

Chapter 1

Misplaced Dynamite

During the latter part of World War II, the troopship Admiral W. L. Capps slipped her Seattle moorings and headed for the Pacific theater of war. Fighting was fierce as the Japanese desperately struggled for their very existence. I was one of the 5,000 GIs crammed aboard this unescorted ship bound for the combat zone. Tensions increased with each passing day. Somewhere up ahead in that vast, impatient wilderness, which is the Pacific Ocean, I had a rendezvous with God.

It happened one evening just about the time orders came over the loudspeakers for all troops to go below. While slowly making my way across the deck, I saw the great Southern Cross twinkling off the port side. It seemed to symbolize a tremendous longing in my life. Already at age 19 I had been totally immersed in the church affairs of a large, liberal Protestant denomination. From childhood I certainly was church oriented. But although I professed to be a Christian, I did not know Christ. And that was frightfully disturbing to me. Suddenly all the thoughts and feelings that had been building up within me swirled into a vortex of need. I was never one to display emotions in public, but right then and there I dropped to my knees on that steel deck and poured out the deepest longings of my heart to know Him. Something like an electric shock seemed to pass clear through me. When I arose the most profound sense of peace settled over me. I was a new person. And I realized that I had finally found the beginning of a relationship with the same Jesus whose own cross was not a starry one against the sky but anchored deep in the rocky ground of Golgotha.

Shortly after this I met another GI whose cheerful attitude and smiles attracted me. Floyd Cromwell stood tall among the men. His one-time crew-cut had grown half out so that his blond hair flopped back and forth like some signal flag. He carried his Bible wherever he went, and since he never seemed to buckle his combat boots, the tinkling of those buckles always announced his presence wherever he walked. Something about this big, friendly ex-prizefighter with the broken nose drew me to him. I was desperately hungry right then to know more about the Bible, and I couldn't think of anyone I would rather have help me than Floyd.

“My mother gave me a small pocket New Testament before I shipped out, but I’ve never read much of it. Would you mind studying the Bible with me?” I asked.

He smiled. “Sure. When shall we start?”

The only possible place for any semblance of privacy was down on the mess deck. Even though it was extremely hot below, that’s where we went to study. Both the starboard and port doors were flung wide open to capture as much ventilation as possible, but it was precious little. Down there the cooks, stripped to the waist, their bodies glistening with perspiration from the sauna-like heat, moved in slow motion. It was here, though, that the Word of God suddenly came alive for me for the first time. Day after day as the ship zigzagged its way, Floyd and I would go below to study. Placing our Bibles on one of the chest-high mess tables, we would explore the Scriptures together. He was an excellent teacher, never moving ahead until I understood clearly.

One day while covering a verse-by-verse study of Revelation, Floyd asked, “Would you like to see where Seventh-day Adventists are in prophecy?”

I was stunned. Floyd had never discussed any particular church affiliation with me before, and the name Seventh-day Adventist meant nothing to me. I had heard it used a few times before, but that was all. Their teachings and practice were totally foreign to me. I was skeptical.

“Aw, you can’t show me from the Bible!” I exclaimed.

“Come back tomorrow, and I’ll show you.”

Floyd was a master psychologist. I wanted him to tell me right then and there, but he refused on the grounds that we had studied enough for that day. I could hardly wait. The next day I bounded down to the mess deck to hear his proof. And for the first time in my life I read the passage in Revelation 12:17:

“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Then in his own inimitable way Floyd led me through a sweeping history of God’s people and Satan’s attack on them down through the ages. Before me opened the truth about those who had remained loyal to the Lord by representing His character through His law and held firmly to the testimony of Jesus Christ, which, according to Revelation 19:10, is the “spirit of prophecy.” For the first time I understood how

God would have a people on earth when Jesus returns who would uphold the same truths from that long line of faithful believers.

Shortly after landing on Okinawa I was determined to take my stand with the remnant church. No Adventist chaplain was available, and the Baptist chaplain assigned to our outfit refused to baptize me because I wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Floyd borrowed a jeep and drove clear to the south end of the island to where the army was still mopping up the last of the Japanese resistance and found a major who outranked our chaplain. The word came back: "Baptize this man even if he wants to become a Buddhist! You are here to serve the men!"

So on Sunday, July 15, 1945, I was baptized by a Baptist chaplain at Ishikawa Beach. He consented to perform the rite on condition that I take out membership in his church and later transfer. Mine was probably the briefest membership his church ever had!

The subsequent years offered opportunities for further study at college and graduate school, but none could replace nor do much to amplify the profound Bible study that day aboard ship so many years ago when Floyd opened Revelation 12:17 to my understanding.

Adventists early laid claim to this text as evidence that it set forth the earmarks of the true remnant people of God. The strength of keeping the commandments and having the spirit of prophecy in the writings of Ellen White were sufficient evidence.

But as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth and the decades have continued to slip away, something seems to have happened to the remnant itself. Some are saying that the motivating drive that sparked the fire of the founding fathers to make such a claim seemingly has all but died out. In its place has come a whole new shift of emphasis.

The story is told of an English farmer who dug a well on his property. He struck water and had it tested by the local health authorities. The water was discovered to possess excellent medicinal properties. Word spread, and soon people were coming with their jugs and jars to obtain his "miracle" water. It wasn't long before the circle widened, and more people heard the good news. Finally the farmer had to provide some accommodations for those traveling long distances. In time an entire village grew up on that end of his farm. The news kept spreading. More and more people came, until finally that small village with a few places of lodging and shops grew into a large city engulfing all the surrounding farmland. Today it is a thriving metropolis with

great factories belching smoke and teeming millions busily engaged in making a livelihood.

An American tourist visited the place a few years ago and, fascinated by the historical account, went to the city hall for information.

"I've heard so much about this place," he said. "Just where is the well located that started this great city?"

The clerk looked up sheepishly. "That is a frightfully embarrassing question," he answered, "but the fact is we can't find the well." These people had lost the source of their beginnings !

In the process of preparing for Christ's soon coming and heaven, Seventh-day Adventists have built churches and schools, hospitals, publishing houses, and food factories. Humming industries have kept up a cash flow, and there is an abundance of machinery to keep up the constant image of growth and prosperity. We have made a reasonable showing financially, materially, and in membership growth, BUT WE ARE STILL HERE! Could it be that we need to go back to the source of our beginnings and rediscover the truths that established the remnant in the first place?

Out of the night of delusion and darkness at the end of the papal supremacy, God called out a people from every nation and tongue to demonstrate once and for all time the truth about Himself. The remnant church, prophetically arising on time, was designed by God to enhance the quality of life here and now and to prepare a people to stand in the great day of Christ's return.

Undoubtedly the greatest wealth of spiritual truths and the most soul-jarring warnings ever entrusted to man have been committed to the Seventh-day Adventists to be shared with the world.¹

And this has aroused the enemy, alias the great dragon, the old serpent, the devil, or Satan. And so the final phase of the longstanding struggle began in earnest. He is angry with the remnant!

Satan knows that he has but a short time. It is now or never with him. Since sin is of such a self-destructive nature, the enemy has unleashed forces of evil that are beyond his own ability totally to control or to halt. He is caught in the meshes of his own machinations.

Satan also has to hurry, because God is proving through at least a few of His people that the enemy is a liar. There really are some who would rather die than knowingly commit a wrong act—who would go to the wall for their faith! This fact makes the enemy extremely nervous.

VOICES FROM THE SKY

Over nineteen centuries have elapsed since Christ silenced the devil's charges that God is not sacrificial. The wrath of the enemy cannot now be directed toward Christ personally, so he puts forth every effort to reach His representatives. The battle is very real. And how has this warfare gone-this battle with the remnant church? Heaven's warning to us as a people is clear. Listen:

"I have been shown that the spirit of the world is fast leavening the church. You are following the same path as did ancient Israel. There is the same falling away from your high calling as God's peculiar people."²

"Satan's snares are laid for us as verily as they were laid for the children of Israel just prior to their entrance into the land of Canaan. We are repeating the history of that people. Lightness, vanity, love of ease and pleasure, selfishness, and impurity are increasing among us."³

"The church has turned back from following Christ her Leader and is steadily retreating toward Egypt."⁴

As we take a close look at ourselves, we are forced to face some sobering conclusions. Every indication from divinely-inspired sources points to the painful fact that the second coming is long overdue. Jesus longs to have His professed people turn from their gods of pride and passion. Unconsciously we have followed a modernized, sophisticated form of Baal worship. We are here because we want to be-because we have accepted a kind of idolatry that satisfies us.

To be sure, many Adventists have not bowed the knee to the god of some self-seeking Baal. They can stand the winds of strife, because their roots go deep into the love of God. These are the kind of people who will go to the wall for their faith no matter where they live.

But far too many of us have grown lax in our worship of the true God and have unconsciously exchanged the Savior for some system-some customized, self-aggrandizing god that keeps us comfortable and secure.

In a sense we are all part of this pattern. None of us have any cause to feel smug or spiritually complacent. All of us constitute part of the whole. Like Daniel, who placed himself right alongside his confused, rebellious people, we are all at fault. "We have sinned," he prayed, "and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly." Daniel 9:5. And we have-we have before us the sad spectacle of broken homes and shattered lives. Divorce rates among Seventh-day Adventists do not differ significantly from divorce rates among worldlings.

Bickering, backbiting, and malicious gossip go on unabated. The grasping covetousness and overreaching in trade is very much with us. Some have even been known to brag about having “skinned” someone in a business deal. The terrible testimony of youths and adults entangled in sex, drugs, booze, and all the music and madness of their worldly contemporaries is a jarring reality. As a people we have often blended in with the worldly woodwork. Too many Adventists wear the same jewelry, see the same movies, dance to the same tunes, and are generally caught up in the same whirl of pulse-pounding excitement. And this is not some isolated package of case histories. It is very real and very sad. The overall sweep of the current SDA scene has an alarming similarity with the old Israelitish drift—a strange fascination with heathen gods. Baal worship! Not literal Baal, of course, but his equivalent. With many self is secretly enshrined in the high places of the heart!

The Scriptures plainly teach that the last days before the second coming would see a recycling of the corruption of the antediluvians and the final days of Sodom. God has graciously warned that the line of distinction between His professed people and sin-lovers must be plain and clear, or the coming destruction will strike both with equal force.⁵

Ever since I became an Adventist, I have heard Matthew 24:14 quoted. We love this passage of Scripture. And yet I wonder if we really know what Jesus is saying here: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Somehow we have projected the notion that if we could just get into every country on the face of the earth and establish some SDA contact, this would fulfill our mission. Such a notion is as far removed from the truth as is the misconception of the disciples in Christ’s day when they clung tenaciously to the false idea that He was going to establish an earthly kingdom.

The key word in this text is witness. But what is a witness? Believing and proclaiming the truth about the Sabbath? Telling people about the state of the dead or the second coming of Jesus? Passing out literature that explains the important doctrines we hold so dear?

“Our doctrines may be correct; we may hate false doctrine, and may not receive those who are not true to principles; we may labor with untiring energy; but even this is not sufficient.... A belief in the

theory of the truth is not enough. To present this theory to unbelievers does not constitute you a witness for Christ.”⁶

We face the danger of finding ourselves in the same spiritual cul-de-sac as the Jews in Christ’s day. They were strict Sabbath-keeping, health-reforming, Bible-believing, “God-fearing” church members, but they crucified the Lord of glory!

“The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ’s day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness.... The same danger still exists.... Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world.”⁷

It is a horrible thought, but is it possible that some Seventh-day Adventist could become a curse to the world?

How well I remember the evening a minister backhanded his son and sent him sprawling because he was noisy as vespers began. When a father shouts, “Shut up, you kids! We’re going to have family worship!” the curse begins to take shape. In the case of the minister’s son it came as no great surprise to me to learn a few years later that he had left the church, bitter against his parents, the denomination, and God Himself. This did not happen because of one isolated incident, but from an accumulated pattern of misrepresenting the character of God.

Back in the early 1950s my wife and I and our two daughters visited a small, back-country church tucked neatly in the foothills. It was one of those churches where it seems that everyone is somehow related to everyone else. We were true visitors. We sat about midway down the aisle with a lot of empty pews both ahead and behind us. The old potbellied stove in the rear was doing its best to generate some semblance of heat, but not really succeeding too well. The Sabbath School superintendent smiled and welcomed us to Sabbath School.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, “the stove isn’t as hot as it should be on this cold morning. The person who was supposed to start the fire didn’t start it on time.”

From the rear of the room roared a loud, irate voice. “I DID TOO start the fire on time!”

“You did NOT!” yelled the superintendent from the pulpit.

“I DID TOO!”

“DID NOT!”

We were caught in the crossfire. Welcome to Sabbath School!

One of the single most prevalent Adventist cliches is the term, “finishing the work.” I have heard that ever since those days on Okinawa, and I wonder if we honestly know what such a term means. Just suppose it were possible to baptize every man, woman, and child in the entire world—all the Protestants, Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, Confucianists, Animists, Taoists, Hindus, Shintoists, and any other “ism” or idolater and atheist on the face of the globe. Imagine their all becoming Seventh-day Adventists! (It staggers the mind just figuring out the tithe and contemplating the rush on “vege” food.) But let’s say they are all baptized church members of the Adventist faith. I am totally convinced that, even if such a thing should ever happen, “the work” would not necessarily be finished!

I made this statement from the pulpit once, and afterward a doctor met me at the door and said, “What you preached today is heresy.” Then taking me by my coat lapels he pulled me closer. “But it’s the truth!” he whispered loudly.

Now I certainly believe in baptism, but not as an end in itself, as if some statistical body count for a mythological “progress report” demonstrates that somehow the work is being finished. Too long have we subscribed to the false notion that “bodies, bucks, and bricks” fulfill the great commission! When we come to the place that we understand our own message and translate it into practical godliness, others will take notice. Such a life will produce a genuine witness.

Several years ago the public relations director for the Southern Baptists wrote a letter to the General Conference department, then known as Public Relations, about an Adventist family he had known in his early years as a pastor. Here is what he said:

“The best public relations I have ever seen from the Seventh-day Adventists were the Culverhouses. This aged couple lived just 200 yards from my first pastorate. They were convinced Seventh-day Adventists, but they were also good neighbors. They carried their share of community responsibility. They opened their humble home to the itinerant young pastor just as did the Baptists. They sent their tithe to their closest church nearly a hundred miles away, but they gave also to the little Baptist church to keep the gospel alive in their community. Some of the most elevating prayers I have ever heard were from Mr. Culverhouse. I can see him now, white hair, bowed head, on his knees. Once when the church had a storm sweep through it, the one force that helped the young pastor to keep his feet on the ground was the

integrity and simple logic of this dedicated farmer. In that community, where he was the sole representative of his faith to which he was devoted publicly and privately, the name Seventh-day Adventist stood for something-integrity, dedication, loyalty to the Bible, common sense, good neighbor.

“We can have surveys, opinion research, planned campaigns, and all the rest, but we will never beat the kind of public relations I saw in Charlie Culverhouse. God bless his memory.”

How wonderful when someone leaves such a track of light leading to God! How warm and good to find Seventh-day Adventists who are “seven days” Adventists; who do not distort the message with their free-swinging, worldly stamp or come across as gaunt and grim in their misguided zeal to live health reform if it kills them. What a privilege to know that there are magnetic Adventists who draw folk to Christ instead of repelling them!

At the present time we are in a transition period-between dying policies and programs and a primitive godliness waiting to be born. Jesus, speaking in Acts 1:8, gave us the key to understanding what God means by a witness to all the world.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.” Jerusalem Bible.

The Greek word for power in this verse is *dunamis*. It is from this word that Alfred Nobel derived the name for the powerful explosive he developed, which we call dynamite. God has promised to fill us with “dynamite” -explosive power if you please-in order to accomplish the work of heralding God’s last message to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people in every quarter of the earth. I used to read this passage and wonder just how the word dynamite applied. But later, after a very revealing experience with the explosive, I understood more clearly.

Back in 1960 I purchased some property high in the Black Hills of western Washington. It had a fabulous, sweeping view of the snow-capped peaks of the Cascade Range. It was a wonderful spot. Nothing seemed to mar the beauty except for one thing. The whole hillside was dotted with huge, burned-over, head-high fir stumps. There was enough cleared area to build a house, but I fully intended to rid the whole hill of those unsightly black “monsters.” I asked a friend of mine just how to go about such a task.

“You’ve got to blast them out,” he declared.

With his promise to teach me how to use dynamite, I bought a case of the explosives, a coil of fuse, and a box of blasting caps, and began.

I was still blowing stumps long after we had moved into our little Swiss chalet. Then one summer day my wife said, "We have so many visitors coming to our hill, especially those with children. I just wish you'd get rid of the dynamite stored down there in the old barn. I'll plant ivy over the rest of the stumps. Now that it's getting warm I think it's just too dangerous to have it around."

She was right. Warm weather does change dynamite. A sudden jar can set off an unexpected cataclysm.

"Ok," I answered, "I'll get rid of the stuff. You and the girls stay indoors, and I'll make one final blast."

For many months I had had my eye on one huge old "beast" by the driveway. Every time I passed it in my car I would say, "Someday, baby, you're coming out of there!" I had singled out this stump because of its monstrous twelve-foot diameter base and proximity to the driveway.

I brought up the rest of the dynamite from the barn and proceeded to dig under the stump to lay the charge. After priming the first stick I began packing others around it. I knew the usual eight-to-ten sticks would not be enough, so I kept packing... 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40... 50! I crammed in 50 sticks! There weren't any more sticks in the case! Then I reeled off 15 feet of fuse to allow plenty of time to get far away.

I lit the fuse and shouted the usual, "Fire in the hole," three times. Only this time I added to myself. "And I mean there is a fire in the hole!"

I'll have to admit I walked a bit faster than usual this time. I wanted to reach the top of Coyote Ridge, where I could watch the fireworks. From up there I could easily see our little chalet on the knoll not more than a hundred feet from the stump. Whisps of telltale smoke emerged from the ground. As the fuse burned steadily toward the charge I had a feeling that the whole hillside was going to blow shortly.

And just about then it happened. A terrific explosion rocked the ground and sent dirt, dust, and debris flying in all directions. For a moment the view of my house was obliterated by the upheaval. But I blinked like the proverbial toad in a hailstorm. I could not believe what I was seeing. The stump barely jiggled, then settled back down.

I hurried down the ridge to see what had happened. The smell of high explosive was still heavy in the air, but there before my wondering eyes was a huge cave blown clear out from under the stump. The earth

had been blasted away, leaving nothing but a great cave, so huge I could actually crawl under the stump. But the stump still stood! The only thing that had been removed was dirt. I had far more fire power than necessary. I could have blown up a bridge with that much dynamite, BUT IT WASN'T PLACED IN THE RIGHT SPOT! I should have placed it squarely under "the beast" so the power of the explosion could have effectively dislodged it. Instead I just blew sod!

I went back to Acts 1:8. The promise for power is there. God's Spirit can blast loose all the evil traits and clear us from our own carnality, but we must be willing to allow Him to place that power in the right spot-in our hearts!

If dynamite must be placed in the right spot for its power to be effective, how much more is this true of the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not enough just to know the message of Jesus Christ. It is not enough to attend a Christian school and get a diploma, to march down the aisle with honors to the tune of "Pomp and Circumstance." It is not enough to keep learning and learning until there is a whole disarranged alphabet after one's name. It is not enough merely to share our unique message with others. The Holy Spirit must translate that message into practical godliness. Otherwise we are just blowing sod!

Two little six-year-old girls attended church in their spring finery. Both had reached the age when the front teeth were missing, and the tongue protruded through the gap. Any conversation at close range usually meant getting sprayed.

One of the girls sidled up to her companion to make an announcement. "The memory verth for today ith, 'Be ye kind one to another,' " she lisped smugly.

The other girl shook her head. "Ith not either!" she lisped back. Not understanding the King James Version, she proceeded to quote, "Ith 'Be 'E kind one to another.'" And as she said this the little feather that angled so cutely from her new hat danced in unison with her shaking head.

"Ith not either. Ith 'Be YE kind!" "

"'Be 'E kind!" the other countered.

Little "Be ye kind" became so angry that she tore the feather from her challenger's hat, threw it to the floor, and stomped on it. That did it. Instantly they began clawing and scratching each other in a first-class, mini-female fight in church. And the irony of it all was that it was over the memory verse "Be ye kind one to another"! These little girls were just blowing sod!

VOICES FROM THE SKY

Now listen to the following statement: “The reason why our people have not more power is that they profess the truth, but do not practice it.”⁸ Could it be that like my misplaced dynamite and those two little girls, many of us are just blowing sod?

Our greatest need today is for a true revival and reformation. In the days of young King Josiah it was brought about by the discovery of the book of the law. That ancient scroll had been buried amidst the clutter of the sanctuary itself. What followed was an unprecedented reformation and destruction of idols.

Could it be that we need once again to discover the message of those three angels given especially to us in Revelation 14:6-12? We have systematically printed their figures on letterheads, used them as a logo on our literature, and sculptured statuary of these angels flying in the midst of heaven, but do we know what they mean to us individually?

There has been a sinister plot against these messages. It has been Satan’s studied purpose to cause the remnant people to accept only a superficial understanding of what those three angels were shouting about so loudly in John’s vision.⁹

Day by day we are moving into line-moving toward the point of no return-the final separation between those who are controlled by God and those who are manipulated by Satan. Decisions are being made today for time and eternity.

“As we near the close of earth’s history, we either rapidly advance in Christian growth, or we rapidly retrograde toward the world.”¹⁰ As the saying goes, You will be tomorrow what you are becoming today!

It was almost noon on the last Saturday of March 1955. A crippled Pan American Airways Stratocruiser went down 25 miles off the Oregon coast. All 23 persons aboard the ditched aircraft survived the crash. A Seattle Times newspaper reporter picked up the drama and wrote this account:

“It was what they call a calm sea. The ocean winds were almost noiseless. The men and women in the life rafts could talk clearly to those who were about to die.... Those in the rafts who had strength paddled, and those in the water swam, but the sea was stronger than all....‘For as long as perhaps a half hour,’ said one survivor, ‘we stroked, and they swam, and called for help, but we couldn’t gain an inch.’... Soundlessly, remorselessly, the rolling sea separated those who would live from those who would die.... The three in the ocean drifted away until the last cry for help was heard across the expanding gulf of salt water.”¹¹

What a tragedy! The sea and elements finally took their toll on those three bobbing in their life jackets! They died from exposure even while being supported on the waves. It is hard to understand how someone could be lost while wearing his life jacket. But some will be lost right within the church, right where they could easily learn how to keep from perishing. This, however, need not happen.

This book is a new, fresh look at those three angels' messages and how God designed them to prepare us for that grand event of meeting Christ face to face when He returns.

1. See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* , vol. 7, p. 138.
2. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 75, 76.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
5. *Seelbid.*, vol. 1, p. 189.
6. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, February 2, 1891.
7. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 309, 310.
8. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 613.
9. See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 2, p. 117.
10. White, *Review and Herald*, December 13, 1892.
11. Excerpts from the *Seattle Times*, March 30, 1955.