

On Making 1844 Meaningful

BY C. MERVYN MAXWELL

How can we make 1844 seem meaningful to children in this sesquicentennial¹ year, 1994, a century and a half after the Great Disappointment?

One way to make 1844 seem important is to show how it affects almost everything we believe. It adds so much to our understanding of Jesus, salvation, the Sabbath, global mission, life-style, and the nearness of the Second Coming that at one time Ellen G. White said, “The sanctuary question is the foundation of our faith.”² She meant that 1844 so enlarges our understanding of Christ and of many Bible teachings that a new denomination was required to spread the word about it.

We have often spoken of our responsibility to proclaim the three angels’ messages (Revelation 14:6-12). The first angel announced, “The hour of his judgment has come.” The hour for the judgment to begin fell in 1844; so the time for the first angel to start preaching was 1844 (or a few years before, to help get people ready). But the first angel talks about other things in addition to the judgment—and it is also followed by the second and third angels. Thus, 1844 marked the time for paying special attention not only to the judgment hour, but also to all the other momentous topics included in the three angels’ messages.

A journal article is too short to cover all the important items! A number of helpful new books and articles have been written about the events surrounding the Great Disappointment (see Gary Land’s annotated bibliography on page 36). Included in these is a new book I have written, *Magnificent Disappointment: What Really Happened in 1844 . . . and Its Meaning for Today*. The title comes from the observation that although the “great disappointment” of October 22, 1844, seemed like a very dark cloud at the time, it turned out to have a silver lining so bright that it can be

called a “magnificent disappointment.” The silver lining was Jesus Himself and the marvelous new things He was about to teach us and do for us.

Here are a few additional suggestions for making 1844 meaningful to your students:

The year 1844, at the end of the 2300 days (along with 1798, at the end of the 1260 days), is a great pillar past which humanity marched into the end time. The year 1844 marks the beginning of the investigative judgment, the first phase of God’s final judgment. Thus, 1844 is a major signpost telling us how close we are to the end of the world.

But to many people—and especially to young people—1844 seems like a long time

ago. How can we show them that it is indeed a “sign” that Jesus is coming *soon*?

A teaching procedure I have used often is to form a *living time line* running from Creation to the end of the world, with 1844 located proportionately near the end. The longer the time line, the more impressive the effect; so you would do well to form your time line in the assembly hall or gym.

Explain what you are doing. 1844 may seem like a long time ago when we look backward from our day, but it seems very close to the end of time when viewed from Adam’s day.

Ask the children to imagine a time line stretching between the side walls of the assembly hall or gym. This represents approxi-

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mately 6,000 years, the length of time between Adam's day and ours, according to Bible chronology. Have a child stand at the far left point of the time chart to represent Adam or Eve. Then ask a child to choose the point along this imaginary line that represents the date of the cross. (To relieve possible embarrassment by the student's having to represent Jesus, point out that we are all called to represent Jesus every day.) After accepting suggestions from the other students, place "Jesus" about two-thirds of the way along the time line, some 2,000 years ago and 4,000 years after Adam and Eve.

Locate "David" at the mid-point of the line, approximately 1000 B.C. Then have "Abraham" stand near 1800 B.C. and "Moses" at 1445 B.C., about 500 years before David. Put "Daniel" some 500 years after "David" (midway between David and Jesus). Locate a "Roman soldier" representing the fall of Rome (A.D. 476) and "Columbus" (A.D. 1492). Then place a child a mere 150 years back from our day to represent 1844.

Be sure to include girls in the time line. "Sarah" can replace Abraham, "Miriam" can do as well as Moses, "Mary" can stand or kneel at the cross, and "Mrs. Columbus" can easily replace her husband.

If your class is large, or if you form this time line at an assembly session, having the

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participants identify themselves will help the other children remember whom they represent. One way of doing this is to have each person carry a name card. A more interesting way is to have each participant perform a characteristic action *when referred to*. For example, "Moses" can hold up the Ten Commandments, "David" can twirl his sling, and "1844" can announce loudly, "The hour of His judgment has come." (Girl participants can think of other actions, like Sarah laughing with joy over baby Isaac, Miriam caring for baby Moses,

Mary kneeling and weeping at the cross, Mrs. Columbus waving goodbye, and so on.)

Having located the participants along the living time line, go to the Eden end of the time line (the left wall as viewed from the congregation), and pretend that you are joining Adam and Eve as they weep for their sin and search the future to find the cross. Hold a "telescope" to one eye to help in your search. After 2,200 years (nearly 11 times the age of the United States and almost the same length of time human beings have lived since the cross!) you have only passed the Flood and reached "Abraham"/"Sarah." As you mention the name, have the child briefly do the designated action.

Keep searching. After some 350 additional years, nearly twice the age of the U.S.A., you can see only as far as "Moses"/"Miriam" (prompt appropriate action). And so on.

When you reach the cross, you let out an exclamation, "Adam, Eve! There it is, the cross of Jesus!" "We are so happy for Adam and Eve," you say to your class or student body, "but we want to find 1844 and the end time and the three angels' messages and the Second Coming." Picking up the "telescope" and again putting it to your eye, search on, finding the fall of Rome 500 years after the cross; then Columbus, more than a *thousand* years after the fall of Rome (more than four times

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the history of the U.S.A.)—and you still haven't come to the Pilgrim Fathers or the Declaration of Independence. "The search has taken so long," you say, "that the day has grown late. Sunset clouds are forming in the distance. Ah, look! There they are! There, in the sunset clouds of the end time, the three angels are flying. And there at last is 1844."

As you say, "There at last is 1844," the participant who is "1844" shouts loudly, "The hour of His judgment has come!"

If you explain this process clearly, step by step, all the children who are old enough to understand will see that 1844 really is near the end of time. Show them that 97.5 percent of human history was lived before 1844. We are down in the final 2.5 percent of time.³

Making the Heavenly Event Real

Our pioneers and many of our leading writers since then have clearly understood that in 1844 both Father and Son moved from one part of heaven to another. For example, Joseph Bates, one of the cofounders of our movement, wrote in 1850:

Jesus was sitting with His Father on His throne in the Holy, where the seven lamps of fire were. Then at the appointed time, 2300 days, the Ancient of Days moves in something that has wheels burning like fire, with thousands of angels in attendance. Then one like the Son of Man is brought near before Him, 13th verse [of Dan. 7], . . . How evident that both Father and Son here left the throne in the Holy and moved into the Most Holy, in accordance also with, and close of, the message of the flying angel in Rev. xiv. 6, 7, to sit in judgment.⁴

This understanding of a tremendous *literal* event helped to stimulate a sense of the importance of 1844.⁵

I find it helpful to renew students' understanding that in 1844 Jesus did in fact move from one part of heaven to another in an event as real as His ascension to heaven and the Second Coming. God has twice described the

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event for us, once in Daniel 7:9-14, 22, and again in *Early Writings*, pages 54 and 55.⁶ Daniel saw the event from the "camera angle" of heaven's vast most holy place. Ellen G. White saw it from the angle of heaven's vast holy place. She saw the Father *going out of the holy place* in 1844 to go into the most holy place and then saw the Son follow Him. Daniel saw the Father *coming into the most holy place*, with the Son following.

After studying these references, teachers of young elementary children can help them "dramatize" the great event. Form two groups, one around the Father's throne, the other around the Son of man. One group could move first, open books, and sing praises as they wait for the Son of man to arrive. Then the other group could move toward the first group and join in the singing as the Son is presented to the Father. You might even have a "Daniel" and a "Mrs. White" viewing the scene with video cameras from their different angles.

After older children have studied Daniel 7:9-14, 22, and *Early Writings*, pages 54, 55,

you can read aloud the discussion of the event from *Magnificent Disappointment*, pages 61-68. You could have them sing, "Christ the Lord, All Power Possessing," No. 415 in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*. (Don't be afraid that they won't be able to sing the grand music to which this hymn is set. Children love to sing great music when they are taught it enthusiastically.)

The painting on the cover of *Magnificent Disappointment* is one artist's (Lars Justinen's) concept of the 1844 event. After studying together the references from Daniel 7 and *Early Writings*, ask your students what changes, if any, they would like to make in the painting. For example, do they think God was floating in the air when Jesus came to meet Him?

Relating 1844 to End-Time Issues

Young people in junior high and academy can be led to analyze the three angels' messages (Revelation 14:6-12) to find how many different topics the angels bring up. All these topics are made especially applicable to our day by the fact that *1844 triggered the first angel's message*, "The hour of his judgment is come." A topical list of such end-time issues could include well over a dozen items, such as a special emphasis on Creation, on Sabbath observance, on true worship and false worship, on the fallenness of most Christian churches, on the mark of the beast, and notably on what it means to be a true, loyal commandment keeper through faith in Jesus. To emphasize these matters is a major reason why our movement exists.

Making such a list can be done in a practical way. For instance, in respect to the mark (characteristics) of the beast, ask, "Although I don't keep Sunday, am I breaking the commandments in respect to videos I watch or books I read?" "I don't persecute saints as the beast did, but do I 'persecute' my mother and brother by the way I talk to them?" "Do I really 'worship' God, responding fully to what

I think He is 'worth?' "If most churches have become 'Babylon,' on what basis can I evaluate such practices as their 'gospel music' or speaking in tongues, and beliefs that may have been influenced by New Age philosophies?" And most importantly, "Am I taking advantage of Christ's help to keep His commandments, not only with regard to the Sabbath, but also about loving God and loving people?"⁷

Is the Investigative Judgment Good News or Bad News?

Before the 1970s, our schools in North America tended to speak of the investigative judgment in ways that seemed threatening. Since then, the emphasis in many cases has shifted to one of complete assurance. A helpful exercise that I have conducted many times is to invite students to find out for themselves whether this phase of the judgment is good news or bad news.

Older students can be divided into two groups and asked to read chapter 28 (chapter 29 in Spanish) of *The Great Controversy*. Ask one group to list all the encouraging, "good news" kinds of things they can find, and the other group to list cautionary, "bad news" things. (Distributing photocopies of the pages for the children to mark up would be helpful.) When they are through, they may find they have about equal numbers of items in each list.

The point of this exercise is to help them see that the phase of the judgment that has been going on since 1844 and is going on *now* is one in which Jesus is most eager to save them and to remember all their good works. However, it is also a serious judgment in which—for the future happiness of everyone concerned—only people who really want to love God and be kind to people can be accepted.

The exercise needs to be done in an earnest but upbeat manner, encouraging youth to see that they are growing *in* Christ and that He is patient and "isn't through with them yet."

See *Magnificent Disappointment*, pages 123-134 for (1) the relationship between cleansing the sanctuary and soul-searching on the day of atonement (pages 126-128), (2) Christ's parable teaching that to remain forgiven we should be forgiving (pages 123, 124), and (3) a portrayal of the joy angels will express when they meet the kind people Jesus told them about in the investigative judgment (pages 129, 130).

1844 and the Time of Trouble

Seventh-day Adventist youth are often very interested in the upcoming time of

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trouble. Help them see that it is 1844 (along with 1798) that teaches us that we are nearing the time of trouble. Thus, 1844 teaches us that we need a kind of preparation that runs directly contrary to many temptations that are influencing young people today.⁸

Demographics indicate that when probation closes, half the world's population will be under 25, mostly under age 20. The thought of preparing Seventh-day Adventist teenagers and juniors to stand individually for Christ when "all the world" worships the beast, and to choose loyalty to Him over buying and selling essential food when billions of their materialistic peers are lining up with the enemy is sobering. The year 1844 has brought us startlingly close to the end of earth's time line. Help your students to discover what preparation is necessary *now*. ☞

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Resources

Articles about 1844 have been appearing all year in the *Adventist Review*. The first, by James R. Nix, in the January 6 *Review* shows how important Jesus was to William Miller.

Adventist Heritage teaching materials have been developed in the Lake Union. They are described by Fred Stephan elsewhere in this issue.

1844 Made Simple, by Clifford Goldstein. *Magnificent Disappointment: What Really Happened in 1844 . . . and Its Meaning for Today* (Pacific Press, 1994).

Tell It to the World, and *Moving Out*, by C. Mervyn Maxwell. Similar books that describe the rise and development of our movement and message in more-or-less story form, adapted to different ages. They have been popular. *Tell It to the World* has sold 10 times the usual number of a Pacific Press book, and is still being sold after 17 years.

An interactive computer program about William Miller has been developed for elementary children by Laurel Damsteegt, 10184 Garr Road, Berrien Springs, MI 49103, (616) 471-5172.

The Great Controversy, chapters 18-28, along with many other writings by Ellen G. White, are of immense significance to our understanding of 1844.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Many children love codes and mysterious big words. You can tell them that when they say "sesquicentennial," they're talking Latin. Well, almost Latin. *Ses* means "a half," *qui* means "and," *cent* means "a hundred," and *ennial* (like *annual*) means "having to do with a year or years." Hence, "sesquicentennial, having to do with a hundred and a half years"—or, simpler but less fun, "a 150th anniversary."

2. Manuscript 20, 1906, in *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 248.

3. For supplementary reading, see *Magnificent Disappointment*, pp. 89-97, especially pp. 91, 92. For all students from the sixth grade onward, consider presenting the counsel in Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1958), book 1, p. 189. See *Magnificent Disappointment*, pp. 96, 97.

4. Joseph Bates, *An Explanation of the Typical and Anti-Typical Sanctuary* (New Bedford, Mass., 1850), p. 10.

5. In the 1950s, the idea of two literal places in the vast heavenly sanctuary, with Father and Son passing from one to the other in 1844, began to be lost sight of in many of our schools in North America, contributing to a reduction in our sense of the importance of the 1844 events. However, the concept of two places was confirmed by vote of the 1980 General Conference in article 8 of the "Outline of Doctrinal Beliefs" for the instruction of baptismal candidates.

6. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1882).

7. See *Magnificent Disappointment*, pp. 152-154.

8. See *ibid.*, pp. 166-168.