

## Y2K: MASS HYSTERIA OR PROPHETIC EVENT?

*"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7)*

In the early 1820s a young Baptist preacher-farmer named William Miller started preaching in New York and Pennsylvania. His main message was that Jesus was coming back in the year 1843. He based this view upon the contemporary day-year theory of prophecy, namely, that in prophetic passages "one day" should be taken as speaking of "one year." He applied this to the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 and calculated the coming of Christ to the precise day on that basis. As the predicted time approached, his followers, called "Millerites," began to sell all of their goods, put on white robes and went to the mountains to wait for Christ to come. Of course, Christ did not come. As a result, Miller recalculated. Perhaps he was one year off. So the next year at the appointed time, they repeated the scenario to await the return of the Lord. The newspapers gave tremendous coverage to the event. But alas, Christ did not come again for the second time. The papers hailed it as the "Great Disappointment" and the Christian faith was ridiculed publicly.

To his credit, William Miller admitted that he probably had no idea what he was talking about and dedicated himself to the restudy of the prophetic issues involved. Unfortunately, there were those in the group who did not give up the vision easily. Led by a young woman named Ellen G. White, they argued that Christ did return on that date, but not to earth. He returned to the literal Temple in heaven to begin a new ministry of investigative judgment. Hence, began the movement known as the Seventh-Day Adventists.<sup>1</sup>

Since the time of the "Great Disappointment" there have been numerous prophetic "failures" by professing Christians. Can anyone remember how many times the Jehovah's Witnesses have made such predictions? Do you recall in more recent times the pamphlet giving 88 reasons why the rapture would be in 1988 and the follow up the next year giving 89 reasons the rapture would happen in 1989? There is no lacking of such predictions in spite of the fact that Jesus clearly said that no one, even the Son (Jesus Himself) knew the day or hour when He would return, only the Father (Mark 13:32). For obedient Christians, that should be enough to prevent speculation.

However, such speculation is on the rise because of the approach of a new century and new millennium. But this time there is a catch. The coming of the year 2000 (called "Y2K" in computer lingo) has a built in "secular apocalypse" fueling the fire of prediction. Because of a belief in coming great catastrophes due to computer failures, many believers in Jesus as well as secular voices are proclaiming a kind of end time doom.

### What is the "Y2K" Problem?

The Y2K problem is simple to understand. Although involving sophisticated computer equipment, it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out. When computer memory was scarce

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<sup>1</sup> For the Seventh-Day Adventist version of their beginnings, see Ellen G. White, *America in Prophecy*, (Reprint ed., Jemison, AL: Inspiration Books East, Inc., 1988). This book was originally published under the title of *The Great Controversy*. One can also see *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, (Washington, D. C.: Ministerial Association of the General Conference, 1988). 313-331.

many programmers used only two digits for the date in the time function in many software programs (e.g., "75" for 1975). A problem comes when the clock rolls around from "99" to "00." Does it mean 1900 or 2000 or something else? Depending upon how the software is designed and for what purpose, the execution of the software might lead to strange or inaccurate results.

## Was the Problem Short-Sighted Programmers?

Actually, the problem was not the shortsightedness of any of the programmers in the past. This author's many years of experience as an aerospace engineer included the design and programming of software for jet fighters, missile defense systems, and the Space Shuttle. Computer memory has not always been as plentiful or as inexpensive as it is now. Hard decisions had to be made to make programs fit into the memory in light of the constraints which were present. I once heard a top engineer in charge of some weapons testing for the government say that his area had been working on the Y2K problem for twenty years. Obviously, this can not always be blamed on shortsightedness on the part of technical computer personnel.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the amount of money necessary to correct this problem world wide is staggering. However, it is this author's contention that the problem is manageable and controllable in spite of protestations to the contrary:

Already we've seen companies that have experienced problems during the fix-and-test process. One problem with a single satellite knocked 90 percent of the world's pagers off the air in 1998 during a Y2K compliance test. In 1997, an entire ATM network was shut down by the failure of a single networking device. These examples suggest that at least some level of disruption is inevitable, even in isolated systems. The daunting prospect of Y2K is that, because of global networking and commerce, no system is truly isolated. Widespread simultaneous failures of systems could set off a domino effect around the world.<sup>3</sup>

Such a statement, while well meaning, unnecessarily glosses over two things: (1) the good news in those reports and (2) the problems from non-Y2K areas that we face every day which are just as problematic in the world in which we live. As to the first one, a failure in 1998 shows that testing is, in fact, being done ahead of time and not at the last minute in the case in question. This fact could be noted for much that is going on in the world right now to offset any potential Y2K problems. As to the second area of non-Y2K problems, the networking failure mentioned has no real connection to the Y2K problem. Such failures will always be part of our technological culture. They can come from several different areas. A few years back, this author learned that Emory Riddle University, an engineering school in the Daytona Beach area, had its computer systems shut down by a computer virus. Baptist Bible College & Seminary in Pennsylvania (where this author teaches) had many of its power systems shut down once by an inconvenient lightning strike and on other occasions network down time has been significant due to various technical failures. This is part of living in a technological world. There are any numerous events that could disrupt our lives, many of which are just as devastating as Y2K. Y2K, in my judgment, just gets more attention because it is associated with the perceived roll over into the next century (even though technically the next century does not begin until 2001).

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<sup>2</sup> Jerry MacGregor and Kirk Charles probably overstate the case when they discuss the question of the origins of the Y2K problem, *Y2K Family Survival Guide*, (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1999), 15-18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

## **Is Y2K a PC Problem?**

Y2K is not a desktop PC problem per se although PCs can be affected. It involves mainframe computers and computer programs written long before the advent of the desktop computer revolution of the last fifteen years. This is also not a Windows problem per se. Sorry. We can not blame Bill Gates on this one. The problem developed when he was too young to know the difference between a mouse and a keyboard. However, it is a real problem, not an imaginary one. It does not involve someone's interpretation of anything (like William Miller's prophecies). There is a completely understandable phenomenon in real computers.

## **What About September 9, 1999?**

Before we experience Y2K, we will experience another computer-induced problem. Many software packages used any number of the digit "9" to indicate things like an end of file. On September 9, 1999, we have the ninth month, ninth day, and using two digits, "99" for the year. Hence, we might have a date code of "9999" or some form of it. So when the clock rolls around to that day later this year, some expect problems. However, it is unlikely that such codes are "time" sensitive. That is, most of these codes involve functions unrelated to time and which are not interpreting the sequence of nines as a current date. More good news is that we do not have to wait to Y2K to find out! In fact, if the doomsayers on this one are right, we get to have a dress rehearsal for Y2K!

## **Why is Y2K Such a Problem?**

How can the fact that computers may misread the rollover to the year 2000 as 1900 or some other date be such a big problem? One example can be taken from the world of finance. A lot of programs in the programming language COBOL have been around for years as a staple product for calculating such things as insurance premiums, tax rates, interest, and pensions. If the software rolls over from "99" to "00" the program might calculate your pension based upon the year 1900 rather than 2000. If so, your pension may have just disappeared! A second example might be the failure of ATM machines to read credit cards correctly. The unanticipated date may, in fact, lead to the conclusion that the card has expired although this is an unlikely event. For those who see apocalyptic conclusions to all of this, there are several areas within the secular realm where the Y2K concern has been discussed the most.

### **Air Travel**

Some are predicting that the computer malfunctions associated with Y2K will create havoc with global positioning satellites (GPS) by which airliners control their routes and track their positions. Fear has led to the suggestion that no one should be aboard an airplane in or around the change to the year 2000. Note this comment from MacGregor and Charles:

Air travelers are more likely to encounter Y2K troubles than bus and train travelers, because of the industry's reliance on so many computers. Computer systems coordinate cockpit instrument panels, takeoff

and landing procedures, collision detection, navigation, and communication with air traffic control. In addition to a plane's roughly 500 computers, each airport air traffic control uses computers, and each airline has computers handling reservations and scheduling. The potential for disaster is enormous.<sup>4</sup>

The authors go on to warn, "Try to avoid flying the first month of 2000."<sup>5</sup> However, such statements as the one above can be misleading. No one questions the reliance upon computers that exists in air travel. However, the Y2K problem involves computers that are time sensitive. To state that an airliner has 500 computers obscures the real facts. Few, if any, of the computers on an airplane depend upon the "clock year" in which the airplane is flying. Furthermore, pilots receive incredible training and must be able now (not waiting until Y2K) to navigate the airplane if global positioning information is not available due to failed instruments.

In fact, the GPS world has an important deadline to reach before Y2K. It is even before September 9, 1999. It is technically the week-number rollover to take place on midnight on August 21, 1999.<sup>6</sup> Dave Hunt comments

Aircraft are not going to fall from the sky because their GPS receivers are not set to work properly after August 21, 1999, when the next rollover occurs. They could suffer wrong information for navigation and would have to resort to other methods. In fact, there are several navigational systems at work simultaneously on commercial aircraft, checking against one another.

So the GPS system has been erroneously associated with Y2K when, in fact, it has nothing to do with the year 2000. And for outdated receivers on earth, the result is not an end-of-the-world consequence, but an inconvenience. Of course, all commercial and military aircraft will have their GPS receivers in proper working order well ahead of schedule. There is no reason, other than gross negligence, why they would not.<sup>7</sup>

My own experience as an aerospace engineer has given me some confidence in this area. While working on F-16 jet fighters, I became aware of the great amount of testing that went into the development of just one operational flight program for just one of the many computers on board the aircraft. There was no way that the "clock year" could ever cripple the computer that I was working on. Furthermore, if there were a problem, it would not take thousands of programmers several years to fix. It would take a handful (maybe just one) only a few weeks to make any change if the problem did exist.

Further encouragement comes from the FAA itself. The last couple of years have seen aggressive testing of air traffic control computers. Not many major bugs have been found of the Y2K nature. One of the reasons is relatively simple. Radar information is not date sensitive. In addition, other problems have been handled.

Another example is the HOST computer, one of the FAA's chief workhorses in the air traffic system. It allows controllers to track high-altitude traffic across the country.

The HOST computer, the same one used for Y2K tests here, made headlines more than a year ago when IBM, which made the machine, said it could not guarantee it would function in the new millennium.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>6</sup> Dave Hunt, *Y2K: A Reasoned Response to Mass Hysteria*, (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1999),

113.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 114-15.

When FAA officials asked IBM what the problem was, the computer company said it didn't know because the machines were too old. But rather than scrap the computers, the FAA hired two retired IBM programmers who had helped develop HOST in the 1980s. What they found was not too frightening.<sup>8</sup>

It is curious that IBM has a conflict of interest here. If it cannot guarantee that the old computers would work, would that be because they wanted to sell a large number of new computers?<sup>9</sup> A major test of the air traffic control system in and around the Denver area will be performed on the weekend of April 10-11, 1999. These tests should tell us much about the progress which is being made.<sup>10</sup> In the end, expect few problems and those that exist will be mostly inconveniences.

### Electricity & Power

Many Christians are concerned that computers which control production of electricity (in the various plants) will shut down thereby providing power outages anywhere from three days to three months. So, individuals, families, businessmen, et al, should buy generators, stockpile fuel, stockpile food, and unfortunately stockpile weapons since there will be some rioting and looting by those who did not prepare and who begin to panic. Michael Hyatt has written what is probably one of the most frightening books on Y2K in his recently famous book *The Millennium Bug*.<sup>11</sup> The Christian author Steve Farrar has referred to Hyatt's book with these words: "The best one-volume explanation of Y2K that is available. Hyatt lays out the facts on everything from the power grid to food supplies. Highly recommended."<sup>12</sup> Farrar lays out many of the possible scenarios which Hyatt presents and tries to inject some faith in God on the part of Christians as they face this potentially enormous catastrophe. The problem theoretically could be as serious as that: "Other effects on daily life are still unclear. Everything hinges on the electrical system. If the nation has power, by and large, it can run. Without electricity, there will be serious problems."<sup>13</sup>

I have personally talked to Christians who have bought generators (without wondering if any of them had any time-embedded chips) to help them through this time. In some cases, there is good reason to be on the safe side **on the basis of other potential disruptions in available power quite apart from Y2K**. In my own reading, I have come to the conclusion that some of these alarmist scenarios persist because such a power outage would indeed create havoc and because the electric companies seem to have been the slowest to talk to the public about their plans to overcome this problem. Yet the casual, unresearched, and unthoughtful spreading of paranoia on this issue by Christian teachers and authors is astounding (as well as wrong). One example is the spread of one rumor of a nuclear plant shutdown which has been traveling the Christian circuit. Below I quote at length to highlight the issue:

Eventually, one begins to suspect that there may be some exaggeration and considerable misinformation involved. The so-called experts seem to quote one another without checking to verify the

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<sup>8</sup> Alan Levin, "FAA Finds Few Glitches Likely for the Year 2000," *USA Today*, April 9, 1999, 12A.

<sup>9</sup> The same question is asked by Steve Hewitt, "Year 2000 Bug! Part 1," *Christian Computing Magazine* 10 (September 1998), <http://www.gospelcom.net/ccmag/y2k/sepy2k.html>, 12/12/98.

<sup>10</sup> Levin, 12A.

<sup>11</sup> Michael S. Hyatt, *The Millennium Bug* (Washington, D. C.: Regnery Publishing, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Steve Farrar, *Spiritual Survival During the Y2K Crisis* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 235.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Kellner, "Y2K at Home: What Could Happen?" *Computing Today* (January/February 1999), 13.

story. And sometimes they don't get it straight. For example, in his talk to the ministerial association, Jack Anderson [Larry Burkett Associate] referred to a nuclear power plant in Florida that ran a test by turning the clocks forward to 2000, which shut the whole thing down. Jack told the wide-eyed ministers: 'They spent weeks trying to find the problem on that. It turned out there was one noncompliant chip all the way up in the top of the smokestack, one that tested for the particulates in the smoke as it was leaving, and it shut down the whole plant right there. So you've got all these little bugs that are running around.'

We asked Larry Burkett's office for the name of this nuclear plant they were unable to provide it. John Davis of the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) said he had never heard of this event and doubted that it had ever happened. Furthermore, he stated that the NEI had established Y2K guidelines way back in 1977. Any problems he has been notified of were caught in following the protocol for reaching compliance. When we finally reached Anderson, he said that the power plant was actually in England but could give no further details. On Dobson's program, Chuck Missler stated, "In Great Britain a power plant went down because a chip in a smokestack was . . . taking data from two different points and subtracting and it had a date function." At this point he was interrupted by Dobson.

We checked with Missler's office and they provided the origin of the story, but it didn't match what Anderson had said. It was not a nuclear power plant, and the sensor in the flue stack had nothing to do with testing "particulates" as Anderson said, but was programmed to integrate and average temperature over a specific time period. The story was first told during a Year 2000 Embedded Systems Workshop sponsored by the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) September 10-11, 1997, in Scottsdale, Arizona. Nothing was stated concerning how long it took to locate and correct the problem, so we have no notion where Anderson derived the idea that "they spent weeks trying to find the problem."

Rick Cowles' website carries a story apparently about the same plant being shut down during a test in England, but rather than being in a smokestack, one of those "little bugs running around" was part of a generator temperature-controlling system. The story may well be true, but we have been unable to discover the name of the power plant or the date of the incident or which version is factual.

Cowles' website where this alleged incident was cited had the impressive heading, "Electric Utilities and Year 2000: Real-Life Examples of Date Related Problems for Electric Utilities." Yet there was nothing else, beyond this story, of any substance.<sup>14</sup>

I do not know how you feel after reading this quote. For Christians who want to believe Christians rather than certain government leaders who have lied to us before, this is a major disappointment. Three prominent ministries report the same event in contradictory ways none of which matches the original source of the information. I once had an unbelieving engineering friend who ridiculed the Christian belief in healing and miracles. He complained that every time he got close to one, it disappeared, that is, the actual accomplished event was much less than the reported miracle (he was complaining mostly of charismatic healing services). Christians could be setting up the Faith for ridicule in the same way on this issue. I also feel a little like I do at my AWANA club where I often put kids in a circle and we play the game of whispering something to the one next to you and so on around the circle. Rarely does what I started out whispering make it around the entire circle intact. Did our Christian friends lie? No, I do not think so. I believe they got caught up in the exaggeration of the moment. In the end, they did sloppy research because what they heard seemed to fit the grid which they were already presenting.

On the other hand, there are more optimistic reports coming out from the power industry in recent days.

. . . anyone can go on the Internet and find reams of material from electrical power plants across the country declaring that they have been working on the Y2K problem and will have it conquered well ahead of January 1, 2000. . . the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) recently said in relation to

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<sup>14</sup> Hunt, 49-50. By the way, I believe that Dave Hunt's book cited earlier is the most balanced of the Y2K presentations and is worthy of purchase by all believers.

Y2K, 'At this point, the perceived operating risks are manageable.' As for the pessimistic reports one continues to hear, that there will be widespread electricity outages beginning in 2000, NERC said they 'are unsubstantiated.'<sup>15</sup>

Several power suppliers are on record with their assertion of compliance and the details of what they have done to get ready for Y2K.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, one usually damaging aspect of our culture may actually help in the Y2K dilemma. There will probably be a massive increase of lawsuits if any current trends hold up. Companies, whether financial or power industry, have this added incentive to pay the necessary money up front to fix any software problems related to Y2K. Otherwise they will pay later.<sup>17</sup> Added encouragement has been introduced into the equation by the October 1998 passing of the Year 2000 Disclosure Act which prohibits companies from keeping private about progress and costs for Y2K solutions in their particular business venture.<sup>18</sup> In the end, I believe we will see, at most, small localized problems with no major national power grid blackouts.

### U. S. Military

Some are concerned that the U. S. Military is unprepared so that when so many of our computers crash, we will be vulnerable to foreign or terrorist attacks. I was enamored by the headlines in a local paper which read "Y2K Crisis Real, CIA Says."<sup>19</sup> I was even more amazed when I read the article. The brunt of the message was that other countries are having difficulties and are not responding to the Y2K problem as quickly as the United States. In particular, Russia and Red China were mentioned. That is to be expected and should not be a surprise because of the technological advantage right now of the USA. The entire article could be interpreted in such a way as to give confidence and to lessen our fears about military readiness because other countries will be in greater trouble than we will. This was echoed by another article with a scary headline but a mild article which occurred in USA Today. The article noted that

Many foreign countries lag behind and risk economic disruptions and civil unrest, the report says. . . . Though the chance of an accidental nuclear launch is low, the report says, terrorists might take advantage of the confusion [in foreign countries] to wreak havoc. The U.S. military might experience minor disruptions; intelligence gathering should not be compromised.<sup>20</sup>

It is really hard to imagine a major disaster for our military simply because of Y2K. I have highlighted above my convictions about aircraft and their dependability. It is also true that our

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<sup>15</sup> Hunt, 80.

<sup>16</sup> Hunt, 100-04.

<sup>17</sup> Tom Lowry, "Y2K Lawsuits Pile Up Before Limits Set In," *USA Today*, April 5, 1999. Lowry's article suggests that the number of Y2K lawsuits has skyrocketed in the last fifteen months. In light of this and the American interest in lawsuits, one can safely say that "we haven't seen anything yet." See also Jim Seymour, "Y2K Countdown," *PC Magazine*, April 6, 1999. Seymour is one of my favorite editorialists on computer issues. He takes a balanced view of individual participation in solving problems as opposed to ignoring the problem or becoming a doomsday prophet.

<sup>18</sup> Seymour, 124. See also

<sup>19</sup> Jim Abrams, "Y2K Crisis Real, CIA Says," *The (Scranton) Tribune*, February 25, 1999, A1.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Wolf, "Congress Sounds Y2K Alarm," *USA Today*, March 3, 1999.

military has one of the largest stockpiles of petroleum and supplies when compared to other sectors of government or public life. I have few concerns in this area.



### Financial Institutions

Some believe that the computers controlling banking and stocks will crash bringing a halt to it all. Such miscalculations as mentioned before will lead to a stock market crash as bad as the 1929 crash which helped spark the Great Depression. This is said even though Jan. 1, 2000, is on Saturday when the banks and stock market will be closed for two whole days before operations pick back up on Monday, Jan. 3. President Clinton has announced that the Social Security Administration is now Y2K compliant. Social security checks will be taken care of with no problem. Also, while at the end of 1997, government computers (many dealing with money issues) were only 34% Y2K compliant. However, by the end of 1998 that percentage had grown to 61%. Predictions were made that March 1999 would see that number rise to 85 or 90% as more and more systems are checked and solutions phased in.<sup>21</sup> It is also true that the Federal Reserve has decided to release extra money into the economy to prevent any damage from runs on banks:

The Federal Reserve announced recently that they plan to increase the amount of cash on hand in America by a third. This is in anticipation of U.S. consumers that want to have cash on hand because they believe the Y2K problem will cause their banks to have difficulties with their accounts. Because the Federal Reserve feels that people will begin to hoard cash due to such fears, they have decided to add \$50 billion to the \$150 in cash reserves next year. They will do this in two ways. First, they will allow more slightly worn U.S. dollars to stay in circulation instead of having them collected by banks and turned in for disposal. They will also order the Bureau of Engraving & Printing to print more \$50 and \$20 bills in place of \$10's and \$5's.<sup>22</sup>

Banks who traffic in money have a special interest in being timely about their holdings of pension funds, individual deposits, etc. What we have said earlier about lawsuits easily applies here. It is in the best interest of financial institutions for them to make Y2K a no-show as a problem. How should you react? Make sure that you are talking to your bank and to the company that takes care of your pension. Merrill Lynch has a rather rosy picture of the whole thing and believes that most of the financial world has been made compliant.<sup>23</sup> Everyone is just worried about everyone else. Reports have indicated that the stock market has passed numerous tests and others are still scheduled. It is highly unlikely that any major financial institutions will go under simply because of the Y2K computer problem. As long as we all keep our paperwork and we still have pencils, we can do it like the old days if we have to for a couple of days.

However, there is one other issue here. That is the issue of fear. It is quite possible through the spread of panic to create a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy.

"This could all turn out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy," admits Edward Yardeni, the global investment strategist at Deutsche Bank Securities in New York who has played a major role in raising anxiety by loudly publicizing his doomsday vision. He worries that a crisis in confidence over Y2K will send stocks tumbling before 1999 draws to a close. Those worries could then infect the economy, giving investors something to

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<sup>21</sup> Matt Donnelly, "Y2K Update," *Computing Today*, March/April 1999, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Steve Hewitt, "Year 2000 Bug, Part 2, Good News and Bad," *Christian Computing Magazine* 10 (October 1998): 2, <http://www.gospelcom.net/ccmag/y2k/octy2k.html>, 12/12/98.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Luening, "Merrill Lynch: An Optimistic View," *Quit You Like Men* (May/June): 15-16.

really worry about. The resulting stock market drop could cause consumers to retrench, leading to a recession.<sup>24</sup>

What if there is a fear that all our money will be wiped out? Then there will be that run on the banks that many are predicting. However, it will only happen if we have fear. I am bothered by the fact that it is the Christian community which is largely spearheading the spread of such fear. We, through our fears, can make the crash happen, long before January 1, 2000 gets here. It is up to us, as the people of faith to help prevent that from happening.

### Medicine

By all means, some would suggest, do not schedule any elective surgery around the turn of the year. Who knows how some of the high tech equipment used to assist doctors and surgeons will respond? Medical appliances which have time-embedded chips (to record the time medicine is dispensed) will malfunction leaving patients vulnerable in perhaps life-threatening situations. However, this may be overblown. Most hospitals now have generators to handle power failures. It is also true that most of the medical appliances with embedded chips do not depend upon the date to function. To my knowledge only the recording feature, not the dispensing feature is an issue. If you live in a small town with a small hospital, it might be wise to check if they have generators to handle emergencies. Otherwise, I would not be overly worried about how the Y2K problem will affect health care.<sup>25</sup>

### **Prophetic Uses of Y2K**

The potential secular apocalypse of January 1, 2000 has no shortage of correlation with biblical prophecy or truth by many evangelical preachers. In fact, it is amazing that it appears to be conservative Christians which are pressing the panic button the most. This is hailed by some but others are greatly concerned:

Some critics, however, are less sanguine about the arrival of a doomsday that would coincide with the turn of a millennium. Indiana State University professor Richard V. Pierard, an evangelical, says, 'I see this as just a bunch of nonsense and hysteria to sell books, get money, and alarm people.' Pierard, coauthor of the forthcoming *The New Millennium Manual: A Once and Future Guide* (Baker Book House), blames the explosion of Christian television and the Internet with fueling the Y2K situation. He warns that even if 'university studies' and other 'expert' opinions are attached to Y2K prophecies, Christians need to exercise caution regarding the more dire warnings.

'I don't see how evangelicalism can benefit in any way from this,' Pierard says. 'It simply holds them up to ridicule.'<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, it is hard to find any Christian leader dealing with this issue who is not trying to sell something like a video or a book. Christian responses with varied approaches but within what

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<sup>24</sup> James M. Pethokoukis and Mindy Charski, "Bugged by Y2K," *U.S. News & World Report* (March 22, 1999): 64.

<sup>25</sup> I just ran out of time to deal in this paper with time-embedded chips which I consider to be simply a small nuisance as far as around the house is concerned. I also have not dealt with the food supply issues. However, I believe that if the electricity is not affected by Y2K, then the food supplies will probably be fine. See Dave Hunt's earlier cited work.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Kellner, "A Secular Apocalypse?" *Christianity Today* (January 11, 1999): 57-58.

might be called some form of sensationalism would be Pat Robertson (CBN Y2K seminars nationwide and website), Grant Jeffrey (book *Millennium Meltdown*, videos, newsletters), Michael Hyatt and his book mentioned earlier, Shaunti Feldhahn (book *Y2K, The Millennium Bug: A Balanced Christian Response*), Jerry Falwell (videos, pamphlets, *National Liberty Journal*), websites for Larry Burkett and James Dobson and their respective ministries. There are others as well. All of these Christian and usually national figures are probably sincere. However, more sane analysis comes from Steve Hewitt and his *Christian Computing Magazine* and Dave Hunt's book *Y2K: A Reasoned Response to Mass Hysteria*.

In general, there are three options for a possible response to Y2K:

- Express no concern and do nothing
- Express mild concern and take some precautions for short-term problems
- Express major concern and begin to stockpile in preparation for a long time of chaos (i.e., adopt a "survivalist mentality")

There are Christians who represent each of these responses. Because of the association of this problem with the turn of the millennium in the minds of many, there has become attached to this event a kind of apocalyptic halo. The last category of people tend to focus with this kind of apocalyptic energy in mind. However, let me share with you some of concerns with how these believers handle the Y2K issue.

- They often quote old data as if it were current.<sup>27</sup>
- They often quote without documentation. Recall the earlier conflict of three separate Christian accounts of the same event. No one really knew what they were talking about.
- They over-emphasize the problem compared to the solution. One illustration was the interview with five men (four preachers and one computer guy) on Focus on the Family. The preachers were allowed to express their panic while the computer guy in vain tried to get a sane analysis into the conversation.<sup>28</sup>
- Many of the Christian sensationalists are associated with the Christian version of the Bible Code controversy (e.g., Chuck Missler, Grant Jeffreys).<sup>29</sup>
- Many of the Christian sensationalists are making a killing off of the problem by selling books, tapes, dried food goods, etc. Y2K has become big business. That concerns me greatly.
- There exists among many of the sensationalists a conspiracy mentality. By that I mean that they deny any testimony that would tend to go against their view of this by relegating opposing views to a government or other kind of conspiracy. After all, Bill Clinton has lied to us before. However, the earlier cited problem of conflicting stories by Christians should make us careful simply to lay this at someone else's doorstep. Contrary evidence should be investigated and weighed. This is especially true since so much is being written on both sides.
- The panic mode of the sensationalists on some fronts can actually become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy.

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<sup>27</sup> Dave Hunt in his earlier cited work gives several good examples throughout his book.

<sup>28</sup> Steve Hewitt, "Y2K, The Challenge Ahead," *Christian Computing Magazine* 10 (November 1998): 4-5; taken from [www.gospelcom.net/ccmag/y2k/covr1198.html](http://www.gospelcom.net/ccmag/y2k/covr1198.html), 12/12/98.

<sup>29</sup> For a clear refutation of this unfortunate approach, see John Jelinek, "Understanding the Bible Code Controversy," (Unpublished paper given at the Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, April 17, 1998).

However, whether or not these writers above go overboard on the Y2K issue, there are certainly many others who try to attach “detailed” prophetic significance to the Y2K dilemma. For example, Gary North, a Christian Reconstructionist and postmillennialist<sup>30</sup> is advocating that Y2K is going to wreak havoc on the economic system (and elsewhere) to the point that we will have major chaos.<sup>31</sup> While a negative event, this occurrence can serve the dominionists<sup>32</sup> well as they seek to reconstruct society on the rubble that is created. Thus, for Christians like North, Y2K could become a kind of step along the way in the evolution of the postmillennial vision of Christian Reconstructionism. North has a website and a periodical named *The Remnant Review*. Yet, even premillennialists quote North as if he is an authority on these issues even though he has a theological agenda quite different. Christians need not worry about his dire predictions. North had predicted that July 1998 would see runs on the banks due to the rollover to “99” as the fiscal year and the consequent loss of payments caused by computer shutdown. He even predicted the shutdown of most governments.<sup>33</sup> But it didn’t happen!!!! Remember the saying, “Fool me once shame on you; fool me twice . . .”

However, premillennialists have also gotten into the sensational fray over the Y2K dilemma with a kind of historicist frenzy rather than the traditional futurist approach used by most premillennialists. A couple of examples would be Jack Van Impe’s television program and his *2000 Time Bomb* video. An advertisement for this video states, “See how the effects of this predicted computer catastrophe coincide with Bible prophecy regarding the coming of the Lord and the latter days of time on this earth!”<sup>34</sup> I have not watched the video to see what those details might be. Ron Reese of Maranatha Ministries gives another example. He states that

The Bible prophesies several major military conflicts the final seven years of the Tribulation before the Second Coming of Christ. More than half of the population of the world will die during this cataclysmic time!!! Could this computer Y2K crisis play a major role in bringing about these horrible wars, where the Bible strongly implies the use of weapons of mass destruction . . .?!<sup>35</sup>

Dave Hunt shows a good job of how Reese even quotes Gary North for justification even when Gary North is a preterist and postmillennialist who believes that all of the tribulation passages have already been fulfilled!<sup>36</sup> However, Reese surprisingly talks about governments being laid low and an economic earthquake emerging per North but does not realize that the absence of

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<sup>30</sup> Postmillennialism is the view that the Church will usher in the kingdom of God on earth at the end of which Jesus will return to earth. It views the Second Coming as something distant in the future.

<sup>31</sup> His rather extensive Internet collection of links on the subject is impressive but selective (see [www.garynorth.com](http://www.garynorth.com)).

<sup>32</sup> By “dominionist” is meant someone who holds to one of the recent brands of dominion theology. Two major camps exist which are influenced by each other. One is the charismatic dominionists who see through many of the gifts of the Spirit and engagement in spiritual warfare a way to gain victory over Satan and the world and create a period of widespread revival and change in society due to the success of the spiritual warfare. The second camp is the Reformed dominionists whose postmillennialism is an attempt to Christianize society through evangelism as well as political and social means. North is in the latter camp.

<sup>33</sup> Hunt, 228.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Hunt, 173-74.

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Hunt, 173.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* It is not clear to me if Reese is pre-tribulational or post-tribulational (or something else) in his view of the rapture of the Church.

computers goes contrary to the present use of weapons of mass destruction which are all virtually delivered via the aid of computers.<sup>37</sup> This leads to one major contradiction that seems to be a mainstay among those who are trying to use the Y2K issue in correlation with Bible prophecy.

### **Passages That Suggest the Absence of Computers**

Some might turn to passages such as those involving the invasion of Israel by Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39. Notice the verses below:

**Ezekiel 38:15** And thou [Gog] shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army.

**Ezekiel 39:8-10** And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves, and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire seven years: So that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall burn the weapons with fire: and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and robbed them, saith the Lord God.

The mention of horses in warfare and the mention of various implements of war, which by themselves are not described in any modern technological way, could be taken to mean that at some point, the battle involves more primitive weapons. This is certainly possible but may only be localized for this particular battle.

### **Passages That Suggest End-Time Use of Technology**

There are many other passages which suggest weapons of mass destruction or that lead modern Christians to the assumption of a computerized age. For example, note the following examples:

- **Daniel 12:4** – Some take this as a prediction of great mobility/speed and increase of knowledge in the last days. As such it might suggest a technological age in a context of the tribulation period described in the latter verses of Daniel 11.
- **Rev. 11:9** – The dead bodies of the two witnesses, which are viewed in the streets, are seen by all in the world. Is this a reference to technology (electricity, video, satellites, et al)?
- **Rev. 13:11-18** (especially verse 17) – The rise of the first beast (associated with Antichrist) and the use of the mark of the beast and the number 666 have all been related to a technological world.
- **Rev. 14:20** – The extent of the blood and the implied deaths is hard to imagine without weapons of mass destruction which entails for most modern readers some computerization.

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<sup>37</sup> Part of this author's experience was designing software for guided "smart" bombs.

- **Rev. 18:3, 11-17** – The ongoing collection of wealth may or may not reflect the continuation of modern economic advancement right up to the end. It is hard to imagine this without some form of technology.

In light of these kinds of passages, there is plenty of room for seeing the continuation of technology into the worst of times, the seven-year tribulation period. What is interesting is that some alarmists try to hold both things true at the same time – Y2K destruction of technology and the continued use of weapons of mass destruction and other features requiring technology. One can not hold to both at the same time.<sup>38</sup>

One final note on the prophecy connection is that no one knows the day or the hour of the Rapture of the Church. It is important for believers not to join anyone in making any wild predictions associated with Y2K as if there is a certainty of the return of the Lord when 2000 gets here.

## Concluding Recommendations

After all of this discussion, so what? What should we do in a practical way? First of all, I want all Christians to refuse to think in terms of Y2K as a special form of public dilemma. The reason I have already hinted at. I believe there are just as many other serious factors in our culture such as virus attacks on computer systems, nuclear attacks by unsuspected dictators or terrorists who somehow get the bomb, biological warfare, etc. All of these do not need the Y2K dilemma to sit at the same level or higher as a major problem. It is one of my abiding concerns that Y2K, far from being a “sign of the times,” has become a “sidetrack of the times.” It distracts us from the task in front of us as Christian witnesses by turning many of us into paranoid people without faith. It also moves our attention away from these other menacing problems. With that in mind, a believer can have a proper perspective for responding modestly to the Y2K problem. Here are some suggestions based upon a three-day scenario of maximum disruption of life:

1. Collect enough water to last a few days for your entire family.
2. Collect some extra blankets if you live in a northerly climate.
3. Keep handy flashlights, batteries, etc.
4. Keep handy some propane for cooking on your campsite stove in case you have temporary loss of power.
5. Procure a first-aid kit.
6. Take a few days cash out of the bank as a precaution (\$60 to \$100).
7. Trust Christ as Lord and Savior if you do not know him. Then get involved in a local church where you have a larger family who can help you through any difficult times.
8. Consciously voice faith instead of paranoia to unbelievers you come in contact with. The last thing they need to see is a frightened Christian.

I want to introduce my last suggestion with a quote from computer expert Pete Holzmann. I found this quote which reminded me of some of the wild predictions that occurred when I was in high school and college two decades and more ago. First, we would run out of petroleum in the

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<sup>38</sup> See Hunt, 175-78.

1990s. That one was not even close. Also, I was taught global freezing, not global warming. Why can't they get their act together? Well, back to Pete Holzmann. He was asked about prior predictions of great distress that had failed. His answer was

Oh, sure. In fact, I was just reading an article about the world population explosion: Paul Erlich's 1968 best seller, *The Population Bomb*. He predicted that by the 1970s hundreds of millions of people would starve to death. That 65 million Americans would starve between 1980 and 1989, and by 1999, the US populations would have declined to 22.6 million. And he said that England was in an even more desperate situation and if he were a gambler, he would take even money that England would not exist in the year 2000. Today that sounds ludicrous! Yet his theory was taught in serious college courses in the late 60s and early 70s.<sup>39</sup>

We must be careful as Christians not to tie our wagons to something that might be a laughable item in generations to come. So, how do I word my last recommendation to you. Oh, yes ...

## **9. Remember William Miller!!**

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<sup>39</sup> Interview, Pete Holzmann, "Y2K Campus," <http://www.boundless.org/features/a0000102.html>, 2, 3/23/99.