

When Jesus Almost Came

Lewis R. Walton, from the book 'ADVENT'

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DISTANT THUNDER

It was autumn, 1856. Across the landscape of history the wind was rising -a storm wind, filled with hints of distant thunder. In young America no one seemed to be in clear control anymore; there was anger in the land, with muffled threats of oncoming civil war, and from time to time its onset glowed like heat lightning just over the horizon, crackling prophetically above places such as Charleston and Gettysburg. Soon they would become altars upon which Americans would offer 500,000 sons.

The economy, too, was headed for trouble.. Just a few months hence would come the famed panic of 1857. "In the midst of all its plenty and pride," one historian wrote, "the nation woke one morning to find the glory was all a dream. While speculation was at a fever-heat and when men were wild with a mania for moneymaking, there came a financial crash unprecedented in the nation's history." 1.

Other problems nibbled at the fringes of history, some of them still hidden from view. At that very time Charles Darwin was polishing for publication his ideas regarding evolution. American readers of the New York *Tribune* might have noticed regular articles by a European communist named Karl Marx. And in New York Richard Gatling was busily hatching up an invention that might have been designed by the devil himself-a six-barreled gun that could fire bullets as rapidly as a man could turn its crank. It was the forerunner of the machine gun, this engine of Gatling's creation, the first in a series of new devices designed to kill with grim efficiency. In the years to come it would keep grave diggers busy.

So the autumn of 1856 was a dynamic moment, filled with events that cast long shadows into the future, as if history might be on the brink of something. And indeed, history was -something larger than most people imagined. In the autumn of this year an event occurred that would come tantalizingly close to ushering in the coming of Jesus.

WAKE-UP CALL

It all began with an editorial in the *Review and Herald*. On October 9, 1856, James White ran a brief article on the back page of the *Review*, it probably took most of his readers by complete surprise. Until now, Sabbathkeeping Adventists had contentedly assumed themselves to be represented by the church at Philadelphia (Rev. 3:8-11)-a congregation of brotherly love, for whom the Lord had no rebuke. But White was challenging them with a series of questions suggesting that the Laodicean message might apply to them. How well were they really doing the work of God? Were they truly represented by the era of Philadelphia, as most of them supposed? Or was there a dreadful possibility that they might actually be Laodicea -pretentious, proud of their accomplishments, but lacking in true godliness?

His questions could hardly have been more revolutionary. The roots of Adventism were still young and vital. Only twelve years had passed since the autumn of 1844, and the memories of that experience were still warm- memories of a golden moment, when thousands believed that the coming of Jesus was at hand, and revival swept the land.

In the dozen years that had gone by, those who remained faithful following the Disappointment had studied intensively in the Word of God. In so doing, they had plowed squarely into one of the 2 richest caches of truth one could imagine. The Sabbath. The judgment. The truth about death. Even an emerging understanding of health. Simultaneously they began discovering that in the Hebrew sanctuary service lay enormous insights, capable of answering some hitherto unsolved problems. For centuries theologians had been grappling unsuccessfully with a question in the Christian faith: How does one harmonize the apparent contradiction between a believer's full assurance of salvation and the possibility of later losing salvation? The brightest minds in Christianity had wrestled with that one, producing such odd inventions as purgatory, predestination, and once saved, always saved. None of their solutions had made sense, and now, in the middle 1850s, Adventists were putting the finishing touches on a system of theology that put it all together. It would come to be called the investigative judgment, and for the first time in centuries it would place the plan of salvation on a rational legal footing.

There was, in summary, much to be proud of. And as James White was about to point out, that just might be part of the problem.

LETHARGY IN BELIEVERS

As one looked at Adventism in the middle 1850s, there were multiplying signs that all was not well. A dozen years had passed, during which the believers had plumbed some of the deepest spiritual truths explored in centuries. Yet ironically, they were further from heaven than they had been in the autumn of 1844. "I was pointed back to the years 1843 and 1844. There was a spirit of consecration then that there is not now," Ellen White exclaimed in 1856. "What has come over the professed peculiar people of God?" 2

She had said such things before. In 1852 she lamented that "many who profess to be looking for the speedy coming of Christ are becoming conformed to this world," and in 1854 she warned that "stupidity, like lethargy, seemed to hang upon the minds of most of those who profess to believe that we are having the last message." 3

A disturbing trend was developing in Adventism. After twelve years of great discoveries, God's people were not progressing as they should spiritually. Something was wrong. One of the reasons was the editorial decision to omit references to the Spirit of Prophecy in the pages of the Review, to make the paper more acceptable as an evangelistic tool. As a result, fewer people listened for the prophetic voice, and fewer visions were given to Ellen White. In late 1855 the General Conference took steps to rectify the situation, and in 1856 James White seemed to have decided to hit the crisis head-on.

"As a people we profess to believe that Christ is soon coming. Yet professed believers rush on in their worldly pursuits, taxing their entire energies in pursuit of this world as if there was no coming Jesus, no wrath of God to fall upon the shelterless, and no flaming judgment bar, where all deeds will receive a recompense. We tremble, we shudder, as we contemplate the condition of the professed people of God." 4

"Our positions on Bible truth are clearly defined in the Scriptures, and easily defended. The present truth is so connected with the present fulfillment of prophecy that the people who read

and hear our views both see and feel the force of truth. But where is a consecrated church on whom God can consistently pour out the Holy Ghost, and make them flaming instruments in giving light to the world. ...It does not exist," he said sadly. "It cannot be found." 5

He described mournfully how workers had "toiled over the midnight lamp" to produce tracts for Adventist witnessing, and he told how such publications "remain piled up in the office," 6 almost entirely undistributed. It would appear that in the 1850s, believers were falling into a trap that would ensnare them repeatedly in the decades ahead. God's people, immersed in the mightiest message that the imagination could conceive, were living as if the Second Coming were only a dream. They were failing to deliver the Advent message.

"O, ye Laodiceans," James White cried out, revealing himself at his evangelistic best, "our mouth is open unto you. Be not deceived as to your real condition." 7

RESPONSE TO THE CALL

It was strong medicine, but it worked. Something about the fervency of his appeal resonated in the young church. Mail poured into Battle Creek from people who seem to have been just waiting for someone to raise the warning. There was God's church, trembling on the brink of the most awesome developments in human history, professing to have a judgment-hour message, yet acting as though the judgment had not come-and suddenly reality dawned, like sunrise over a scene of danger, and people began to wake up. There was nothing to be proud of-not while earth's last warning lay "piled up" in Battle Creek, undistributed by those who claimed to have God's message for the world. Adventism was not an abstract truth, to be savored in book-lined rooms, detached from the real world. Adventism was the world; it was history, and prophecy, and the two merging-merging in an ongoing drama where life and death were at issue and the destiny of souls hinged on whether believers did the work that God had given them. The final time prophecy in the Bible had occurred; now, according to Adventism, humanity would face a terminal crisis. Just ahead lay a scene of trouble so severe that the most vivid imagination could not picture it beforehand. One's only hope of survival was the coming of Jesus; nothing was as important as delivering that message.

Somehow the people of 1856 saw that. Letters poured in, by dozens, and scores, and hundreds. From Loraine, New York, one man wrote, "I am thankful that faithful brethren through whom the Lord could work have apprised us of our lukewarm state." 8 He confessed that he had been too ready to condemn others; now he took the Laodicean message for himself.

An Ohio man, who had been publicly critical of James White, wrote an open confession in the *Review*: "I have seen clearly that pride and selfishness have been mixed with all that I have done. ...I do sincerely hope that the brethren will freely forgive me." 9 He added an interesting account of how, in response to the Laodicean message, revival and reformation were sweeping the church in the Midwest.

Nearly 350 such letters flooded the *Review* office, at a time when the total number of believers was only about two thousand. In other words, nearly 20 percent of the church responded, and without dissent they agreed that the time had come for revival. Considering the fact that each such letter no doubt represented a household, one can only conclude that a large proportion of the church was prepared to follow leadership into a new era of commitment. A revival unlike anything since 1844 began to sweep Adventism. Its extent can be sensed by the fact that even ministers felt constrained to make heartfelt, open confession.

"I have been led to consider with deep humiliation, the wrongs of my past life," wrote M. E. Cornell, a leading Adventist minister. "My example has not been right. ...I ask the forgiveness and prayers of all I have in any way grieved. I mean to make clean work, and arise with the remnant." 10 Another pastor, A. S. Hutchins, said, "I have confessed, and still do humbly confess, my great lack of patience, my want of meekness. ...The Lord abundantly pity and freely forgive me is my prayer." 11

With impressive force revival swept Adventism, heralded by public confession, surrender of pride, healing of differences between believers. Perhaps the mood of that moment is best summarized in a statement by James White in 1857: "The Spirit of the Lord came down upon us on Sabbath afternoon, and the Lord there plead[ed] with His people, as it were, face to face." 12

REVIVAL SWEEPS THE COUNTRY!

And now another event occurred, outside Adventism in secular society, showing the extent to which happenings in the church may affect history more profoundly than we dream. In 1857 a massive revival also swept America with such power and intensity that even jaded newspaper editors put out special editions to report its progress. Historians are at a loss to explain why it occurred; it seems to have come from nowhere, arising spontaneously among laypeople in such unlikely places as the merchandising districts of New York. "In the Great Revival of 1857-1858 preaching seems to have occupied a very secondary place," one historian wrote. He explained how it "received its chief emphasis through the personal testimony of the men and women whose hearts God had touched." 13

Ellen White once described a scene in which "servants of God," their faces "lighted" with power, would "hasten from place to place" to proclaim the truth. 14 In 1857 the world apparently was nearly ready for just such an event, for religious interest suddenly surged everywhere. In New York, businessman Jeremiah Lanphier commenced noon prayer meetings; the idea quickly spread to Philadelphia, Boston, and other cities, until there was "scarcely a place of any considerable importance in the United States in which similar services were not undertaken." 15 In fact, it became a global phenomenon, reaching much of the English-speaking world. It came to be called a "Revival With a Million Converts." 16

For a time it eclipsed nearly everything in the news. "Politics, casualties, crime, and the various secular interests of the day were overshadowed by the news of the revival." 17 Reporters followed it, dutifully informing their papers by telegraph of the latest events that were accompanying this wave of religious fervor. Such well-known news journals as the *New York Herald* got out extra editions, just to report its progress. "Such a time as present was never known since the days of the apostles," one journal reported. "Revivals now cover our very land, sweeping all before them, as on the day of Pentecost, exciting the earnest and simultaneous cry from thousands, What shall we do to be saved? ...There is hardly a village or town to be found where a special divine power does not appear to be displayed." 18

And therein lay a fascinating insight. In away he himself only partially imagined, the writer had described something that was very real. Beyond the veil that separated the seen from the unseen world, mighty agencies were indeed in motion, hurrying between earth and heaven, going everywhere to prepare the way for God's people. We know that, because of a passage found in volume 1 of *Testimonies for the Church*. In response to revival in the church, Ellen White said, all heaven had moved into action. She described what she had seen-angels on the move, going "in every direction," working with intense activity "to prepare unbelieving hearts for the truth." 19

Before that mighty onslaught of grace, prayer meetings broke out in unexpected places. Irreligious cities were swept with revival. Laypersons handed out tracts, gave personal testimonies, held daily meetings. All this was happening outside Adventism, in secular America—in the business buildings of New York and the offices of Philadelphia, in a thousand towns and hamlets across the country. It was happening everywhere, with such intensity that even New York papers avidly reported it.

This was no accident. Heaven was arranging the stage of history for the quick completion of the third angel's message. And it was all coming as a result of revival and reformation in the church!

REVIVAL COLLAPSED

Then, tragically, the revival collapsed. With the stage of history set, with a depressed economy to pry people's minds away from material distractions, with angels going everywhere to prepare the way, with the nation poised on the brink of a massive civil war, with everything ready except the church, Adventism's revival withered. The bitterest irony of all was the fact that most believers had, for a time, fully expected their brief reformation to usher in the coming of Jesus.

"Nearly all believed that this message would end in the loud cry of the third angel," Ellen White wrote in 1859. ²⁰ Yet between the dream and the fulfillment something failed. They had been near enough to the coming of Jesus to sense its presence, yet the opportunity slipped through their fingers.

So near and yet so far. Before them lay an opening so wide that it could hardly be missed—a classic end-time scenario, complete with angels preparing the way for the quick completion of the Advent message. With victory in hand, surrounded by events so providential that even secular editors accurately recognized them, God's people stumbled. From that distant era a question cries out, reaching into our own lives, begging to be answered. What went wrong? Could we make the same mistake?

On page 187 of volume I of the *Testimonies*, Ellen White explains quite clearly what went wrong. "Many moved from feeling, not from principle and faith, and this solemn message stirred them. It wrought upon their feelings, and excited their fears, but did not accomplish the work which God designed that it should." They had not, she said sadly, allowed God to purify them from "their selfishness, their pride, and evil passions," and she described in chilling terms what happens when people resist the sanctifying efforts of heaven: Angels are told, "They are joined to their idols, let them alone."

For a time the Laodicean message had powerfully affected the church, healing differences, reconciling believers to each other, provoking heartfelt confession of sin. At its height the reformation was so intense that "nearly all" thought it would usher in the coming of Jesus. But the experience was superficial. They did not give the message "time to do its work"—to reach completely into their lives, producing in them the total surrender of heart that was necessary before people could stand the unimaginable challenges of the end of time. In other words, Adventists had failed in the one thing that could blunt their whole mission: They had failed to take Adventism to its ultimate.

A UNIQUE AND POWERFUL MESSAGE

Therein lay a sad irony, for in the middle 1850s, Adventism was developing one of the most cross-centered theologies in Christendom. For centuries Christians had looked to Calvary for relief from guilt. Three hundred years had passed since Luther had fired the Reformation with the mighty doctrine of justification by faith, and multiplied denominations now relied upon the vital truth that man's only hope is God's forgiveness.

But something was missing. Too often believers acted as though Christianity began and ended with justification alone, providing them with a handy tool for relieving personal guilt but producing remarkably little benefit to the surrounding world. Believer fought believer on the battlefields of Europe, each side solemnly invoking the blessing of God on the forthcoming carnage. Too often, Christians earned no special reputation for honesty, for moral chastity, for temperance. Indeed, Muslims spurned some of the low standards in the professed Christian world, and the Chinese people suffered cruelly from the opium trade, thrust on them by professedly Christian nations.

Something was wrong, and Adventists were suggesting a solution. The power of the cross did not end with forgiveness, they said; salvation contained unlimited power, capable of transforming lives into conformity with a long-ignored standard called the law of God. For centuries Christians had used terms such as *love*, seldom bothering to translate that word into daily life. Adventism offered a concrete definition for love: Ten simple rules of life that instantly told whether love was or was not being expressed. In that clear mirror the Christian was at last without excuse for double standards and a mediocre life.

"The love of Jesus in the heart will lead to humility of life and obedience to all His commandments," Ellen White once said. "The love of Jesus that goes no farther than the lips will not save any soul, but be a great delusion." 21 Though her words seemed blunt, they were no blunter than those of John: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

When one stopped to think about it, there was really no other rational way Christianity could work. One could best show love to God by treating Him as He asked to be treated-and that included worshiping Him on the day He had specified. And one could best express love to others by simply practicing the last six commandments of the Decalogue. Thus, in reemphasizing law, Adventists had unearthed a vital truth, utterly essential before Christ could return: They had found the theological basis for demonstrating what God's people would be like at the end of time. "Here is the patience of the saints," John said: "here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12).

WE MUST LIVE IT!

But all of that was only talk until a generation of God's people actually lived it. Sensing their drift from that ideal James White had challenged believers with the Laodicean message, and for a time revival swept the church.

"Like an electric shock the Laodicean message ran through the ranks," wrote historian Arthur W. Spaulding. "It revived the doctrine of the sanctuary; it turned the eyes of the people from themselves to their true source of peace and power, Christ. ...If it had had free course, it would soon have finished the gospel message in glory.

"But the work done was not thorough enough. The people generally were content with half measures. ...They were content with a little victory. And being so content, they backslid." 22

It was a mistake they should not have made-not in 1857. For this very year they were putting the finishing touches on a system of theology that revealed, with great clarity, just why earth's last generation would have to meet such a high standard of faith and behavior. The clue was to be found in a truth they were just now understanding in its fullness-the doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary.

For centuries theologians had been struggling with an apparent contradiction in Christian faith. On the one hand, a believer is supposed to have full assurance of salvation. "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12), John said, pulling the future into the present. Salvation is so powerful that in its presence even time distorts. In a moment of faith, one can have the assurance that eternity begins now.

On the other hand, Jesus made it clear that not every believer would retain salvation. "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 7:21). Therein lay the contradiction: How does one harmonize "full assurance" with continuing human free will, whereby one may actually have salvation but later decide to cast it aside? Over the centuries the best minds in Christendom had tried to solve the riddle. Calvin attempted to handle the problem at the source: Get rid of free will itself, he said, through the doctrine of predestination. Catholic theologians used another approach: Give sinners full assurance with the second chance of purgatory. Still others tried to accomplish it by getting rid of human free will at the moment of conversion so that a person could not later lose salvation by changing his mind. Thus they produced the soothing doctrine of once saved, always saved. None of the solutions made Biblical or intellectual sense.

FREE WILL AND ASSURANCE COMBINED

In 1857 Adventism was formulating a system of theology that addressed that dilemma head-on, developing a model for full assurance while preserving human free will. The secret lay in the sanctuary service. The concept they offered is astonishingly similar to a commonsense mechanism used by earthly courts of law to grant someone full assurance of a legal right that cannot take place until a future time.

Let me illustrate.²³ Suppose an aggrieved spouse comes to court and proves that she is legally entitled to a divorce. In most states the law requires that the judge delay granting her a final decree, in the hope that her marriage can be mended in the meantime. Now the judge faces a dilemma: He has before him a person with an absolute legal right, but he cannot grant that right-not yet. His solution? He enters a provisional decree called an "interlocutory judgment." He writes the person's name down in the records of the court. He declares that she is entitled to a decree that will occur in the future. At the end of that time, if she still wishes final judgment entered, she is entitled to return to court and ask for it. From that moment on she has a legal right that is secure, unless she herself changes her mind. She has been given the most absolute assurance it is possible to give without robbing her of free will. Thus her probationary period ends with a conscious expression of her own will.

I recognize the dangers of trying to illustrate heavenly truths with earthly realities, and Biblical concepts with twentieth-century institutions, but here I think the analogy fits. I believe I have

just described the mechanism of the plan of salvation. When a sinner comes to God in the name of Jesus, he has asserted a legal right to which even God subjects Himself -the right to live forever in His presence. It was paid for at Calvary; God willingly grants it. In the records of the heavenly court his name is entered among the redeemed-entered, in Biblical terms, in a document called the book of life. But the sinner, however repentant, remains a free moral agent, capable in the future of turning his back on salvation. Only at the end of one's probation is it possible to enter a final decree. When probation does close, that person indicates whether he still desires salvation-and he does so with the best possible evidence, "upon the record of his deeds" (Rev. 20:13, N.E.B.). Thus, every person who ever lived, saved or lost, is guaranteed a final trip to court.

Adventism was saying all this in 1857. They had even coined a term for that act: the "investigative judgment." 24

For the first time in centuries, that doctrine put the plan of salvation on a rational legal footing. But lurking within it was a challenge of almost unimaginable proportions, and that challenge revolved around an event called the close of probation.

THE CRUTCH OF DEATH

Throughout human history one's probation had simply closed at death. When life ceased, one's final decision had been made regarding salvation; thereafter, nothing could affect one's destiny. Thus, hidden in mankind's greatest apparent tragedy could be found one of its greatest blessings. For death gave one a final chance at salvation. Even if people had failed repeatedly in the Christian life, God's mercy could seek them one last time as death approached. Even the weakest could, in the closing glimmer of consciousness, reach out like the dying thief and grasp the hand of God. Then, before Lucifer could brew up a new agony of temptation, they could slip away into the quiet peace of death, forever secure from his devices.

In other words, for many people death was a crutch, an escape route by which they could hide at last from the possibility of failure!

Therein lies a hint of a profound truth. Everything that God allows to happen to His children, however painful, has within it an even greater blessing. In the Garden of Eden the Lord told Adam and Eve that they would "surely die." At that instant it is unlikely that they recognized it, but in reality He had given them a refuge where they could find peace at last from the nagging dangers of temptation. Without the crutch of death it is difficult to imagine how Adam could have preserved his sanity, let alone salvation, as he watched the depths to which his children would go. For him death was a moment of finality, beyond which he could rest eternally secure from the power of sin.

So it has been for the rest of the human race. Billions have lived; a vast number have undoubtedly accepted salvation. Yet in all history, we are told of only two people who didn't use the crutch of death, who transcended from this world to the next, lifted by translationary faith. Their names were Enoch and Elijah.

Enoch and Elijah-the very persons whom Ellen White says typify the people who will be living when Jesus returns! 25

ULTIMATE ADVENTISM

And that brings us back to Adventism. To ultimate Adventism. To the failure of 1857 and the challenge of the future. Somewhere, sometime, the crutch of death will not be available. A generation of God's people will have to face probation's close without it; and they will do so at the very end of the human genetic chain, when humanity is weakest and temptation strongest, when there is no place left to hide, and human weapons hazard the globe; when theological confusion darkens the earth, and our brightest lights go out; when former brethren become the most articulate foes of God's people. When to 'survive the ordeal, one will need to have the "faith of Jesus."

Probation will close while a generation of believers are still living. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly."

Quickly, but not yet. Jesus closes probation, but He has not yet returned. A generation of God's people is declared to be eternally redeemed while they are still in this world, still theoretically capable of turning their backs on God! Like Enoch and Elijah, they face the close of probation without having death to lean on. Here is the risk the Creator takes: He bestows salvation upon mortals who face the most dreadful conditions the world has ever seen. They must survive on faith alone.

But along with the risk comes an enormous benefit—an ultimate, clear demonstration of the power of the cross. If, through faith in Jesus, His people can come through this, then Calvary is more than a convenient mechanism for dealing with feelings of guilt. It is powerful enough to keep God's people faithful, whatever the challenge. And the universe is secure; sin will not arise again, and the war is over. Forever.

Such was the challenge of the old Advent message. Out of the sanctuary had come a new ideal for Christian living, and it was expressed in some of the most powerful language Ellen White ever used.

"Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people on earth. ... "When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing." 26

NOT PREPARED!

So that was it. In 1857 God's people had simply not finished the work of preparation necessary to meet Him. They had had revival and reformation. There had been public confession and repentance. But they had not allowed God to finish the work necessary to prepare them for the coming of Jesus. Ellen White spoke sadly of "pride, ... fashions, ...empty conversation, ...selfishness." Something more was needed. They were to persevere in a "special work," a "putting away of sin." They were to be "conquerors in the battle with evil." 27 They had simply given up too soon!

"Nearly all believed that this message would end in the loud cry of the third angel," Ellen White wrote in 1859. "But as they failed to see the powerful work accomplished in a short time, many lost the effect of the message. I saw that this message would not accomplish its work in a few short months." Indeed not. It was a program that would transform their whole lives, fitting them for "the loud cry of the third angel." That would take a little time, more than a "few short months." 28

But it could have happened much faster than most of them dreamed. In 1857, as church members began to grow weary of revival, they were-ironically-at least a third of the way into a process that could have led directly to the coming of Jesus! In fact, everything necessary to prepare them for that event could have been done if they had persevered about two more years.

On July 15, 1859, only thirty-four months after James White first published the Laodicean challenge, Mrs. White wrote that "God has given the message time to do its work." 29 It could not have been completed in a few short months, but within three years it had had "time to do its work." Time to awaken the church with a call for reformation. Time for confession of sin and unity among the believers. Time to get ready for the "loud cry of the third angel." The whole process could have been completed in a total of less than three years!

Less than three years-and God's people could have seen Pentecost. Empowered by heaven, they could have gone out into a world prepared by angels for their message. And the Civil War might never have to come, and 500,000 lives need never be lost, and, just as Ellen White said, the slaves could be liberated not by earthly conflict but by the second coming of Jesus. It could all have happened so soon.

Which brings us to the present. If the lessons of history are correct, everything necessary to prepare Adventism for the coming of Jesus can be accomplished in only three years. That means that heaven is available. It is not some far-off dream, receding before us like a mirage. It is real. We could have it. The final preparation of God's people could be completed in the lifetime of virtually everyone reading this book!

Three years. Three more winters. Three more summers. And we could be ready for something even mightier than Pentecost-the gospel flooding the world, final events forming rapidly around us, history racing toward its conclusion. "It is impossible to give any idea of the experience of the people of God who will be alive upon the earth when past woes and celestial glory will be blended," Ellen White once said. "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." 30

All that could be ours -all that, and heaven, too. And that leads us to the greatest question facing Adventism today: How can we help it happen?

Notes

1 Warren A. Candler, *Great American Revivals and the Great Republic*, pp. 189, 190, quoted in Felix A. Lorenz, *The Only Hope* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1976), p. 53.

2 *Testimonies*, vol. I, p. 128.

3 *Review and Herald*, June 10, 1852; *Early Writings*, p. 119.

4 *Review and Herald*, Nov. 13, 1856.

5 *ibid*

6 *ibid.*

7 *ibid.*, Oct. 16, 1856.

8 *ibid.*, Dec. 25, 1856.

9 *ibid.*, Feb. 26, 1857.

10 *ibid.*, Feb. 5, 1857.

11 *ibid.*, April 9, 1857.

12 *ibid.*, May 28, 1857.

13 Frank G. Beardsley, *Religious Progress Through Religious Revivals*, p.176, quoted in Lorenz, loc. cit.

14 *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

15 Candler, op. cit., p. 192, in Lorenz, op. cit., p. 54.

16 Arthur Strickland, *The Great American Revival*, pp. 132, 133, quoted in Lorenz, loc. cit.

17 Beardsley, op. tit., pp. 48, 49, in Lorenz, op tit., p. 55.

18 Henry C. Fish, *Handbook of Revivals..* pp. 77, 78, quoted in Lorenz, op. tit., p. 55.

19 *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 186. ; 20 *ibid.*

21 Ellen G. White manuscript 26, 1885.

22 Arthur W. Spalding, *The Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists!* {Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1962), vol. 2, p. 287.

23 The following analogy was proposed in my book *Decision at the Jordan* {Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982), pp. 65, 66.

24 *Review and Herald*, Jan. 29, 1857.

25 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 89; *Prophets and Kings*, p. 227.

26 *The Great Controversy*, p. 425.

27 *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 189; *The Great Controversy*, p. 425.

28 *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 186. ; 29 *ibid.*

30 *The Faith I Live By*, p. 340.