

# Faith Pulpit

## Millennial Madness and the Year 2000 Parts 1 & 2

The new millennium is bearing down at us at the rate of 3,600 seconds per hour – that magic moment when the cosmic odometer comes up with three zeroes.

The year 2,000 has been called “Father Time’s big day, Christianity’s horological cul-de-sac, a chronological, coinstantaneous, quadruple mind-blower: new year, new decade, new century, new millennium!” (William Ecenbarger, “Comes the Millennium,” *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, Feb. 18, 1996, p. 15).

Ecenbarger points out that “this epochal event will occur in the middle of the year 5760 according to Judaic reckoning, and in the year 1420 for the world’s Muslims. Actually, it’s a non-event, a figment of the imagination. . . a snowstorm in a glass paperweight, future schlock, right up there with crystal balls, tea leaves, and goat’s innards as an indication of anything” (Ibid.)

When the clock strikes midnight on December 31, 1999, billions of people around the world will celebrate the dawn of a new millennium. But in fact, they are a year too early or four years too late. As the researchers at the Royal Greenwich Observatory in Cambridge, England, point out, the start of the new millennium is January 1, 2001—not the year 2000. They note that the sequence of years from B.C. to A.D. does not include the year 0. The sequence of years runs 2 B.C., 1 B.C., A.D. 1, A.D. 2. The first year of the first millennium was A.D. 1 and the thousandth year A.D. 1000. The first year of the second millennium was New Year’s Day 1001. Thus it is clear that the start of the new millennium will be January 1, 2001 (“British Observatory Takes Stand on When Millennium Begins,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1996, p. 9).

On the other hand, it should be noted that the new millennium is already here. The miscalculation in our present calendar was occasioned by Dionysius Exiguus (Dennis the Short, if he lived today) around A.D. 525. It is he that reckoned time “from the incarnation of our Lord.” He pegged Christ’s birth as

754 A.U.C. (ab urbe condita, that is, from the founding of Rome). But Dionysius miscalculated. Historical evidence suggests that Christ was born in 5 B.C., or five years earlier than Dionysius believed. This means that for us the new millennium will not arrive in 2001 but began already in 1996. It is later than we think (Robert Rosin, *Concordia Journal*, January 1996, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 7).

So much for historical accuracy and chronological conciseness. The world will still celebrate the new millennium New Year's Eve 1999. Nothing will deter people from their millennial mania. Jay Gary, a Baptist from Colorado who calls himself the Millennium Doctor, hopes to lead a five-month camel caravan from Iraq to Israel to duplicate the feat of the magi. Richard Kieninger from Garland, Texas, is said to be building a fleet of blimps that will airlift him and his followers 14 miles above the earth as our planet is tossed by a cataclysmic shift on its axis. Lacy Shields, president of the UFOlogy Society, based in Dallas, hopes that she and her fellow abductees will be taken off the planet during catastrophic times by flying saucers.

Ted Daniels of the Millennium Watch Institute in Philadelphia says "die-hard millennium watchers break down into four groups: evangelical Christians, some of whom believe that Christ will return and that the Battle of Armageddon will be fought sometime around the year 2000; environmentalists, who believe we are polluting and populating ourselves into imminent apocalypse; UFO watchers, who believe aliens are visiting the earth to warn humans that the end is near; and New Agers, who believe the year 2000 signals the dawn of an enlightened era."

Undoubtedly, the new millennium will have repercussions for most people. In perusing the copious literature on the new millennium, it may be helpful to discuss the implications of the year 2000 for the scientists, the secularists, the sensationalists, and the saints.

## **1. The Year 2000 and the Scientists**

For the info-tech professionals, the approach of the year 2000 is a nightmare of unprecedented proportions. They dread the millennial mess caused by what is variously known as the Millennium Bug, the Year 2000 Problem or simply "Y2K. Gina Smith explains: "It's the problem resulting from the fact that most big-computer software created in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s records dates using only the last two digits of the year—as in 02/15/97. So, to many computers, the year 2000 (01/01/00) will look like 1900, since the "19" is assumed. And every day thereafter could be construed as occurring 100 years earlier. It's a seemingly small glitch that could wreak havoc for millions of American consumers come the turn of the millennium" (*Popular Science*, February 1997, p. 26).

Analysts say that as much as 30 percent of all American businesses will not have their computer software ready by 2000. And then there is the cost. Alarmism seems to be justified. Estimates are that corporations will spend between \$300 billion and \$600 billion grappling with Y2K over the next three years. On January 3, 2000—the first business day of the new millennium—computerized billing

systems will begin warning of 100 years of outstanding debt. While concern is widespread, Americans need not worry, and here is why: Big Brother comes to the rescue. "Clinton...vowed to fix the problem in the nation's computers that threatens to disrupt delivery of many government services in 2000 ("Clinton tells plans to mark Millennium [sic]," *The Des Moines Register*, August 16, 1997, p. 5A).

## **2. The Year 2000 and the Secularist**

Some 40 nations have official millennium projects underway. The 6,000-member Millennium Society started plans in 1979 to put on a series of 24 public festivals in each of the world's time zones at the stroke of midnight. Celebrations are planned for the Great Wall of China, the Taj Mahal, Mount Fuji, the Eiffel Tower, the Great Pyramid of Cheops and, of course, Times Square.

According to President Clinton's declaration, the national celebration will enable Americans to "honor the past and to imagine the future." The First Lady is in charge of the project, which includes "60-second TV spots highlighting U.S. historical events over the last 1,000 years[!]" (*Ibid.*). One does not know whether to laugh or cry.

Along with the anticipation of the year 2000 there is also a great deal of apprehension. Doomsday books are forecasting the demise of America and the world. Ecenbarger notes that "the grim orgy of prognostication began way back in 1961 when sociologist Daniel Bell published *The End of Ideology*. Since then there has been a plethora of publications with titles such as *The End of Affluence*, *The End of Intelligence*, *The End of Christendom*, *The End of Libraries*, *The End of Law* and dozens more" (Ecenbarger, p. 22).

## **3. The Year 2000 and the Sensationalist**

Not just secular authors but Christian writers are gearing up for the upcoming millennial change. Nick Harrison suggests that "the potent year of 2000. . .may prove a marketing bonanza. . .with prophets leading publishers for profits (*Publisher's Weekly*, January 13, 1997, Vol. 244, No. 2, p. 40). Hal Lindsey's newest prophetic book is *Blood Moon*, a fictionalized account of how predictions concerning the fate of the world could be fulfilled in the early stages of the 21st century. Lindsey, though basically correct in his eschatology, is ever given to sensationalism. On the Fox Network program, "Prophecies of the Millennium," which aired on July 30, 1997, Lindsey said the following, "The prophet (John) who wrote the Book of the Revelation, says, 'I looked, I saw and heard.' A first-century man was propelled up to the end of the 20th century and he actually saw a war of technical marvel. . .an intercontinental ballistic missile warhead reentering the earth's atmosphere; poison water, radioactivity, every city on earth virtually destroyed."

Jack Van Impe's 1996 book, *2001. On the Edge of Eternity*, predicts that the millennium will begin shortly after the year 2000. His videotape, "2001: Countdown to Eternity," is advertised with the

following words, “Discover for yourself how our Millennial Kingdom is predicted to begin shortly after A.D. 2000.” On his telecast on Sunday, August 12, 1997, he opined that “the apocalyptic times started in 1948 and will find culmination somewhere around 2001, probably no later than 2014.” Then on September 7, he asserted, without giving any support, “The Bible predicts there will be a war with China anywhere between 2003 and 2006.”

The informed interpreter of Scripture realizes that date setting is wrong. One would think that the date-setters would learn a lesson in humility from their disappointed predecessors or their own erroneous earlier prophecies. In Acts 1:6–7 Christ leaves His disciples with the reminder that it is futile to guess and forbidden for them to know the times or seasons of His return and the subsequent establishment of the Kingdom. Many of the evangelical date setters base their calculations on the problematic premise that world history can be divided into seven epochs of 1,000 years each, corresponding to the seven days of creation week. The seventh day, then, would be a millennial age of rest. The scheme, popularized by Larkin in his *Dispensational Truth* (p. 16), places Adam around 4000 B.C., and the seventh epoch would thus begin around A.D. 2000.

#### **4. The Year 2000 and the Saint**

As the world approaches the new millennium, the average person’s imagination projects either an apocalypse and Armageddon or progress and paradise. The preferred position is neither that of pessimism nor optimism but biblical realism. For believers there is, as it were, “a balm in chiliad.” True Christians should be anticipating the rapture and eventually a 1,000 year reign with Christ on earth. As they anticipate the eternal future with the Savior, they are guided by certain chronological, prophetic, ethical and ecclesiastical considerations.

- a. The believer recognizes God as the God of eternity who is in sovereign control of history and not bound by a human chiliastic calendar (Psalm 90:1,2; 31:15).
- b. The believer is guided neither by an anticipation of the terrifying apocalypse nor technological advance, but by the triumphant appearance of the Bridegroom to gather the world’s believers to glory before the judgments of the tribulation period (Titus 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:18; 5:9).
- c. Each additional day on this earth brings the believer one day closer to the rapture. This hope should produce personal purity (1 John 3:3) and ethical productivity (Eph. 5:16).
- d. The believer knows that the Bridegroom is completing an eternal home for His own in heaven (John 14:1–4) and is consummating the Church on earth (2 Peter 3:9). When the last building block is added to the city in heaven and the last believer is added to the Church on earth, the Savior will return. And that might be this very day.

*Dr. Manfred Kober (Th.M. and Th.D., Dallas Theological Seminary) is a German-born theologian and educator who has significantly contributed to Christian scholarship and ministry. After enduring the hardships of post-war Germany, he emigrated to the United States in 1953. Dr. Kober pursued theological studies at Baptist Bible Seminary in Johnson City, New York, the University of Erlangen in Germany, and Dallas Theological Seminary.*

*He served as a professor and chaired the Department of Theology at Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa, from 1969 to 1999. Today, he resides in Bondurant, IA, with his wife, Sharon, and they have two children and three grandchildren.*