

Why I Still Trust
Our Prophecies

End-Time Living

Eschatology and
Kingdom Ethics

FALL 2016 • WWW.ATODAY.ORG

Adventist *Today*

A NEW LOOK
at the
END TIMES





features

3 A New Look at the End Times

By Loren Seibold

6 Eight Reasons to Stop End-Time Fearmongering

By Michelle Doucoumes

8 Jesus and God's Kingdom

By Zane Yi

10 Three Reasons to Still Believe in our Prophetic Message

By Clifford Goldstein

13 End-Time Living

By Rebecca Murdock

16 Prophetic Eschatology and the Ethics of the Kingdom

By Olive Hemmings

18 Yes, We Are Still "Advent-ist"

By Fritz Guy

20 Why Hasn't Jesus Returned?

By Richard W. Coffen

22 A Brief History of the Investigative Judgment

By Glenn Hansen

DEPARTMENTS

24 Alden Thompson

If the Pope Reflects the Character of Christ

28 The Exegete

The *Ki*Factor: Isaiah 55:8-9

By Maylan Church

Executive Editor

Loren Seibold

Copy Editor

Debra J. Hicks

Contributing Editors

James Walters
John McLarty
J. David Newman

Art Director

Chris Komisar

Online Editors

Senior Editor: Jiggs Gallagher
News Editor: Bjorn Karlman
Correspondent: Alethia Nkosi
Features: Debbonnaire Kovacs
Commentary: Mark Gutman
Poetry and the Arts: Debbonnaire Kovacs
Reviews: Edwin A. Schwisow
Web Coordinator: Heather Gutman
Facebook Editor: Emmy Halvorsen

Executive Director

Monte Sahlin

Executive Secretary of Development

Edwin A. Schwisow

FOUNDATION BOARD

Nate Schilt, Jim Walters, Monte Sahlin, Andrew Clark, Keith Colburn, Chris Daley, Larry Downing, Bill Garber, John Hoehn, Edmond Jones, Mailen Kootsey, Keisha McKenzie, Chuck Mitchell, Jim Nelson, Warren Nelson, Chris Oberg, Gene Platt, E. Gary Raines, Paul Richardson, Sasha Ross, Dan Savino, Loren Seibold, J. Gordon Short, James Stirling, Eldon Stratton, Ervin Taylor, David Van Putten, John Vogt

SENIOR LIFETIME ADVISORS

(\$25,000+)
Elwin Dunn, Patricia & Douglas Ewing, Kathi & Richard Guth, John Hoehn, Judy & John Jacobson, Al Koppel, Joan Ogden, Dr. & Mrs. Thaine Price, Judy & Gordon Rick, Mike Scofield, Lovina & J. Gordon Short, Marilyn & Ervin Taylor, Nancy & John Vogt, Priscilla & James Walters

LIFETIME ADVISORS (\$10,000+)

Jane Bainum, Susan & Hernan Barros, Diana & Ken Bauer, Kelli & Robert Black, Ginny & Todd Burley, Tierrasanta Church, Pat & Ron Cople, Kathryn & James Dexter, Rosemary & Merlyn Duerksen, Dan Engeberg, Sandra & Sam Geli, Patricia Hare, Jackie & Jim Henneberg, Marielynn & Edwin Hill, Carmen & Clive Holland, Erika & Brian Johnson, Carmen & Yung Lau, David T. Person II, Patricia Phillips, R. Marina & E. Gary Raines, Judith Rausch, Dee Dee & Nate Schilt, Stewart Shankel, James Stirling, Tierrasanta SDA Church, Kit Watts

UNDERWRITING ADVISORS

(\$2,500+ DURING THE LAST TWO YEARS)
L. Humberto Covarrubias, William Garber, Delores & Robert Hasse, Lucille Lorenz, Lyndon Marter, Paul A. Richardson, Alden Thompson, Betty & James Webster

GENERAL ADVISORS

(\$500+/YEAR PLAN)
Cherry Ashlock, Almon Balkins, Charlotte & Robert Brody, Beverly & Sidney Christiansen, Ruth Christensen & Glenn Henriksen, Debra & Anders Engdahl, Ed Fry, Wayne Greaves, Karita & DeWitt Goulbourne, Catherine Lang-Titus, Vincent Melashenko, Charles Mitchell, Dale Morrison, Corinne & Michael Pestes, Tracy & Craig Reynolds, Ruth & Beryl Rivers, Gretchen & Monte Sahlin, Beverly & David Sandquist, Carolyn & Robert Tandy, Amabel & Eric Tsao, Dr. Robin Vandermolen, Jackie & Hal Williams

Adventist Today brings contemporary issues of importance to Adventist church members and is a member of The Associated Church Press. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor, and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send an email to atoday@atoday.org or mail to: *Adventist Today*, PO Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135. Voice: (503) 826-8600 Website: atoday.org.

As an independent press, *Adventist Today* relies on donations to meet its operating expenses. To make a donation, go to www.atoday.org or mail to *Adventist Today*, PO Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135. Thanks for supporting *Adventist Today* with your regular tax-deductible donations.

Adventist Today (ISSN 1079-5499) is published quarterly by Adventist Today Foundation, 50800 SE Baty Rd, Sandy, OR 97055. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2 years) for individuals. \$40 for institutions. (Payment by check or credit card.) Add \$10 for address outside North America. Periodical postage paid at Sandy, Oregon, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135. Copyright © 2016 by Adventist Today Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.



A Hermeneutic for the End Times

By Loren Seibold

“He worries me,” he said, “this charming, open-minded pope.”

“Why?” I asked. “He seems to me very thoughtful, very kind.”

“That’s just it,” my friend said. “He’s becoming entirely too popular. He has even taken you in. If he becomes influential enough, he can bring to pass all the things that we know the papacy is going to do at the end of time.”

“Have you seen any evidence,” I asked, “that he’s gearing up for a takeover of our government in order to enforce a Sunday law?”

“No, of course not,” he said. “He wouldn’t come right out and say that. He’s coy, seductive. First, he’s winning the confidence of the world. Remember, ‘all the world wondered after the beast.’ Then, he’s going to spring it on us. And people like you will be unprepared.”

Sigh.

Analyzing the Signs

It seems that no matter what the pope does or doesn’t do, no matter what he says or doesn’t say, he is going to fulfill our worst expectations of him. He can’t win. If he advocated on behalf of kittens, some Seventh-day Adventists would come out in opposition to kittens. If he and Ted Wilson were walking along the same sidewalk, and Ted suddenly fell over with cardiac arrest and the pope gave him CPR until the squad arrived, they’d accuse him of spreading pope germs.

When I was a child, I was told that we Seventh-day Adventists followed closely the events in the world around us, that we were looking to see Bible prophecies in the signs of the times. But it seems to me now that it has rarely been a genuine analysis, an open-minded attempt to understand what’s happening in the world and how it affects us and our faith. No, everything we see tells us the same thing.

If the pope is nasty and controlling, as happened in the Middle Ages, it confirms our view that the “time of trouble, such as never was” (Dan. 12:1, KJV) is upon us. If the pope is good and kind, it confirms our view that the time of trouble, such as never was, is upon us.

And the fact is that up until now, we’ve been wrong. The time of trouble such as never was hasn’t arrived. If you want to know why our current generation is so much less interested in eschatology than our great-grandparents were, you only need to look at the clumsy and unsubtle way we’ve employed end-time signs. We have wasted our reputation as world-watchers on predictions that scared and excited people at first, but later left them disillusioned.

Confirmation Bias

Of course, it goes beyond the pope. When the European Union (EU) came together, I remember people saying: “See that? They’re organizing so that it will be easier to enforce the International Sunday Law.” When Britain voted to leave the EU, I knew I would soon hear: “See? Just like the Bible says, the toes of iron and clay will never cleave one to another.”

Every event in the world seems painted just for our canvas. If there’s a war, we declare, ‘Wars and rumors of wars!’ If peace breaks out, we mutter, “Peace, peace, but there is no peace.” If a politician does something we disapprove of, we’re one step closer to the end. If he does something moral and just, something of which no thoughtful person can disapprove, Satan is just using him to lull us into a false sense of security.

Go ahead. Come up with any bit of news. Good or bad or in between. I bet you’ve heard some saint spin it to say that the time of the end is here.

Sunday blue laws are now largely eliminated in the United States. I wonder if closing stores on Sunday ever was a threat to our Sabbath keeping. But

Fear has affected not only our theology, not only our eschatology, but also our psychology. It’s why, through so much of our history, we’ve been so hard on people.

supposing it was, isn't this good news? Keeping religious symbols and displays off of public property and out of schools—isn't this good news for the separation of church and state? But lately an increasing number of us have bought into the evangelical Christian agenda of making the public sphere Christian, so now

Seventh-day Adventist scholars might do well to define an interpretive framework for explaining world events, one that does more than repeat what we have been wrong about for more than 170 years.

we can say, no, these things mean the secularizing of America, which (and this is a canard repeated so often that many people believe it) our founding fathers intended to be a Christian nation. (Most of our founding fathers were—I'm glad to say, because of the several essential freedoms they bequeathed to us—humanists.)

Our studying the signs of the times is largely meaningless if we slap the same conclusion on all of them. It means that we're not doing very thoughtful or very nuanced exegeses of world events. Wouldn't common sense say that if you are carefully monitoring world events and trying to predict what prophesied event is about to happen based on them, then if something happens that leads to one conclusion, the opposite of that would lead to a different conclusion? But among us, totally opposite events often mean the same thing. We're finding what we want to find, which is mere confirmation bias.

In this observation I am joined by Ellen White, who noted the same tendency in her day. "We are not to set our stakes," she wrote, "and then interpret everything to reach this set point."¹ Again, "If every idea we have entertained in doctrines is truth, will not the truth bear to be investigated? Will it totter and fall if criticized? If so, let it fall, the sooner the better."²

Indulging in Fear

Someone is bound to say, "Yes, but what you call bad news—papal opposition, Sunday laws, persecution—really is good news, because it means Jesus is coming soon." On the face of it, perhaps. But I'm seriously beginning to doubt whether very many Adventists are looking forward in eager anticipation to Jesus' return. If they were, the emphasis would be there, rather than on all of the dangers they expect to face first.

Read through *The Great Controversy* and notice the small proportion of it that has to do with joyful expectation and peace in Christ. It is mostly an account of God's people persecuted and hounded, intensely suffering as they stand for the right in the face of opposition. It ends with the Spirit of God actually being withdrawn from his people so that they are forced to stand without a mediator. Only in the last several pages do we succumb to unalloyed joy.

That is to say, how we came by our fearfulness is no mystery: it's in our founding documents, part of the character that established us.

Fear has affected not only our theology, not only our eschatology, but also our psychology. It's why, through so much of our history, we've been so hard on people. It's why so many, including many of our children, leave the church when they run into difficulties. There's too little good news here. There's good advice. Lots of warnings. Plenty of correctives. But of good news—news that erases fear, such as "Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" or "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief"—there's not enough.

We're hardly aware of it anymore, even those of us who are gospel believers. This pessimism permeated us early on, imprinted upon us like a fear tattoo that we can't scrub off and can't quite cover up, either. It's why we write so critically about the church and about one another. Even when we're at our happiest, that reedy *sotto voce* intones in the background: there's so much to be afraid of, so much to oppose, so much to be suspicious of, so much to criticize. We have all kinds of reasons for peace, for optimism, for actual cheer. But we complain a lot. We fight a lot. We try to control others in the church orbit. All because our outlook on the world is a fearful one.

And how's that pessimism working for us? Well, look around. After years of indulging our fears, has anyone started Sunday law proceedings? Is religious freedom being taken away from the Western church? We have a few problems, but we're doing quite well, thanks.

Meanwhile, Seventh-day Adventists in parts of western Africa are in actual peril because of their faith, who—and this

is no lie—don't believe they're in a time of trouble because the Adventists in the United States are still worshipping freely!

Let's admit that events haven't happened according to any of the schedules we've laid out. Our record isn't good.

A Hermeneutic for World Events

If we're going to make a case for end-time signs, then let's do it intelligently and systematically. Seventh-day Adventist scholars might do well to define an interpretive framework for explaining world events, one that does more than repeat what we have been wrong about for more than 170 years.

Some years ago I wrote an article titled "Letting Roman Catholics Off the Hook"³ about how it was time for us to rethink our enemies list. I argued that after a century-plus, we ought to at least be open to the possibility that there are other dangerous threats to religious liberty—such as radical Islam, something Ellen White didn't have much cause to warn us about—and that in a rapidly dechristianizing world, Roman Catholicism might not be a threat as much as an ally. I also suggested that it was unhealthy for followers of Christ to base so much of their identity on fear of another religion rather than trust in God.

What I was attempting was precisely what I'm calling for here: to study the world in a thoughtful way and to chart an eschatological path forward, even if it means admitting that we have been wrong in some past particulars. The result was that I was accused of being a Jesuit, in direct converse with the pope. (There is even a sermon floating around about my alliance with Rome. I suppose I should be flattered. How many people get to be preached against by name?) I heard *The Great Controversy*, page 581, quoted at me incessantly: "And let it be remembered, it is the boast of Rome that she never changes."

While I realize my objections won't change anyone's mind, let me just say that my importance to the Holy See has been greatly exaggerated. For the record, at least some of Catholicism's doctrines are, as far as I can see, described well by Jesus when he spoke of "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." I can't see the biblical basis for celibacy, the sacraments, or images; neither the power of the Roman church hierarchy nor its wealth; or how it treats women.

But I confess that I do not spend a lot of time fretting about either Catholics or the papacy. Several of my dearest friends are Roman Catholics. As for the pope, he seems like a kind man. He wants to see everyone treated justly, even those who choose lifestyles that some Christians believe the Bible doesn't approve of. I don't think he's the vicar of Christ or any kind of divine figure, but in WWJD terms, his behavior is at least as good as

I've seen from some of our own, and sometimes better. It would be downright unchristian of me to deny that he and I worship the same Lord. If I had the chance, I would love to meet him and would gladly pray with him.

If We Wait Long Enough...

And by the way, it isn't any more useful to say that if we wait long enough what we predicted will happen, than it is to say that with enough billions of years, single-celled organisms evolved, entirely on their own, into a Gandhi or an Abraham Lincoln. Don't forget that we were told right up front not to get specific about Christ's schedule. After a list of bad things we'll all suffer—wars, natural disasters, spiritual deceptions—Jesus added: But that's not yet the end. That sort of stuff has always happened, and it will keep happening. So don't get all worked up every time you're afraid of something. That's just life on this Earth. I'll return when I decide to, most likely when you *aren't* expecting me.

Because a few reading this may not be especially adept at understanding nuance, I'm going to have to say this clearly: I'm not denying threats to religious liberty or even persecution for faith. How could I deny it when it's happening right now in parts of the world? Nor am I doubting that Jesus promised to return for us. I'm only saying that we might be better served if we did our end-time interpretation by a sensible hermeneutic that could interpret events in whichever way they pointed.

One might even argue that we call a moratorium on sign-of-the-end predictions. That we Seventh-day Adventists needn't mention the pope (or "apostate Protestantism") ever again. That it might be enough for us to say: "Jesus is coming again. We are ready because we trust in God's grace through Christ Jesus. In the meantime, we will be kind, just, and filled with the Spirit. We'll watch out for unkindness and injustice and do our best to counter it. We'll help those who are victims of sin. We'll be as much like Jesus as we can be, until he returns."

Were we to adopt that plan, I suspect we'd find plenty of our own spiritual work to do without wasting our spiritual energies on another religion's weaknesses. 🚫

¹*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), p. 44.

²*Ellen White Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 9 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 216.

³*Adventist Today*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Winter 2010, pp. 22-23.

EIGHT REASONS TO STOP END-TIME FEARMONGERING

By Michelle Doucoumes

“THE END OF TIME”—WORDS THAT STRIKE fear into the heart of the best of Adventists. You know you might be Adventist if your childhood nightmares were about running through the woods being chased by angry Catholics. (Some of you may still have those dreams.)

The end times raise some frightening questions. Do I qualify for translation? What if I cave under persecution? Don't I need to achieve perfection before Jesus can come? Isn't the church going down the drain of compromise? Am I canning enough food?

Here are eight reasons why I believe we need to stop spreading fear about the end times, reasons that might shine light on some of our under-the-bed end-time monsters.

Because they're going to steal your stash of food anyway. If you have a hoard of food, don't you think others will come looking for it? Maybe God will miraculously hide it from them, but he could also let your food be taken so you'd actually have to trust him to provide for you, just as the rest of the saints will. I'm not saying we shouldn't prepare, but if you're trying feverishly to get off the grid and get set up in your own self-sufficient hideout before everything goes down, you may have a surprise coming.

Because your making it through the end times is God's business, not yours. At what point in the future does your salvation stop being about what God does and start being about what you do? Instead of worrying about whether your faith will be strong enough to stand through end-time persecution, why don't you ask yourself a better question: Am I learning to trust God now? Because if you are, then he should have enough raw material to work with to get you through



the end times. If God helped you yesterday to prepare for the challenges of today, what makes you think he won't continue that all the way through to the end?

Because the final-generation folks won't be any better than you. But wait; haven't we read that "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own"?¹ Perhaps we're missing what it means to reproduce God's character. If God's character is love (1 John 4:8), then these would be the people who've allowed God to come into their hearts completely. Since we know there will be a shaking time when many in the church will exit and others will enter (2 Thess. 2:3, etc.), we don't know exactly what this group will look like. Might there be that one random guy who found Jesus toward the end, is fully committed to him, and will be standing around with long hair, necklaces, or torn-up jeans, munching on a bag of Cheetos that he joyously found in the wilderness right before translation? Cheetos in the wilderness may be a little far-fetched, but you get the point. I have a suspicion that the makeup of that 144,000 might surprise us, but if you love Jesus, it'll be a group you'll fit right into.

Because standing without a mediator doesn't mean that your best Friend leaves you. You have read quotes such as this: "Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling."² Yes, there will be a time when right and wrong, good and evil, can be seen so clearly that following the deceiver's lies will hold no appeal. *The Desire of Ages* tells us that "Through an appreciation of the character of Christ,

through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us."³ But does this mean that we're left alone to conquer in our own strength—that we've reached a holy state where we don't need Jesus anymore? Friends, if I ever—even at the very end of time—get to a place where I don't think I need Jesus anymore, you will know I'm not right with God.

Because it's God who vindicates his character, not us. I am in no doubt that God's people will show his character of love at the end. But this can make us feel like we'd better get our act together or else the universe won't be able to believe that God's law can be kept—and it's up to us to prove it! No, Jesus has already proved God's character. Done. What about the idea that there must be some critical mass of people in the end who are so good that God can start the final events, because his character will be secure? Look through Scripture: every time God's name is to be vindicated, he is the one who does it (Psa. 23:3; 79:9; Isa. 43:25; Eze. 36:21-24; and more). I do believe that God's end-time people will be a witness to the universe. But let's not forget that it is God who vindicates his own name, not us.

Because not every change or differing opinion is a sign that the church's standards are going down the drain.

New music that's not in the hymnal? We're becoming like the world! A new way of looking at something in the Bible? We're losing our identity! Now, certainly, there are new things that don't take the church in good directions. But not *everything* new or different is a step down the road to perdition. A lot of the controversy in the church is not so much about the issues themselves, but about fear. We are constantly on guard, classifying others and their ideas as "safe" or "questionable." False teachings and practices will threaten the church at the end, as they have in the past,

which is why we must remain faithful to Scripture. But in our zeal to preserve the message of our Adventist pioneers, are we losing their spirit—a spirit that was not afraid to ask questions, challenge beliefs, and follow God's leading wherever it took them?

Because it's not your job to facilitate the shaking. If we're trusting God to lead his church, why are we so zealous to clean it up, so fearful of its corruption? In Matthew 13 the workers (representing us) were getting all freaked out that tares were growing with the wheat. But God let them remain in his field—his church. Until the harvest, can we believe that this is still the church God loves, even with the tares? Liberal tares, conservative tares, tares that look like wheat, wheat that looks like tares...God knows which are which. You don't.

Because fear is not of God. Maybe you fear that you're not good enough or prepared enough for the end times. Or that you'll not be perfect enough to stand in the final generation. Maybe you fear what's happening in the church right now. We are definitely to watch and pray—but we are not to fear. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (1 Tim. 1:7, NKJV). Fear is of the devil. Hope is of God, a hope that the same God who started the work will complete it—in the world, and in you (Phil. 1:6).

No, you're not ready for what's coming. But God is. 🇺🇸

¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), p. 69.

² White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 425.

³ White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 668.

GROWING UP IN THE CHURCH, I ENVISIONED getting ready for the second coming to be something like what is portrayed by the families on the National Geographic show *Doomsday Preppers*.

Doomsday Preppers follows real families who are anticipating a catastrophic event and preparing themselves accordingly. They stockpile equipment, food, and water; undergo special training; and build structures that will withstand heat, cold, wind, water, and fire. These families are not awaiting the second coming, but they are anticipating that something will happen in the future to drastically change the world's social, political, economic, and physical landscape.

My understanding of the second

reality in his day. He began his ministry proclaiming that “the kingdom of heaven *has come near*” (Matt. 4:17, emphasis mine).¹ When his healings were called into question by religious leaders, he told them, “[I]f it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God *has come upon you*” (Matt. 12:28, emphasis mine).

Jesus evidently talked about the kingdom being near so often that people wanted to know when it would actually come. Here's what Jesus told them: “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God *is in your midst*” (Luke 17:20-21, emphasis mine).

exactly. The term “heaven” is only used in Matthew for Jesus’ audience of Jewish Christians who, out of reverence, would not say God’s name out loud. Jesus’ instructions on prayer to his disciples clarify that the kingdom he spoke of isn’t a geographical place. Think of these lines in the Lord’s Prayer: “*your kingdom come, your will be done*, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9-10, ESV, emphasis mine). This parallelism, a common way the Bible reiterates important points, shows that God’s kingdom is synonymous with his will being done. It’s wherever and whenever God’s intentions for his creation are being carried out.²

Jesus explained what these intentions were, and he also demonstrated what they looked like. Matthew summarized his ministry this way: “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them” (Matt. 4:23-24).

The gospel, according to Jesus, is that God’s will can be done in the world. Jesus dedicated his life to teaching what this looked like and to living it out. And two thousand years later, it continues to be a pregnant possibility for each of us at each and every moment.

The Growing Kingdom

There is definitely an “already/not yet” aspect to Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom,³ but as Adventists, we’ve naturally focused on the “not yet”: God’s kingdom still to come. So, how does one reconcile Jesus’ clear emphasis on the present kingdom with equally clear teachings about the future judgment and rewards that have received so much emphasis in our eschatology? Some of

JESUS AND GOD’S KINGDOM

by Zane Yi

coming and how to prepare for it has changed (might I say matured?) over the years, thanks to a growing understanding of something Jesus talked about a lot: the kingdom of heaven.

A Present Reality?

Adventist eschatology, with our teachings about the second advent, encourages us to focus mostly on those teachings of Jesus that emphasize judgment, preparation, and the signs of his return. We understand these passages through the vivid, apocalyptic imagery of Daniel and Revelation. But this type of reading can distort Jesus’ message by making it more about the life to come than the lives we currently live.

Our usual eschatology is challenged when we examine the central theme of Jesus’ teaching ministry: the kingdom of heaven. Jesus spoke of it as a *present*

Apparently, the kingdom was much closer than most people thought in Jesus’ day. Could it be closer than we think today? Might it be, in some sense, already here?

What’s a Kingdom?

I find that my own confusion stems from the associations I have with the words “kingdom” and “heaven.” I immediately start thinking about Disneyland, or about chubby angel babies floating in fluffy clouds with harps. These associations share something in common: they are places. Alone or combined, they might lead us to misunderstand Jesus as referring to some other locale, somewhere other than here, and some time other than now, like the exotic places we see in Facebook vacation photos.

Was Jesus referring to a place when he spoke of the kingdom of heaven? Not

the metaphors that Jesus used to explain the kingdom help us bridge what initially appears to be a conceptual chasm.

The preaching of Adventist evangelistic campaigns usually features, at some point, King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue being demolished by a rock (Dan. 2:31-35). The evangelist explains how each part of the statue represents points in history up to the very present, while the rock represents the return of Christ crashing into the world cataclysmically at the end of history, which is expected in the very near future. Daniel even explains: "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It *will crush* all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (verse 44, emphasis mine).

Yet Jesus seems to allude to this same passage as already being fulfilled, or soon being fulfilled, by his ministry. Referring to himself as a "cornerstone," he declares: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls *will be crushed*" (Matt. 21:43-44, emphasis mine). If this is the case, the rock in Daniel 2 shouldn't be interpreted as an event yet to come, such as the second coming, but as a person who has already come. In other words, we may need to revisit the popular exposition of this passage, admitting that God's kingdom, in some sense, is already here.

Perhaps we need to, as I've suggested previously, read the Bible more the way Jesus did,⁴ to interpret Daniel the way Jesus did rather than letting Daniel and Revelation tell us what Jesus meant.

In tension with the apocalyptic expectations of his own day, Jesus sometimes described the coming of the kingdom using organic metaphors. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed," he said, "which a man took and planted

in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches" (Matt. 13:31-32). Notice the echoes of another dream sequence in Daniel, where the king envisions a tree growing to fill the earth and providing shade and shelter to animals and birds (Dan. 4:4-12).

Another metaphor Jesus used is that of yeast working itself through dough (Matt. 13:33). Any baker knows that granules of yeast, as unimpressive as they are, are essential to a properly baked loaf of bread. The common theme of both metaphors, seeds and yeast, is that the kingdom of heaven starts off small and insignificant but grows into something big. God's kingdom grows *through* history rather than coming all at once at the end of history.

Ellen White discusses Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of heaven in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*. She distinguishes between the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory, explaining that the kingdom of God's grace is something we can experience now, whereas the kingdom of glory will be established at the second coming.⁵ In some ways, this distinction is helpful, but I also think one could easily misunderstand Mrs. White to be talking about two different kingdoms—one of grace and another of glory—rather than two stages of the same kingdom.

It is important to emphasize the fundamental continuity between the reality Jesus spoke of and what many of us hope for. History is a movement of *some* people in *some* places doing God's will *some* of the time to a time when *all* people in *all* places will do God's will *all* of the time. The great news is that we are invited by Jesus to live life the way God intended it here and now. In other words, Jesus' teachings are not a means for something else, such as making it into the kingdom of heaven one day—an interpretation that

makes Jesus into a legalist. Rather, they are a gracious invitation to more and more people of living life at its fullest now.

Curing Otherworldliness

Theologians classify Adventist eschatology as variety of *premillennialism*, an alternative to *postmillennialism*. Premillennialists are wary of postmillennial tendencies to optimistically identify God's kingdom with purely human initiatives (i.e., the spread of the Enlightenment, political liberalism, or free-market capitalism). But in reaction, there is a tendency among premillennialists to de-emphasize the way God is already at work in the world and to overemphasize societal darkness and depravity. This certainly seems to be the case when it comes to many sermons preached at worship services on Sabbaths following a tragic news cycle.

Adventists are not Gnostics in the technical sense of the word; we don't view materiality as evil or something to be escaped. But the sharp duality that we find in this ancient early competitor to Christianity is often mirrored horizontally in our collective thinking. The metaphysical distinction between the material and immaterial found in Gnostic thought has been flattened and stretched temporally; we may live in the present, but really, we're waiting for the future.

And in doing so, we make ourselves susceptible to Friedrich Nietzsche's critique that faith is a symptom of a nihilistic otherworldliness.

An antidote to this very real existential malady, I believe, is reclaiming Jesus' understanding of the gospel as an ever-present possibility and reality. 🚦

¹ All scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version (NIV).

² See Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

³ See George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

⁴ See Zane Yi, "Beyond Biblical Bread" in *Adventist Today*, Spring 2016, pp. 9-11.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1896, 1955), p. 108.

SOMEONE ONCE ASKED THE QUESTION, “WHY SHOULD WE STILL believe in our prophetic message?” The question reminded me of another one: “Have you stopped beating your wife yet?” Each question comes front-loaded with an assumption that I reject; in the case of the first, it’s an assumption that reasons exist for doubting whether we should *still* believe in our prophetic message. Of course we should still believe in it.

What follows are three reasons why.

First: World Events

I was born again one evening in the early fall of 1979. The next day, in a health food store with some Adventists whom I had just met (though I didn’t know that they were Adventists, and the label would have meant nothing to me anyway), I said that I wanted to study prophecy, especially about America.

assuming an electoral clout that, to some degree, remains today. Armed with Bibles, these conservative holy rollers rolled into Washington, D.C., threatening to oust from office anyone who didn’t vote the “biblical” position on everything from Star Wars and lower taxes to aid to the Contras. At the time, they seemed unstoppable.

In short, in the early 1980s, prophecy seemed to be unfolding right before our eyes.

Only one minor problem remained: the Soviet Union.

How could our prophetic message ever happen as long as the United States faced the guns, tanks, barbed wire, and ICBMs of Soviet Communism? The Americans couldn’t remove a tin-pot Bolshevik 90 miles off our shores because of Soviet military might. So how could this country ever wield the kind of influence depicted in Revelation 13? At the time of the pope’s visit, the

THREE REASONS TO STILL BELIEVE IN OUR PROPHETIC MESSAGE

By Clifford Goldstein

“Is America in Bible prophecy?” I asked.

For the next few days, they took me through Daniel 2, Daniel 7, then Revelation 13 and 14. I ate it up. What made it especially appealing was that the same week as I was first shown these prophecies, Pope John Paul II was visiting the United States on a historic and triumphant tour that, possibly even just 10 years earlier, would have been politically impossible. The first time I read about prophecies concerning the United States and papal Rome, the pope was being paraded around the United States like a hero. I learned about the predictions of a future Protestant American alliance with the Vatican the week *Time* magazine published a picture of John Paul II shaking hands with President Jimmy Carter on the White House lawn. The first time I heard of a coming unity between Protestants and Catholics was when the pope of Rome sang Wesleyan hymns with American Protestant leaders.

Not long afterward, especially after the election of Ronald Reagan, the Christian Right rose to political prominence,

Soviets had invaded Afghanistan, and all Jimmy Carter did was withhold pole vaulters from the Moscow Olympics. Saigon had become Ho Chi Minh City, and the Khmer Rouge had taken over Cambodia. In the 1980s, Haile Selassie’s government in Ethiopia was replaced by Marxists, and the socialist Sandinistas gained power in Nicaragua. South Yemen had a Marxist government, and Fidel—thumbing his nose at the *yanquis*—sent troops to prop up a Marxist government in Angola.

I remember, while still a brand new Christian, facing waves of doubt about this prophetic message because of the Soviet Union, which at the time seemed an implacable barrier to the fulfillment of prophecy. As I prayed my way through the doubt, I was brought back to Daniel 2 and the sequence of nations coming and going just as predicted. I realized that yes, the Lord was in control of the nations. So I took a deep breath, uttered another prayer, and pressed ahead in faith, regardless of how the existence of the USSR made it all, in the mid-1980s, seem so impossible.

After all, was the Soviet Union going to just disappear?

Of course, when it did disappear, in the early 1990s, the United States became by far the world's greatest hegemon, having assumed a dominance it hadn't enjoyed since, perhaps, the end of World War II.

All of this was even more remarkable considering that when early Adventists first identified the second beast power of Revelation 13, the United States was hardly in a position to fulfill that role. In 1851, J.N. Andrews first named that power as the United States; in 1888, in *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White affirmed that identification. Although people had inklings of the potential greatness of the United States, it seemed highly unlikely, even in 1888, that America could have ever enforced the mark of the beast on the world.

In the mid-1800s, after all, the big powers were still the old ones: England, France, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary. In 1851, when Andrews first identified the United States as the second beast power in Revelation 13, America had a peacetime army of about 20,000 men, one-tenth the number of the combatants at the Battle of Waterloo alone. In 1814, just 40 years earlier, the British had burned Washington, D.C.; in 1867, just 16 years after Andrews made this prophetic identification (and more than 20 before White penned *The Great Controversy*), Sitting Bull's braves wiped out General Custer's 7th U.S. Cavalry Regiment.

And yet this was the nation that, even back then, early Adventists predicted would enforce the mark of the beast upon the world? A pretty gutsy prediction—one powerfully vindicated, considering the unrivaled dominance that, for now, the United States wields.

As in the early days of the Adventist movement, as in the days when I first joined the church, and still today, seemingly intractable questions remain in regard to how America and Rome could, together, fulfill what Revelation 13 teaches. But so what? Who before the late 1980s ever imagined that the Soviet Union would disappear—and so quickly, too?

There is no question that great changes will need to happen for prophecy to be fulfilled. But great changes can and do come, sometimes quickly. Meanwhile, considering the powerful role America has now, and its good relationship with Rome (the pope in 2015 addressed joint houses of Congress, and some still question the Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of prophecy?), world events—despite obvious challenges—provide the first good reason that we should still believe our prophetic message.

Second: Prophetic Fulfillment

My second reason has to do with the Adventist interpretation of Daniel, which powerfully reinforces our prophetic message regarding the role of Rome in end-time events—no matter how politically incorrect that position.

Daniel 2 is the key, affirming historicism as the hermeneutic for interpreting Daniel. This chapter's sweep of world history places the foundation upon which much of Daniel itself (and, later, Revelation) can be interpreted. The four major world powers can be readily identified as Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome—the vision ending with the destruction of these earthly empires and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

The crucial point? After Greece, which was the belly and thighs of brass (Dan. 2:32), only one other earthly empire arises: the iron in the legs of the statue, which is mixed with clay in the feet and the toes (verse 33). After this final earthly hegemon, God sets up his eternal kingdom (verses 34-35).

In other words, after Greece, only one more power comes, even if it is manifested in two phases: first the legs of iron, and then the feet of iron and clay. It's iron all the way down, which means that the same power, which arises after Greece, extends to the end of the world.

What entity comes after Greece and extends to the end of the world, even if it has changed its form?

What else could be it, but Rome?

Daniel 7 repeats these same four powers, in the same diachronic order, though now they are depicted as beasts and revealed with more detail: lion (Babylon); bear (Media-Persia); leopard (Greece); dragon-like beast (Rome). As with Daniel 2, the last earthly kingdom is the fourth, Rome, which is then followed by God's eternal kingdom. "And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan. 7:27, KJV). The fourth kingdom, the dragon-like beast, though sprouting a little horn, remains the same kingdom all the way through (verses 7-8, 19-21, 23-27).

As in Daniel 2, the power that arose immediately after Greece remained until the end of the world. The fourth kingdom, Rome, which arose immediately after Greece, remains Rome all the way through, even if changed into another phase, that of the little horn, before it is supernaturally destroyed at the end.

Again, what can that be but Rome?

In Daniel 8, a parallel sequence of these empires is revealed, with the exception of Babylon. The ram (named as Media-Persia), the He-goat (named as Greece), is then followed by a final empire, the last one, which—as in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7—arises after Greece and exists until the end, when it is “broken without hand,” (Dan. 8:25, KJV), a clear parallel to the stone cut out “without hands” (Dan. 2:34, KJV), which led to the end of this world and the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom.

Despite the near-universal identification of that final power in Daniel 7 and 8 as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, he and his rule cannot possibly fit. The fact that people believed it was Antiochus makes it Antiochus no more than people centuries later believing that it was Napoleon made it Napoleon. Antiochus disappeared from history a century and half before the first coming of Jesus, which means he couldn’t possibly be the final earthly hegemon depicted in Daniel chapters 2, 7, and 8—a hegemon of worldwide influence and massive strength that exists until supernaturally destroyed at the world’s end.

Again, one entity and only one entity fits: Rome, first pagan, then papal.

And it’s in this papal stage that Rome reappears in Revelation 13, as the first beast, the one that is in alliance with the United States in the context of coerced false worship.

Third: Theology

One doesn’t need to be a Seventh-day Adventist to see in Revelation 13-14 that the issue in the last days will center around worship. People are called to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV), or they are compelled by the second beast (the United States) to worship a manifestation of the first one. The second beast will “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Rev. 13:15, NKJV). People will either worship the Creator or the image of the beast.

The call to worship the Creator in Revelation 14:6 comes directly from the fourth commandment, the seventh-day Sabbath. As Daniel warned, the little horn—the papal stage of the final empire in Daniel 7—“shall intend to change times and law” (Dan. 7:25, NKJV). Though the precise timing and process of change from the seventh day of the week to the first day is still not fully known, there can be no question that Rome, in its

papal stage, institutionalized that change—a direct fulfillment of Daniel 7:25. Every time we drive by a church with a sign for Sunday services, we see a powerful confirmation of our prophetic message.

Revelation 14 makes an unequivocal call to worship the Creator, and it does so with language from the fourth commandment, which itself points to the creation, the foundational truth of all that we believe. What of our beliefs makes sense if God is not our Creator? Every truth, every doctrine, everything we teach rests ultimately on the fact of the Lord as our Creator—a truth so foundational that we are commanded to spend one-seventh of our lives, every week and without exception, to remember this truth. That’s how important it is.

Hence by thinking to “change times and law” the beast of Daniel 7, which reappears in Revelation 13, attempted to usurp the role of God at the most foundational level possible: that of God as Creator. When the question of worshipping the Creator as opposed to worshipping the beast and his image comes to a climax, the outward issue will, we believe, center on the deepest symbol of God as the Creator: the seventh-day Sabbath.

Whatever the looming unknowns about how this could be implemented politically worldwide, theologically what else would the question of worship center upon but the seventh-day Sabbath? Nothing else on Earth gets so basic, so behind and prior to everything else than does the Sabbath. You can’t go any farther back, except to God himself, and what power can usurp *him*? None. So, instead, the beast usurps the next best thing, the broadest and deepest symbol of God as Creator: the seventh-day Sabbath.

Conclusion

In 1979 when I first heard about the mark of the beast, we could raise numerous questions about how prophecy could be fulfilled. We still can. So what? Questions will exist after we are in heaven, too.

Until then, Daniel 2 provides a powerfully rational foundation for our prophetic message. If we build on this prophecy and the historicist hermeneutic it demands, our prophetic message will remain rooted in something as unmovable, as unchangeable, as world history itself. It doesn’t get more solid or universally accessible than that.

So, yes, we have good reasons to *still* believe our prophetic message. You just read three. 📖

END-TIME LIVING



BY REBECCA MURDOCK

I REMEMBER CALLING MY MOTHER FOR career advice, around my second year of college. As I spilled out my woes about all of the things I wanted to study and how little time and money there was to study them all, I asked her how *she* had picked her major in college.

“Well,” she said, “at that time we thought Jesus would be coming soon, so for awhile my friends and I didn’t think we should get a college education. When our prospective missionary destinations wouldn’t accept us unless we had a skill to contribute, I signed up for a two-year associate’s degree, because it took the least amount of money and time away from what I wanted to dedicate to church work and preparing for the second coming.”

Her response surprised me. My mother holds a doctoral degree and is the strongest proponent of education I can

imagine. She has taught at all levels and even chaired departments of education at several Adventist universities. The religious logic she had in her young adult years had never occurred to me throughout mine. Of course, I grew up in a household knowing that Jesus would come soon and that we *should* prepare, but in her youth she had *actually, really* been preparing: academically, financially, and vocationally.

The conversation bothered me, so I hung up the phone and decided to create a file for it in my mental theological-problems-to-work-on-one-day folder. The file sat dormant while I finished college, but in the past couple of years, with the increased social commentary on shootings, bombings, politics, and general end-of-the-world worry, I’ve had plenty of opportunity to take it out, dust it off, and add to it.

The World in Which We Live

If I gained a jewel in heaven for all of the times I’ve heard someone make an eschatological comment in the past year, my heavenly mansion would be full and overflowing by now. The most common exclamations I hear are: “Wow, this is just more proof that we are living in end times” or “I’d like to [insert planned action] in a few years—if we are still here by then” or “What a terrible world we live in” or, lately, “I really hope Jesus makes it here before the election.” We hear this from people in Adventist communities, but even the news anchors on television have been making concluding commentary such as, “What is our world coming to?”

While it proves that all creation and even we ourselves “groan inwardly [and, sometimes, outwardly] while we wait for

adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23, NRSV), I wonder what the effects of our groaning are, especially in an Adventist context. Does our groaning change our relationship with God? How does our longing for another world affect our lives in this one? And are we to groan along with those around us?

Our Relationship with God

Long-distance relationships seem to be framed by a certain tension between contentment with the status quo and anticipation of a future together. Too much of one or the other affects the relationship adversely.

For example, when my husband and I were in a two-year, long-distance relationship during our dating years, I would have days where I was ready to drop my job, friends, family, and rent payment in California and catch a plane to visit his graduate school in Michigan in order to end the pain of missing him. There were other days when I anticipated being with him so much that I actually resented him for not dropping everything he was doing and flying to California to be with me. Sometimes I would numb the pain of distance by getting so wrapped up in homework, family responsibilities, roommate cooking contests, church movie nights, and the like that I would miss his Facetime calls—or forget to call him back.

It could’ve been a lose-lose situation. Too much anticipation and the pain of distance could have overwhelmed me to the point of losing productivity and participation in my current context. Too much contentedness in my current context could’ve slowly blotted out the tremendous imprint his relationship had had in my life, eventually leading me to an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” mentality.

What does love have to do with the end times? From the running-to-the-hills part of the plan to the escaping-persecution part of the plan, I never really imagined that love had much to do with it.

Maintaining such a tension in our relationship with a God that we cannot be with is exhausting. Some days we are forgetful, some days we are impatient, and some days we find ourselves just downright angry at God for taking his long, sweet time in returning. Despite our rationalizations to cope with the time gap, the human heart remains unconvinced, restless, and unsatisfied until the day of reuniting, and it seems that our outward groaning serves to express this persistent restlessness.

Our Relationship with the Earth

During my Adventist schooling, I don’t remember that anyone ever taught a theology of our relationship with the Earth. I knew that we were put on Earth to be stewards, and I was accustomed to hearing professors say how impossible it was to believe in evolution when we look at the intricacy and design of nature. But other than that, nature wasn’t really mentioned all that much, and most of the actual ecological measures were left to the tree-hugging hippies. After all, why pour so much time and money into something that’s just going to pass away in the end? Resources in my church were

usually redistributed to focus on saving *people*, not whales. Until recently, I saw no problem with that. Of course, it would be nice to save the whales too, if we had extra offering money after the church budget was fulfilled, but, realistically, when is that going to happen?

However, my views on our relationship to the Earth changed when my Hebrew professor spent a whole day’s lesson emphasizing the Sabbath and the intricacies of the verb “to rest” in Hebrew community and culture. Resting necessitates having a space/place to rest in, and a very strong link exists between ownership of space and one’s identity. The Israelites always sought their promised land, where they’d have their own space to be a community. From decorating our lockers in high school to taking pride in our family homes, the concept of “our space” is important to us, containing a pride of ownership and a special symbolism.

Why would that be any different on the little corner of the planet that we are privileged to call our own? Why would we stop tending to our “space” because we’re frustrated with what has happened here? We don’t stop washing the dishes or sweeping the floor of a family home just because we got into a fight there with our spouse or kids. Instead, wouldn’t a negative experience at home motivate us to try even harder there, possibly setting out candles or comfortable chairs to create a welcoming and positive environment where positive relationship will thrive?

So let’s ask ourselves: What would preparing our Earth for welcoming and positive relationships look like?

We know that this world is not our permanent home and we are just passers-through. The tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai was also only a temporary space to engage the community in worship and right relationships, but it was important in its context. May we not forget that this “terrible world we live in” is *our* terrible world, and with ownership comes responsibility. Adventists, above all, are well equipped to handle that responsibility, not by complaint, but by example.

Our Relationship with Others

Just as any other Millennial who would rather not deal with the repercussions of politics, I would have been thrilled if Jesus had chosen to come before this year’s general election. I would also happily welcome him if he chose to come before my next Greek midterm. However, since “of that day and hour no one knows,” until then there is an ethic of Christian responsibility for my life here on Earth—and to the others upon it—even in the midst of people or situations I may dislike.

Many of these Adventist slogans about the end of time come from fear drummed up by our reading of Matthew 24, which sounds pretty scary. I was taught that once we hear of wars and rumors of wars, we know that we are living in the end times. And frankly, 2016 seems to fit the bill quite accurately, between violence in the Middle East, North Korea’s threatening actions, and ISIS terrorism. However, a closer reading of verse 6 leads to a completely different conclusion. In fact, the verse says, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; *see that you are not alarmed*; for this must take place, *but the end is not yet*” (NRSV, emphasis mine).

Passionate contributions to the incredible space here on Earth that we’ve been gifted ... serve not only as acts of worship, but also as acts of encouragement to those overwhelmed by the conflicts surrounding us.

Matthew 24 includes another interesting phrase that seems to have been underemphasized. “And because of the increase of lawlessness, *the love of many will grow cold*. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come” (verses 12-14, NRSV, emphasis mine).

Love? What does love have to do with the end times? From the running-to-the-hills part of the plan to the escaping-persecution part of the plan, I never really imagined that love had much to do with it. The end times definitely seem like a period when love would grow cold, yet “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” What does that mean? And why does the verse talk about the good news of the kingdom, after encouraging us to endure to the end and pointing out a lack of love in the world?


In the Old Testament, a blessing received from God (or a fellow being) was always accompanied by an imperative to bless others. If, indeed, Adventists have been blessed with the good news of a loving kingdom, instead of “running to the hills,” or getting ready for Jesus to

“take us home,” or moving to Canada when a U.S. election gets tough, aren’t we the most equipped to stay and do triage in the world when love grows cold? Shouldn’t we be the ones least alarmed? After all, we have the narrative of another world to which we belong and from which we gain the strength to operate in this one.

Watching and Waiting

Thinking back to how my mother in her youth chose to prepare for Jesus’ second coming, I resonate with her anticipation. Yet her choice in later years to continue her education helped her develop into a tremendous missionary in the classrooms she has occupied and communicate powerfully to the many minds she has educated. She has not ceased her waiting and watching, but she has not been idle in the meantime.

I believe that the balance between anticipation and contentment is best represented by the fulfillment of individual vocations, as well as passionate contributions to the incredible space here on Earth that we’ve been gifted. Such contributions serve not only as acts of worship, but also as acts of encouragement to those overwhelmed by the conflicts surrounding us.

In true faithfulness to our call to watch and wait, perhaps we should worry less about what time it is and focus more on fulfilling our God-given mission. For “blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives” (Matt. 24:46, NRSV). 

PROPHETIC ESCHATOLOGY AND

By Olive Hemmings

BECAUSE OF OUR HISTORY, WE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS ARE naturally interested in the end of the world. Some of us go through life obsessed with it, seeing in every world event and natural disaster another apocalyptic sign. Others preach fervently about the end of sin. Stories abound of faithful people who died in despair, disappointed that they didn't live to see the heavens open and hear the last trumpet sound.

Yet what if we who have this hope are ourselves ignoring, or even contributing to, the suffering we hope will soon come to an end? Should the church hope for a New Jerusalem while it overlooks—or even enables—materialism, greed, and exploitation, the chief causes of human suffering?

Two Eschatologies

We may approach eschatology from two directions.

We can carry on as a church, unaware of our own contribution to the problems in the world, and place all of our hope in a time when God will clean up Earth for us through fire and plagues. This is *apocalyptic eschatology*.

Or, we can take up the prophetic role of harbingers and overseers of God's justice in the world. We can get down to the unpopular and dangerous task of cleaning up our actions by doing what God expects us to do, based on the example of Jesus the Messiah: to deny self, take up the cross, and follow. This is *ethical eschatology*.

The Kingdom of Righteousness

There is a popular assumption that the work of prophecy is to predict end-time events. However, in the Hebrew scriptures, the prophet is most often one who speaks for God, to warn his people against the consequences of immoral practices such as oppression of the poor and powerless, marginalization of the different, and corruption among leaders. The prophets exhort God's people to eradicate injustice and assure them of God's mercy and forgiveness as they turn away from evil practices. In this role the prophet is a preacher of righteousness, a herald of the kingdom of God.

The eschatology of the prophets finds consummation in God's kingdom. Jesus exhorts his disciples to “seek first the kingdom of God *and* his righteousness [*dikaïosunēn*]” (Matt. 6:33, NIV, emphasis mine). *Kai*, the Greek word translated “and,” is what scholars describe as *epexigetical*, meaning that the two terms or ideas that *kai* connects define or stand parallel to each other. So in prophetic eschatology, God's kingdom *is* God's righteousness.

This understanding of eschatology shifts the focus from date setting and end-time proclamations toward the prophetic task of calling the world to God's righteousness. In other words, the kingdom of God becomes an ethical reality defined by righteousness.

Twinned Terminology

What makes the kingdom an ethical, rather than only an apocalyptic, reality? The answer lies in the meaning of the word *righteousness*. When Jesus and the prophets speak of righteousness, they use terms that mean legal justice or social justice.

When speaking of righteousness, the Hebrew prophets sometimes use a twinned terminology: *mishpat* and *tzedakah*. Because it is difficult to distinguish between the two, Bible translations vary: “judgment and righteousness,” “justice and righteousness,” or “fairness and justice.” *Mishpat* is retributive or even-handed justice. It upholds rules that settle disputes based on “right rather than might.”¹ It ensures that all receive what is rightly theirs, letting none pursue their own interests at the expense of others. *Tzedakah* is hard to pin down in law, because it is a timeless principle applied in response to social, political, and economic inequities in a particular circumstance.² When the prophets use both words together, they allow them to define each other.

Jeremiah, in the midst of his anguish over the injustice and corruption in the government of Israel, says:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD,
“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;
A King shall reign and prosper,

And execute *judgment* and *righteousness* in the earth” (Jer. 23:5, NKJV, emphasis mine).

Isaiah points to a king who will continue the Davidic kingdom “with *justice* and with *righteousness*” (Isa. 9:7, NRSV, emphasis mine).

Jesus and Justice

In the New Testament, the word *dikaïosunē*, translated “righteousness,” carries implications³ of both *mishpat* and of *tzedakah* and can also be translated “justice.”

It is important to realize that the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is an eschatological discourse. Matthew portrays Jesus as the new Moses, the true teacher of justice, as demonstrated in the ethical teachings following the repeated formula: “You have heard that it was said... . But I say to you... .” Israel's Messianic hope is fulfilled in ethical behavior: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17, NIV).

THE ETHICS OF THE KINGDOM

The theme of righteousness as justice is present in the Beatitudes, where Jesus proclaims: “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice...” (Matt. 5:6, DRA) and “Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice’s sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (verse 10, DRA). In his final eschatological discourse in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus says that God will judge the nations based on how they practiced justice, as well as whether they fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and saw to the sick and incarcerated.

After his temptation described in Luke 4, Jesus enters the synagogue on the Sabbath and reads from the scroll of Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV).

He then handed over the scroll, saying, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (verse 21, NRSV). Isaiah’s prophecies were often about social justice, and here “the year of the Lord’s favor” refers to the Jubilee year, a time in ancient Israel for economic restoration and justice.

Immanuel

The prophetic vision of God’s reign of justice comes through *Immanuel* (Isa. 7:14), a name meaning “God is with us.” Matthew 1:23 applies this oracle to Jesus of Nazareth. For Matthew, the Messiah’s coming is eschatological fulfillment. The prophetic oracles were ethical demands upon the people of God, as Amos 5:24 (NRSV) says: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

In the Gospels, Jesus demonstrates that *Immanuel* is an ethical demand for human responsibility in the process of salvation.

Mark and Matthew picture Jesus as the righteous king for whom Israel has yearned since the Babylonian captivity (Mark 1:1-11), who will re-establish the Davidic line (Matt. 1:17). Importantly, he does this not through political might or social affluence, but through suffering (Mark 10:32-38) and humility. Jesus’ call to “seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his justice” (Matt. 6:33, DRA) works itself out in love for one’s neighbor: “Therefore, concerning everything whatever you wish that humans do to you, do also to them” (Matt. 7:12, paraphrase mine). In this way one becomes perfect, as God is perfect (Matt. 5:48), for divine perfection resides in the heart and in the world where justice reigns.

In calling Jesus “the son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38, NIV), Luke’s genealogy is a call to recognize in every human being—both son *and* daughter—the child of God, just as the Messiah was. As we become like Christ, God comes to the world through us. Luke’s second volume, Acts of the Apostles,

emphasizes justice in action in the primitive church, where long-established social walls begin to dissolve (Acts 2:17-21; 10:34-35).


The Gospel of John says that Jesus is the incarnate *logos* of God (John 1:1, 14), who prays that his followers be one as he and God are one and then leaves with them a new commandment to love one another (John 17:20-21). In the Johannine writings, love is an ethical demand (1 John 3:17), the signifier of the incarnation of the *logos* in humanity (1 John 4:13), and the ultimate eschatological requirement (1 John 2:28).

Prophecy and Justice

As society becomes more complicated, so does the demand of justice. It is ironic, and perhaps spiritually tragic, that some Christians loathe the word *justice* as it relates to the gospel and the church. It is ironic because the church thinks itself a prophetic movement. It is spiritually tragic when the church focuses on doctrinal hegemony while practicing power games and allowing financial viability to motivate its actions. The church is to be the harbinger and custodian of God’s reign of justice, and as the passage of time avails humanity with increased knowledge, so our responsibility for justice increases.

Perhaps these events we read as signs of the end are really signs that the end is yet a distant reality, because where evil—hunger, prejudice, bigotry, oppression, materialism, greed, and global warming—persists, God’s reign remains a hope rather than a realization. The prophets called Israel to clean up its act, and Jesus took on the prophetic role as a preacher and doer of justice. God through Jesus of Nazareth calls the church to do the same in the interest of all God’s creatures. These ethical demands are eschatological demands.

Rather than a cacophony of sensational predictions of the end of the world, prophecy should occur in the biblical sense as a call and a hope for justice in the church and the world: the *coming in* of Messiah. Too many predictors preach and practice divisiveness, hatred, and intolerance—the very antithesis of the prophetic ideal. This distorted version of the prophetic task has made some preachers into celebrities with millions of followers. But the true work of prophecy is unpopular; it demands the rolling up of sleeves and the willingness to suffer at the hands of the very “people of God,” as did Jesus and the Hebrew prophets.

What if Christians consistently and progressively seek to live out the ethical prophetic narrative of the gospel? Will God’s kingdom come? Will *Immanuel* come? 

¹ See <http://www.rabbisacks.org/reeh-5767-tzedakah-the-untranslatable-virtue/>
² See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 112.
³ *ibid.*

YES, WE ARE STILL “ADVENT-IST”

BY FRITZ GUY

IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 1960-1961, THE LATE AND WIDELY LOVED Roy Branson and I were students at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, which had recently relocated to the campus of Andrews University. One day as we were walking together back to our respective residences in graduate student housing, he asked how long I thought it would be until the second advent. As I recall our conversation, I responded with something like “Maybe five to 10 years.”¹ Although my prediction turned out to be wildly wrong (since that was more than half a century ago), my response was typically Adventist. At that time, as well as in the preceding decades, when practicing Adventists referred to an event eight, five, or even three years in the future, they often (maybe usually) added the qualification “if time should last”—reflecting a lively sense of Jesus’ imminent return, or at least a recognition that such a sense was assumed. Nowadays I seldom hear this qualification, and never from anyone younger than 60.

Is this change in verbal practice simply an incidental sociological fact about an American religious subculture? Or does it reflect a significant theological and spiritual difference? Has the traditional Adventist sense of an imminent advent withered or disappeared? Is the second advent itself less important to us, so that we are no longer really “Advent-ist”? In any case, we do seem to have made a verbal, theological, and spiritual transition from “*Marana tha—Our Lord, come!*” (1 Cor. 16:22, GNT)² to “one far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves.”³

This brief essay is an attempt to address the often-subconscious question, *What does it mean to say that “Jesus is coming soon” 172 years after the Great Disappointment?* The glib reply, “Well, it just means that the second advent is 172 years closer now than it was then,” doesn’t work, because the question will become increasingly important—and persistent—for thoughtful Adventist Christians. The sooner we address it together, directly and honestly, the better off we’ll be.

As we think about it, we would do well to keep in mind a couple of relevant precedents. The first one is nearly 2,000 years

old. The earliest Christians were very much “Advent-ist”—and properly so. They knew that Jesus had said to his disciples, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).⁴ They also knew well Luke’s report of an angel saying to the disciples, “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). There was a letter from Paul—a contemporary of Jesus, perhaps a little younger—who wrote of the second advent, “We who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess. 4:17). Evidently the apostle expected to be alive to experience the event. A generation or so later, John (possibly, but probably not, the disciple) reiterated a promise of Jesus three times. Twice he quoted the words “See, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:7, 12) and then finished off the account of his visionary experiences by reporting, “The one who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely [Greek *nai*, meaning “yes” or “yes, indeed”] I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:20). In a real (though perhaps not the most important) sense, Paul, Luke, and John were all mistaken: their expectations and predictions were not in fact fulfilled. Jesus did not come how and when they believed (and said) he would.

The second precedent is much more recent, although still far enough back in time that we must rely on written accounts. Here is the first-person recollection of Hiram Edson: “Our expectations were raised high, and thus we looked for our coming Lord until the clock tolled 12 at midnight. The day had then passed, and our disappointment became a certainty. Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.” After recalling further reflections and prayers, Edson wrote: “I began to feel there might be light and help for us in our present distress. I said to some

of my brethren, Let us go to the barn. We entered the granary, shut the doors about us and bowed before the Lord. We prayed earnestly; for we felt our necessity. We continued in earnest prayer until the witness of the Spirit was given that our prayer was accepted, and that light should be given, our disappointment be explained, and made clear and satisfactory.”⁵

One implication of this story is that we Adventists should be celebrating not October 22 as the day of the Great Disappointment, but October 23 as the day of the “new understanding.” For the truly remarkable aspect of that experience—you can call it a “miracle,” if you like—is that a group of “true believers” recognized and accepted the fact that they had seriously misunderstood their key passages of Scripture but did not stay spiritually devastated and psychologically demoralized. They were still as “Advent-ist” as ever, even though there was a radical difference in the way they afterward understood the Bible.

The fact remains, however, that just as the second advent did not occur on Oct. 22, 1844, so it still has not occurred even after 172 years. During much of this time, the expectation of Jesus’ imminent return remained bright and vibrant. Ellen White, for example, expected the soon coming of Jesus throughout her life, and she affirmed it hundreds of times. “Time is short, let us hold fast unto the end,” she wrote in 1849.⁶ In September 1850, in Sutton, Vermont, she said, “I saw ... that time can last but a very little longer.”⁷ In 1856 she reported, “I was shown the company present at the [General] Conference [Session in Battle Creek, Michigan]. Said the angel, ‘Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.’”⁸ In 1886 she wrote that “we are nearing the end of time.”⁹ In April of 1888: “The Lord is soon coming.”¹⁰ Toward the end of her years, she still insisted that “the Saviour’s coming is near at hand”¹¹ and that “Soon he will appear the second time.”¹²

In the light of such persistent expectation of an imminent second advent, the question *Why the delay?* has become inevitable and evoked a variety of responses. A general explanation has been the conditionality of biblical forecasts in general; a positive prediction is encouragement for the people to keep on doing right, and a negative prediction is a warning of the outcome of the present course of action, with the actual future determined by the people’s response. “The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the word of the Lord

failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.”¹³

Sometimes more specific explanations have blamed God’s people, who have failed—either to proclaim the gospel adequately to all the world (see Matt. 24:14) or to develop a sufficient level of spiritual maturity. “When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”¹⁴ Or, quite reasonably, both.

Of course, other explanations have also been suggested. One is based on the observation that in an important sense, every person “lives but a heartbeat away from the Second Coming.”¹⁵ Another consideration is that the Greek word *tachu*, translated “soon,” may mean (depending on the context) “quickly, at a rapid rate” as well as “without delay,” and it is not always possible to make a clear distinction between the two meanings.¹⁶ Perhaps “soon” may also connote unexpectedness; Jesus warned that “you also must be

NOWADAYS I SELDOM HEAR THE QUALIFICATION “IF TIME SHOULD LAST,” AND NEVER FROM ANYONE YOUNGER THAN 60.

ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (Matt. 24:44). It has also been noted that we need to think of the advent in relation to the fundamental character of God, whose eternal nature is, according to Scripture and in contrast to Greek philosophy, to come and come and come—first in creation, then in incarnation, and finally in consummation.¹⁷ As the first two of these “comings” were unprecedented and unexpected, so, it is believed, will be the third. It is true, of course, that *in retrospect* New Testament authors sometimes saw prophetic anticipations in the Hebrew Bible. A prime example occurs in Matthew 2:15, applying to Jesus’ return from Egypt with his family the words of Hosea 11:1, “out of Egypt I called my son,” which originally referred to the people of Israel (compare “Israel is my firstborn son” in Exodus 4:22).

Continued on page 29



WHY HASN'T JESUS RETURNED?

By Richard W. Coffen

I'M SITTING IN A SABBATH SCHOOL CLASS, LISTENING TO THE teacher tell me how bad the world is. "Consider deaths by gunfire—right here in the USA—12,942 during 2015. Thirty-five daily! In addition, every hour on average 2.25 individuals commit suicide by shooting themselves. Computer hackers cost us between \$375 billion and \$575 billion annually! Women are being tortured and subjected to "honor killings." An estimated 4.5 million persons worldwide are enslaved in sex trafficking. Think of the rampant victimization in American schools, in which 2.1 million bullies torment their fellow students. And don't forget AIDs—1.2 million people, more than 47,000 new cases annually, have contracted this illness in our own country! As of Aug. 23, 2015, there have been 28,041 cases of Ebola and 11,302 subsequent deaths!"¹

The teacher finally wound down: "With escalating evil, *surely* the end is near. Jesus *must* return soon to stop the brutality. The 'cup of iniquity' is full, and Jesus' return is 'even at the door.'"

He added, "If he doesn't return soon, there won't be anyone left on Earth to receive him!"

Everything Is Failing

Ardent Adventists repeat the same refrain with many causes: global warming, military conflicts, financial meltdowns (actual or anticipated), increasing technological advances, escalating overpopulation, a multiplicity of non-Christian religions overrunning America, and on and on. Such talk presumes that there's a cause-and-effect relationship here: Jesus will return soon because, morally, people have become increasingly perverse and because, physically, the biosphere and its contents will soon deteriorate to the point of no return. The worsening of people and the environment must hasten the second advent—or at least reveal its proximity.

The Faulty Logic of World Breakdown

An indirect logic embedded in these rationalizations should give us pause.

If Jesus' second coming is somehow either correlated with or caused by escalating moral degeneracy, then shouldn't those

awaiting the return and abet human depravity, thereby hastening his coming? Doesn't our denominational outreach in 947 languages in 216 countries, which led to the acquisition of 1,057,645 newly baptized members worldwide, actually delay his return because it *alleviates* human immorality?²

If deterioration of our biosphere—such as incidences of lethal weather phenomena, regularity of earthquakes, frequency of disease endemics and pandemics, and ominous symptoms of climate change—precipitates the second coming, then the Adventist world church must plead guilty to delaying Jesus' return. Why? Because the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has been at work in 130 countries and other areas of the world, providing nearly \$300 million of aid to approximately 22 million victims of these natural disasters.³ And what about the 467 hospitals, sanitariums, clinics, and dispensaries aimed at relieving physical suffering?

Maybe a truth was concealed in the wording of a photo caption in a denominational newsletter that identified an Adventist employee as a “disaster coordinator”: if physical cataclysms somehow hasten the second coming, should our church hire more people to coordinate them? Similarly, if we take seriously the nearness of the second advent, an argument could be made that we should aid and abet moral degeneracy in society or proclaim the imminence of Christ's return by making capital of the tragic aftermaths of planetary catastrophes.

World Improvement

Are such calamity howlers being fair? What about signs of world *betterment*? Intellectual honesty requires acknowledgment that on many fronts, the world is improving.

Slavery in many, if not most, countries is illegal.

Despite scattered military skirmishes, legislation such as the Geneva Conventions forbids martial brutality.

In America and other nations, laws safeguard personal and civil rights.

Across the globe, citizens are becoming increasingly aware of the personal sensitivities of others, as evidenced by PC (politically correct) terminology.

Many nations, America excepted, now recognize capital punishment as “cruel and unusual.”

Females can inherit real estate, cast ballots in national elections, drive motorized vehicles, get equal pay for the same work, protest rites of genital mutilation, and serve as president of many countries.

In America, teenage pregnancies have reached an all-time low.

Soldier deaths haven't been so low for a century.

Life expectancy is longer than ever before in recorded history, biblical statistics excluded.

Worldwide child mortality rates have decreased by half since 1990.

Fewer people now live below the poverty level.

The literacy rate has doubled since 1900.

Fewer wars are presently being waged than at any other time in recent history.

Diseases that once infected and killed thousands are now nearly eradicated: measles, rubella, polio, Guinea worm, elephantiasis, river blindness, mumps, rinderpest, yaws, malaria, hookworm, yellow fever, diphtheria, and tetanus, among others.⁴

Have we willfully blinded ourselves to the improvement of society because of our preconception that evil must increase prior to the second advent?

One of my friends took exception to those facts. “Things *are* getting worse,” he hotly contended. In return, I asked at what time in history he would have preferred to have lived. A century ago? The previous millennium? The time of Jesus? The time of David or maybe Abraham? “Don't be silly,” he said. I replied: “Case closed.”

Have we willfully blinded ourselves to the improvement of society because of our preconception that evil must increase prior to the second advent? Maybe it depends upon which set of statistics we study.

The Delay

From the onset of the church, Christians have wrestled with “Why the delay?”—though “delay” is surely a misnomer after nearly 2,000 years.

Jesus hasn't returned. Peter, perhaps writing between A.D. 60 and 65, argued that Jesus hadn't returned because God wanted

Continued on page 30

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT

BY GLENN HANSEN

WHEN MOST SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS think of the history of the investigative judgment, they think of Hiram Edson's iconic insight in a cornfield after the night of the Great Disappointment. But Edson's vision of Christ entering the inner sanctuary of the heavenly tabernacle didn't mention the investigative judgment. Edson, along with O.R.L. Crosier and Dr. Franklin B. Hahn, developed the teaching that Jesus had entered the Most Holy Place, which was then published in an article by Crosier in a Millerite publication called *The Day Star*.¹ There is no mention of the investigative judgment in that article or in Edson's account of the cornfield experience. Edson saw that Jesus had "a work to perform in the Most Holy Place," but he wasn't sure what it was.²

As early as 1841, Josiah Litch had advanced the notion that judgment could happen before Christ's second advent. Citing Hebrews 9:27, Acts 10:42, and 2 Timothy 4:1, Litch wrote: "Nor is there a text which presents the judicial scene of judgment after the resurrection. On the contrary, the Scriptures can be harmonized on no other principle than that every man's doom is fixed before his resurrection."³

Elon Everts Suggests Important Link

The development of these ideas into what came to be called the investigative judgment begins with Elon Everts. Ordained to the gospel ministry during the fall of 1853 in New Haven, Vermont, his name was a familiar one in the *Review*, with several letters describing his evangelistic labors in Vermont. Everts eventually migrated to Round Grove, Illinois, where he continued his evangelistic work, including time with J.N. Loughborough, and died in February of 1858 at age 51.⁴

James and Ellen White first discussed Christ's Most Holy Place ministry with Everts during a wagon ride in Illinois in 1856.⁵ Everts was quite certain Jesus was

in the heavenly sanctuary, but he was unsure about what he had been doing there for more than a decade.

Everts began to flesh out his ideas in a "communication" published in the Jan. 1, 1857, issue of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. He worked from 1 Peter 4:5-6: "Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

Since the Scripture speaks of a judgment of both the living and the dead, Everts reasoned that Jesus had been judging the dead of the ages since 1844, offering this text as evidence that judgment must take place before Christ's return during the final generation of life on Earth. Here Everts first floated the phrase "investigative judgment" to attempt to explain what Jesus was doing—the first time it appeared in an Adventist publication.⁶ He followed this with another article on the investigative judgment, dated June 4, 1854, but not printed in the *Review* until June 11, 1857.

Other Adventist Leaders Weigh In

The first full article addressing the investigative judgment came from James White, who picked up the themes of Everts' "communication" just a month later, in the January 29, 1857, *Review*, with an article titled "The Judgment."

James White's argument was based on his understanding of the blotting out of sin, the record of sin in heaven, and the "lot" of Daniel 12:13: "For thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." He listed more than 70 Old Testament passages from *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance*, some of which indicated that "lot" referred to the position of the judged. Daniel in his lot was a reference to his already having been judged. James

White followed Everts in the idea that Scripture taught that there would be a judgment of both the living and the dead, based on 1 Peter 4:5-6, and that this judgment had started with the righteous dead in 1844.⁷

A pamphlet printed in Battle Creek in 1872 refers to the investigative judgment as Principle XVIII: “That the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary (see proposition X), synchronizing with the time of the proclamation of the third message, is a time of investigative judgment, first with reference to the dead, and at the close of probation with reference to the living, to determine who of the myriads now sleeping in the dust of the earth are worthy of a part in the first resurrection, and who of its living multitudes are worthy of translation—points which must be determined before the Lord appears.”⁸

Uriah Smith wrote at length about the investigative judgment in his 1877 work *The Sanctuary and the 2300 Days*, which saw in Daniel 7:9-10 the basis for the investigative judgment: “Thus the cleansing of the sanctuary involves the examination of the records of all the deeds of our lives. It is an investigative Judgment. Every individual of every generation from the beginning of the world thus passes in review before the great tribunal above. So Daniel, describing the opening of this scene, calls it a work of judgment, and expressly notices the fact that the books were opened.”⁹

In a sweeping statement, Smith joined several biblical motifs: “We have already seen that the cleansing of the sanctuary, the investigative Judgment of the saints, the blotting out, or remission, of sin, and the finishing of the mystery of God, are all one and the same thing. We now make the additional statement that this is also the atonement.”¹⁰

The Biblical Institute, an 1878 synopsis of Adventist doctrines by Uriah Smith and

James White, also linked the cleansing of the sanctuary with the investigative judgment and the finishing of the mystery of God.¹¹ On page 84 of the same work, they stated that the investigative judgment takes place as the sanctuary is cleansed.¹²

Prior to his death in 1883, J.N. Andrews wrote *The Sanctuary of the Bible*. He mentions the investigative judgment twice, saying it is identical with the cleansing of the sanctuary: “The nature of that work we will now briefly indicate. The work of the Judgment is divided into two parts. The first part is the *investigative* judgment, which takes place in the heavenly sanctuary, God the Father sitting in judgment. The second part is the *execution* of the judgment, and is committed wholly to Christ, who comes to our earth to accomplish this work. John 5:22-27; Jude 14, 15. It is while the investigative judgment is in session that the cleansing of the sanctuary takes place. Or, to speak more accurately, the cleansing of the sanctuary is identical with the work of the investigative judgment.”¹³

His posthumously published *The Judgment: Its Events and Their Order* includes an entire chapter on the investigative judgment.¹⁴

Ellen White Enhances the Doctrine

Because Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy* is the most widely read source of religious history among Adventists, it may be easy for us to assume that the investigative judgment teaching started with her. Yet we’ve shown that several Adventist scholars had already written upon the topic for 30 years before she took it up. Her first address of the investigative judgment isn’t until 1884, in chapter 23 of *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4. While her husband had found evidence for an investigative judgment in Daniel 12:13 and the judgment of the living and the dead referred to in 1 Peter 4:5-6, Ellen White

mentions neither, relying instead (as did Uriah Smith) on Daniel 7 (which James hadn’t mentioned) and arguing that verses 9 through 10 and 13 through 14 portray the opening of the investigative judgment in heaven.

Ellen White expanded her investigative judgment teaching in the 1888 edition of *The Great Controversy*, introducing a unique array of passages to support and illustrate it: “The coming of Christ as our high priest to the most holy place, for the cleansing of the sanctuary, brought to view in Daniel 8:14; the coming of the Son of man to the Ancient of days, as presented

Because Ellen White’s *The Great Controversy* is the most widely read source of religious history among Adventists, it may be easy for us to assume that the investigative judgment teaching started with her.

in Daniel 7:13; and the coming of the Lord to his temple, foretold by Malachi, are descriptions of the same event; and this is also represented by the coming of the bridegroom to the marriage, described by Christ in the parable of the ten virgins, of Matthew 25.”¹⁵ She also appealed to Matthew 22:11 to support her investigative judgment teaching.¹⁶

Other early treatments of the investigative judgment include Uriah Smith’s influential *Daniel and the Revelation* (1897) and S.N. Haskell’s *The Story of Daniel the Prophet* (1901), *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* (1905), and *The Cross and Its Shadow* (1914).

Ellen White’s 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy* on page 29



If the Pope Reflects the Character of Christ

By Alden Thompson

My rather naughty title is a two-edged sword, for lurking in the shadows is that famous Ellen White quote that when “the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”¹ It therefore implies, on the one hand, that those who are like Jesus will be saved. But New Testament believers confess that being like Jesus is not the basis of salvation: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; ... it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9, KJV).

Apparently heaven will be a rogue’s gallery where all kinds of saved sinners roam the streets. Hebrews 11 suggests that we could easily find ourselves at table with Rahab the prostitute—that’s what Hebrews 11:31 calls her—as well as Samson the womanizer and the illegitimate judge, Jephthah, who sacrificed his daughter as a result of an ill-advised vow (Judg. 11:29-40).

On the other hand, Scripture bluntly states that behavior, both good and bad, does affect our place in the kingdom. Romans 2:14-16 teaches that Gentiles who do not have the law are judged apart from the law. What they do “by nature” shows that the requirements of the law are “written in their hearts” (KJV). Doesn’t that suggest that God will reserve a place at the table for “good” people? But on the shadow side, Galatians 5:19-21 (NRSV) declares that those who manifest “the works of the flesh” won’t be there—those who have not mastered jealousy, anger, envy, etc. Sobering.

In short, if God invites both saved sinners and polished saints into his kingdom, we must all be prepared for surprises.

But now to the pope. Two questions: First, could he reflect the character of Christ? Second, if he does, can he join us at the New Jerusalem table? In such a situation, the table conversation would be memorable!

To address those issues, however, we must first explore the eschatological implications of my title. How does prophecy relate to the Adventist understanding of the last days?

Historicism

Our first concern is history and the end of time. Adventism is rooted in historicism, which takes its cue from Daniel 2. Successive kingdoms move us from Daniel’s day and the head of gold (Babylon) through the chest of silver (Medo-Persia), the belly and thighs of bronze (Greece), the iron legs (Rome), to the feet of mixed iron and clay and, finally, to the great stone that smashes the image then fills the whole earth. Daniel 2:44-45 says the stone represents a kingdom that will “endure forever” (NIV). In short, Daniel’s vision takes us from his day to the end; that is historicism’s sweep, and it is thoroughly biblical.

But we must note two important qualifications to that scheme, one rooted in Scripture, the other in the history of biblical interpretation. First, Daniel nowhere names the fourth kingdom. Protestants have consistently interpreted it as Rome. But Rome’s name does not appear in either Daniel or Revelation. In Daniel 7 the fourth kingdom is an unnamed nasty beast. Furthermore, Daniel never lays out a tidy four-kingdom sequence. Only Babylon is named in Daniel 2, none of the kingdoms are identified in Daniel 7, and in Daniel 8, only Medo-Persia and Greece are named. The four kingdoms never appear together by name.

A New Interpretation

That leads us to the second qualification, one suggested by the book of 2 Esdras (IV Ezra), an intertestamental book in the Apocrypha, written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. In 2 Esdras 12, an angelic interpreter links an eagle vision with the visions of Daniel, but with a twist: “The eagle which you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel. But it was not explained to him as I now explain or have explained it to you” (2 Esdr. 12:11-12, RSV).

All interpreters agree that the author is identifying a shift in the interpretation of Daniel. Before the rise of Rome, the four-kingdom sequence apparently was understood as Babylon, Media, Persia, and

Greece. But when Rome emerged, it became the new beastly fourth kingdom. The Reformation secured that interpretation and pointed to the little horn growing out of the fourth beast as having religious significance. It would “speak great words against the most High,” “wear out the saints of the most High,” and “think to change times and laws” (Dan. 7:25, KJV). For Adventists, that has always meant papal Rome.

But notice what the author of 2 Esdras has done. Following a thoroughly biblical method, he has given a *new* interpretation to a passage of Scripture. Just as a grasshopper plague in Joel’s day was interpreted first as the Dark Day/Day of the Lord foreshadowing the Dark Day of the crucifixion for Peter (Acts 2:17-21), then as the Dark Day of 1780 for our Adventist pioneers, and now for us as the Dark Day just before the second coming (Rev. 6:12-14), so the prophecies of Daniel can receive a fresh coat of paint.

The same pattern appears in the successive interpretations of the polluted sanctuary of Daniel 8. Daniel knew only the sanctuary that Babylon destroyed; but when Antiochus Epiphanes, a small-time Syrian king, invaded and polluted the temple precincts in 168/67 BCE, offering pig on the altar of burnt offering, Jewish believers applied Daniel 8 to their day (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:54). Finally, Jesus referred to Daniel’s “abomination” (Matt. 24:15) as still future, a clear reference to the Roman destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

The Disappointment and Conditionalism

And now an Adventist wrinkle: after the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, how could the prophecy of Daniel 8 be fulfilled? Verses 17 and 19 clearly state that the sanctuary prophecy was for “the time of the end” (KJV). But what sanctuary and when? Originally, the Millerite Adventists had thought that the Earth was the sanctuary. But after the Great Disappointment, they shifted their attention to the heavenly sanctuary. Those who want to remain faithful to Scripture now have two choices: a perfect sanctuary in heaven or a rebuilt

sanctuary in Jerusalem, according to the interpretation of our futurist friends. Given that choice, I’ll take the heavenly sanctuary any day.

We may try to second-guess God’s intention for the Disappointment. My students typically are astonished that our forebears couldn’t hear the words of Jesus: “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matt. 24:36, NIV). Similarly, we struggle

If God invites both saved sinners and polished saints into his kingdom, we must all be prepared for surprises.

to understand how our Millerite forebears managed to date the Lord’s return. But here a non-Adventist historian makes a crucial point: “All Protestants expected some grand event about 1843, and no critic from the orthodox side took any serious issue on basic principles with Miller’s calculations.”²²

The Great Disappointment of 1844 has also bequeathed a great gift to us, namely, the concept of conditional prophecy, a perspective that bears directly on our view of the pope. Now the term “gift” is ironic, for devout conservatives are rarely enthusiastic about conditionalism. We want firm, clear facts that do not move. How, then, could conditionalism be a gift?

Let me address that question against the backdrop of an intriguing quotation that helped shape a significant article in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. This article is largely unknown today, even among Adventist ministers. “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy”²³ describes, on the basis of Scriptural references and hints from Ellen White, what the authors saw as God’s original plan for Israel: Instead of rejecting Jesus, his people would have accepted him; he would have died for their sins

and then led in the restoration of God's kingdom on Earth, a process that would involve the gradual elimination of evil.

The crucial Ellen White quotation undergirding the article states: "The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short. Thus it has always been presented to me. It is true that time has

Even those whom we suppose to have passed the boundary of God's mercy will be won to Christ.

continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as soon as we hoped. But has the Word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional."⁴

Zechariah vs. *The Great Controversy*

The implications of that quotation are far-reaching and potentially troubling. As one retired pastor put it to me in an email: "This is scary stuff—the context is the timing of the 2nd Advent—but can it be limited to that? It would seem to close the door to any and all prophecy as well as all Bible promises!"⁵

Surprisingly, the behavior of even the most conservative Adventists indirectly confirms the point of White's quotation. I know of no Adventists anywhere who go door-to-door distributing the book of Zechariah, with its end-time scenario in chapter 13 that differs radically from the New Testament perspective. Yet this chapter contributes significantly to the article in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Now if we don't distribute the book of Zechariah because times have changed, is it not possible that the time may come when we will also no longer distribute *The Great Controversy*? We won't throw the book away, any more than Jesus and the disciples threw away the book of Zechariah. We can

still see both Zechariah and *The Great Controversy* as being "inspired." The conceptual framework of the book wonderfully portrays the Adventist understanding of a good God who allowed sin in order to make the universe secure in the end. But the historical setting is tied to the late 19th century, when Adventist sermons about Sunday laws made sense because Sunday-closing laws were featured on the front page of every newspaper. Today the only way to preach Sunday-closing laws is from *The Great Controversy*.

Beast Bashing

If and when the time is right, God will find a way to bring the issue to the front. It almost happened in 1993 when Catholic-bashing billboards, sponsored by devout but independent Adventists, began springing up across the country. Gentle Adventists—those whose lives are more typically guided by the gracious spirit of *The Desire of Ages* than by the more strident lines of *The Great Controversy*—were horrified at these inflammatory billboards.

Given the urgent situation, I wrote extensively on the issue.⁶ Otherwise very conservative church leaders received the articles eagerly but with great ambivalence, because as a church we have not grappled seriously with the issue of conditional prophecy. So the billboards gradually disappeared, the crisis passed, and the church went back to sleep.

In that series of articles, I quoted a remarkable statement by General Conference Vice President Charles Bradford from the official reports of the 1990 General Conference: "Today there are fewer Sunday laws being enforced than at any time in recent years."⁷ I had never before seen anything quite that blunt in an official church paper. A 1993 statement from Roland Hegstad, then editor of *Liberty* magazine, reinforced the point: "Over the past 30 years the growing secularization of society has been a greater threat to our church than have Sunday laws."⁸

Now if conditionalism is going to be good news rather than something scary, we need a biblical framework within which we can approach the issues. And perhaps the most pressing issue for Adventists is what to say about the beast and the pope. Here an astonishing passage in the prophets can help. In

Isaiah 19:16-25 the prophet looks forward to a time when Israel and her two historic enemies, Assyria and Egypt, would come together as co-heirs of God's kingdom. The passage concludes: "On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage'" (Isa. 19:24-25, NRSV).

Hope for the Pope

If God could see hope for Assyria and Egypt, might he not also see hope for Rome and the pope? And we don't have to compromise our teachings one iota. Ellen White herself said in 1896: "We may have less to say in some lines, in regard to the Roman power and the papacy."⁹

We can do what the New Testament writers did. They never mentioned Rome. For them Babylon was the beast, long since gone from the face of the Earth. But everyone would know that Babylon was code for the beast. If the shoe fits, wear it! In Revelation, the beast is coercive and deceptive. Wherever those traits appear in our day, we know that we are dealing with something beastly. I have dealt with this concept in *Beyond Common Ground* under the heading of "applied historicism."¹⁰ In short, we never baptize the beast. He is always there to inform our thoughts and actions today.

At the same time, we need to recognize that it is quite clear from Scripture and the writings of Ellen White that we should never condemn anyone on the basis of biblical predictions. Sprinkled throughout Scripture are failed predictions that have resulted in successful prophecies. The book of Jonah is our best example. Every time that happens, heaven rejoices.

With Respect

We need to hear a remarkable quotation from Ellen White, originally written to A. T. Jones, one of Adventism's most notable beast-bashers: "In the advocacy of the truth the bitterest opponents should be treated with respect and deference. Some will not respond to our efforts, but will make light of the gospel invitation. Others—even those whom we suppose to have passed the boundary of God's mercy—will be won to Christ. The very last work in the controversy may be

the enlightenment of those who have not rejected light and evidence, but who have been in midnight darkness and have in ignorance worked against the truth. Therefore treat every man as honest. Speak no word, do no deed, that will confirm any in unbelief."¹¹

Quite frankly, I have been impressed by the many ways in which the current pope has been reflecting the character of Jesus. To treat him as honest, to treat him as a genuine candidate for the kingdom, is fully in keeping with Jesus' most succinct summary of his message: "In everything do to others as you would have them to do you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12, NRSV). But I do wonder how long he will survive within a system that rightly earned the beastly label by its past behavior.

The beast rules by coercive authority. Jesus was just the opposite. He was not an authoritarian. He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28, NIV). By God's grace, we can model Jesus in our words and deeds. And whenever individuals demonstrate that they are following Jesus, we should rejoice, regardless of any label. After all, the only label in the kingdom is the new name given to each believer on the white stone, a name that no one knows except the one who receives it (Rev. 2:17). 🇺🇸

¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), p. 69.

² Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 321.

³ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Francis D. Nichol, ed., Vol. 4 (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 1955), pp. 25-38.

⁴ White, Manuscript 4, 1883, unpublished until it appeared in part on page 695 of *Evangelism* (1946), and then more completely on page 67 of *Selected Messages*, Book 1 (1958). The original response was apparently never sent to anyone.

⁵ Personal correspondence from 2005.

⁶ My five-part series was published in the North Pacific Union *Gleaner*; the Columbia Union *Visitor* expanded it to seven parts with two interview articles; shorter, interview-based articles appeared in the Southern Union *Tidings* and in the Canadian Union *Messenger* (now *Canadian Adventist Messenger*).

⁷ *Adventist Review*, July 17, 1990, p. 8.

⁸ *Liberty Alert*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (Jan/Feb 1993), p. 4; insert in *Adventist Review*, January 7, 1993.

⁹ White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), p. 112 [Letter 57, 1896].

¹⁰ Alden Thompson, *Beyond Common Ground: Why Liberals and Conservatives Need Each Other* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2009), pp. 194-220.

¹¹ White, *Testimonies for the Church* Vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1901), p. 122.

THE *Ki* FACTOR:

ISAIAH 55:8-9

BY MAYLAN SCHURCH

ALTHOUGH NOT AN ASTUTE OBSERVER of what's being printed on the knick-knacks crowding out the books in Christian bookstores these days, I'm fairly certain that "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another" (Gen. 31:49, NKJV) has finally been banned from teapots and coffee mugs, as it was not a tender farewell but, rather, Laban's snarled threat to his slippery son-in-law.

This expulsion is all to the good, of course. Context must rule. Verse numbering—at least during exegesis—should vanish, and the old trivia game "Who said _____ to whom and under what circumstances?" should be the order of the day.

Context can not only correct misuse, but also add more than one layer of meaning to a familiar verse, giving it far deeper value than before. Consider Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV): "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"

In my early sermons, I would often grab for this verse when I needed to drive home the idea that God can be trusted with things we don't

understand. "God is smarter than I am," I would intone, "and therefore I can safely allow him to solve the puzzles I can't, even if he needs to conceal their solution for awhile."

All of this is true, of course, *except that God didn't speak that passage to prove that point*. And I should have figured that out, because the verse starts with the Hebrew word *ki*, a demonstrative particle that (depending on its context) can mean, among other things, *yes indeed, truly, or because*.¹ In the majority of English translations,² *ki* in verse 8 is translated *for*. The general idea—as in its usage in other passages, such as Jeremiah 29:11-12³—is that *ki* signals that the verse it begins contains in some fashion a reason for, or explanation of, or logical conclusion to, what has come before it.

My first attempt at gathering the context into this passage didn't go far enough. The last phrases of Isaiah 55:7, ESV ("let him [the wicked] return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon") speak of forgiveness. So in a later sermon, I told my congregation: "God is indeed vastly more intelligent than we are, but verses 8 and 9 are really telling us how

abundant his mercy is. We are feeble forgivers compared to God." Which, again, is true, amply demonstrated by the King Manasseh story (2 Chron. 33:1-16). Yet still my exegesis didn't go far enough.

Finally, with the Hebrew parallel to refer to, I read the first half of verse 7 ("let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts"), and I discovered that the words *way [dereh]* and *thoughts [machashabah]* are the same words used in verses 8 and 9, in which God proclaims that not only are his ways and thoughts not ours, but that they are much higher.

Therefore, I believe (especially with the linking *ki*) that the primary intent of verses 7-9 is not that God is smarter than I am, nor that God is more forgiving than I am, but that I need to forsake my own ways and thoughts in favor of God's ways and thoughts.

Which is probably too much to communicate if printed on a bit of Christian kitsch. 🚫

¹ William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 155.

² <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Isaiah%2055:8>


³ "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you" (NIV84).

Guy continued from page 19

At this point in history, some further observations are in order. For one thing, just as scriptural accounts of human origins (Genesis 1 and 2, for example) are best understood not as historical, much less scientific, *reports of events* but as theological *explanations of meanings*, so scriptural visions of human destiny (such as Revelation 20 and 22) may be best understood not as *eschatological scenarios* but as *affirmations of ultimate meanings*. The “lake of fire” is a vivid picture of the ultimate divine elimination of sin from human existence and the ultimate triumph of love among humans and between humans and God. So far from being a “watering down” of traditional Adventist eschatology, this kind of reinterpretation could actually represent a significant deepening of understanding and appreciation. An attitude of “Just the facts, ma’am, nothing but the facts” may have been appropriate for Sergeant Joe Friday in the radio, television, and film series *Dragnet* in the 1950s and ’60s, but in the context of theology and spirituality, our primary concern is (or at least ought to be) *ultimate meanings*.

So, for us to say that “Jesus is coming soon” *means* that we intend our lives to be increasingly focused on the ultimate fulfillment of our God-created destiny. This future is defined not by heavenly residences and golden streets but by the actualization of the values—the ideals, motives, and relationships—that Jesus expressed and exemplified. As Ellen White put it, “From His earliest years, He was possessed of one purpose: He lived to bless others”¹⁸ and, as a consequence, “The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”¹⁹

The bottom line is that however

different this sort of larger and deeper understanding of Adventist eschatology may seem to be, it can make us more, not less, passionate about and eager for the actualization of the Advent. Yes, when we are at our theological and spiritual best, we are still “Advent-ist.” 

¹ Roy Branson’s slightly different recounting of our conversation appears in his editor’s introduction to *Pilgrimage of Hope* (Takoma Park, MD: Association of Adventist Forums, 1986), p. 6.

² *Marana tha* is an English transliteration of a Greek transliteration of two Aramaic words that are translated “Our Lord, come.”

³ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, concluding verse. This contrast between an affirmation of (and/or prayer for) an imminent Advent and a “far-off divine event” is suggested by Jack Provonsha, *God Is With Us* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), p. 137.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this essay are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁵ Hiram Edson (1806-1882), excerpt from an untitled and undated manuscript fragment published in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Knoxville, TN: UT Press, 1993).

⁶ Ellen G. White, Letter 4, Mar. 22, 1849.

⁷ White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1882), p. 58.

⁸ White, *Last Day Events* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), p. 36.

⁹ White, Letter 12, Dec. 27, 1886.

¹⁰ White, Letter 74, April 1888.

¹¹ White, Manuscript 123, 1908, para. 5.

¹² White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 13, 1913.

¹³ White, *Selected Messages, Book 1* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), p. 67.

¹⁴ White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), p. 69.

¹⁵ Jack Provonsha, *God Is With Us* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974).


¹⁶ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 814-815.

¹⁷ See Provonsha, “The God Who Comes to Man,” in *God Is With Us*, pp. 136-47; John Webster, “Towards a More Radically ‘Adventist’ Adventism,” unpublished presidential address, Adventist Society for Religious Studies, Boston, MA, Nov. 20, 2008.

¹⁸ White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 70.

¹⁹ White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), p. 470.

Hansen continued from page 23

Controversy remains the primary source for the investigative judgment teaching, but she was largely silent on the subject of the investigative judgment until 1884, long after it had been studied and written on by Elon Everts, James White, J.N. Andrews, and Uriah Smith, who were the principal proponents of the teaching. While Ellen White later enhanced and gave credibility to the teaching, she did not originate it. 

¹ O.R.L. Crosier, “The Law of Moses,” *Day Star Extra*, Vol. 9, Feb. 7, 1846, pp. 37-43.

² Handwritten Hiram Edson Manuscript, Document File 588 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, circa 1866-1873).

³ Josiah Litch, “An Address to the Public and Especially the Clergy” (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1841), pp. 38-39.

⁴ James White, “Eastern Tour,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 4, No. 19, Nov. 15, 1853; John Lindsey, “Obituary,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 11, No. 17, Mar. 11, 1858; J.N. Loughborough, Elon Everts, and J. Hart, “Tent Meeting in Green Vale,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 10, No. 13, July 30, 1857.

⁵ Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862, Vol. 1* (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), pp. 353-354.

⁶ Elon Everts, “Communication From Bro. Everts,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 9, No. 9, Jan. 1, 1857, p. 72.

⁷ James White, “The Judgment,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 9, No. 13, Jan. 29, 1857, p. 100.

⁸ “A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists” (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1872).

⁹ Uriah Smith, *The Sanctuary and the Twenty-Three Hundred Days of Daniel 8:14* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1877), p. 276.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 275.

¹¹ Uriah Smith and James White, “The Biblical Institute: A Synopsis of Lectures on the Principal Doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists” (Oakland, CA: Pacific Seventh-day Adventist Publishing House, 1878), p. 72.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 84.

¹³ J.N. Andrews, “The Sanctuary of the Bible,” Bible Tracts No. 5 (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 186-?), p. 14.

¹⁴ Andrews, *The Judgment: Its Events and Their Order* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), Ch. 1.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), p. 426.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 427.

Coffen *continued from page 21*

more converts (2 Pet. 3:9). Yet the world population keeps mushrooming at the incredible rate of 2.37 live births per second. Christian membership grows at 1.3 percent annually, and the world birth rate is 1.13 percent. But don't get too excited: one percentage is calculated on the Christian population and the other on the world population. Christian population is *not* gaining on world population.⁵

After the Great Disappointment, the Millerites proposed two major reasons for their mistake. Either they'd had the wrong *date* or the wrong *event*. Though 170 years have passed, those of us with roots in Millerism continue to speculate about why "the delay."

Here are some of the rationalizations I've heard:

The second advent has been delayed because women wear pants(suits).

We Seventh-day Adventists aren't good enough, not having *en masse* achieved sinless perfection and, therefore, aren't "safe to save."

Non-Adventists aren't bad enough, so we must wait until the "cup of iniquity" gets filled to the brim.

We church members haven't emptied our bank accounts and turned the proceeds over to God's work, especially projects effected by independent, self-supporting ministries.

The gospel hasn't yet been preached to every living person.

In 1956, psychologist Leon Festinger co-authored the landmark book *When Prophecy Fails*, which explains how people resolve the discomfort produced when predictions don't come to pass. One psychological coping mechanism is to double down (as they say in politics) despite the letdown: just keep

repeating the claim while adding various explanations for the failure. This is exactly what we continue to do. Those taking this approach tell us century after century that we should lift up our eyes, because our "redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28; James 5:8).


No Good Answer

Why, then, hasn't Jesus returned? I know of no definitive answer. Furthermore, it's my belief that attempts to provide one are exercises in futility. A happening that Jesus foresaw 2,000 years ago and predicted would actually take place *then*, that his followers have eagerly expected for two millennium but that hasn't yet occurred, and that has required rationalizations as coping mechanisms for 2,000 years, by any logical definition is a non-event.⁶

During those 2,000 years, all well-meaning rationales formulated to explain the purported delay have been empirically negated. If this historical pattern continues, sometime during the next 100 or 500 or 1,000 years literalists of our ilk will find themselves constrained to concede grudgingly that Jesus' return must be a spiritual experience rather than a physical event capable of firsthand empirical verification. Otherwise, future Adventists will be chief among "the eccentric, ... the perpetually mistaken and the constantly recalculating."⁷ Shocking as a *spiritual advent* may seem to us, it happens to be biblical! "The Fourth Gospel argues that Jesus comes already in the presence of the Paraclete [Holy

Spirit]."⁸

The fact is that we—along with Jesus (Matt. 24:36)—simply don't know when the second advent will occur, and despite the name *Adventist*, our various speculations either blunt the cutting edge of our message (at best) or make us look like chumps (at worst).

The whens and ifs are God's concerns, not ours, but what is within our grasp is *being ready* (versus *getting ready*). Additionally, if we expect to salvage any credibility, we'll emulate our Lord, "who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38, KJV). We'll do our utmost to further social, ethical, spiritual, and physical betterment of society, and we'll abandon our whining that the world is going to pot materially, morally, and spiritually. 

¹ Data gleaned from the following online sources: The Trace organization, www.usnews.com, Polaris Project, AVERT, Make Beats Not Beat Downs organization, and The Economist.

² <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/statistics/article/go/-/seventh-day-adventist-world-church-statistics-2014>

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Stats gleaned from online sites such as Startup Guide, Business Insider, Wikipedia, and Our World in Data. See especially <http://startupguide.com/world/the-world-is-actually-getting-better>.

⁵ See <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population>.

⁶ Christopher M. Hays, *When the Son of Man Didn't Come* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), pp. 74-75. Hays and his collaborating authors point out that "Jesus speaks of his coming in three different ways." First, his personal Parousia (John 14:3). Second, the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (John 14:18-20). Third, Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to the disciples (John 14:23-26). "Thus, in one chapter, John speaks of the future coming of Jesus in three senses."

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 255.

⁸ *op. cit.*, p. 256.

EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the editorial board. One of the purposes of this magazine is to encourage dialogue between those of differing viewpoints within the Adventist Church. Thus, we will publish articles ranging throughout the conservative-liberal continuum.

BIBLE CREDITS

Scripture quotations from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press.

The Douay-Rheims 1889 American edition is in the public domain.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (GNT) are from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version- Second Edition Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan (www.zondervan.com). All rights reserved worldwide. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contributors



RICHARD W. COFFEN is a retired vice president of editorial services at Review and Herald Publishing Association and writes from Green

Valley, Arizona.



MICHELLE DOUCOUMES writes from Chattanooga, Tennessee, where she enjoys teaching evangelism and

business, being outdoors, and sharing Jesus.



CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN is editor of the Adult Bible Study Guide for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



FRITZ GUY is a retired dean, editor, college president, and professor of theology and philosophy. He continues to teach at

La Sierra University and is the author of *Thinking Theologically*.



GLENN HANSEN recently retired after 13 years of teaching English in Central China and now lives on the China-Myanmar border. He

attends a local Chinese Christian church and is searching for the perfect avocado.



OLIVE J. HEMMINGS is a professor of religion and ethics at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland.



REBECCA MURDOCK is pursuing her M.A. in Systematic Theology at the Andrews University Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

She works with the Adventist Muslim Relations Forum on campus and with circulation of the *Andrews University Seminary Studies* theological journal.



MAYLAN SCHURCH is pastor of the Adventist church in Bellevue, Washington, and has authored or co-authored more than

a dozen books.



LOREN SEIBOLD is a pastor in Ohio and the executive editor of *Adventist Today*.



ALDEN THOMPSON is a professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla University.



ZANE YI is an assistant professor in the School of Religion at Loma Linda University, where he teaches courses in philosophy and

theology.

GREAT HOLIDAY BOOK DEALS

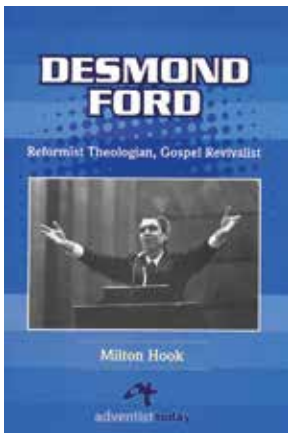


Something's Happening,
By Y. Suzanne Ocsai:

An in-depth look at the first 10 years of GYC, one of the most powerful youth movements in Seventh-day Adventist Church history....
Introductory Price: 19.95

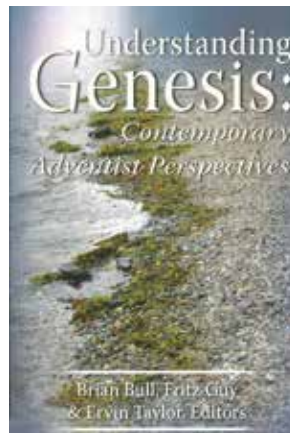
Genesis Versus Darwinism,
By Desmond Ford:

This book studies the objections to the early chapters of Genesis and calls into question the influential teachings of Charles Darwin....
Introductory Price: 19.95



Desmond Ford:
Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist
By Milton Hook, Ed.D:

A meticulous account of the ministry of Desmond Ford, a strong, controversial voice in Adventist evangelicalism....
Regular: 19.95; Special: \$14.96



Understanding Genesis:
Contemporary Adventist Perspectives: Brian Bull, Fritz Guy, and Ervin Taylor, editors:

A scientifically literate review of how to intelligently read the Genesis account....
Regular: 19.95; Special: \$14.96



Where To?:
The Adventist Search for Direction
By J. David Newman:

AT editor Newman writes about the direction of the Church, in light of recent emphases at the General Conference level....
Regular: 11.95; Special: \$8.96

Order Today!!!

Web: www.atoday.org
Phone: (503) 826-8600
Mail: *Adventist Today*
PO Box 1135
Sandy, OR. 97055-1135

Prices good thru January 1, 2017
Phone for bulk and/or wholesale prices