

When Time Was Supposed to Be No More

Part 1

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For years, in teaching Church History at Oregon Bible College, and then Atlanta Bible College, one of the joyful sections of the course for me was the formation of the Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith. As prelude to that formation, considerable time was spent on the Millerite/Millenarian movement that culminated in 1844 in what is termed “The Great Disappointment,” when the promise of Christ’s literal return to the earth was not fulfilled.

My own heart was strongly touched by the depth of the passionate preaching of Christ’s imminent return, and even more deeply touched by the disappointment, embarrassment and despair felt by those who had committed their lives to this truth.

In a previous paper presented at the second Theological Conference, I explored the movement itself, and only briefly touched on the response of the Adventists subsequent to the Great Disappointment. For the most part, those reactions come from recollections years later. The few immediate reactions always made me wish for access to materials from that immediate time.

*This article will be the beginning of an in-depth study of *The Voice of Truth and Glad Tidings of the Kingdom at Hand*, published by Joseph Marsh, former editor of the *Christian Palladium (Christian Connexion)*, who was dismissed from the *Palladium* because of his millennialism. The years 1844 and 1845 were central to those caught up in this brilliant, meteoric movement, and reveal to us the depths of their profound, though misguided faith. This article will explore the truths that drove this early movement, and those which continue to be central to small groups that continue from that time.*

Background to the Millerite Movement

The entire area of up-state New York was fertile soil for the fervent, passionate message of the literal return of Jesus to this earth. The ground had been fertilized by Charles Finney and other revivalists in what Whitney Cross termed “The Burned-Over District.” The area had been covered by evangelists such as Finney and many others since the early 1820s, culminating in the great revivals in Rochester in 1829.

Not limited to up-state New York, William Miller began his work in Low Hampton, Vermont. But his local lectures caught the spirit of the area, termed “ultraist” by Cross, where any new view was latched onto with great enthusiasm. With J.V. Himes trumpeting Miller, the cause moved on to Boston, Philadelphia and even New York City.

Originally Miller was reluctant to set dates, but pressed, he finally said he felt confident that Jesus would return literally sometime in the year between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. When that date passed there was real disappointment, but they had not yet generated the excitement and frenzy that would come later, when they would fall from an even greater height.

In the February 15, 1844 issue of *VT (The Voice of Truth and Glad Tidings of the Kingdom at Hand)*, William Miller wrote a letter:

Dear Brethren,

Time rolls on his restless course. We are one more year down its rapid stream towards the ocean of eternity. We have passed what the world calls the last round of 1843, and already they begin to shout victory over us. Does your heart begin to quail? Are you ready to give up your hope in the blessed appearing of Jesus Christ? or are you waiting for it, although it seems to us that it tarryes? Let me say to you, by the language of the blessed book of God, “although it tarry, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not tarry.” Never has my faith been stronger than at this very moment. I feel confident the Savior will come and in this true Jewish year; in 2300 days in the decree given... Artaxerxes in the seventh year of his reign, the end will come, or in 2520 years from the captivity of Manasseh, the children of God will be delivered from their bondage to the kings of the earth, in 2450 years from the time when the Jews ceased keeping their Jubilee, and the land was left desolate and their enemies dwelt therein, the great Jubilee will come, and the people of God will enter into the peaceful possession of the promised land and eternal _____;¹ and also in 1335 years from the taking away of the _____ power, the resurrection of the saints, and when the seventh trumpet begins to sound, the mystery of God will be finished; all that he hath declared by his servants the prophets.

These are some of the reasons why I believe that Jesus will come this Jewish year. I have confidence in God’s word; it will not fail: and we may depend on it: all men will acknowledge that God is true to his name, as well as to the _____ of his Judgment.

I call heaven and yourselves to witness, my brethren, that I have never taught anything to make you throw away any part of God’s word. I have never pretended to preach anything but the Bible. I have used no

¹ The blanks indicate places where the text of *The Voice of Truth* is not legible.

sophistry. My preaching has not been with words of man's wisdom. I have not countenanced fanaticism in any form. I use no dreams or visions, except those in the word of God — I have not advised any one to separate from the church to which they may have belonged, unless their brethren cast them out, or deny them religious privileges. I have taught you no precept of man: nor the creed of any sect, or to give you a nickname; this the enemies of Christ's second advent have done: and we must patiently bear it until he comes: and then he will take away our reproach. I have wronged no man: neither have I sought for honors or gold. I have preached about 4,500 lectures in about twelve years to at least 500,000 different people. I have broken my constitution and lost my health: and for what?

That if possible, I might be the means of saving some. How many have been saved by these means, I cannot tell; God knows: to him be all the glory. In one thing have I great reason to rejoice. I believe I have never lectured in any place, but God has been with me and given some fruits of his Spirit as an evident token of truth. I have never preached or believed in any time for Christ to come but the end of the prophetic periods, which I have always believed would end with this Jewish year: and which I still believe, and mean, with the help of God, to look for until he comes.

This lengthy citation shows the confidence of the movement as March 21, 1844 approached. It would be the end of time, as they understood the Bible to teach, and as Miller articulated. In retrospect, we see how they were building up for the Great Disappointment that was soon to come, initially at the end of March, and later, and more profoundly, in October.

In the same issue, in his editorial, Joseph Marsh wrote:

The Advent cause has now nearly reached the great crisis in its unparalleled history. The "fullness" of all the prophetic "times" will soon be complete: then "all things in Christ will be gathered together in him," at his glorious coming. None will be gathered, in that glorious morn, but those who will be found "purified, and made white, and tried."

As they believed the return of Jesus was just over one month off, they continued to press their case in preaching and reaching others with the news about his return. Again in this issue, we note this advertisement of a Second Advent Conference: "It has been thought advisable, by the friends of the Advent cause in this vicinity, to hold a Second Advent Conference in this city, to commence on the first Wednesday in March next, at Talman Hall, at ten o'clock. AJW."

Less than two weeks before they believed Christ would return, they were still trying to reach others with this truth.

In the March 22, 1844 issue, in the days before Christ was supposed to appear, the *VT* expressed some ambiguity about the exactness of the date-setting, but still a fervency for the message of Christ's soon return.

Elon Galusha wrote, in the lead article of that issue:

Beloved Brethren: Allow me in all kindness and humility to urge upon you a serious and candid consideration of the present crisis. To me it appears that we are on the last crumbling verge of time.

To those who believe the end is nigh: — Dear brethren, be watchful — be prayerful — be humble — be holy; believe all that God has spoken — do all he has commanded: — breathe a spirit of kindness to all — avoid the spirit of controversy — pray and labor for the salvation of sinners; — fix not your faith on March or April, but on the Jewish year 1843 which, should it prove to be civil instead of the sacred year, may extend to September. But be instantly and constantly ready, as we have no assurance of another day. We have evidently entered upon the last year of prophetic time — and can see nothing beyond but the eternal state. The prophetic period, the sign of the Savior's coming, and the end of the world blaze around us, and bid us trim our lamps, gird our loins, be sober, and hope to the end.

Dear impenitent reader, — receive a friendly warning: it may be the last — You may soon hear the trump of God, and see the dead in Christ arise, feel the earth tremble beneath your feet, and behold the Judge descending from the parting skies! And should the time seem to have passed away, and Belshazzar-like, you should spread the bacchanalian feast, deride our hope, and insult our God, your triumph will be short: — The song of revelry soon will cease — the voice of truth heard no more forever — the chilling horror will suddenly seize upon you — the sheltering rocks will not protect you — the falling mountains will not hide you — the fiery stream will not spare you — the wail of anguish will not relieve you — Nor gushing fears — nor Mercy's name — nor bleeding Lamb — will then avail you. "Now is the accepted time — now is the day of salvation." Now, while the last tide may be ebbing — while the last sand may be falling — fly to Jesus — swiftly fly — your sins confess — for mercy plead — while He is on the mercy seat. Your unworthy servant for Jesus' sake, Elon Galusha.

Their passion and deep concern is evident, and it can be seen that they had already experienced persecution and ridicule. The "disappointment" soon to come would only exacerbate the embarrassment of their deeply held convictions being proved wrong. Yet they felt so certain that they had carefully studied the

Scriptures and correctly interpreted them, that they pressed on zealously.

Marsh himself wrote in that same March 22 issue:

We have laid over some valuable communications, which were designed for this number, to give place to Elder Galusha's article. The Lord willing, our next number will be issued immediately after this is sent out. What we now do must be done quickly, for the Lord is truly at hand. Be ready to meet him.

Elsewhere in the issue he wrote, "Reader, reject not this sheet by giving it a careless reading, or by throwing it aside. It may be your last call to prepare to meet your God. Oh, listen to his voice while you have opportunity to repent! Soon — very soon, it will be too late."

By the April 27 issue, though the message of readiness continued, there was a change in tone, and an indication of uncertainty becomes apparent. In his lead article C.B. Hotchkiss indicated that there must be something not quite on schedule: "The signs of the times, the providence of God, as well as the apparent harmony of the prophetic numbers, all admonish us to give heed to our Savior's exhortation: 'Watch! for though the vision tarry, wait for it, for it will surely come: it will not tarry.'"

Later in the same article he said:

However much this assurance has been the comfort of God's people in past days, yet, in a special manner, must it be to those who come down to the time when the vision shall be made plain upon tables; and which, to those who exercise faith upon the promises, would have their faith tried by the fact, that to them the vision would appear to tarry.

Throughout this issue we see indications that Marsh wanted to give some explanation of why Jesus did not return. He went into a lengthy interpretation of prophetic Scriptures, but with an air of uncertainty. Note the first lines of succeeding paragraphs in the Hotchkiss article:

"Just so for then, as the crucifixion fell short of the full time..."

"We think the 1260 days run out in February 1798...The termination of this may be the time of the end, which appears to be found..."

"There is some evidence to believe..."

"The distance of time between these events we profess not to know..."

The tone takes on a slight note of desperation, and a bit of anger and bitterness shows. In a short article in the issue entitled "No Difference Now," the author posed the question:

They say, there is no difference now between us since "the time is past": we all believe in the coming of Christ...If there is no difference why do they treat with utter neglect, if not with contempt, those Advent hymns found in their own hymn books...Why do they not preach the near

coming of the resurrection...and why do they not proclaim the fulfillment of the signs of Christ's coming, expose the corruption of the church and the world, and come out of Babylon, as God commands?

The attitude of other churches toward the Adventists had generally been one of neutrality or mild disdain, but the ones who had doubted their message were becoming bolder in denouncing the Adventists, especially as it began to appear evident that their message had been wrong about Christ's soon and literal return. But for the Adventists, there was not much to do except watch and wait.

Another short article in this issue stated:

Many have reached the point where they expected to meet the Lord. He has not come, and the inquiry is made. What will you do now? Do? Why, just what he has told us to do. He has told us to wait, "to watch and pray" and be "ready, for ye know not at what hour" your Lord will come. We now stand where we should look for him hourly.

In his letter of April 12, 1844, Butler Morley expressed the importance of patience to God's people:

Great patience is necessary, also, in view of the peculiar perils of the present time — when multitudes are professing to be ready for, and loving the appearance of the Savior, whose desire for it is not strong enough to require the least patience to balance it. Beloved, be not deceived, they that sow to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting: and in due season, if they faint not. Let all who are thus sowing and laboring without fainting, remember that God is not slack concerning his promises. He will "create new heavens and a new earth" — He will "make all things new" — He will see you again and your heart shall rejoice forever. "Then let patience have her perfect work, that when you shall be weighed in the balance, you may not be found wanting."

It is evident in looking over these issues how the tenor of the message changed. It moved from one of supreme confidence to one less confident, yet strident in its assurance of being correct.

In the issues of *VT* between April and August, while the cause was still strongly encouraged and proclaimed, it also becomes more and more evident that there were many now strongly opposing both the messengers and the message of the literal advent of Jesus. In the May 11 issue of *VT*, O. Irish wrote, "Our little advent band continues to hold on, looking for the speedy coming of our Lord, although they are ridiculed by the heedless throng about the time being past. Their faith is strong as ever."

In the May 18 issue we see more of the same. One article is entitled "Any Thing to Put Down Millerism." Another lengthy article was to answer the critical

pamphlet entitled, "Review of the Doctrines and Prophetical Chronology of Mr. William Miller, by an Israelite. Toronto. Canada West." Marsh also published a lengthy rebuttal by William Miller of a Professor Bush's "Reasons for Rejecting Mr. Miller's Views of the Advent" and informed the readers that an entire booklet was available with the complete refutation.

In the June 1 issue of *VT*, two doctrines that would become part of the Adventist movement began to appear: the "shut door," and the issue of "indefinite time." Marsh wrote:

An opinion (it cannot be called faith for it is without evidence) is being entertained by some of our brethren, some lecturers, that the day of grace is already past...This temptation should be resisted with fervent prayer: and instead of slackening our hands, or feeling less concern for the salvation of souls, we should feel a deeper concern, and labor with renewed diligence to save them.

One of the strong temptations of the present time doubtless is an inducement to defer the time of the Lord's coming to some remote indefinite period...God has provided a permanent object for this important purpose: and that object is a definite point in time which we should constantly be looking for the coming of the Lord...That point is now hourly.

By now the *VT* had become a weekly, when six months earlier it had been published monthly. The intensity was beginning to build toward what soon became the newly established "definite time," October 22, 1844.

The Adventist movement was regaining a bit of bravado as it sought to counter the effects of Christ not having returned. Marsh wrote in the June 22, 1844 issue a short article entitled "Another Thorn in Their Crown":

Our opponents are now making all the capital they can of Br. Miller's recent acknowledgment that he was mistaken relative to the Lord's coming in A.D. 1843. It furnishes them a new text to preach, and write, and publish their falsehoods about. The facts in the case are, Br. Miller had acknowledged just what we all have, and no more: viz: that he was mistaken relative to the precise time, but still most fully believes and preaches, that the mistake can only be of a short time, the Lord may come at any moment.

In a letter sent June 22, but printed in the July 6 issue, Samuel Snow proposed startling new insights, and gave a new date — October 22, 1844:

About the first of last January I felt it my imperative duty to impart to the world, and especially to the Advent band, the light which my heavenly Father had given me, concerning the termination of the prophetic periods. I had been previously quite strong in the belief with

Adventists generally, that the 6000 years of this world or age — the seven times of the Gentiles — the 2300 days of Dan. 8 and the 1335 days of Dan. 12 must end with the Jewish year 1843. I had preached accordingly...It was necessary that a mistake should be made in regard to the ending of the days, and that this mistake should be general among the expectants of the kingdom, in order that their faith might be tried: and that a wicked world and a world-loving church might have ample opportunity to manifest their hatred to our blessed Lord's appearing — to mock and scoff and harden themselves in their sin, and ripen for their coming destruction.

After thus commanding his people, in verse 45 (Jeremiah 51), to go out of Babylon, he proceeds, in verse 46, to give them a precious word of caution and encouragement, "And lest your heart faint, and ye fear (___) the rumor that shall be heard in the land: a rumor shall both come one year, and after that there shall come in another year a rumor and violence in the land, ruler against ruler. What is the rumor here spoken of? It is the Advent message. And what is the first year of the message? It is the Jewish year 1843. As God foresaw the passing of that year of the rumor, he saw it necessary, lest the hearts of his people should faint and be fearful, to forewarn them that there should come another message, and in another year after the first.

This was clearly unfolded to me, who am the least of all the saints, before the passing by of the first year of the (___). I felt it my indispensable duty to proclaim to the world and to the dear brethren and sisters of the Advent, that the periods could not terminate before the seventh month of the Jewish sacred year in A.D. 1844. I could not rest unless I proclaimed this truth.

A response was not immediately forthcoming. It wasn't until an August 5th letter, published in *VT* (August 21, 1844), that Snow's message seems to have made a dramatic impact, bringing together the scattered elements of the movement into a final thrust, or spasm, of proclamation.

Again note the detail with which Snow made his case:

Dear Bro. Marsh — I feel a strong desire to address a few words to the dear brethren scattered abroad through the *Voice of Truth*, concerning the "times and seasons."

About a year ago I was led to examine the types of the first and second advents of our blessed Lord...I saw clearly as Jesus died on the cross on the day of the killing of the Passover lamb — as he rose from the dead on the day of the offering of the wave-sheaf, the first fruits of the harvest — and as the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, on the fiftieth day, which was the anniversary of the Lord's descent to

fire and smoke and tempest, at the giving of the Mosaic Law, which was a type or shadow of good things to come, so we had the very best of reasons for believing that our Lord would come the second time on the day of atonement, the same day in which the Jewish high priest, who is a type of our High Priest, came out of the Holy of Holies, having accomplished the work of atonement, and blessed the waiting congregation of Israel. That the great jubilee of jubilees would come, and the great trumpet would be blown...I therefore saw that we must expect the coming of the King on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish sacred year.

At that time I believed, and was proclaiming, that the prophetic periods would end in A.D. 1843. Consequently, I was expecting to see my blessed Savior last autumn. But the time passed, and I did not realize my expectations. I felt disappointed — but not in the last degree staggered in my faith. But yet, there was somewhere a mistake. At first I thought it must be in the chronological dates...But I was somewhat surprised to find that the error was not in the chronology, but in our mode of calculating the prophetic periods: and if the dates were correct the periods could not possibly terminate before the autumn of A.D. 1844.

Since last January I have, by preaching and writing, been to some extent proclaiming to those who are looking for the Lord and to others these views concerning the time. And although I have been called to encounter many obstacles, not the least of which has been the opposition of brethren whom I love and who were stereotyped to '43...

As it was in B.C. 677 that the final captivity of Israel occurred, and as the kingly power and independence of Judah was broken in the same year, it must have been in the late autumn of the year that Manasseh was taken captive. Had the 2520 years begun with the first day of B.C. 677, they could not have ended before the first day of A.D. 1844: as it would require all of 677 and all of 1843 to make the period complete. As it did not begin before the autumn it cannot end before the autumn of A.D. 1844. In a future communication I intend, the Lord willing, to show the commencement and termination of the 2300 days.

Yours in the hope,
S. Snow

This was it! It was what they had longed to hear — “a sure word of prophecy.” Efforts began to mount. In the August 28 issue Marsh announced he would print an extra 20,000 copies of the next issue, a special appeal to the unconverted. In that issue, he announced that the next would have 10,000 extra copies. In that September 11 issue, Marsh wrote:

We print TEN THOUSAND extra copies of this number for general distribution. We want them immediately circulated. Our time for benefiting our fellow beings is evidently short. If Bro. Snow has given us the true light on the termination of the prophetic numbers, as published in this number, then most certainly the Judge is truly standing at the door. We cannot see why Br. Snow is not correct.

In the September 18 issue two letters from Snow were featured, and in the issue of the 25th, Snow had the lead article. Marsh revealed the Herculean effort that was being made. In his editorial titled "Seventh Month," Marsh wrote:

Br. G.W. Peavey has given us three lectures on the coming of Christ on the tenth day of the seventh month. The effect of this proclamation in this city has been most salutary in waking up the slumbering and sleeping virgins, to make a full preparation to meet the Lord. Joy, of course, fills every heart which fully believes this message. And we cannot see why it is not true: the weight of testimony is certainly in favor of this conclusion. Duty therefore is clear, viz. to proclaim the glad tidings with as little delay as possible. Hence we have gathered what light we could in so short a time, and given it in this number, and printed fifteen thousand extra copies for general distribution.

With time drawing toward the October deadline, the efforts accelerated and intensified. The lead article by George Storrs in the October 26 issue was entitled, "Go Ye Out to Meet Him," indicating the immediacy of the expectation. Marsh, in his editorial entitled, "Prepare to Meet the Lord," was direct and bold:

My brother or sister, are you ready to meet the Lord? — Understand me: I do not ask whether you mean to get ready at some future time: but are you ready now is the important question I wish you to answer to your God immediately. We cannot enter into a detail of the necessary qualifications to meet the Lord in peace. It would be a waste of time to do it. You know what they are — and if you lack any of them you know it. Your heart and your God condemn you...Deal faithfully with yourself at this momentous period. If you cannot, with most confidence, answer the question, "Am I ready now?" then lose no time in making the necessary preparation.

We say lose no time: for the Lord will doubtless come within a few days. Then he that is filthy or unholy will be so still: the door of salvation will be forever closed against such. It is now open: and the last invitations, the last warnings for you to enter are now being given...O prepare, prepare to meet the Lord. The evidence of your preparation will be pure desire and love for his appearing NOW.

Marsh printed an extra thirty thousand copies of the last number, and indicated a willingness to print more. He added, "Send your orders, with or without the cash. We want them circulated: but a few days more and our work will be done." His and their passion is evident in every line and letter of this issue. Br. L. Crocker of Fredonia, New York wrote, "The Advent cause never looked so glorious as at present." Sister L.M. Mersey of Syracuse wrote, "We are having a glorious time here: sinners have been converted and backsliders reclaimed. The Lord is with us in power, and giving life to the truth of the termination of the prophetic numbers this autumn, even the tenth day of the seventh month."

The acceleration continued to increase. The issue of October 9 was quickly followed by one the very next day. Marsh said that they had printed an extra fifty thousand copies of numbers nine and ten. He noted that Br. Himes had abandoned his planned trip to England. He concluded his editorial with these words:

Others have clearly presented the case, and to us the evidence is conclusive that the Lord will come on the tenth day of the seventh month, or the present October, about the 22nd day...Our work here will soon be closed. A few days more and we will enter upon the saints' everlasting rest. O glorious hope: my brother or sister, is this hope yours? Or are you still clinging to this world and full of doubts relative to your preparation to meet the Lord?...Rest not a moment until you have the fullest assurance that you are ready to meet the Bride.

Another issue, number 13, printed on October 12, came quickly on the heels of the previous two, and it too had "extra thousands" printed. Already the extra thousands of numbers 9 and 10 had been distributed, and while there was still some of number 12 left, they were going quickly. In the last issue before the supposed end of the age of man, October 17, Marsh wrote that in the previous three weeks "not far from One Hundred Thousand Extra copies of the *Voice of Truth* have been circulated." An October 6th letter from Bro. William Miller closed the last issue before the Great Disappointment. He wrote:

This, then, shows clearly that Christ will come and save his people, before the time of trouble can be accomplished: and I now do not know of a single text which disproves Christ's coming this 7th month, and I have no drawback in my mind. If he does not come within 20 or 25 days, I shall feel twice the disappointment I did this spring. But says my unbelieving neighbor, "If you will be disappointed again, we will not pity you if you fail." Then so it must be. But one thing I do know; there is glory in my soul now: and I will not spoil that by doubting, when I have no reason to doubt.

What bitterness awaited them just days hence. But what magnificent courage and boldness of faith inspired them in these last days before their expectation of Christ's return. Such heroic courage is to be admired.

In the next issue part 2 of this article will explore the subsequent days and their response following the Great Disappointment.