Advent investigative judgment.

This new insight into Christ’s heavenly ministry “is not a departure from the historic Christian faith it is, instead, the logical completion and inevitable consummation of that faith. It is simply the last-day appearance and fulfillment of the prophesied emphasis characterizing the everlasting gospel...in the closing segment of the witness of the world.” (From, *Movements of Destiny*. Quoted in *Seventh Day Adventists Believe....*, from Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Wash., DC, 1988)

Seventh-day Adventists Believe

There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary of the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to the heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. *Fundamental Beliefs*, 23.

Notes

¹ *The Didache, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, Chapter XVI, E. Glenn Hinson, Ed., The Early Church Fathers, Christian Classics, Broadman Press, 1980, p. 33.

² From, Edwin LeRoy, *The prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Review and Herald, Washington, DC, 1950, Vol. I, pp. 690-691.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 278

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 278 (fr. *Table Talk*)

⁵ Ibid., Vol II, p. 291 (fr. Melancthon, *Danielum Propheticum Commentarius in Opera Corpus Reformatorum*).

⁶ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 687

⁷ Ibid., Vol. III, p. 134

⁸ Bernard McGinn, *Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*, Harper San Francisco, 1994, p. 260

⁹ Quoted by Otto Friedrich, *The End of the World*, Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, NY, 1982. p. 221

¹⁰ Froom, Vol. I, pp. 233-234

¹¹ Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 525

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