

# The Great Disappoint

William Miller, a New York farmer, army captain, and Bible student, is best remembered as the leader of an early American groundswell of enthusiasm for the truth of Christ's second advent. This grassroots stirring of souls, known as the Millerite Movement, unsettled the established churches of the 1830's and 40's, mostly in the northeastern United States.

Church members from all denominations and doctrinal persuasions were attracted to the movement, expecting that the Lord Jesus would soon return in person to judge the nations and bring eternal righteousness. From the time Miller's public ministry began in 1831, large numbers attended the crusades, campmeetings, and conferences that expounded the Second Coming message. Groups of Millerite Adventists, as they were called, sprang up in several states, and whole Adventist denominations later appeared. William Miller never observed the seventh-day Sabbath, however, nor did many Millerites before 1846.

The movement led by Miller was one of several to appear on the religious landscape of mid-nineteenth century America. Two new sects of that era were much further from the Christian mainstream than Miller: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), founded by Joseph Smith, and the Christian Science

Church, began about 1870 by Mary Baker Eddy.

In mainline churches too, waves of renewal swept over much of the young nation as its population spread further westward. Itinerant Baptist and Methodist preachers made their impact on the untamed frontier, and a campmeeting movement further east saw many conversions, along with unorthodox elements of devotion. The fervor swept on to the Atlantic, climaxing in the noon-hour prayer meetings of 1858-60 in New York City. All these elements taken together are called America's Second Great Awakening.

Energized by early waves of this national revival and contributing to it, the Millerite Movement reached its zenith around 1844. For some time, leaders and preachers of an imminent Second Advent had urged William Miller to announce a date when the Lord would appear in clouds of glory. Miller finally yielded, saying that Christ would come within a year of March 1843, based on his study of the 2,300-day prophecy in Daniel 8.

When the year came and went without Jesus' return, Miller and his associates identified their mistake in calculating the year zero between B.C. and A.D. The new date for the Second Advent was fixed on the seventh day of the seventh Hebrew month that year: October 22, 1844.

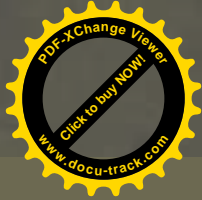
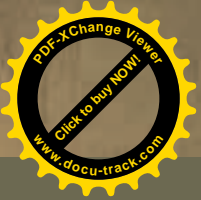
Now the fervor of hard-core

Adventists intensified. As the countdown continued into the summer and early fall of 1844, more individuals and families left the normal pursuits of life to prepare for the marriage supper of the Lamb. By the dozens and hundreds they gathered on October 22, in obedience to the Bible call: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6, KJV).

They came in the evening with intense holy anticipation of seeing the Lord. They returned home the next morning, disheartened and crushed. This was the night of the Great Disappointment.

In the months that followed, the movement led by William Miller crumbled. Some hopeful Adventists were disillusioned and ceased to practice their faith. Many returned to their previous churches. Others retained their confidence that the Second Coming was near, in spite of the Great Disappointment, and continued to carry the Advent message. From the latter, four denominations soon sprang: Adventist Christian Church, Church of God of Abrahamic Faith, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Church of God (Seventh Day).

The God who brought light from darkness also beams His truth from the errors of men. One lasting benefit from Miller's movement was that the blessed hope of believers, too often dimmed in orthodox faith, re-



# ment of 1844

gained a position of prominence. A revival of Bible teaching on the Second Advent was needed, and it came!

Further, the Holy Spirit used the intense study of this time to reveal other long dormant Bible truths. In 1846 a Seventh-day Baptist named Rachel Oakes shared her conviction about the weekly Sabbath with a group of Millerites in New Hampshire. About the same time, many Adventists learned sleep-of-the-dead teachings, coupled with focus on the resurrection and establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth at His return. Interest in other Bible topics waxed and waned during this period.

With the benefit of hindsight and inquiry, we now recognize the much ado that brought disappointment to Adventist Christians in 1844 was based on error. The prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9 had been misread by William Miller and pressed into a function never intended: setting a date for the Lord's return.

We need not maintain any Bible significance for the 1844 date. Attempting to reclaim one faulty interpretation by imposing another does no service to the cause of ultimate truth. Neither should we commit the proverbial error of throwing out the baby – Christ's imminent return – with the bathwater of 1844. There is an entire vein of rich biblical truth to support the Second Advent, and its ore loses

no value merely because some nuggets were misused for a time.

As heirs of the Millerite Movement, of the Protestant Reformation, and of the apostolic church of God, we concede the error of 1844, and we move on. Jesus will return to this earth, though no man knows the day, hour, or year of that event. The time for

the end of this age is concealed in the mind of God and is not for us to know. In our confidence that the awesome Day of the Lord is still ahead, we remain Adventist Christians.

Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

—BA

## 2,300 Days of Daniel 8, in Shorthand

1. In vision, Daniel sees a he-goat (Greece) with a prominent horn defeat a two-horned ram (Medo-Persia) in battle (vv. 3-7, 19-21).
2. When the prominent horn (Alexander the Great) is broken, four smaller horns (his four generals) replace it (vv. 8, 22).
3. One of the four successors of Alexander's Grecian empire (Antiochus Epiphanes) grows mighty to oppress the people of the holy temple (Jews) and to take away their daily sacrifice (vv. 9-12, 23-25a).
4. It is explained that the daily sacrifice would be restored after 2,300 days (or 2,300 evenings and mornings): "then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" and the oppressive, evil king be broken (vv. 13, 14, 25b).
5. From this, William Miller calculated the year of the Lord's return. He began with the year 457 B.C. (based on Daniel 9:25) and added 2,300 years (using a year for each day, Numbers 14:34) to arrive at A.D. 1844.
6. When Jesus did not return in 1844, some Millerite Adventists explained that He entered the heavenly sanctuary then, cleansing it by applying the merits of His sacrifice on the cross to those found worthy by a pre-Advent, or investigative, judgment.
7. Time and Scripture suggest a better explanation. The 2,300-day prophecy was fulfilled in the desolation of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes around 170 B.C., a desolation that lasted 1,150 days, or 2,300 morning and evening sacrifices.

The time of Christ's return remains unknown and unknowable.