

## Chapter 1

### Why Talk About the End Time?

The last half of 1989 seemed to wake up Seventh-day Adventists. Over and over, as I spoke with church members in various parts of the United States and other areas of the world, I heard them say, “The dramatic events in Eastern Europe are prophetic.” Time and again I read in Adventist magazines that Eastern Europe’s total break from the Communist orbit in less than a year fulfilled Ellen White’s prediction that “the final movements will be rapid ones” (*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 11).

Hard on the heels of those developments came Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Desert Storm, and George Bush’s talk about a “new world order.” Again, startled Seventh-day Adventists sat up and said to themselves, “Something’s going on here. The time of the end is upon us!”

The dust had scarcely settled on Desert Storm when the Soviet Union erupted again. Hard-line Communists attempted a coup, and the Russian people exploded. They took their political future into their own hands, and, as it appears at this writing, set their nation on a permanent course to democracy.

Such rapidly multiplying signs of the end threaten to put Adventists and other Christians into sensory overload! Who knows what will happen next? By the time you read these words, the events I just mentioned may have been superseded by other developments far more dramatic and far more prophetic.

In light of this growing sense of the approaching end of the world, it seems appropriate to examine again what Scripture and Ellen White tell us the end time will be like, and to ask ourselves, Are the final events really upon us? As the future unfolds, this understanding of last-day events can help us relate to them with maturity rather than fanaticism.

Webster defines a primer as “a textbook giving the first principles of any subject” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, third college edition). If I were to give one reason above all others why I wrote this book, it would be to provide Adventists in the last decade of the twentieth century with a primer on eschatology - a textbook giving the

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first principles of end-time events as Adventists have historically understood them.

Something a friend told me recently impressed on my mind the need for this review of our teachings about the end time. In the course of our conversation, I mentioned the latter rain, and she asked me what that meant. I explained to her briefly about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days.

“I remember talking about that in academy Bible class,” she replied, “but that’s been a long time ago. I don’t always remember what those things mean.”

I believe many Adventists, like my friend, are not familiar with the understanding of end-time events as it was taught by our pioneers, especially Ellen White. Perhaps a majority in our church today have not had the advantage of attending an Adventist academy or college, either because as Adventist young people they attended public schools or because they joined the church as adults. Their exposure to the Adventist understanding of end-time events has been limited to Sabbath School, the pastor’s sermon, and an occasional magazine article. And, as my friend confessed, many Adventists who studied these things years ago in academy or college have forgotten what they mean.

I want this book to help fill that gap in our understanding.

What about Ellen White?

Adventist eschatology has been profoundly influenced by Ellen White. Here probably more than in any other area of study, we turn to her writings in combination with Scripture when we want an authoritative opinion from the Lord. I believe this is perfectly appropriate. God gave us a prophet at this time to help us prepare for the final days of earth’s history. It should come as no surprise, then, to find that prophet expanding greatly our understanding of what is to happen just before Jesus comes and how to prepare ourselves and others to meet the crisis.

I recognize that in the past some of us exaggerated Ellen White’s infallibility and attempted to give her an authority over our understanding of Scripture that she herself did not claim. For example, the church’s leadership during the late 1880s tried repeatedly to get her to take a position on the identity of the law in Galatians, but she refused. She told the brethren to ask the Bible that question.

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I believe we should do the same with prophecy. We must search Daniel, Revelation, the Old Testament prophets, and the prophetic views of the apostle Paul for ourselves, and not let Ellen White be our primary interpreter of these books. However, we need a balance. Some Adventists today almost seem embarrassed and apologetic about Ellen White. That, too, is unfortunate. I agree that we should use the Bible and the Bible only when we are writing and speaking to those who are not Adventists. However, Ellen White received specific instruction about end-time events, and if she was God's messenger to the remnant, then we who are the remnant ought to take her seriously.

I believe it is perfectly valid to interpret current events in light of what Ellen White foretold. If God really did tell her what the world will be like at the end of time, then we ought to be able to see trends in current events that are a fulfillment of what she wrote. So please do not be troubled when I quote a great deal from Ellen White. One important reason I am writing this book is to help Adventists understand what she said about the end time. My purpose is to organize her thoughts about the future together with Scripture to make them more easily understood.

In some cases Ellen White unfolded in great detail ideas that Scripture only suggests. That bothers some people, because they think she is adding to the Bible. They don't want to believe anything she said unless it can be found stated just as clearly in the Bible. I disagree with such restrictions on Ellen White. Why would God have bothered to give us another prophet if all she ever did was to repeat what Scripture says? New light has to be truly new light, and not simply a repeat of the old light.

Unfortunately, some Adventists have fallen into the trap of interpreting prophecy by the headlines in the newspaper. Adventists aren't the only ones who do that. In fact, we probably do it less than dispensationalist evangelical Protestants of other faiths who tend to interpret every event in the Middle East as a sign that the Russians are about to descend on Israel or that the temple is about to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Some dispensationalists got so excited over the war in Iraq and Kuwait that they almost lost their ability to reason sensibly. I'm glad Adventists didn't do that.

Yet we scarcely fare better when it comes to future events that are meaningful to us. Let the slightest hint of a Sunday law show up in the news, and outcome the charts of last-day events. All of a sudden some

of us have it figured out down to the year when the latter rain will be poured out and probation will close.

Events or trends?

I believe we should be very cautious about interpreting any one event as the fulfillment of a particular Bible prophecy. Trends are much more valid than single events as indicators of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. For example, when Mussolini returned the Vatican to Rome in 1929, many Adventists said, "The deadly wound is healed." No it wasn't. That was only one small piece very early in a long process that is still going on. Ronald Reagan's appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican in 1984 was not the healing of the deadly wound either, nor was Gorbachev's reconciliation with Rome in 1989. But, taken together, these events form a trend that is leading toward the healing of the deadly wound. And that, in my opinion, is a valid way to interpret prophecy, whether from the Bible or Ellen White.

Viewed in this way, I believe it is possible even to see the world's conflict with Iraq in 1991 as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. With all due respect to the dispensationalists, that war is not mentioned in Daniel or Revelation or the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament. But the context of the war and the alignment of nations that arose out of it are significant as trends that appear to be fulfilling Bible prophecy. I will have more to say about that later in this book.

While I believe we need to be careful how we interpret, I believe that we must interpret. Interpretation of Ellen White's views on last-day events is even more important today because we live between 70 and 140 years from the time she wrote. I think most Adventist scholars would agree that she wrote of earth's final events in the context of her own time. Now we must understand her predictions in the light of what is happening in our day, which is significantly different from hers in a variety of ways, not the least of which is the much greater speed with which history is unfolding today.

You will find that I have done considerable interpretation in this book - considerable application to our own time of what Scripture and Ellen White say about the end time. I do not claim that my conclusions are 100 percent accurate. However, I believe we have a responsibility to try to understand our own times in light of Bible prophecy. This book is my effort to fulfill that responsibility. I present my views both to encourage God's people to prepare for the end time and also with the hope that where my interpretations are unwarranted, others will

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provide the needed correction. I hope you will not hesitate to do that. For my part, I promise not to argue.

### Chronological charts

A word about charts. Because of the misuse some Adventists have made of them, I am a bit reluctant to create charts. I am particularly opposed to charts that try to fit every last detail into one single flow of events. I find Ellen White quite consistent in her view of the broad sweep of end-time events but often rather hazy about the details. I don't think, for example, that it's possible to nail down exactly when the shaking, the latter rain, and the loud cry will begin or end in relation to a supposed first, second, or third national Sunday law.

However, there is a certain chronological order to Ellen White's view of the end time, and in some cases diagramming this broad outline on a chart can aid understanding. For that reason, where it seems that a chart or diagram would help the reader to understand a point, I have provided one.

You will find, however, that I have not combined the information from the individual charts scattered throughout the book into a single "master chart" at the end. Such a chart would no doubt satisfy some people's curiosity, but I don't think it would make the points I stress in the various chapters any easier to understand. If you would like to have such a chart, I encourage you to create your own. The review of the evidence and the effort to put everything together will fix the chronology of the end time in your mind much better than had I done it for you.

### Spiritual issues of the end time

"But our salvation doesn't depend on understanding every jot and tittle of end-time events," you say. "Why not focus on the love of God and developing a relationship with Jesus?"

That very question brings into focus the dual purpose of this book: prophetic events and the spiritual message that arises out of them. Unfortunately, in their fascination with the "what" and the "when" of last-day events, Adventists have too often ignored the spiritual issues involved. Understanding the order of events is important. It's just not most important. Most important is developing a relationship with Jesus that will see us through those times. In the context of spiritual relationships, understanding the order of last-day events can be very

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helpful. In the following statement Ellen White stressed this combination of prophetic events and their spiritual implication:

The student... should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found (Education, p. 190).

Notice the two points Ellen White emphasized: Tracing the great controversy through history and prophecy, and recognizing its influence in one's own life. Prophetic events and spiritual life are the theme of this book. And nothing is more important than the last sentence of Ellen White's paragraph: "Whether he will or not, he [the student] is even now deciding upon which side of the great controversy he will be found." The choices you and I are making today, this very moment, will become the determining factors in the ultimate choices we make when the end time is upon us.

I hope you find this book interesting and informative, but most of all, I hope you find it spiritually uplifting. My greatest hope is that it will help many of God's people to keep their relationship with Jesus who otherwise might fall by the way in earth's darkest hour.