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Preparing for the Second Advent

P. Gerard Damsteegt /5



Morning's Trumpet

Lewis R. Walton /18



The Nearness of the Second Advent

G. Edward Reid /28



Skyscrapers in the Last Days

Robert W. Olson /40



God's Challenge to His Wayward Remnant

Kevin Paulson /47



While the Winds Hold

Ellen G. White /56

Letters /2

The Blessed Hope Jo Ellen Walton /3

But a Little Time Gordon A. Lee /44


Previous Issues of ADVENTISTS AFFIRM /64

Statement of Mission /67

- ◆ Home
- ◆ About Us
- ◆ What's New!
- ◆ Previous Issues
- ◆ Store
- ◆ Links
- ◆ FAQ's
- ◆ Contact Us
- ◆ Site Map

- ◆ Subscribe Now!
- ◆ Log In

»



Adventists **AFFIRM**

[Home](#) > [Previous Issues](#) > [Volume 15, Number 3](#) >

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Preparing for the Second Advent

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What does it mean to prepare for Christs return?

Seventh-day Adventists are confident about the return of Jesus. He will come soon.

Yet for most of us this blessed hope has very little impact on our day-to-day living. Our lives are filled with our daily routine, jobs, plans, projects, and aspirations, trying to fulfill our dreams for the future.

Our young people attending church-operated academies, colleges, and universities are choosing careers that will guarantee good-paying, secure jobs. The growing number of our youth who are attending public schools do likewise. They find respectable careers that offer security and a good income. That is their main focus.

A general feeling permeates many of our churches that, as long as you love the Lord, regularly attend church, pay your tithe, respect the Sabbath, assist from time to time with church work, and do not do anything really bad, Jesus will take care of you and you will be all right when He returns. Many go beyond this and reason that since we are saved by faith only, not by our works, what we do is not even important. Some feel that we ought not to worry about any special preparations for Jesus return, as long as we love Him. Jesus will come at His determined time, and we cannot do anything about it anyway.

But what does the Bible teach about preparing for the Second Advent? Is there any indication that we need to make special preparations for it beyond expressing faith and love in the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Bible reveals that at every major juncture in the history of salvation, God in love informed His people of His plans. Throughout the ages they have found comfort in His promise, Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets (Am 3:7).

[Table of Contents](#)

ADVENTISTS AFFIRM	
	Preparing for the Second Advent <small>by P. Gerard Damsteegt</small>
	Marriage's Transport <small>by J. W. Cannon</small>
	The Significance of the Second Advent <small>by J. W. Cannon</small>
	Shyrenners in the Last Days <small>by J. W. Cannon</small>
	God's Challenge to His Wayward Remnant <small>by J. W. Cannon</small>
	While the Winds Blow <small>by J. W. Cannon</small>
Lesson 2: The Second Advent, by J. W. Cannon, 1888 The Sabbath, by J. W. Cannon, 1888 The Second Advent, by J. W. Cannon, 1888 The Sabbath, by J. W. Cannon, 1888 The Second Advent, by J. W. Cannon, 1888 The Sabbath, by J. W. Cannon, 1888	

[Order Information](#)

Looking at the message and experience of the prophet Elijah, we will examine what the Bible says on the importance of preparing for Gods major events. This will provide us insights on how we ought to prepare for the Second Advent just before us.

Coming Judgments. Throughout history God has sought fellowship with mankind. Through the symbolic worship service of the sacrificial system of the sanctuary He revealed to His covenant people the good news of salvation. He selected spiritual leaders that had the proper qualifications to teach His people how to be saved through His mercy and escape the corruption of sin.

Yet time and time again the people departed from Gods law and His testimonies, following the deceptions of Satan and bringing inevitable judgments. In attempting to avert these tragic consequences, God sent His messengers, the prophets, to prepare His people to avoid these judgments by coming back into a covenant relationship with Him.

One of the greatest reformers He used was the prophet Elijah. In a time of deep apostasy God chose him as His special messenger to warn His people of their impending doom. Great was the apathy of the people. Almost single-handedly Elijah faced the nation, denouncing their evil ways and calling them to repentance. His work was to restore among Gods people the worship of the true God which foreign worship forms and practices had displaced. He called the people to a radical decision to abandon false worship practices and to return to the Lord. Elijahs message became a pattern for all true reformers. And Scripture links it to both the First and Second Advents of Christ.

Preparation for the First Advent

Scripture associates the spirit and power of Elijahs message with the work of preparing a people for one of the greatest events in the history of salvation: the First Advent of Christ.

Jesus identified the ministry of John the Baptist as the work that was preparing the people for His first coming. Quoting Malachi 3:1, He told His hearers that John is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You (Mt 11:10, NKJV here and throughout). He added that John was Elijah who was to come (v. 14).

Reinforcing the importance of this work of preparation is the fact that prior to Johns birth the angel gave special instruction to his father about Johns lifestyle and mission. As to lifestyle, he instructed that John shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mothers womb (Lk 1:15).

Like Elijah. Regarding the nature of Johns ministry, the angel said that he will also go before Him [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (v. 17). This indicates that John was to be a reformer like Elijah.

The type of preparatory work John would do was similar to that of Elijahs mission. Jesus explained that John was to restore all things (Mt 17:11). This restoration characterized the preparatory work of John the Baptist.

Six months before Jesus began His ministry, John began preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. In fulfillment of Isaiahs prophecy, Scripture describes Johns ministry as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Lk 3:3-6).

Thus, in the spirit and power of Elijah, John preached a radical reformation, calling on Gods people to bear fruits worthy of repentance (v. 8). It was a message to prepare people for the Messiahs first coming.

Preparation for the Second Advent

The next event of monumental significance after the First Advent is the Second Advent that will bring an end to all sin. If the Scriptures place such importance on the need to prepare for the First Advent, should we not expect to see a similar call to prepare for Christs Second Advent?

Some very specific Bible prophecies tell of events to unfold just prior to Christs return. These prophecies demand special preparation on the part of Gods people. They tell how to prepare for the climax of the centuries. Failure to take them seriously will cripple our preparation for the Second Advent.

Warning Message. As God sent a message to warn humanity before He destroyed the world by a flood, so He will send a warning message before the destruction of the present world by fire.

Malachis prophecy about the coming of Elijah before the Day of the Lord was not completely fulfilled at the First Advent of Christ. At that time the great day of judgment, the Day of the Lord, was not imminent. That event would take place at the conclusion of the time of the end. This makes Malachis prediction very relevant for today.

In harmony with Gods promise to send Elijah, the book of Revelation (18:1) reveals that just prior to the destruction of Babylon, the Lord will send a warning message which will enlighten the whole earth with the glory of the Lord, revealing Gods purposes and final actions in the great controversy drama and bringing everyone to a decision.

Remnant. How will He give this warning? Just as He has done throughout history, God will use His faithful remnant to do this unique work. This final demonstration of Gods love and His righteousness will be the greatest revival of the centuries, preparing the world for the Second Advent.

Elijah will come by Gods raising up messengers in the spirit and power of Elijah to perform a mighty work for the Lord. This work will restore the relevant truth for this timethe present truth, which will prepare the world to be ready for the return of Jesus Christ and provide the means for everyone to escape Gods final judgment on unrighteousness.

Jesus Urgent Appeals. Jesus promises and admonitions underscore the seriousness of preparing for the Second Advent. Just before the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus assured His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in heaven. When this preparation is completed, He will come again to take them to their heavenly homes.

Realizing the weaknesses of human nature, Jesus warned His followers not to lose sight of this beautiful promise, diverting their focus from His return to the things that the world considers priorities.

Because no one knows the exact moment of His return, it is easy to get careless during the waiting period. As the antediluvians had neglected to prepare for the flood, Jesus predicted a similar lack of readiness just before His return: But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Mt 24:37-39).

Watch and Pray. How can we avoid repeating this sad history? Jesus warns, Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man (Lk 21:36). He points out the urgency of escaping the coming judgments, to stand before Him when the sky parts and He appears as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19).

The great question for us to consider is the cry of the lost on the Day of the Lord: Who is able

to stand? (Rev 6:17).

Scripture is plain that failure to watch and pray constantly will lead to such involvement with daily affairs that the Day of the Lord will surprise us as a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2). Jesus strongly urges His followers to make earnest preparations, not to be caught off guard: But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth (Lk 21:34, 35).

Those who accept His warnings, making serious preparation for His coming, will not be in darkness that the close of human probation should surprise them as a thief (1 Thess 5:4).

Jesus calls for us to be ready: Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him (Mt 24:44). His followers are not only to prepare daily but to be ready at any time.

This calls for serious reflection. If He returned today, would we be ready to meet Him? Are we ready for heaven if death should come upon us today? Are we prepared to face the judgment? What does the Lord expect of us in this time of preparation?

The Call to Watch. As we noted, Jesus said to watch and pray (Lk 21:36). What does Jesus want us to watch? His last sermon on the Mount of Olives clearly urges us to watch the signs of the times of His return. Those who heed this counsel will study the Scriptures to discover the harbingers of the Second Advent. They are people of prophecy, ready to identify every sign Providence gives.

These students of Gods Word will not be fanatical, reading newspapers with paranoia and setting speculative times for the next sign to take place. They will, however, be well acquainted with the Bibles scenario of the last acts in the great controversy drama.

They will focus on the present truth in prophecy and closely observe how the prophecy of Revelation 13 is being fulfilled. They will watch the astonishing transformation of a country that has been the worlds strongest defender of freedom of religion. They will notice this precious freedom gradually being taken away and a dreadful image of the beast being formed that will persecute Gods people.

In response, they will do everything in their power to defend the divine privilege of all to worship God according to the dictates of conscience. They will tell others of the tragic results of taking away this freedom.

The Call to Pray. In the light of the Second Advent, what is the meaning of Jesus call to pray? While the signs of the times occur in rapid succession, those who pray for Christs coming kingdom will call upon Him to establish His kingdom soon. Praying daily Thy kingdom come (Mt 6:10) will bring the assurance that no matter how long we have to wait, His kingdom will surely come.

For our encouragement the Lord has given us prophetic signs to keep this promise alive in our minds. Every fulfilling sign will inspire us to greater dedication, remembering the promise to look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near (Lk 21:28). These signs of the times make our prayers more intentional and meaningful as they help us to keep the Advent hope alive in our hearts.

Jesus, however, will not inaugurate the kingdom of glory before the preparation for the coming of the Second Advent is done. This work involves first of all a personal preparation, and secondly, a preparation of the whole world to meet the Lord.

Elijah and the Time of the End

The life and work of Elijah, one of Gods most outstanding reformers, reveals our work of preparing for the Second Advent.

Malachi prophesied, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Mal 4:5, 6).

Here Elijah is a type or symbol of the work that prepares people to meet the Lord at His coming. This prophecy gives us a glimpse of Gods compassion for the world, in which He brings about a work that is to prepare the people for the Day of Judgment so that they can escape the seven last plagues.

Malachis prophecy makes it clear that Elijahs work will change the hearts of Gods people. It will bring about a reformation that prepares people for the Day of the Lord and Christs return.

Elijahs Time

The prophet Elijah lived in a time of great apostasy. At the head of this apostasy were the leaders of Gods people, who had departed from the truth more than any others before them. Scripture stated, And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him (1 Kgs 16:30). This situation brought on Gods wrath: Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him (v. 33).

Departures from Truth. The spiritual and moral decline among Gods people did not take place suddenly but gradually. It began with Solomon, deepened with Jeroboam, and reached its awful depth in Elijahs time. What were some of the departures that led to such apostasy?

Violation of the marriage covenant. Departure from the truth began a century earlier with Solomon, reputed to be the wisest man on earth. In spite of his fame he fell into sin by disregarding the plain counsels of Scripture regarding lifes most intimate relationship—marriage. His personal passions took priority over the principles of Scripture, and he departed from the biblical principles of the marriage relation, taking multiple wives, among them even unbelievers.

The Bible records this strong censure: But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods. Solomon clung to these in love (1 Kgs 11:1, 2).

These intimate relations with unbelievers led him astray in the end. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David (v. 4).

How did this happen? To please his unbelieving wives, he not only allowed them to have their own worship preferences, but he took an ecumenical attitude and personally participated in these deviant forms of worship. The Scriptures, however, judge his behavior as totally unacceptable, stating bluntly, Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord (v. 6).

New forms of worship. With the next king, Jeroboam, the apostasy deepened. This king was not satisfied to have his people faithfully worship their God and attend the religious services in the house of the Lord. Jealously he surmised that if his subjects attended the annual religious festivals in Jerusalem he would lose his popularity, the peoples support, and finally his job.

To prevent the people from worshiping in Judea, Jeroboam decided to compete with the Jerusalem church by offering an alternative worship that would be easier and less demanding than the traditional worship that God had outlined to His prophets. Thus he made two calves of gold, and said to the people, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt. And he set up one in Bethel,

and the other he put in Dan (1 Kgs 12:28, 29).

Low standards for spiritual leaders. Jeroboam next lowered the standards for spiritual leadership. The Bible gives no reason for his actions, but one may safely assume that not everyone went along with his plans for revised worship. In order to attract sufficient new leadership for the new worship styles, he disregarded the biblical requirements for leadership. Scripture states that the king made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi (v. 31).

Personal ambitions or desires, not Scripture, became the standard for qualifying as a spiritual leader. Thus the king would set apart or ordain anyone who felt called to lead Gods people: Whoever wished, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places (1 Kgs 13:33). Most people saw nothing wrong with these changes, but Scripture saw it differently: And this thing was the sin of the house of Jeroboam (v. 34).

No Fear of the Lord. In the time of Elijah, the fear of the Lord had diminished so much that Gods people were no longer concerned about the false worship forms. These had become a light matter, firmly established and nothing to worry about. Commenting on the attitude of leadership, Scripture states, And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him [Ahab] to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and went and served Baal and worshiped him (1 Kgs 16:31).

Foreign Worship. The driving force behind the new worship trends came from the powerful influences of the pagan nations worship practices. Israels leader loved what he saw in one of these nations so much that he did not see anything wrong in making an alliance through marriage. This alliance impacted his personal life and the life of the nation. But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up (1 Kgs 21:25). This intimate relationship with an unbeliever paved the way for one of the deepest apostasies among Gods people.

Trained Leaders. Israels experience shows that the type of leadership determines the success of apostasy. The new worship styles required a specialized ministry, leaders who had been trained by the fallen nations in these worship styles. They facilitated the adoption of worship practices foreign to the heritage of Gods people. Scripture informs us that there were the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah. The national leadership favored these priests skilled in the pagan worship styles they ate at Jezebels table (1 Kgs 18:19). With such a force of false teachers one can understand the full-scale apostasy in Elijahs time.

Persecution. The national leadership strongly promoted the new worship forms. Any defense of Gods worship style was politically incorrect. Truth was unpopular and its defenders were persecuted. So many feared to stand up for the truth that Elijah felt that he was the only one left faithful to the Lord. Seeing no sign of public support, he shared his disappointment with the Lord: I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life (1 Kgs 19:10).

Leadership was determined to make the new worship styles a success. Traditional worship services were no longer tolerated, and strong action was taken to eliminate any opposition. Systematic persecution began against Gods faithful ministers: Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord (1 Kgs 18:13). When God used Elijah to bring about a revival and reformation, Jezebel issued a death decree against him: So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them [the prophets of Baal who were killed] by tomorrow about this time (1 Kgs 19:2).

Although they did not dare to speak up openly, God still had believers who refused to participate in the popular worship forms. The Lord comforted Elijah, saying, Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him (v. 18).

These examples show clearly that apostasy leads to a change in the style of worship. This is not surprising, because apostasy affects the way we view God, which in turn influences our reverence for Him, how we communicate and relate to Him, and finally, our behavior and lifestyle, even in worship.

Elijahs Message

Elijahs message resulted from his prayers and his intimate relationship with the Lord. The Bible states that he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months (James 5:17). This prayer shows that he recognized the apostate condition of his people and longed for a change for the better. He realized that such a change could only come as the result of divine judgment on his people. Thus he interceded with God for his own people, calling for divine judgments to awaken them from their apathy towards the apostasy. The people desperately needed to hear a straight testimony that would cure their spiritual paralysis.

Judgment Message. Because Elijah interceded, the Lord sent him a message of judgment to proclaim to the leaders who had been promoting the new worship styles. He said to Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word (1 Kgs 17:1).

Conditions for prosperity and adversity. Scripture clearly states that rain was one of the blessings of obedience: And it shall be that if you diligently obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season . . . (Deut 11:13-15).

Since the time of Moses, Scripture had pointed out that a departure from the true worship of God leads to disaster: Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lords anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you (vv. 16, 17).

The judgments that the Elijah message announced were simply the result of departing from Gods counsels and following the worship of the apostate nations around them.

The cause of calamity. After Israel suffered from years of famine, Elijah appeared again in public and pointed to the real reason for the present calamity. Elijahs message was clear and direct: they had failed to follow the plain counsels of the Lord. In addressing Ahab, he said, you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals (1 Kgs 18:18).

Confronting Apostasy. Elijah knew that the issues dividing Gods people needed clear identification and decisive action. No politically correct positions for the sake of preserving peace would do.

Elijah called for a general conference of all believers to bring an open confrontation between true and false worship. He invited everyone to Mount Carmel to investigate the worth of the false and true worship forms. He commanded, Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah (1 Kgs 18:19).

Call to take sides. The meeting Elijah called for had to produce results. Thus he appealed to everyone to take a firm position on the issue of worship. The message called on the people to give up their indecisiveness and to take sides openly, no longer remaining neutral. And Elijah came to all the people, and said, How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. But the people answered him not a word (v. 21).

Error Exposed. During the investigation Elijahs message exposed the error of false worship.

He showed the utter bankruptcy of the new worship forms, calling to the false prophets, Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping, and must be awakened (v. 27).

Restoring True Worship. After having demonstrated the utter failure of the apostate practices and teachings, Elijahs message arrived at its ultimate objective: restoring Gods true worship.

Foundations. The first thing, therefore, that Elijah did was to call the people together and restore the foundations of true worship, the altar around which all worship of God centered. And Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me. So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down (v. 30). Here on the altar the only sacrifice for sin is lifted up before every worshiper, calling attention to the ultimate price that was paid for our redemption.

Such simple, uncomplicated worship leads people into a new covenant relationship through deep repentance and affliction of soul. The new covenant brings the worshiper into a relationship of loving obedience to the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. The worshiper asks what is pleasing to God and how He wants to be worshiped as Creator, not what kind of worship style we like or prefer and what makes us feel comfortable.

Reformation. When the people saw the result of Elijahs message of true worship, they fell on their faces; and they said, The Lord, He is God! the Lord, He is God! (v. 39).

Elijahs message did not simply restore genuine worship practices, it did away with all apostate teachings. The false teachings and teachers had to be eliminated from among Gods people. When the false teachers offered no sign of repentance, Elijah called on Gods people for a radical removal of the sources of apostasy, commanding, Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape! So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there (v. 40).

Results of the Elijah Message

It changes the heart. The results of the Elijah message are impressive. It will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children (Mal 4:6). This message leads to bridging any gap in family relations. Fully accepted, it brings unity instead of separation. It leads to reconciliation, stops divorce proceedings, ends lawsuits between Gods people, and rejuvenates family happiness, for where Jesus rules, happiness reigns supreme. The result will be a home that is truly a heaven on earth, a model of Christian love, and the most powerful demonstration of what God can accomplish in families.

It leads back to the original faith. The heart-changing influence of the message has even deeper consequences. Malachi stated that the message will turn . . . the hearts of the children to their fathers. In the end-time setting, this means that it would lead people to return to the faith of their fathers—the simple but powerful faith of the early church as well as a revival of the faith of the Adventist pioneers.

In the pioneer experiences we see the power of the Holy Spirit especially at work, and we see the message and mission that God has given to His remnant. Understanding Gods original purpose for His people in preparing the way for Jesus return will bring a revival. We will also better understand how to fulfill the task that lies before us. Truly, we have nothing to fear for the future, unless we have forgotten Gods leading and teaching in the history of His people.

It brings persecution. Elijahs message did not go unopposed. The public exposure and resultant failure of the apostate worship brought violent reaction—persecution.

After Elijahs message at Mount Carmel, Jezebel tried to kill him. He explained his desperate situation to the Lord, stating, they seek to take my life (1 Kgs 19:10). The promoters of the false worship styles tried to destroy Gods messenger and the message of reform he bore, but the Almighty protected him and he continued unharmed.

It carries an eternal reward. Proclaiming the message of reform brought rich results. Faithful Elijah was translated to heaven. Suddenly, a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, . . . and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kgs 2:11).

When Gods people go forward in the spirit and power of Elijah, faithfully presenting an unadulterated message, their work will have an effect similar to that of Elijahs message on his generation. In the same way, our faithfulness in proclaiming the three angels messages will receive abundant reward when we enter the glorious heavenly mansions the Lord is preparing.

When Is the Elijah Message Preached?

Bible prophecy says the Elijah message will be proclaimed just before the Day of the Lord, which begins with the seven last plagues. This message will be given by a people who will go forward in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare a people ready for the Second Advent.

According to Ellen G. White, Adventists around 1844 proclaimed the Elijah message. Thousands were led to embrace the truth preached by William Miller, and servants of God were raised up in the spirit and power of Elijah to proclaim the message (*Early Writings*, p. 233).

Today. In commenting on Elijahs dealings with apostasy, the servant of the Lord stressed todays need for the Elijah message to correct the apathy toward sin among Gods people: Today there is need of the voice of stern rebuke; for grievous sins have separated the people from God. Infidelity is fast becoming fashionable. We will not have this man to reign over us, is the language of thousands. Luke 19:14. The smooth sermons so often preached make no lasting impression; the trumpet does not give a certain sound. Men are not cut to the heart by the plain, sharp truths of Gods word (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 140).

She bemoaned the lack of ministers like Elijah and saw that many have fallen victim to compromise: So men who should be standing as faithful guardians of Gods law have argued, till policy has taken the place of faithfulness, and sin is allowed to go unreproved. When will the voice of faithful rebuke be heard once more in the church? (*ibid.*, p. 141).

She expressed a deep desire for ministers and leaders to live up to their divine calling: Would that every minister might realize the sacredness of his office and the holiness of his work, and show the courage that Elijah showed! As divinely appointed messengers, ministers are in a position of awful responsibility. They are to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering. 2 Timothy 4:2. In Christs stead they are to labor as stewards of the mysteries of heaven, encouraging the obedient and warning the disobedient. With them worldly policy is to have no weight. Never are they to swerve from the path in which Jesus has bidden them walk (*ibid.*, p. 142).

Then she stated what kind of message God calls them to proclaim today: Their message is to be, Thus saith the Lord. God calls for men like Elijah, Nathan, and John the Baptistmen who will bear His message with faithfulness, regardless of the consequences; men who will speak the truth bravely, though it call for the sacrifice of all they have (*ibid.*).

These urgent appeals make it obvious why Scripture has chosen the prophet Elijah as a type of those who will proclaim a similar message today as did Elijah. Gods remnant church is characterized as Laodicea, revealing a spirit of apathy. It should come as no surprise to us that God will raise up people who, in the spirit and power of Elijah, confront apostasy and do everything possible to lead Gods people back to His way, ready to stand in the Day of the Lord.

How to Be Filled With the Spirit and Power of Elijah

Many Adventists have heard about the Elijah message, but few have made this subject a serious, prayerful study. The Lord has given some crucial information through Ellen G. White

about how to receive the Holy Spirit so that we will be filled with the spirit and power of Elijah, ready to be a part of the exciting adventure of preparing others for the Second Advent. Here is the simple but profound advice that will transform our lives.

Study the Word of God deeply. We need first to become thoroughly dependent upon the Lord by the study of His Word. There is too little dependence upon God. When God would have a special work done for the advancement of the truth, He will impress men to work in the mines of truth with prayerful earnestness to discover the precious ore. These men will have Christlike perseverance. They will not fail or be discouraged. They will sink self out of sight in Jesus (*The 1888 Materials*, p. 169). Only after having thoroughly digested His Word and obtained a knowledge of the present truth message will we be able to catch the spirit of Elijah that will drive us forward as successful witnesses for the truth.

Share Gods Word, lifting up Christ. Second, we need to share what we have obtained from the mines of truth regarding the Second Advent and Gods special message that will get peoples attention and commitment. Said the messenger of the Lord: They are to preach Gods Word; their testimony must not be molded by the opinions and ideas that have been regarded as sound, but by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. They are to lift up Christ and call sinners to repentance (*ibid.*).

No human opinions, ideas, and methods must dilute the proclamation of the three angels messages, the Elijah message of the last days. No human strategies but Gods methods are to be used to arouse the churches and the world. When we unreservedly follow the counsels given to us by the Lords messenger, we will be able to share Gods Word most effectively and draw the minds of people to Christ. In Him alone will we obtain the repentance we need to stand in the Day of the Lord.

Practice the graces of Christ. Finally, we need to present the Elijah message with the same tact and courtesy as our Lord used when He brought the bread of life to starving souls. Those who deliver the Eljiah message are to practice the graces of Christ, to pursue a straightforward course, breaking down skepticism and urging upon all their personal responsibility to be kind and courteous, to do good and to win souls to Jesus (*ibid.*).

Results. As we take these three steps, we will be able to go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is their work to make crooked things straight. Some things must be torn down, some things must be built up. The old treasures must be reset in a framework of truth (*ibid.*).

When we fulfill the conditions, God will have an army that will go forward conquering the enemy territory and obtaining victory after victory. In a short time the whole earth will be illuminated with His glory, and many will be ready for the Second Advent.


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- ◆ Home
- ◆ About Us
- ◆ What's New!
- ◆ Previous Issues
- ◆ Store
- ◆ Links
- ◆ FAQ's
- ◆ Contact Us
- ◆ Site Map

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Adventists **AFFIRM**

[Home](#) > [Previous Issues](#) > [Volume 15, Number 3](#) >

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Mornings Trumpet

by Lewis R. Walton

Retired Attorney

Author, Mornings Trumpet

In the aftermath of Septembers terrorism, how should Gods people live?

Alas, alas, that great city . . . For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. Revelation 18:16, 17

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Adventist law student Richard Walton was in his apartment just a few blocks from the Pentagon. Suddenly an airliner filled his top-floor window, crashed through a tree just outside, and roared eastward.¹

Dropping the telephone on which he had been talking to a persistent telemarketer, Richard raced to the window. The airliner turned to evade a high rise hotel and disappeared behind the low hill on which is located a row of government buildings known as the Navy Annex. Moments later there was a fireball.

Racing down seven flights of stairs, Richard hurried down Columbia Pike toward the Pentagon joined, as he ran, by a crowd of Marines from nearby Henderson Hall and the impromptu rescue party arrived to find dazed survivors straggling out of the burning building. In a single hour the world had changed forever.

Everybody seemed to sense that we had reached a mysterious turning point in history. Sales of Bibles soared by over 20 percent, and books on prophecy sold out. Voices everywhere spontaneously seemed to proclaim an end-time message.

Suddenly it was time to take the Advent very seriously.

The Adventist Connection

During the Watergate crisis, someone coined a phrase that became a litmus test for Richard Nixons presidency: what did the President know, and when did he know it? Apply the same question to Adventism, and one comes up with some startling insights.

[Table of Contents](#)

ADVENTISTS AFFIRM	
◆	Preparing for the Second Advent 7/15/2009-12
◆	Mornings Trumpet Lewis R. Walton, D.D.
◆	The Nations of the Second Advent 6/15/2009-12
◆	Skyrappers in the Last Days Robert W. Crane, D.D.
◆	God's Challenge to His Wayward Remnant Gordon R. McMillan, D.D.
◆	While the Winds Howl David C. Worley, Ph.D.
Lesson 12 The Second Advent, the 12th Number of the 144,000, and the 144,000 Previous Issues of <i>Adventists Affirm</i> are available at Volume 15	

[Order Information](#)

Changes. For decades we have known, or should have known, that we are living in the time of the end that great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones (*Testimonies for the Church*, 9:11). As early as 1904 Gods people were warned that the world would see cruel, evil working against the rich who have exalted themselves against the poor (ibid., 8:50) a class struggle, in other words, in which the wealthy suffer some kind of terrible attack. We have also known that the final crisis will involve religion, and that liberty will be imperiled as frightened people seek stability.

But for those who took the time to read, there was even more detail. In 1904 the same year Einstein was working on his special theory of relativity Ellen White also revealed that human agents were developing such powerful machinery of destruction that those without Gods protection would find no safety in any place or position (ibid.). At almost the same time she penned a warning of tragic events destruction of tall buildings she had been shown while in New York City.

Calamities Likely. In other words, calamities such as befell the World Trade Center were not just a possibility, they were *likely*. We were told that such events would increase as human history nears its close, and that our job was to warn the world in advance. A great terror is soon to come upon human beings. . . . We who know the truth should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise (ibid., 8:28).

More importantly, we were given the spiritual reason why such startling calamities would occur: because of evil, the Holy Spirit is being withdrawn from the earth, and when Gods restraint disappears we can expect to see turmoil. The restraining Spirit of God is even now being withdrawn, Ellen White warned, and when that happens there will be such a scene of strife as no pen can picture. She cautioned that travel from place to place would soon be hedged with dangers a prediction now quite recognizable and that there would be no security in anything that is human or earthly (ibid., 6:408, 22; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 636).

Ominous Trend. More, we knew that this turmoil would lead to a world in which the majority seeks some form of global religious accord, enforced by economic and military coercion. In the hours following September 11 one could almost sense the onset of such a trend in America. People were rediscovering the importance of religion. Public officials were openly suggesting that in order to maintain order we may have to surrender some liberties guaranteed in our Constitution. The Fourth Amendment faces immense challenges, as privacy is eroded for the sake of public security. One wonders whether the First Amendment, guaranteeing religious liberty and freedom of speech, may face a similar challenge.

In short, the world we have long expected seems to be materializing with each passing day.

The Adventist Mission

Terrorism threatens our vital infrastructure. Action in Afghanistan inflames Muslim riots from Asia to Africa. Israeli-Palestinian tensions teeter on the brink of open combat this mix of events is entirely capable of producing a world war. Seasoned military officers admit they have never faced anything remotely like it.

Faced with a crisis that could lead to the end of the world, what should Adventists do?

Our Messages. First, we should reaffirm who we are and what we have been put here to do. Revelation 14:6-12 clearly describes an end-time people with a series of specific messages to give. These begin with the everlasting gospel which means we need to be clear on what the gospel is, and what it isnt. Does the gospel save people *in* their sins or *from* their sins? We'd better know.

As Revelation 14 also points out, we are also a judgment-hour people with a judgment-hour message which means we had better understand why the pre-Advent judgment is biblical. It wouldnt hurt if we also realized that it offers some of the best news in the whole Bible: according to Scripture, Jesus is both our judge and our defense attorney (Jn 5:22, 1 Jn 2:1).

As long as we retain Him to handle our cases, we are assured of vindication, not condemnation.

We need to rediscover the timeliness of warnings such as the fall of Babylon, and understand why the biblical reference to Babylon is so filled with end-time meaning. We should also realize how rapidly technology is propelling us toward a world in which the mysterious mark could be so easily enforced. For example, one of the terrorists mechanisms to avoid detection is to make purchases entirely with cash, so as not to leave electronic trails. Could this lead to calls for a cashless society? Already the nation is discussing whether to issue national identity cards. What implications do these things suggest to people who know a time is coming when buying and selling will be controlled? We should become serious observers of our world, relating what we see to the prophetic pictures painted by books such as Revelation and *The Great Controversy*.

Our Lifestyle. And we should explore in prayerful depth the promise found in Revelation 14:12. There *will* be a generation of Gods people who keep the commandments. That is a promise some people dismiss as impossible: after all, never before has a generation of believers done it. But the holy and true One saw it happen. That should be assurance enough that it is possible.

A gospel message. A judgment hour message. End-time warnings about the fall of Babylon and the danger of surrendering ones religious convictions in the face of economic coercion. The law of God and the faith of Jesus all of this is what Revelation describes as the message of Gods last church. Wed better be sure we understand it. More importantly, wed better be sure that we are living what we preach.

If our task is to preach the gospel to the world, and if the gospel we preach must be the same one by which our own souls are saved, then are we really ready to deliver that message? To put it another way, are we ready for the coming of Jesus?

THE ADVENTIST CHALLENGE

On September 11, 2001, all the things for which we have so often been tempted to sell our souls disappeared. Money, power, and professional glamor all came down in a tragic cloud of dust and debris, leaving a few acres of New York looking like the post-millennial world. You no longer had to be an Adventist to see it; everyone could, and people everywhere agreed that something very fundamental had changed. Nearly everyone realized that we had reached one of those mysterious bends in the river of time, when the whole course of world events changes. Things will never be the same was a remark one heard repeatedly.

Personal values changed instantly as well. Ive got kids, and were getting out of the city, one man said, sounding just a little like the sort of Adventist many would have snickered at the week before. Ball games were called off and even Hollywood showed restraint, canceling the release of violent films people no longer wanted to see. Meanwhile books on prophecy sold out and people prayed unashamedly in public. The stones were crying out, and their message was impossible to misunderstand.

Wake-Up Call. Let me say it plainly: we have heard a wake-up call for the Advent, and the time has come to take inventory of our lives to think about how we spend our money and our time, about how we eat and dress and keep the Sabbath, about the places we go and what we look at and, yes, even about the videos that burden our shelves, and the message we convey by having them there.

What are we telling our neighbors about our sense of mission?

What are we telling ourselves?

What are we telling our children?

Entertainment. So long ago that some people conveniently dismiss her remarks as outmoded

Victorian rhetoric, Ellen White specifically warned about amusements that could, with subtle power, change us into persons we never dreamed of becoming. At the head of the list was the theater. There was, she declared, no influence in our land more powerful to poison the imagination (*Testimonies for the Church*, 4:653).

Her words have the ring of old-fashioned Adventism, an absolute couched in terms that allow for no shades of grey, and in recent years people have had an increasingly hard time taking her seriously on the subject. Indeed, some Adventist college newspapers publish movie reviews, and right next to their listing of New Movie Releases one such collegiate paper even did a satirical list of movie titles that one might expect to see if Adventists ran Hollywood.² Shown as they appeared in the paper, some of these were:

10. Friday the 13th: Sabbath is Coming
9. Splash 2: Baptism by Immersion
8. Latter Rain: Starring the prophetess formerly known as Ellen Gould Harmon
7. Holy Ghostbusters
6. Dead Prophets Society, and:
1. 144,000 Dalmatians.

Comment on the above seems unnecessary except, perhaps, to remember what Jesus said about insulting the Holy Ghost.

What Happened? Perhaps it is proper to ask what has happened to us whose forebears preached a soon-coming Lord, and whose children now play word games with the Holy Spirit's name. One of the most obvious answers can be found in the topic that produced this attempt at collegiate wit: we have obviously spent a great deal of time with Hollywood.

A couple of generations ago most Adventists made at least some effort to stay away from the theater. But they soon encountered a new challenge: if they wouldn't go to Hollywood, then Hollywood obligingly came to them through the new medium of television. At first the device seemed harmless enough, delivering up fuzzy black and white images of Howdy Doody and Leave It to Beaver. But that was an era when the worst you might expect even from a movie was a plunging neckline, not full frontal nudity, and a moviegoer did not hear street language fit for a waterfront bar. Back then, television was protected by the Federal Communications Act of 1934, in which profanity on the air could be punished (as I recall it from my law school days) with a ten-year prison term or \$10,000 fine. As television became an accepted part of Adventist family life, few people wondered what might happen if all this changed.

But change it did. Little by little the content of programming became more explicit, more profane, more overtly violent and sexual, until we learned to tolerate things we never dreamed we would accept in our living rooms. The dangers foreseen by Ellen White had come into the heart of our homes through a window we ourselves had opened, and the effects showed in our spiritual lives. We read less in the Word, allowed popular culture to mold our priorities, and without realizing what was happening became more and more like the world we were put here to warn.

Worse, it was happening to our children. It is easy to criticize our colleges, but it is also important to remember that our colleges must contend with the attitudes our children bring to school. If we have left Hollywood as their baby-sitter, it is not surprising if they sometimes prove inept at distinguishing between what is sacred and what is profane.

Two Roads. Something was happening to us that Ellen White had described with dreadful clarity. There were two roads, she said, one leading to heaven and the other to eternal night, and in the latter road she saw many . . . who had the words written upon them: Dead to the world. The end of all things is at hand. Be ye also ready. This group of Adventists looked just

like all the vain ones around them, except a shade of sadness which I noticed upon their countenances. Their conversation was just like that of the gay, thoughtless ones around them; but they would occasionally point with great satisfaction to the letters on their garments, calling for the others to have the same upon theirs.

And the worlds reaction? Those around them would say: There is no distinction between us. We are all alike; we dress and talk and act alike (*Messages to Young People*, pp. 126, 127).

How can one successfully preach the gospel to a world he or she is imitating?

Out of Date? There may be a reason why prophets are almost universally unpopular: they speak too plainly to be misunderstood. Throughout history, whenever they rebuked sin in the language and idiom of their era, people wished them dead. And so the temptation is strong to hush the echo of their voices in our souls to attack them personally, to explain them away, or, in Mrs. Whites case, to say that her messages were, after all, for another era and are hopelessly out of date.

But are they really? Take a look at what else she had to say about theatrical amusements. Among the most dangerous resorts for pleasure is the theater. Instead of being a school of morality and virtue, as is so often claimed, it is the very hotbed of immorality (*Testimonies for the Church*, pp. 652, 653).

Out of date and out of touch? Hardly. Even those who profess no religion could recognize, when terrorism wrote its ugly message across the New York sky, that much of what Hollywood produces is unfit for serious people in a serious time. By the time he or she graduates, the average high school student will have seen 15,000 hours of television, witnessed 18,000 murders, seen 800 suicides, and viewed enough illicit sex to explain why marriage is no longer considered necessary by half of the new couples in the country.

Vicious habits and sinful propensities are strengthened and confirmed, Mrs. White went on to say. Low songs, lewd gestures . . . deprave the imagination and debase the morals. Antiquated Victorian rhetoric? Get real: it is as if she *saw* todays world and indeed, there are ample indications that she did, even to what we accept as our nightly entertainment.

For those who care about their children, she warned, there is a special danger here: Every youth who habitually attends such exhibitions *will be corrupted in principle* (ibid., p. 653, emphasis mine).

Symptoms. What might be the symptoms of such corruption? Inability to distinguish between right and wrong? Between the sacred and the profane? Between eternal life and eternal night? *Inability to sense what it means to be an Adventist?*

Worse, she said there is something addictive about the entertainment process: The love for these scenes increases with every indulgence, as the desire for intoxicating drink strengthens with its use. It is hard to laugh this warning off: how do people react when the power (or the cable connection) goes out, and they cannot receive television?

The only safe course is to shun the theater, she concluded. There is no influence in our land more powerful to poison the imagination, to destroy religious impressions, and to blunt the relish for the tranquil pleasures and sober realities of life . . . (ibid.).

Used rightly, television is a force for good. It can spread the Advent message and keep us informed about what is happening around us. And broadcast news (as imperfect as it is) does provide a window on the world. But it is time for us to be discriminating about what we allow into our lives. Perhaps we have reached a moment when we ought to do a thorough housecleaning, starting with videos and other programs that give the enemy an arguable right to possess our homes and our souls. In ancient Israel Gods people experienced occasional revivals in which idols were thrown out and their lives were cleaned up. It may be time for something similar in Adventism.

Danger Signs. And while were at it, what about the things we eat and drink? Buying lunch at an Adventist hospital recently I tried to find some fruit juice, and found it difficult to locate anything without caffeine in it. *Why?* Do we have the truth, or dont we? Did God give this church the Spirit of Prophecy, or not? And if He did, why dont we do what we know is right?

The very first Sabbath after the tragedies in New York and Washington I attended church where a visiting pastor was speaking. As the senior pastor of a major institutional church he was an experienced minister, yet his sermon started out with a bad joke about people on an airplane that was about to crash this while fires still burned in the Pentagon and World Trade Center, when the bodies of American heroes lay in the wreckage of an airliner in Pennsylvania, when thousands in New York and Washington were brokenhearted at the loss of loved ones, when we were aching to hear the good old Advent message, with its comforting promise that Jesus is coming.

Only a few days later an Adventist youth group in Southern California was invited by a youth pastor to a social gathering. A disc jockey was present to spin the latest rock songs, wine bottles were in evidence, the kids danced, and the young woman who related this story walked out in bewilderment this, too, when smoke still drifted upward from Lower Manhattan, and when our kids deserved better than a pastoral blessing on entertainment that could cost their souls.

It is easy, in a crisis, to be too critical, but someone has to say something. *What has happened to us?* In this kind of condition, how can we preach the gospel to the world?

I have often urged people to stay loyal to Gods organized church. I still believe in it with all my heart. But sometimes the best sign of loyalty is to say something when someone (or something) you love is in danger.

Scripture. But let us first and foremost examine our own lives. It is time to improve the hours we have wasted and spend our time in the Word of God. How many of us even know the weekly memory verse let alone an entire chapter of Scripture from memory? If not, is it any wonder we have come to doubt that sin can be overcome?

Thy word have I hid in my heart, said the Psalmist, that I might not sin It is worth remembering that when He met Lucifer one-on-one, Jesus did not dignify him with theological debate. In response to temptation He simply quoted Scripture. If the Son of God used Bible truth to defeat temptation, is there a possibility we might need to do the same?

None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594). Implicit in that warning is the need to study now, before the last great conflict arrives an event that, following the World Trade Center attack, may not be as comfortably distant as we have supposed.

In that time of stress, the Lord foretells that His followers will be called before judicial tribunals to answer for their faith. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost (Mk 13:11). One of the functions of the Holy Spirit will be to give people clarity of thought and recollection to bring to their minds just the right passages of Scripture that speak to the questions raised by a judge, or senator, or member of parliament. *But how can the Holy Spirit help you remember something you never learned?*

Those who have only a superficial understanding of truth will not be able clearly to expound the Scriptures, we are warned. They will become confused, and . . . ashamed (*Review and Herald*, Feb. 14, 1893).

By Memory. But why make that mistake? Why not follow the example of Rear Admiral Barry Black, an Adventist minister who is head of Navy chaplains? At the Pentagon memorial ceremony he was asked to participate. Instead of delivering a prepared speech he

simply stood and quoted Scripture from memory, capturing the attention of 20,000 onlookers and an international television audience with verses that called attention to the return of Christ. In the presence of the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States, he witnessed to his faith in a way that calls to mind the promise of Mark 13:11, and so moved was the audience that they gave him an ovation. There is simply nothing so powerful as the Word of God, delivered with familiarity and conviction, and Admiral Black illustrated the eloquence with which truth can be delivered simply by knowing the Bible.

The Word: nothing so well prepares you to witness to your faith. In my hometown lived a pastor and his wife who took the Bible seriouslyseriously enough to commit much of it to memory (an accomplishment duplicated by such giants as J. N. Andrews and H. M. S. Richards). One day this minister entered the medical office of Dr. Barnard, my father-in-law, and in the hall encountered a pastor of another faith leaving the examining room. The doctor introduced the two clerics.

The trouble with you Adventists, the other pastor declared, bypassing amenities to get straight to his pet peeve, is that you dont understand the book of Galatians.

Perhaps youre right, brother, the Adventist pastor replied. Id appreciate your help: please tell me when I get to the part of Galatians that I dont understand. And then he began reciting the book from memory!

The other man discovered an appointment for which he was already late, and hurriedly left.

Scripture: once it was the center of our lives, the joy of every Adventist believer. So immersed were many of our pioneers in Scripture that our meetings drew interested people by the hundreds, even in small towns, and our work grew rapidly. Travel across small-town America and you can often find a village where once there was an Adventist church, and even a flourishing school. But are they still there today?

New Tools. Fortunately, the very technology that has so distracted us from the Word can be employed to make Bible study more enjoyable than ever. On my computer I have a program that makes available several translations of the Bible, along with the original Hebrew and Greek, Strongs Concordance, Vines Expository Dictionary (a wonderful tool in finding other texts that use the same word), several other Bible dictionaries, a Bible encyclopedia, even a set of colorful maps that allow you to find a place simply by clicking on its name in the textand all you have to do to get all this information is to move a mouse!

All of this is literally at your fingertips, so that a person accustomed to being entertained by a TV screen can find the Word of God displayed on the very same medium. Try it: after a few nights of serious Bible study, you will find the Word of God such delightful mental exercise that nothing Hollywood produces can compete.

Gift of Prophecy. And what about rediscovering the writings of Ellen G. White? Not only are they superb writing, they provide an illuminating second view of truths that we can never know too well. I have sometimes heard people say, Ellen White? Forget it! I want the Bible! I can heartily agree that we should get all our truths from the Bible. But try reading very far in the writings of Ellen White without getting a lot of Bible! Her books are filled with the Word, and a multitude of texts bearing on the subject are brought together in an integrated, systematic way. I have found myself memorizing much Scripture, without even realizing it at the time, simply by seeing it repeatedly in her writings.

Why be bashful about the fact that God has done what He said He would do and favored His last church with the gift of prophecy? The commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus that is what Revelation says Gods people will have, and those are the targets the devil specifically attacks just as the war nears its end. If we dont have both, we cannot be Gods true church.

Time for Change? A celebrated English actor once was talking with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Tell me, your lordship, the Archbishop asked, why it is that you on the stage can affect people so powerfully, while we in the pulpit can affect them so little?

Begging your pardon, your grace, the actor replied, but the answer is simple. We on the stage treat things imaginary as if they were real. Too often you in the pulpit treat things real as if they were imaginary.

Have we made the same mistake? If so, isnt it time for a change?

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come (Mt 24:14). It is a powerful challenge, but we can do it, because Jesus said so. Brethren, to whom the truths of Gods word have been opened, what part will you act in the closing scenes of this worlds history? Could the curtain be rolled back, could you discern the purposes of God and the judgments that are about to fall upon a doomed world, you would tremble. . . . Earnest prayers . . . would go up to heaven.

Watch, lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. Mark 13:36.³

Mornings trumpet is blowing. Its time to wake up.

NOTES

1. Richard is the son of the writer, and is a second-year law student at Georgetown University. His story is told in *Mornings Trumpet*, a new book by Lewis R. Walton, analyzing what September 11 means to Adventists. This article is adapted from that book.
2. La Sierra University *Criterion*, Nov. 12, 1996.
3. Assorted passages without ellipses are from *Testimonies for the Church*, 6:404-410.


The book *Mornings Trumpet* is available at Adventist Book Centers and from Lewis R. Walton, 2701 Rio Vista, Bakersfield, CA 93306.

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- Home
- About Us
- What's New!
- Previous Issues
- Store
- Links
- FAQ's
- Contact Us
- Site Map

[search](#)



[Home](#) > [Previous Issues](#) > [Volume 15, Number 3](#) >

[Share](#)

The Nearness of the Second Coming

by *G. Edward Reid*
Stewardship Director,
North American Division
Author, Battle of the Spirits


How are Revelations prophecies being fulfilled today?

Its in our name. We have talked about it for years. Most people who have joined us over the years have done so because of the sense of urgency regarding the Second Coming. As Adventists we not only understand the Bibles teaching on the certainty and the manner of the Second Coming, we also understand the great prophetic time lines that put perspective on the when of the Coming and are aware of the fulfilling signs given by Jesus Himself and the Bible writers.

We are a people of prophecy with a prophetic message and a prophetic messenger. In fact our primary reason for being is to share Gods last message of warning to a frightened and sin-sick world that is literally teetering on the brink of eternity. In short, we understand that God has called us to share the three angels messages of Revelation 14:6-12. Our challenge is to present the everlasting gospel in the context of the end timethe hour of Gods judgment.

Our movement stands on prophetic certainty, not failure and uncertainty. We have the major time prophecies clearly outlined. We have firm beginning and ending dates for both the 1260 and the 2300 day/year prophecies. They both establish clearly that in the grand scheme of earthly time, we today are living in the time of the end.¹

Signs of the End. Understanding the great prophetic time lines as we do, we further believe that the Second Coming is near at hand because of the many signs Christians were told would signal when Jesus coming was imminent or at the very doors. When one studies the signs given by the inspired Bible writers and then compares them with current events in our world, there is a hand-in-glove compatibility. Signs are occurring in rapid succession! This article will focus on some of these present-day signs.

[Table of Contents](#)

[Order Information](#)

The Little Horn

We have proclaimed over the years in our pulpits and our writings that the biblical presentations of the little horn of Daniel 7:8, 24, 25 and the first beast of Revelation 13 both identify the papacy in symbolic language. We have further held that the second beast of Revelation 13 is the United States of America.² I believe that recent events confirm the validity of our interpretation. There should not be any question that the papacy has risen to a place of prominence in the world and is considered by many to be the worlds religious and moral authority. It is equally clear that the United States is the worlds premier civil super power. The

fact that these two powers are now cooperating as predicted in Revelation 13 should be a wake-up call to every thinking Christian.

Rome Not Changed. Some in the Protestant world and even in our own communion say that it is not fair to judge the Roman Church-State today by the atrocities of the past. They believe that the Church has changed, as proven by the many apologies of Pope John Paul II. For those willing to study, however, a very consistent picture is still present. The Church's actions in the twentieth century—not the middle ages—show that the same principles and teachings that actuated her then are still in full force and effect today. These actions confirm her identity as the religious-political power foretold in Bible prophecy, and they correspond with the understanding of those prophecies as presented in the writings of Ellen G. White.

In presenting these things, we have no intent to discredit any group or anyone who belongs to it. We wish only to be faithful to Scripture and to be among those who can discern the signs of the times (Mt 16:3). These motivations led Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other leaders of the Protestant Reformation to reach the same conclusions hundreds of years ago about the identity of the little horn of Daniel 7 and the first beast of Revelation 13.

The truth they discovered has not changed over the years. The warnings of Scripture are still in effect, as are the gracious appeals of God to reject the false and come to Him, accepting His message and ways. Revelation 18:4 tells us that God recognizes many of His own true people in Babylon. He calls them my people and urges them to come out of her.

Evidence? What contemporary evidence do we have that our forefathers correctly identified the Roman Church as the little horn of Daniel 7 and the first beast of Revelation 13? What evidence do we see that the United States is moving toward fulfilling its role as the second beast of Revelation 13, the one with two horns like a lamb but which speaks as a dragon, cooperating with the first beast? What follows will present such evidence, in the hope that we may [know] the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed (Rom 13:11).

Books. In 1999 and 2000, three different authors—all highly educated and well-known historians, two of whom are life-long Roman Catholics—wrote books exposing the corruption and goals of the Roman Church-State. I will share a brief excerpt from each of their books.

The first, *Ecclesiastical Megalomania: the Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church*, was written by John W. Robbins, who holds a Ph.D. in political philosophy from Johns Hopkins University. Robbins records the following regarding the Roman Church-State's activity during the Second World War:

Totalitarian. Since the Roman Church-State is itself an authoritarian institution in which none of the rulers is elected by the people, in which power flows from the top down, and in which there is to be no disagreement with the leadership, it has shown an affinity for civil governments that reflect its own totalitarian and authoritarian structure, governments made in its own image.³

Robbins tells how the Nazi movement had its stronghold in Catholic Bavaria in southern Germany. German Roman Catholics joined the party in great numbers and gave their enthusiastic support. Over half of Hitler's troops were Roman Catholic.⁴

On July 20, 1933, the Roman Church-State signed a treaty with Hitler guaranteeing the loyalty of German Roman Catholics to the Hitler regime.⁵ This was the well-known Reich Concordat, negotiated by Eugenio Pacelli, then the papal nuncio in Munich and Berlin, who later became Pope Pius XII—the pope during the second world war.

Not only did the Roman Church-State support Hitler and Mussolini [both life-long Catholics in good standing], it also created its own fascist state in Croatia.

Exterminator. The Ustasha regime began in Croatia in 1941, and the Church ordered the clergy to support the regime. During the years in which the Ustasha government existed, a

Franciscan monk, Miroslav Filipovic, managed the Jasenovac concentration camp for two years, during which time he directed the extermination of not less than 100,000 victims, mostly Serbs who were members of the Orthodox Church.

Between 1941 and 1945, the Roman Church-State in Croatia murdered an estimated 700,000 Orthodox Serbs and 90,000 Jews and gypsies. The Vatican neither defrocked nor excommunicated anyone responsible for the holocaust. . . . We can only conclude that one of the most brutal and inhuman regimes of the twentieth century not just the medieval millennium is the Roman Church-State.⁶

After describing the activities of the Roman Church-State in the twentieth century, Robbins went on to describe the aspirations of the church today and why it seems to some that it has changed.

Global Aims. What the Roman Church-State accomplished on a small scale during the Middle Ages is what it desires to achieve on a global scale in the coming millennium. If it fails to reach that goal within the next hundred years, it will not quit. It will continue to work relentlessly for world power, even if it should take another millennium or two.⁷

The Roman Church-State is a hybrid monster of ecclesiastical and political power. Its political thought is totalitarian, and whenever it has had the opportunity to apply its principles, the result has been bloody repression. If during the last 30 years, it has softened its assertions of full, supreme, and irresponsible power, and has murdered fewer people than before, such changes in behavior are not due to a change in its ideas, but to a change in its circumstances.

Then Robbins drew on familiar prophetic imagery in Revelation 13 and made a startling prediction. The Roman Church-State in the twentieth century, however, is an institution recovering from a mortal wound. If and when it regains its full power and authority, it will impose a regime more sinister than any the planet has yet seen.⁸

The second current book that exposes the corruption within the Roman Catholic system is *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit*, by Garry Wills. Dr. Wills was brought up a Catholic and educated by Jesuits. This Pulitzer Prize-winning author received his Ph.D. in classics from Yale and is currently an adjunct professor of history at Northwestern University. Wills is one of the most respected historians in America today. Reviews of his book in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* describe it as an extraordinary indictment of the Church.

Power Corrupts. Wills stated, Most people are familiar with Actons famous axiom, Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. . . . Fewer people remember that he was speaking of papal absolutism more specifically, he was condemning a fellow historians book on Renaissance Popes for letting them literally get away with murder. Wills illustrated the corruption that is overlooked in much that is called history today. In the tenth century a dissolute teenager could be elected Pope (John XII) because of his family connections and die a decade later in the bed of a married woman.⁹

Wills documented a history of the Church that he called, evasions, disingenuous explainings, outright denials, pieties, dodges, lapses and funk. He wrote that the fundamental problem with the papacy, despite the popularity of the current pope, is that to keep evading the truth is a worse embarrassment [than all the crimes it has committed down through history], an insult to those who have been wronged and whose wrong will not be recognized.¹⁰

Hitlers Pope. Another very recent book that is relevant to the current discussion is *Hitlers Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, by John Cornwell, an award-winning journalist and senior research fellow at Cambridge University. He contributes regularly to Londons *Sunday Times* and to religious affairs publications around the world, writing on the Vatican and other subjects. He is a practicing Roman Catholic and lives near Cambridge in England.

When in the early 1990s the Roman Catholic Church announced plans to begin the beatification process that would eventually make Pope Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli) a Catholic saint, there was a world-wide outcry. Many voices questioned whether a pope who stood

silently by and watched the execution of millions of Jews could really be a saint. Cornwell the scholar felt that he could lay the matter to rest by a proper study. I was convinced, he said, that if his full story were told, Pius XII's pontificate would be vindicated.

Indictment. Cornwell's work began in earnest. As a Catholic scholar siding with his subject, he was given access to crucial material in the Vatican. By the middle of 1997, he wrote, nearing the end of my research, I found myself in a state I can only describe as moral shock. The material I had gathered, taking the more extensive view of Pacelli's life, amounted not to an exoneration but to a wider indictment. Spanning Pacelli's career from the beginning of the century, my research told the story of a bid for unprecedented papal power that by 1933 had drawn the Catholic Church into complicity with the darkest forces of the era.¹¹

A summary paragraph from the dust jacket of *Hitler's Pope* states: In the first decade of the twentieth century, Pacelli was a brilliant Vatican lawyer who helped shape a new ideology of unprecedented papal power. As papal nuncio in Munich and Berlin in the 1920s, he used cunning and moral blackmail to impose Rome's power on Germany. In 1933, he negotiated a treaty with Hitler, the Reich Concordat, which ensured that the Nazis would rise unopposed by the most powerful Catholic community in the world. Sealing, by Hitler's own admission, the fate of the Jews in Europe. Until now, historians have focused on only one episode and one issue regarding Pius XII: his silence during the Holocaust. But John Cornwell documents how Pius's wartime reticence was consistent with a career dedicated to enhancing papal power and that he had a personal antipathy toward the Jews for which Cornwell offers striking new evidence.

The New York Times book review of *Hitler's Pope* stated: By combining the painstaking research of other scholars with his own new documentation . . . Cornwell makes a case in *Hitler's Pope* that is very difficult to refute.

The Washington Post review stated: The title tells the tale. And a chilling tale it is: Eugenio Pacelli, then the Vatican's all-powerful secretary of state, made it possible for Adolf Hitler to achieve total power in Germany and, as Pope Pius XII, went on to appease him, maintaining inexplicable public silence as the Nazis destroyed and massacred millions of European Jews before and during World War II. . . . The conclusions and revelations presented by John Cornwell in meticulously researched *Hitler's Pope* . . . leave no doubt that Eugenio Pacelli was the Führer's best imaginable ally.¹²

Unchanged. I mention these three current books to show the agreement of these historians that even in the twentieth century the papacy has used craft, deception, cunning, blackmail, and murder to advance its power and position in the world. It has not changed! These are the kinds of characteristics that one would expect from the power described as the little horn in Daniel 7 and the first beast in Revelation 13. Combined with specific prophecies in these chapters, fulfilled in ages past, about what this power would do, these contemporary characteristics show that the church's nature has remained the same, despite her milder appearance today.

Revelation 13 Fulfilling

Revelation 13 says that after the first beast's deadly wound was healed, all the world marveled and followed the beast (v. 3). It also notes that authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation (v. 7). In many well-publicized events and many that are not calculated to be observed by the public, the Roman Catholic Church is becoming more and more powerful and influential in the world. I will list several typical examples.

Revelation 16:14, 15 tells us that near the end, three great forces—the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet—will unite to war against God and His people. From the interpretation of other passages in Revelation, we understand these to be paganism as expressed in spiritualism (spiritism), Roman Catholicism, and apostate Protestantism. The first of these, spiritualism, becomes the glue that cements the other two together.

Fatima. On May 13, 1917, three Portuguese shepherd children watching sheep on a hillside near the village of Fatima claimed to have seen a most beautiful lady who said she had come

from heaven.

In subsequent apparitions Mary told the children that two of them would die in childhood and come to be with her in heaven, and the surviving child would live to see the second coming of Christ. Francisco and Jacinta did die of illness in childhood, and the surviving child, Lucia, is now 93 years of age. On May 13, 2000, Pope John Paul II beatified Francisco and Jacinta, starting them on the road to sainthood.

This pope has dedicated his pontificate to the sacred heart of Mary, claiming that she saved his life when the Turk Ali Agca tried to kill him on May 13, 1981. He has visited the Fatima shrine many times, and he prays to Mary and offers incense to her on a regular basis. By these actions, this man, who wants to be the religious leader of the world, has demonstrated that he is, in fact, a spiritualist.

Lutheran Agreement. The Vatican has been pursuing ecumenism on a broad front with Christian and non-Christian religious groups. Most startling was the agreement between the Catholics and Lutherans. *The Washington Post* reported on November 1, 1999: Catholics, Lutherans End Doctrinal Dispute. The article began, Augsburg, Germany, Oct. 31 Four hundred and eighty-two years ago today, the blunt-speaking monk Martin Luther nailed his legendary attack on Catholic Church practices to a church door in Germany, an act of conscience that triggered the Protestant Reformation, the wrenching division of Western Christianity, and more than a century of religious wars that killed hundreds of thousands.

Today the heirs of that acrimony and fracture, the leaders of the modern Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches, signed a document that officially settles the central argument about the nature of faith that Luther provoked. The agreement declares, in effect, that it was all a misunderstanding.

In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life, proclaimed Catholic Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, Pope John Paul II's emissary, as he signed the Augsburg accord on behalf of more than a billion Roman Catholics worldwide. All but 3 million of the world's 61.5 million Lutherans were represented by Bishop Christian Krause, president of the Lutheran World Federation, and by the Rev. Ishmael Noko, the federation's general secretary.

The agreement is significant beyond the dispute over doctrine that it resolves. It has deep implications for future relations among Catholics and Protestants, said theologians and church leaders. Many said this accord gives added promise to the ideal their denominations champion of full communion, or merger, between the churches.

Vatican Diplomacy. The Roman Catholic leaders, in addition to welcoming a growing number of Protestant churches seeking unity with them, are also welcoming record numbers of diplomats from foreign countries.

The Roman Catholic publication, *Inside the Vatican*, gave an interesting insight into the Vatican Diplomatic Corps on pages 53-55 of the October, 1999, issue. According to the article, Two weeks after U. S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met in March [1999] with Pope John Paul II and Vatican diplomats, the U.S. announced that it was relaxing some of its restrictions on dealing with Cuba. The State Department specifically cited the influence of the Pope's January visit to Cuba in making this policy change. This episode of Vatican diplomacy, with a high-profile result, is only one example of the increasingly diverse diplomatic dealings conducted by world powers with the Vatican. Most of the diplomacy operates without the media attention that [the] Cuba episode received, and is carried out by embassies and diplomats working quietly in Rome.

Few would have guessed that the late 20th century would see a renaissance of embassies to the Vatican, those ambassadors accredited to what was once the papal court. Rather than fading away as a Renaissance anachronism, countries have been establishing embassies to the Holy See in record numbers in the past decade. The 170 and counting countries now accredited include everyone from Cuba to the Russian Federation to Iran and Libya, with only China and

Vietnam noticeably absent.

A resident diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See dates back to the 1400s, when the Pope controlled central Italy. The loss of the Papal States in 1870 caused many countries to discontinue relations with the Holy See. The British parliament decided that, since the Pope had become just another religious leader, there was no more reason to send an ambassador to him than for the King of Italy to send an envoy to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The situation changed in 1929 when the Holy See and Italy signed the Lateran Pact, which acknowledged the Popes authority as head of the Vatican City state. The Pact also recognized the Pope as a sovereign head of state with all the appurtenances, including his own diplomatic corps.

When the United States established full diplomatic relations [with the Holy See] in 1984 it joined 109 others.¹³ Since that time 61 more nations have entered into diplomatic relations with the Holy See!

Image to the Beast. Since the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant America began diplomatic relations, a wave of pro-Catholic sentiment has begun to sweep through politics. Revelation 13 speaks of a time when this nation will set up an image to the beast and enforce worship of it. Can we see any evidence today of its foundation being established? Here are some examples.

On July 12, 2000, news services all over the world reported that the U.S. House of Representatives, by a vote of 416 to 1, overwhelmingly supported the presence of the Holy See [the official designation for the Vatican] at the United Nations. The House also condemned the efforts of pro-abortion groups to remove the Roman Catholic Church from its Permanent Observer status there a position it has held for 36 years.

United States House of Representatives Majority Leader, Dick Armey (R-Texas), said in *The Washington Times* (July 12, 2000), The Vatican is under attack by pro-abortion extremists, and Congress will not let that attack go unchallenged. . . . We will not tolerate the effort to silence the Vatican.

Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-New Jersey) said, If anything, the Holy See deserves a more prominent role at the United Nations.

Catholic Chaplain. Early in the year 2000, the U.S. House of Representatives needed a new chaplain. After a diligent search, winnowing three finalists from some 50 candidates nominated by a bipartisan committee, House Speaker Dennis Hastert and majority leader Dick Armey secured the appointment of Rev. Charles Wright, a Presbyterian affiliated with the Houses influential National Prayer Breakfast. According to *Time*, March 6, 2000: In doing so they passed over the nominating committees favorite, Father [Timothy] OBrien, a Catholic priest.

In response, the Catholic Church mounted a campaign, charging Hastert with bigotry and anti-Catholic bias. As a result, the Catholic weekly, *Our Sunday Visitor*, reported on April 9, 2000, that Facing charges of bigotry, Republican leaders appointed a Catholic chaplain. The appointment [of Father Daniel Coughlin] came as Hasterts choice for the job, the Rev. Charles Wright, agreed to step aside and spare the House leaders further embarrassment.

The bottom line: in the face of strong Catholic pressure, a Protestant pastor was asked to withdraw his name so the House could appoint a Catholic chaplain.

Growing Presence. In 1998, Catholics numbered over 62 million in the United States. They comprise by far the single largest religious group and continue to grow. At 15 million members, Southern Baptists come in a far-distant second. The Methodist Church is the third largest in the U.S., with 8 million members.¹⁴

Catholics Remain Largest Bloc in Congress following the 2000 election, reported *Christianity Today* in its February 5, 2001, issue. Catholics continue to dominate numerically in the U.S.

Congress, followed by Baptists and Methodists, the latest tally by Americans for Religious Liberty shows. Of the 535 members of the 107th Congress, 150 are Roman Catholic, including 91 Democrats and 59 Republicans.

Three of the U. S. Supreme Court justices Scalia, Thomas, and Kennedy are Roman Catholic. They frequently vote together as a bloc and did so with Justices Rehnquist and O'Connor in the Supreme Court decision to grant George W. Bush's request to halt hand recounts of ballots in Florida.¹⁵ Rehnquist and O'Connor have indicated that they will likely retire soon, leaving George W. Bush the duty of nominating their replacements. When this happens, President Bush may well appoint Catholic jurists to take their places since he was told in effect by Congress, We will confirm John Ashcroft as Attorney General but don't send us another Conservative Protestant [Ashcroft is a Pentecostal] when you fill the Supreme Court positions.

Gold Medal. Though very few Americans know of it, on May 24, 2000, Congressman Chris Smith introduced legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Pope John Paul II. By early July, both the House and the Senate had passed the bill. President Bill Clinton signed the measure on July 27. Catholic News Service reported on January 2, 2001 that, More than a dozen members of the U. S. Congress and the chaplain of the House of Representatives [the Catholic priest we discussed above] will present Pope John Paul II with the Congressional Gold Medal Jan. 8 at the Vatican. The Pope joined a select list which includes George Washington, Bob Hope, and Mother Teresa.

The Associated Press carried the story on Tuesday, January, 9, 2001: The legislation to award John Paul the medal hails the 80-year-old, Polish-born pope for using his moral authority to hasten the fall of godless totalitarian regimes.

May your influence be as strong in the 21st century as it was in the 20th century, House Speaker Dennis Hastert said.

Your strong words inspire 1 billion Catholics and impress people of various faiths throughout the world, Hastert, R-Ill., told the pope after noting that of all the recognitions the Congress of the United States can bestow, the gold medal is considered the most distinguished.

John Paul said he felt honored by this gracious gesture. I gladly accept the Congressional Gold Medal as a recognition that in my ministry, there has echoed a word that can touch every human heart.

Spy Caught. In February 2001, the daily headlines broke the story of an FBI agent that had been arrested and accused of spying. The Associated Press, on Feb. 21, 2001, said that Robert Philip Hanssen had been a spy for Russia for 15 years, betraying three Russian undercover agents to Moscow and disclosing volumes of U.S. secrets in return for more than \$1.4 million in cash and diamonds. The FBI director called the case the most traitorous actions imaginable.

For our purposes, the significant information here is neither that Hanssen was a spy nor that he was a Catholic; people of any religion may succumb to sin but that he was a member of Opus Dei, a specialized group whose world-altering objective has prophetic importance. *The Washington Times* (National Weekly Edition, Feb. 26 - March 4, 2001) reported: Hanssen belonged to a Catholic group that proselytized elites. [He] was a member of an elite religious group that works to spread the Catholic faith by recruiting members active in the upper echelons of government and business.

They are trying to get people in their vocation to change the world. They believe that if you convert the king, you convert the country, says the Rev. Franklyn McAfee of the organization, called Opus Dei. [Father McAfee is the pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church in Great Falls, Virginia and Hanssen's pastor.]

Opus Dei, with around 3,000 members in the United States and 84,000 worldwide, was called a floating diocese or a personal prelate that falls under the direct purview of the Pope.

Other high-profile figures who attend St. Catherine's traditional Mass include Sen. Rick

Santorum, Pennsylvania Republican, and Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. FBI Director Louis J. Freeh also attends the church, Father McAfee said.

Father McAfee said a good number of Opus Dei members in the area attend his church because it is more conservative and sticks closer to traditional Catholic teachings.

It is most interesting to note that there is a Catholic organization that specializes in influencing, even converting, the worlds civil leaders and that many of them attend the same Catholic church in the Washington, D.C. area.

Catholic Connection. When George W. Bush, who is a practicing Methodist, became President of the United States, he introduced a program called faith-based initiatives. He planned to enlist churches and other charitable organizations in delivering billions of dollars in aid to the needy in America. Before announcing this program the president summoned 40 prominent Catholic leaders to the White House and there announced the appointment of Catholic John DiIulio as its director. DiIulio has since resigned because of political wrangling over the initiative.

I felt shocked when I learned what is happening in the background of American politics. In a direct parallel fulfillment of the traditional Adventist interpretation of Revelation 13, the President of the United States has begun the journey down the road to cooperation with the Church of Rome. The Washington Post printed a full article on this topic on April 16, 2001. The headline read, Bush Aims to Strengthen Catholic Base. The article described how President Bush and top advisors are seeking to cultivate Catholic voters. A number of Republican operatives view the Catholic vote as the linchpin of a larger Republican strategy to gain solid majorities among all white religious voters critical to Bushs reelection prospects.

Religiously active voters have been gradually migrating to the Republican Party, leaving the Democrats as the party of the religiously indifferent as well as the politically liberal, pollster Steve Wagner, who is a member of the informal Catholic advisory group to the White House, recently wrote in the conservative Catholic magazine *Crisis*.

Bush, seeking to capitalize on those trends, has met privately with at least three high Catholic Church officials and has adopted Catholic themes in speeches; his staff has instituted a weekly conference call with an informal group of Catholic advisers; and the Republican National Committee is setting up a Catholic Task Force. . . .

The effort to recruit Catholic voters has led to a striking change in the political climate in Washington. [Princeton University political scientist Robert] George noted in an interview last week that in 1960, John Kennedy went from Washington down to Texas to assure Protestant preachers that he would not obey the pope. In 2001, George Bush came from Texas up to Washington to assure a group of Catholic bishops that he would.

We may expect to see both political parties try to win the votes of Catholics, since those votes are increasingly crucial to political power. In the process, the Church is likely to grow in influence, prestige, and power in the United States. This is precisely what Seventh-day Adventists have always understood that Revelation 13 predicted. Now we are watching it unfold.

Conclusion

There is much more that could be written about the healing of the deadly wound and the formation of the image to the beast. Among other things, for example, we could note President Bushs speech at Notre Dame University in May, his visit to the Vatican and the Pope in July, and in September (2001) his appointment of conservative Roman Catholic Tom Ridge, former governor of Pennsylvania, as the director of the Office of Homeland Security.

Every day that passes confirms the validity of the Adventist interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. These events also confirm the credibility of the prophetic gift in the ministry of Ellen G. White. I have focused on just one area of end-time significance. Much

could be said about such things as natural disasters, AIDS, mad cow disease, terrorism, and mens hearts failing them for fear.

Welcome to the time of the end! What an awesome time to be alive. It is an incredible time to be a part of the people of the Second Coming! How should we then live? Our salvation is clearly nearer than when we first believed.

Notes

1. It is beyond the scope of this article to fully flesh out the biblical proof for our prophetic understanding. There are, however, many good sources for further study, such as C. Mervyn Maxwells *God Cares*, 2 vols. (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1981, 1985).
2. What nation of the New World was in 1798 rising into power, giving promise of strength and greatness, and attracting the attention of the world? The application of the symbol admits of no question. One nation, and only one, meets the specifications of this prophecy; it points unmistakably to the United States of America (*The Great Controversy*, p. 440).
3. John W. Robbins, *Ecclesiastical Megalomania: the Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church* (Trinity Foundation, 1999), pp. 162, 163.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 165.
6. Ibid., pp. 169-173.
7. Ibid., p. 187.
8. Ibid., p. 195.
9. Garry Wills, *Papal Sin: Structures of Deceit* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 2.
10. Ibid., p. 45.
11. John Cornwell, *Hitlers Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York: Viking Press, 1999), p. viii.
12. See book reviews of *Hitlers Pope* on Amazon.com.
13. It is interesting to note that when reporting on this growing number of countries seeking diplomatic relations with the Church, the Vatican seems almost surprised. It recognizes that the Church at one time seemed to fall from favor but since 1929 has made a remarkable come-back.
14. *Christianity Today*, May 22, 2000, p. 21.
15. *Washington Post*, December 10, 2000.

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Home > [Previous Issues](#) > [Volume 15, Number 3](#) >

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Skyscrapers in the Last Days

by *Robert W. Olson*
Former Director, Ellen G. White Estate
Author, The Crisis Ahead

Is there a message for us in the World Trade Center destruction? If so, what is it?

Many of us watched in horror last September as the tragedy in New York City unfolded on our television screens. We saw the World Trade Centers No. 2 tower collapse and then, moments later, we saw No. 1 come down as well. Each building was hit by a plane which had the capability of carrying 24,000 gallons of jet fuel. It was a dreadful sightone we wish we could forget. September 11, 2001, has become, like December 7, 1941, a defining moment in Americas history.

Seventh-day Adventists have shown a particularly keen interest in the attack on New York because of a statement published by Ellen G. White in 1909. In the chapter titled The Last Crisis in her final volume of the Testimonies for the Church, she wrote, On one occasion, when in New York City, I was in the night season called upon to behold buildings rising story after story toward heaven. . . . Higher and still higher these buildings rose (Testimonies for the Church, 9:12).

Movement Underway. When Ellen White penned these lines in a letter in 1904, the movement for taller buildings had begun. In the building boom that followed the great Chicago fire of 1871, architects there had developed the techniques for building taller structures using steel frames, and especially in New York City these techniques were being used to raise the skyline ever higher. The New York World Building, completed in 1890, reached 309 feet. At about the same time the Madison Square Garden tower reached 304 feet. A decade later the Park Row Building topped out at 391 feet. The Flatiron Building (307 feet), completed in 1902, had been under construction when Mrs. White visited New York in 1901 and had her vision of tall buildings. The 362-foot Times Building, still featured in New York Citys Times Square celebrations on New Years Eve, was being erected when she wrote her letter in 1904. Before that decade was over, New York City would have the Singer Building (1906-1908) at 612 feet and the Metropolitan Life Tower (1907-1909) at 700 feet.

Competition for heightand glorydid not end there. The Woolworth building, erected in 1913 at 792 feet, was followed in 1930 by the Chrysler building (1046 feet) which was superseded in 1931 by the Empire State building (1250 feet). The World Trade Center Towers (1368 feet) came along in 1972 and 1973, only to be upstaged in 1974 by the 1450-foot Sears tower in Chicago. Not to be outdone, Malaysia erected the two Petronas towers, which rise 1483 feet, at Kuala Lumpur in 1997. And even this is not the end. On television recently we saw an architects drawing of a skyscraper to be built in Shanghai which will put all other skyscrapers in its shade.1

[Table of Contents](#)

ADVENTISTS
AFFIRM

The Official Journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

- [Preparing for the Second Advent](#)
By Ellen G. White
- [Marriage's Triumph](#)
By Ellen G. White
- [The Nations of the Second Advent](#)
By Ellen G. White
- [Skyscrapers in the Last Days](#)
By Robert W. Olson
- [God's Challenge to His Wayward Remnant](#)
By Ellen G. White
- [While the Winds Howl](#)
By Ellen G. White

Letter 2
 The Second Advent
 The Last Days
 The Nations of the Second Advent
 The Nations of the Second Advent
 The Nations of the Second Advent

[Order Information](#)

Reasons. Why do they do it? In his article, *How Skyscrapers Work*, Tom Harris gives two reasons. First, he states the obvious: You can create a lot of real estate out of a relatively small ground area. Then he adds what may not be so obvious: Ego and grandeur do sometimes play a significant role in the scope of the construction. . . . The main force behind the skyscraper race might turn out to be basic vanity. Where monumental height [the pyramids] once honored gods and kings, it now glorifies corporations and cities. These structures come from a very fundamental desire everybody wants to have the biggest building on the block.²

Harris comments sound strikingly like those made by Ellen White nearly a century earlier. In the passage referred to above she declared, As these lofty buildings went up, the owners rejoiced with ambitious pride that they had the money to use in gratifying self and provoking the envy of their neighbors. Not only did Ellen White see skyscrapers rising higher and still higher, she also identified the motivation behind the erection of these buildings human pride. Unhappily, she also saw something else:

The scene that next passed before me was an alarm of fire. . . . These buildings were consumed as if made of pitch. The fire engines could do nothing to stay the destruction. The firemen were unable to operate the engines (ibid., p. 13).

Foretold? Did Ellen White witness the World Trade Center destruction of September 11 a century before it happened? We cannot tell for certain. Striking similarities between what happened on that day and what she described in *Testimonies*, vol. 9, have led many to conclude that she was describing that very scene. But others point to significant differences, saying that the buildings were not consumed as if made of pitch, a description of something totally engulfed in flames. The flames the result of burning jet fuel were confined to a few floors, melting the steel structure there and allowing the top of each building to collapse the part below it. Also, inability to operate fire engines does not seem to have been a factor in the destruction of those buildings.

In 1906 five years after the visit to New York City in which she saw the vision of destruction Mrs. White made the following statement, disclaiming specific knowledge of what was to come on New York City but pleading for the cities everywhere to be warned of their coming time of trouble:

I have no light in particular in regard to what is coming on New York, only that I know that one day the great buildings there will be thrown down by the turning and overturning of Gods power. . . . Death will come in all places. This is why I am so anxious for our cities to be warned (Last Day Events, pp. 112, 113, emphasis mine).

Last Opportunity? Currently hundreds of Christians Adventist and non-Adventist alike are making exceptional efforts to bring a knowledge of Christ to that mighty metropolis and to many others. This may be our last opportunity to work the cities.

Many questions are now being raised especially questions about God. Since God knows everything and is all-powerful, why did He permit evil men to kill thousands of innocent people, including many Christians? And why does God not stop any future attacks which terrorists may plan against the innocent?

If the scales could be removed from our eyes so that we could view the invisible world, we would no doubt discover that God does stop many more of the devils plans than He permits. But it is only in light of the great controversy between Christ and Satan that we can understand why God tolerates evil at all. God gives the devil freedom to perpetrate some of his diabolical schemes enough so that the onlooking universe will be completely satisfied when Satan and all his followers are obliterated at the end of the world.

But for now, Satan still lives. And we have yet to see how dreadful he can be. The final demonstration of the catastrophic power of Satan which God will permit will come after probation has closed and the fate of every man, woman, and child has been sealed. Then and not until then all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old (The Great Controversy, p.

614).

Not Much Time. And what of the time which remains before probations close? We may not have much time left. President George W. Bush wants us to use this time by returning to the lives we were living before September 11 buying, selling, traveling, attending sports events, etc. Much of the presidents advice is certainly good. But what if our normal way of life before September 11 did not include God? In the terrible assault on New York City God has given us a wake-up call.

In fact, every disaster reminds us of how quickly life can come to an end, and how vital it is for us always to be in a state of readiness to meet our Maker. This is a time for us to re-evaluate our priorities. In view of the coming destruction of all things terrestrial, would we not do well to focus now on the things that are eternal? Surely we should give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (Heb 2:3).

Ellen Whites skyscraper chapter contains end-of-the-world language. Listen to these lines:

Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones. . . . Soon everything that can be shaken will be shaken. . . . It is impossible to give any idea of the experience of the people of God who shall be alive upon the earth when celestial glory and a repetition of the persecutions of the past are blended. They will walk in the light proceeding from the throne of God. By means of the angels there will be constant communication between heaven and earth (Testimonies for the Church, 9:11, 15, 16).

Closer. Every day we are drawing closer and closer to the final chapter in the great controversy between good and evil. Our world is soon to undergo drastic changes. Christ is about to return, as He promised, and what a glorious day that will be!

I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church, but I know that in the great day of the Lord my church membership will not save me. There is only one thing that really matters, and that is my personal walk with Jesus. When the world comes tumbling in around me, I want Jesus as my friend. Making Christ first is now my daily goal. Everything else can wait. note

1. See www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/contents.html and www.uh.edu/engines/epi1426.htm for skyscraper information.

2. <http://www.howstuffworks.com/skyscraper.htm>.

[Home](#) | [Contact](#) | [Previous Issues](#) | [Store](#) | [Links](#) | [About Us](#) | [Women's Ordination FAQs](#) | [Site Menu](#)

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- Home
- About Us
- What's New!
- Previous Issues
- Store
- Links
- FAQ's
- Contact Us
- Site Map

- Subscribe Now!
- Log In

search



Adventists AFFIRM

[Home](#) > [Previous Issues](#) > [Volume 15, Number 3](#) >

Share

Gods Challenge to His Wayward Remnant

by *Kevin Paulson*
Evangelist,
Greater New York Conference

Recent acts of global terror mean the death of an illusion and the key to the churchs destined glory.

It was a horror beyond imagining. And I watched it happen.

I had left my home on Manhattans Upper East Side for a mid-town appointment with a fellow pastor, with whom I was to ride to Camp Berkshire to prepare for the Greater New York Conferences coming camp meeting. It was Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001. Mild and sunny, it looked like an ideal New York day.

Until 8:50 a.m.

At about that moment I emerged from the subway station at the corner of 12th Street and 7th Avenue. Instantly I noticed people talking excitedly into cell phones, pointing in the direction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The first plane had already crashed into the North Tower. Smoke poured into the sky.

Moments later I hurried to our church on 11th Street, where the pastor waited for me. I asked immediately that he turn on the car radio. Together we listened as the second plane struck the second tower, removing all doubt that this was a calculated act of terror. Soon the radio announced the closing of all bridges and tunnels into and out of Manhattan. Leaving the pastors car on 11th Street, we walked to the banks of the Hudson. Hardly able to believe our eyes, we watched as the two towers imploded, one after the other. Screaming office workers hurled themselves from the collapsing structure, some using jackets as makeshift parachutes, desperate to escape flaming death.

No Hollywood script could have contrived a scene more terrible. More American casualties were inflicted in a single day than at any time since the bloody Battle of Antietam at the height of the Civil War.

Death of an Illusion. It doesnt take a novelist like Tom Clancy or a movie maker like Steven Spielberg to imagine how events could flow from the recent tragedy. God is on our side, declared President Bush in his address to the nation September 20, 2001. The whole world is coming together now, insisted Secretary of State Colin Powell on the September 23 broadcast of ABCs *This Week*. No sitting on the fence is going to be accepted by anyone, stated King Abdullah of Jordan on the same broadcast.

Not many more attacks of this nature, especially if the weapons become more than

[Table of Contents](#)



[Order Information](#)

conventional, would be needed to convince the world that nothing is safe and that security concerns mandate major adjustments to life and liberty. A recent *New York* magazine article by Tucker Carlson on the prospect of germ warfare describes in graphic detail what could happen if this occurred and how civil liberties would most assuredly be affected.¹ Even more recently, *Newsweek* reported the arrest of hundreds of United States residents of Middle Eastern descent, detained without charges, subjected to official indifference and at times abuse.²

Returning to God? Already leaders of the American Religious Right are calling the recent terrorist acts a judgment from God for the sins of the nation. For the moment, whether or not this is true is beside the point. The point is that in the face of universal terror, a global returning to God by means of civil coercion is no longer some abstract prophetic prediction.

If nothing else, this surely means the death of a cherished illusion among some Adventists. For years they have claimed that Ellen Whites prediction of an end-time Sunday law, with global unity against Gods people through a religio-political alliance, might have been possible in nineteenth-century America but couldnt possibly take place in our enlightened modern world. Now, however, we are forced to wonder how anyone could logically continue to harbor such doubts in the face of the present danger.

The Inspired Summons

Disasters like the recent one remind the Seventh-day Adventist Bible student of the two poles of tension involved in preaching last-day events: the readiness of the world, and the readiness of the church. Sad to say, the world has always been more ready than the church.

Jesus spoke of how various calamities and world conditions will inform us of the nearness of His return, and He urged our need to prepare: Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. . . . Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh (Mt 24:32-33, 44).

Ellen White elaborated further on these events and the preparation required to face them:

The time of trouble, such as never was, is soon to open upon us; and we shall need an experience which we do not now possess and which many are too indolent to obtain. It is often the case that trouble is greater in anticipation than in reality; but this is not true of the crisis before us. The most vivid presentation cannot reach the magnitude of the ordeal (*The Great Controversy*, p. 622).

We are on the very verge of the time of trouble, and perplexities that are scarcely dreamed of are before us (*Testimonies for the Church*, 9:43).

We are coming to a crisis which, more than any previous time since the world began, will demand the entire consecration of every one who has named the name of Christ (*Gospel Workers*, p. 323).

In the midst of the present peril, who indeed can doubt the relevance of these warnings?

Dependence. Adventisms end-time focus on global calamities in connection with the last days is not for the sake of fearmongering but to help us recognize and in many cases recover our total dependence on God. For at the bottom line, both Scripture and Ellen White are clear that God is not waiting for a certain quota of natural or human tragedies to be filled before Jesus can come. He isnt waiting for evil to get any worse.

Rather, the inspired writings are clear that God is waiting for His church. He is waiting for that entire consecration of faith and life that will not only prepare us for the time of trouble but settle forever the issues of the great controversy.

Thus, through the smoke of the fallen twin towers and the deepening gloom about us, we can glimpse Gods challenge to His wayward remnant.

What Manner of Persons Ought Ye To Be?

The first three verses of Revelation 7 give the true reason for the delay of the final events:

And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads (Rev 7:1-3).

Elsewhere, Scripture links this sealing imagery with the Holy Spirits presence in the heart as a guarantee, or earnest, of His work in us (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13, 14; 4:30). This inward presence of the Spirit enables us, according to the same Bible writer, to be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:19). No wonder Ellen White declared:

Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully (*Early Writings*, p. 71).

In other words, revelation is telling us that the failure of Gods end-time people to allow the full accomplishment of the Spirits sanctifying work is ultimately responsible for the delay of Jesus coming.

Preparation Needed. The apostle Peter described what sort of preparation Jesus coming will require and how this preparation will in fact hasten the advent:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? . . . Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless (2 Pet 3:10-12, 14).

Modern Bible translations are even clearer that the hastening of Jesus return is accomplished by the godly living here described. The Revised Standard Version uses the phrase hastening the coming, the New International Version says speed its coming, the New English Bible work to hasten it on, and Todays English Version (Good News Bible) do your best to make it come soon.

Character Issues. We find the same theme elsewhere in the New Testament:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. . . . Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous (1 Jn 3:2-3, 7).

The 144,000 sealed saints are thus described: And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God (Rev 14:5). These words recall another New Testament passage: Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth (1 Pet 2:21-22). The Old Testament seems to have anticipated this end-time expectation for Gods people, in the words of the prophet Zephaniah:

The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth (Zeph 3:13).

Ellen White therefore marched in lockstep with Scripture when she wrote: When the character

of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own (*Christs Object Lessons*, p. 69). The biblical evidence we have seen effectively demolishes any theory among Adventists these days that belief in an end-time perfecting of Gods people as a means of hastening Christs coming is a product of Ellen Whites theology rather than the Bible.

Satans Strategy

It has likewise become popular among some Adventists to speculate as to the devils strategy against the church and its mission. But we dont need to speculate. In prophetic vision Ellen White was shown a council meeting between Satan and his evil angels regarding how best to destroy the Seventh-day Adventist church. She heard Satan say:

Through those that have a form of godliness but know not the power, we can gain many who would otherwise do us harm. . . . Those of this class who are apt and intelligent will serve as decoys to draw others into our snares. Many will not fear their influence, because they profess the same faith. We will thus lead them to conclude that the requirements of Christ are less strict than they once believed, and that by conformity to the world they will exert a greater influence with worldlings. Thus they will separate from Christ; then they will have no strength to resist our power, and ere long they will be ready to ridicule their former zeal and devotion (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 474).

As we survey our church, which despite all remains the object of our Lords supreme regard, we cannot but see in full bloom the diabolical plan revealed to Gods servant in the above statement.

False Gospels. More than one false gospel continues to take its toll in the church. Most of these promise an effortless path to heaven, without the need for strict faithfulness to the written counsel of God. Precious words like grace and acceptance have become code words for an easy, victory-denying salvation of which the Bible knows nothing. Faithfulness in an ever-widening range of lifestyle choices is being dismissed as legalism. Some claim that in order to reach the unchurched, we must modify worship forms and lifestyle expectations so as not to offend the attractive, successful people with whom we seek to fill our pews.

As I write this, the departure of yet another seeker-oriented pastor from the denomination is making waves in North American Adventism. His letter of withdrawal, now making its rounds on the internet, explains among other things why he no longer believes the Sabbath to be binding on the Christians conscience. Much of his reasoning is based on distinguishing between Christ and the truth which alone reveals Him an unscriptural distinction, popular for much of the last three decades in First World Adventism. Without question this mans Adventist education, like much of my own, was dominated by the refrain, Doctrine is nice, but Jesus is better. A key component of this pastors pilgrimage, by his own admission, was his involvement in the Willow Creek-inspired contemporary church growth movement.

Lost Congregations. More than five significant congregations, and even more pastors, have been lost to the church through this misguided movement. Its logic, attractive to many, is a dagger pointed at the churchs heart: Define Jesus in such a way that uncomfortable truths about faith and obedience are left to the individual, and more people will feel safe at church. The sharper features of the Adventist faith such as the Sabbath and the investigative judgment, with their unavoidable call to self-discipline and sacrifice, simply cannot co-exist with this comfort-saturated method of doing church.

How many more pastors and congregations need be lost before we at last recognize the inherent hostility to our faith theologically and stylistically of this contemporary church growth movement?

Flouting the Church. We seem also to be entering an era in which the churchs duly voted policies are treated with increasing disrespect, even by some in responsible positions. The recent action by one union in North America to allow commissioned ministers (thereby including females) as well as ordained ministers to serve as its president is in direct violation of

the clear Church Manual statement that the president of a conference should be an ordained minister of experience and good report.³

A prominent college in the same Division has brought great embarrassment to the church and its religious liberty teachings by its quest through the court system to receive state funds. The profoundest shame in all this is the colleges effort to prove its distance from the church in order to receive these funds. Despite clear remonstrances from high church officials, the college has continued its course.

In neither of these cases has the offending party suffered any disciplinary action. Any parent realizes what happens when a child is told not to do something, then does it anyway, and no adverse consequences result. What will happen in the church if this trend continues?

Our Challenge

Many will doubtless find fault with the above concerns simply because they bring negative facts to light. To be sure, there is much good that God continues to accomplish through the witness of our beloved church. Precious souls in many lands, in ever-growing numbers, continue to be rescued from darkness into Gods marvelous light. The response of so many Adventists to the World Trade Center tragedy, and the help they have brought in these traumatic moments, warms and cheers the hearts of us all. As in the days of Elijah, God retains His seven thousand and more in Israel whose knees have not bowed unto Baal.

But our shortcomings remain serious, more so than at any time in the history of the Advent movement. The soothing rejoinder that weve always had problems, so what else is new? will simply not suffice. Too many among us have long memories memories of a time when the church certainly wasnt perfect, but when one could not have imagined the present level of confusion in doctrines, morals, or worship practices. Our current problems may not be new in the strictest sense, and many believers worldwide are still standing firm. But the widespread tolerance of deviations from inspired standards in doctrinal, lifestyle, and other matters is very new and is of grave concern to many.

What can we do?

1. Seek the Lord daily for a new heart and a right spirit. Revival and reformation must start with individuals. More specifically, with ourselves. With me. Like David, each of us must cry, from the prostration of abased arrogance, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me (Ps 51:10).

We must, at long last, give ourselves wholly to God as revealed in His written counsel, not as revealed by some subjective, personalized understanding of His will. Too much of the relationship theology in contemporary Adventism has evolved into a view of our walk with God as a negotiated settlement, a convenient arrangement in which God puts up with us and we with Him, politely agreeing to disagree on many issues along the way.

At a Greater New York Conference convocation held immediately after the recent tragedy, we closed the service by joining hands and singing, All to Jesus I Surrender. I was deeply moved. It was such a blessing to come together and give our hearts anew to the Lord. May it be our experience every day!

2. Recover our distinctive message with its biblical basis and its amplification in the writings of Ellen G. White. Too much experience-driven, feeling-based religion abounds in Adventism today. More and more of us seem less concerned with faithfulness to Gods Word than with what maintains our spiritual, psychological, and emotional comfort level. As a result, who knows us any more as people of the Book?

We need to spend less time with the writings of spiritual leaders, whether inside or outside Adventism, and much more with the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy writings. Many Adventists are more familiar with Max Lucado, Chuck Swindoll, and such best-selling books as Bruce Wilkinsons *The Prayer of Jabez* than they are with Inspiration. Some Adventists openly admit

they would rather read Philip Yancey than Ellen White. Sad to say, something is wrong when the writings of an inspired messenger are permitted to take a back seat to those containing uninspired opinions.

Study Needed. The reason so many Adventists are fooled by current claims that our historic faith is unbiblical is that they arent taking time daily to study the Bible. Those deluded by the claim that Ellen White contradicts the Bible have clearly failed carefully to study either the Bible or Ellen White. And in our modern world of 24/7 jobs, rushing from work shift to home shift, hurrying from school and day care back home to late suppers and few sane moments, the enemy of souls offers numerous plausible, practical excuses for remaining ignorant of the great issues among us.

It is sobering to recall that in Christs parable of the great feast, the excuses offered by the guests for their non-attendance did not involve overtly sinful acts (Lk 14:18-20). Neither inspecting newly purchased land, proving ones oxen, nor marriage involve anything wrong. All involve necessary, practical aspects of life. None of the guests asked to be excused for the sake of a crooked business deal or some immoral relationship. Christ was obviously trying to tell us that if they take our minds from the best thing, even good things can land us outside His kingdom.

Even if it means major adjustments to our lives, we must take time to read and study the inspired materials. Neither pastors, church administrators, church publications, nor any other human source can be our authority in spiritual matters. Everything we read, hear, and experience must be tested by what God, through His written counsel, has revealed (Isa 8:20; Acts 17:11).

3. Faithful members at all levels of church life must take responsibility for their church.

Contrary to what some believe, this is not the task of God alone, nor does it belong exclusively to leaders and pastors. It is the task of all.

Misconceptions. A variety of misconceptions often prevents faithful church members from fulfilling this responsibility. One is the erroneous belief that Christs parable of the wheat and tares means apostasy and sin should be left to grow unchecked until the Lord returns. But both Scripture and Ellen White are clear that open sin was not the focus of Christs parable and that the rooting out of such destructive forces in the faith community is a most essential obligation on the churchs part (Mt 18:15-17; 1 Cor 5:8-13; 2 Thess 3:14-15; *Christs Object Lessons*, p. 71; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 578; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* [Ellen G. White comments] 2:996, 5:1096).

Others falsely equate correcting and disciplining wrongdoers with harshness and a lack of humility; still others hold that if they just focus on the positive things in the church, keep on winning souls, and quietly practice a godly example, the evil in the church will somehow self-destruct while they keep their hands unsoiled. And the devil is quick to whisper in all our ears that we arent exactly flawless ourselves, so what business do we have seeking to curtail or rebuke the faults of others? More than one person of my acquaintance who has seen the need for reform has fallen for this line.

But when we stop to think, we all know the foolishness of these thoughts. If parents took these notions seriously, they would never correct their children. What responsible doctor would tell a cancer patient to ignore a malignant tumor and just focus on staying healthy and thus assume that the cancer will vanish by itself? If the above reasoning were true, the Bible would not contain such commands as the one in Isaiah, Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins (Isa 58:1). It is time for faithful believers to stop keeping their convictions private.

4. Revive evangelism in the churchs home region. This will automatically follow spiritual revival and reformation. While we cant wait for a purified church in order to evangelize, we must remember the inspired warning that the Lord does not now work to bring many souls into the truth, because of the church members who have never been converted and those who were once converted but who have backslidden. What influence would these unconsecrated

members have on new converts? Would they not make of no effect the God-given message which His people are to bear? (*Testimonies for the Church*, 6:371).

Already we see the revival of evangelism beginning with teams of young workers fanning out across North America, in large cities doing evangelism the Bible-based, old-fashioned way. Some of these crusades have baptized people in the hundreds yet have gone largely unnoticed by many who claim those methods dont work. God is showing us the way back to faithfulness, to purity, and to Him.

Culmination. The churchs evangelistic crescendo will culminate in the demonstration depicted in the following passages from the Lords messenger:

The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works in words of truth and deeds of holiness (*Christs Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416).

The church, being endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the wealth of His mercy, His love, His grace, is to appear in full and final display. . . . The gift of His Holy Spirit, rich, full, and abundant, is to be to His church as an encompassing wall of fire, which the powers of hell shall not prevail against. In their untainted purity and spotless perfection, Christ looks upon His people as the reward of all His suffering, His humiliation, and His love, and the supplement of His glory (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 18, 19).

NOTES

1. Tucker Carlson, Pox Americana, New York, Oct. 8, 2001, pp. 26, 99.
2. Evan Thomas and Michael Isikoff, Justice Kept in the Dark, *Newsweek*, Dec. 10, 2001, pp. 37-38.
3. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (2000 edition), p. 135.

[Home](#) | [Contact](#) | [Previous Issues](#) | [Store](#) | [Links](#) | [About Us](#) | [Women's Ordination FAQs](#) | [Site Menu](#)

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- ◆ Home
- ◆ About Us
- ◆ What's New!
- ◆ Previous Issues
- ◆ Store
- ◆ Links
- ◆ FAQ's
- ◆ Contact Us
- ◆ Site Map

»



Adventists AFFIRM

Home > [Previous Issues](#) > [Volume 15, Number 3](#) >

While the Winds Hold

by *Ellen G. White*

What should we be doing during the last moments of respite?

Read the [full article](#).

And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.—Revelation 7:1

What Does “Hold” Mean?

I saw four angels who had a work to do on the earth, and were on their way to accomplish it. Jesus was clothed with priestly garments. He gazed in pity on the remnant, then raised His hands, and with a voice of deep pity cried, “My blood, Father, My blood, My blood, My blood!” Then I saw an exceeding bright light come from God, who sat upon the great white throne, and was shed all about Jesus. Then I saw an angel with a commission from Jesus, swiftly flying to the four angels who had a work to do on the earth, and waving something up and down in his hand, and crying with a loud voice, “Hold! Hold! Hold! Hold! until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads.”

I asked my accompanying angel the meaning of what I heard, and what the four angels were about to do. He said to me that it was God that restrained the powers, and that He gave His angels charge over things on the earth; that the four angels had power from God to hold the four winds, and that they were about to let them go; but while their hands were loosening, and the four winds were about to blow, the merciful eye of Jesus gazed on the remnant that were not sealed, and He raised His hands to the Father and pleaded with Him that He had spilled His blood for them. Then another angel was commissioned to fly swiftly to the four angels and bid them hold, until the servants of God were sealed with the seal of the living God in their foreheads. (*Early Writings*, p. 38)

What Happens When the Winds Are Released?

Natural Disasters. We are amid the perils of the last days, and trying times are before us. Everything that can be shaken will be shaken, that those things that cannot be shaken may remain. Drought, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, casualties by sea and land, will multiply. Life will be unsafe anywhere, only as the life is hid with Christ in God. Now, while the angels are holding the four winds, is our opportunity to seek the Lord most earnestly. (*Manuscript Releases*, 20:285)

Immorality, Violence, and Persecution. We feel depressed, greatly depressed, as we see the

Share

[Table of Contents](#)



[Order Information](#)

world and its wickedness. The professed Christian world is enveloped in the darkness that covers the earth. We sigh and cry for the abominations that are done in the land. Why is it that all this wickedness does not break forth in decided violence against righteousness and truth? It is because the four angels are holding the four winds, that they shall not blow upon the earth. But human passions are reaching a high pass, and the Spirit of the Lord is being withdrawn from the earth. (*In Heavenly Places*, p. 96)

National Disputes Escalate. Old controversies which have apparently been hushed for a long time will be revived, and new controversies will spring up; new and old will commingle, and this will take place right early. The angels are holding the four winds, that they shall not blow, until the specified work of warning is given to the world; but the storm is gathering, the clouds are loading, ready to burst upon the world, and to many it will be as a thief in the night. (*Special Testimonies, Series A, No. 1b, p. 38*)

Terrible Destruction Flattens Great Structures. The time is right upon us when there will be sorrow in the world that no human balm can heal. Even before the last great destruction comes upon the world, the flattering monuments of man's greatness will be crumbled in the dust. God's retributive judgments will fall on those who in the face of great light have continued in sin. Costly buildings, supposed to be fireproof, are erected. But as Sodom perished in the flames of God's vengeance, so will these proud structures become ashes. (*Maranatha*, p. 175)

Religious Rights Denied. The time is fast approaching when we shall be made to feel the hand of oppression, because we demand our religious rights. Shall we then dishonor God by keeping silent, when his holy commandments are being trampled under foot? (*Review and Herald*, December 11, 1888)

Our Duty While Angels Hold the Winds?

Work to Preserve Freedom. We as a people have not accomplished the work which God has committed to us. We are not ready for the issue to which the enforcement of the Sunday law will bring us. It is our duty, as we see the signs of approaching peril, to arouse to action. Let none sit in calm expectation of the evil, comforting themselves with the belief that this work must go on because prophecy has foretold it, and that the Lord will shelter His people. We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. . . . Let there be most earnest prayer, and then let us work in harmony with our prayers. . . . Man's necessity is God's opportunity. It may be that a respite may yet be granted for God's people to awake and let their light shine. (*Testimonies for the Church*, 5:713)

Awaken From Lethargy and Get Ready. But the churches are not awake. New life must enter into the churches. The last work of warning and mercy for a fallen world is being done. . . .

Now is the time to work, just now. There is not a moment to lose. All national, denominational, and sectarian distinctions between rank and rank, between caste and caste, are lost. The message is to be proclaimed in the highways and byways and hedges. Every human agent is merging his character under one of two heads—the Prince of Life and the prince of darkness. (*Manuscript Releases*, 15:222, 223)

What is the condition of those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus? If in families there are those who are refusing obedience to the Lord in keeping His Sabbath, then the seal cannot be placed upon them. . . . As the sealed of God we are Christ's purchased possession, and no one shall pluck us out of His hands. (*Ibid.*, p. 225)

Don't Focus on the Trivial. The Lord has shown me the danger of letting our minds be filled with worldly thoughts and cares. I saw that some minds are led away from present truth and a love of the Holy Bible by reading other exciting books; others are filled with perplexity and care for what they shall eat, drink, and wear. Some are looking too far off for the coming of the Lord. Time has continued a few years longer than they expected; therefore they think it may

continue a few years more, and in this way their minds are being led from present truth, out after the world. In these things I saw great danger; for if the mind is filled with other things, present truth is shut out, and there is no place in our foreheads for the seal of the living God. (*Early Writings*, p. 58)

Study the Bible as Never Before. If God has ever spoken by me, the time will come when you will be brought before councils, and every position of truth which you hold will be severely criticized. The time that so many are now allowing to go to waste should be devoted to the charge that God has given us of preparing for the approaching crisis. . . .

Study your Bible as you have never studied it before. Unless you arise to a higher, holier state in your religious life, you will not be ready for the appearing of our Lord. As great light has been given, God expects corresponding zeal, faithfulness, and devotion on the part of His people. There must be more spirituality, a deeper consecration to God, and a zeal in His work that has never yet been reached. Much time should be spent in prayer, that our garments of character may be washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. (*Testimonies for the Church*, 5:716, 717)

Overcome Through Dependence on God. We must hang our whole weight on the world's Redeemer; He must be our dependence for strength. Without this, all our efforts will be unavailing. . . . We must connect more closely with God; and all our plans and arrangements must be in harmony with His plans, or they will not prove effectual.

The Holy Spirit is grieved and driven away by the self-sufficiency and rude traits of character which are cherished. These unhallowed elements must be burned out by the Spirit of God. (*Review and Herald*, December 15, 1885)

It is our work to know our special failings and sins, which cause darkness and spiritual feebleness, and quenched our first love. Is it worldliness? Is it selfishness? Is it the love of self-esteem? Is it striving to be first? Is it the sin of sensuality that is intensely active? Is it the sin of the Nicolaitans, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness? Is it the misuse and abuse of great light and opportunities and privileges, making boasted claims to wisdom and religious knowledge, while the life and character are inconsistent and immoral? Whatever it is that has been petted and cultivated until it has become strong and overmastering, make determined efforts to overcome, else you will be lost. It is these cherished sins, abhorrent to God, that make enfeebled moral courage, and leave you to choose to walk apart from God, while you retain a miserable, heartless, outward form. (*Ibid.*, June 7, 1887)

We should daily obtain a deep and living experience in the work of perfecting Christian character. We should daily receive the holy oil, that we may impart to others. All may be light bearers to the world if they will. We are to sink self out of sight in Jesus. We are to receive the word of the Lord in counsel and instruction, and gladly communicate it. There is now need of much prayer. Christ commands, "Pray without ceasing;" that is, keep the mind uplifted to God, the source of all power and efficiency. . . . Those who do not cultivate the spirit and habit of prayer cannot expect to receive the golden oil of goodness, patience, long-suffering, gentleness, love. (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 511, 512)

What are you doing . . . in the great work of preparation? Those who are uniting with the world are receiving the worldly mold and preparing for the mark of the beast. Those who are distrustful of self, who are humbling themselves before God and purifying their souls by obeying the truth—these are receiving the heavenly mold and preparing for the seal of God in their foreheads. . . .

Every individual soul, if he would receive the seal of the living God, must hear the Word of the Lord, and do it with exactitude. There must be no such thing as haphazard religion if men would have a place in the family of God.

Now is the time, while the four angels are holding the four winds, to make our calling and election sure. (*The Faith I Live By*, p. 288)

Help in Temptation. When temptations and trials rush in upon us, let us go to God and agonize with Him in prayer. He will not turn us away empty, but will give us grace and strength to overcome, and to break the power of the enemy. Oh, that all could see these things in their true light and endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus! Then would Israel move forward, strong in God, and in the power of His might. (*Early Writings*, p. 46)

Results Seen Even at Home. We need to offer praise and thanksgiving to God, not only in the congregation, but in the home life. Let the voices of His heritage be heard recounting the works of the Lord. Speak of His goodness, tell of His power. . . .

However black the clouds that roll upon the world at the present time, there is light beyond. Ignorance, superstition, darkness, unbelief strong and masterful, will meet us at every step we advance. But our faith must soar above all and see the bow of promise encircling the throne. We must reflect the light with pen and voice, praising God before the world. (*In Heavenly Places*, p. 96)

Work Earnestly Now. Everything in this world is in an unsettled state. The nations are angry, and preparations for war are being made. But though there is among the nations an increasing unrest, though they are mustering their forces, they are as if held back from action by an unseen power. The angels are holding the four winds until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. . . .

A moment of respite has been graciously given us of God. Every power lent us of Heaven is now to be used in working for those perishing in ignorance. There must be no delay. The truth must be proclaimed in the dark places of the earth. Obstacles must be met and surmounted. A great work is to be done, and to those who know the truth for this time, this work has been entrusted. (*Review and Herald*, November 17, 1910)

The Lord is soon to come. The angels are holding the four winds, in order that God's people may do their long-neglected work. We are not half awake to what might be done in our world. . . .

House-to-house work is one very successful way of reaching souls. But it is not the only way that God has provided for the advancement of his work. Decided proclamations of truth are to be made. But in regard to this work, I am instructed to say to our people, Be guarded. In bearing the message, make no personal thrusts at other churches. Speak the truth in tones and words of love. Let Christ be exalted. Keep to the affirmative of truth. Never leave the straight path God has marked out, for the purpose of giving some one a thrust. That thrust may do much harm, and no good. It may quench conviction in many minds. Let the truth tell the story of the inconsistency of error. . . .

The best way to expose the fallacy of error is to present truth. This is the greatest rebuke that can be given to error. Dispel the cloud of darkness resting on minds by reflecting the bright light of the Sun of righteousness. (*Ibid.*, October 7, 1902)

We all need to be wide awake, that, as the way opens, we may advance the work in the large cities. We are far behind in following the light given us to enter the cities and erect memorials for God. Step by step we are to lead souls into the full light of truth. (*Reflecting Christ*, p. 241)

The message must go, notwithstanding the hard times. We must make special efforts in this direction now, while the angels are holding the four winds. Soon the time to labor will be past. Who does not want to have a part in this closing work? All can do something. Those who cannot give themselves can give of their means, and all can pray that the Lord will not only raise up laborers, but that the treasury, now empty, may be supplied with the necessary funds to extend the work. . . . The truth must go to all nations, tongues, and people, and that speedily. (*Review and Herald*, November 3, 1885)

Live Sacrificially; Spend Your Money to Save Souls. The Lord is soon to come. We must work while the day lasts; for the night is coming, in which no man can work. Oh, many, many have lost the spirit of self-denial and sacrifice. They have been burying their money in temporal possessions. . . .

The Lord calls for every talent of means and ability to be put to use. When the reproach of indolence and slothfulness shall have been wiped away from the church, the Spirit of the Lord will be graciously manifested; divine power will combine with human effort, the church will see the providential interpositions of the Lord God of hosts, the light of truth will be diffused, the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. As in the apostles' time, many souls will turn unto the Lord. The earth will be lightened with the glory of the angel from heaven. . . .

Work, oh, work, keeping eternity in view. Bear in mind that every power must be sanctified. In yourselves you are powerless to do anything good. Christ declares, "Without Me ye can do nothing." Becoming partakers of the divine nature, you can do all things. Through Christ you can have power with God and with men. (*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 1132-1134)

Don't Store Away Provisions. The Lord has shown me repeatedly that it is contrary to the Bible to make any provision for our temporal wants in the time of trouble. I saw that if the saints had food laid up by them or in the field in the time of trouble, when sword, famine, and pestilence are in the land, it would be taken from them by violent hands and strangers would reap their fields. Then will be the time for us to trust wholly in God, and He will sustain us. I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah, or rain manna from heaven, as He did for the Israelites. (*Early Writings*, p. 56)

Give God Control of Property. Houses and lands will be of no use to the saints in the time of trouble, for they will then have to flee before infuriated mobs, and at that time their possessions cannot be disposed of to advance the cause of present truth. I was shown that it is the will of God that the saints should cut loose from every encumbrance before the time of trouble comes, and make a covenant with God through sacrifice. If they have their property on the altar and earnestly inquire of God for duty, He will teach them when to dispose of these things. Then they will be free in the time of trouble and have no clogs to weigh them down.

I saw that if any held on to their property and did not inquire of the Lord as to their duty, He would not make duty known, and they would be permitted to keep their property, and in the time of trouble it would come up before them like a mountain to crush them, and they would try to dispose of it, but would not be able. I heard some mourn like this: "The cause was languishing, God's people were starving for the truth, and we made no effort to supply the lack; now our property is useless. Oh, that we had let it go, and laid up treasure in heaven!" I saw that a sacrifice did not increase, but it decreased and was consumed. I also saw that God had not required all of His people to dispose of their property at the same time; but if they desired to be taught, He would teach them, in a time of need, when to sell and how much to sell. Some have been required to dispose of their property in times past to sustain the Advent cause, while others have been permitted to keep theirs until a time of need. Then, as the cause needs it, their duty is to sell. (*Ibid.*, pp. 56, 57)

Don't Rush the Winds!

It is very strange that some of our brethren should feel that it is their duty to bring about a condition of things that would bind up the means that God would have set free. God has not laid upon them the responsibility of coming in conflict with the authorities and powers of the world in this matter. The withstraining hand of God has not yet been withdrawn from the earth. Let the leaders in the work bide their time, hide in Christ, and move and work with great wisdom. Let them be as wise as serpents, and as harmless as doves. I have repeatedly been shown that we might receive far more favors than we do in many ways if we would approach

men in wisdom, acquaint them with our work, and give them an opportunity of doing those things which it is our privilege to induce them to do for the advancement of the work of God. (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 203)

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What is Advent? These Advent prayers consist of both traditional and more contemporary prayers. They relate to Advent, the four week period leading up to Christmas, when the Church anticipates the first coming of Christ at Christmas, and the second coming of Christ in the future. More Info: Advent. The Great "O" Antiphons. December 17: O Wisdom, O Holy Word of God, You govern all creation with your strong, yet tender care. Come, and show your people the way to salvation. December 18: O Sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the h Advent is a season of the liturgical year observed in many Christian churches as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas and the return of Jesus at the Second Coming. Advent is the beginning of the Western liturgical year. The term "Advent" is also used in Eastern Orthodoxy for the 40-day Nativity Fast, which has practices different from those in the West.