
Can You Explain It?

Seventh-day Adventists know what certain Bible prophecies say, yet they don't believe them!

By Herman L. Hoeh

Why do Seventh-day Adventists believe the 1,000-year reign of Christ will be *in heaven*? And that the earth will be desolate and uninhabited by humans?

That Satan and his demons will be the sole inhabitants of the earth during the 1,000 years? And that Jesus' feet will not stand on the Mount of Olives until *after* the 1,000 years?

Whereas the Bible plainly says the saints shall reign *on the earth* (Rev. 5:10) and that "men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited" (Zech. 14:11).

That Satan and his demons are to be shut away from humans — bound as prisoners — so that Satan "should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled" (Rev. 20:3).

And that when Jesus Christ returns to set up the Kingdom of God for 1,000 years, "his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives . . . And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem . . . And the Lord shall be king over all the earth" (Zech. 14:4, 8-9).

For decades we took for granted that Seventh-day Adventists somehow did not know what the Bible prophecies say. That if we only made

the Bible plainer and clearer they would be brought face-to-face with the meaning of Bible prophecies and the good news — Gospel — of the coming Kingdom of God over all the earth for 1,000 years.

I say "took for granted" because that is what we did in our articles and in our personal correspondence. We assumed that knowledgeable Seventh-day Adventists did not know what the Bible says about the Second Coming of Christ to establish the Kingdom of God. We were wrong. Seventh-day Adventists, as a denomination, know what the Bible prophecies say about the establishment of the Kingdom of God. They simply *do not believe them!* Why?

It should not come as a surprise that Seventh-day Adventists, as a group, know what the Bible says. They do observe the Sabbath. And more than 120 years ago they had fellowship with the people of God, whom we know later in history as the Church of God (Seventh Day). It was with the Oregon Conference of these Church of God people in the late 1920s and early 1930s that Herbert W. and Loma D. Armstrong had fellowship, and out of which the Worldwide Church of God has grown.

Unlike Seventh-day Adventists, the Worldwide Church of God knows *and believes* the prophecies of the Bible — *and teaches them* (Rev. 3:8, 10). Why, then, do knowledgeable Seventh-day Adventists not

believe what they know the Scriptures say?

One very dear friend and an elder in the Seventh-day Adventist Church explained it this way to me more than 15 years ago, "If what you teach comes to pass, I will believe it!" Why do Seventh-day Adventists not believe it now?

To find the answer to this question, we must turn time back 150 years.

The great Adventist movement

The year was 1831. Excitement was in the air, both in Britain and the United States. It was generated by expectations of the Second Coming of Christ and an ensuing 1,000 years of peace.

This excitement was related, for the most part, to the preaching of ministers who had come to believe the proclamation then being made, beginning 1831, by a prosperous New York farmer, William Miller. That year, it should be observed, was 18 centuries, exactly, after the founding of the New Testament Church of God in A.D. 31.

William Miller thought the Kingdom of God would come and the 1,000 years of peace — the Millennium — would begin not later than 1844. He was wrong about the date (based on a misunderstanding of Daniel 8). But his proclamation about the establishment of the Kingdom of God and a thousand years of peace among nations was true. Tens of

thousands came to believe William Miller's proclamation. The world called them Millerites or Adventists (the word *Advent* was used in English in that day, whereas we today use *Coming* to express the thought of the Second Advent or Second Coming of Christ). But the people who believed William Miller called themselves the "people of God," the "Israel of God" and the "Church of Christ" and the "Church of God." They were a scattered people, not formally organized.

These "people of God" believed in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth for 1,000 years. However dimly perceived, they *knew* what the Bible says about a Millennium of peace on earth among nations. Thus the Advent Movement, as it was called, believed what the Worldwide Church of God today announces, and not what Seventh-day Adventists teach about Satan and his demons residing on earth for 1,000 years while the saints reign in heaven.

But 1844 was a great disappointment for many. Christ did not come. William Miller had been wrong in his understanding of the times. And he admitted it. But there were those who did not want to admit it. It hurt their spiritual pride. Instead of acknowledging that the time for the close of this age and the Second Coming of Jesus had not yet arrived because the Gospel of the Kingdom of God had yet to be announced to the world as a whole — radio and television, air travel and satellite communication had not yet been invented to make that final announcement possible — and instead of giving up the error of 1844 completely, there were individuals whose minds dwelt on the date. They let slip the proclamation — the good news — of the 1,000 years of peace on earth among nations. We shall now meet one of them.

Enter: Ellen Harmon

Among those who heard William Miller's proclamation was a young girl, Ellen Harmon. "At the age of 11," she wrote, "I was converted, and when 12 years old was baptized, and joined the Methodist Church." (All this was before she heard the procla-

mation of the Kingdom of God by William Miller.)

"At the age of 13 I heard Brother Miller deliver his second course of lectures in Portland, Maine. I felt that I was not holy, not ready to see Jesus. And when the invitation was given for church members and sinners to come forward for prayers, I embraced the first opportunity, for I knew that I must have a great work done for me to fit me for heaven," she wrote some years later in *Second Advent Review*, Vol. II, No. 1.

During 1842 Ellen Harmon constantly attended meetings with the people of God. She was now 15 years old "and fully believed the Lord was coming."

Note that she says nothing about the 1,000 years of peace on earth among nations. She speaks only of the coming of the Lord and of being fit for heaven. These ideas she inherited from the Methodists. Ellen Harmon apparently never really understood Miller's proclamation.

Having thought she was converted, Ellen Harmon "went before the Lord in secret prayer" only to find herself struggling, as she put it, "for full salvation," which eluded her. Out of her feelings of spiritual inferiority, she later wrote, "I ceased to pray, and settled down in a melancholy state, and finally in deep despair." She told no one of her state of mind.

She continued, "In this state of mind I remained for three weeks, with not one ray of light to pierce the thick clouds of darkness around me. I then had two dreams which gave me a faint ray of light and hope."

Sometime later, Ellen Harmon prayed and the gloom suddenly dissipated, to be followed by a remarkable experience. "Wave after wave of glory rolled over me until my body grew stiff. Everything was shut out from me but Jesus and glory, and I knew nothing of what was passing around me.

"I remained," she continued, "in this state of body and mind a long time, and when I realized what was around me, everything seemed changed. . . . I was then willing to confess Jesus everywhere."

Ellen Harmon and her father's family were cast out of the Methodist Church. Then came the disappoint-

ment of 1844. In December of that year, when she was 17 years old, a disillusioned Ellen Harmon had a vision. In it she "seemed to be rising higher and higher from the earth" and traveled toward "the Holy City." She believed the vision was of God.

In 1847 she had another in a series of visions. She wrote about it in 1851, four years after the event:

"I saw an angel swiftly flying to me. He quickly carried me from the earth to the Holy City. In the city I saw a temple, which I entered. I passed through a door before I came to the first veil. This veil was raised, and I passed into the Holy Place. Here I saw the altar of incense, the candlestick with seven lamps, and the table on which was the shewbread. After viewing the glory of the Holy, Jesus raised the second veil, and I passed into the Holy of Holies.

"In the Holiest I saw an ark. . . . In the ark was the golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that budded. . . ."

These visions caused great controversy among God's people. The visions were tested and questioned by some, taken for granted by others.

The wrong heaven?

The only source of knowledge God's people had of God's throne and of the holy city was the Bible. Those who tested the visions found that the third heaven where God dwells is so vast a place that the holy city is contained in it.

"And I saw," John said, "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:2, Revised, Standard Version). So the holy city now must be in heaven. In heaven is also the throne of God, the Temple, where God dwells (Rev. 11:19, 7:15). But the Temple is not in the holy city!

"And I saw," wrote John, "no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22, RSV). Whatever the heaven was in Ellen Harmon's vision, it was not the heaven of the Bible! In her heaven the Temple was in the holy city!

Remember, up to this point the people who listened to and believed William Miller knew that Bible prophecy foretold the establishment

of the Kingdom of God on this earth for 1,000 years.

But now they were divided in opinion. All admitted something had gone wrong in their understanding. A minority in the churches of God held to the view that the date 1844 was simply wrong. They had misunderstood Daniel 8. The prophecy was not a 2,300-year period beginning in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (457 B.C.) and ending in A.D. 1844.

They believed, however, the proclamation of the 1,000 years of peace on earth that William Miller and other ministers had announced. They believed in a judgment to come.

The majority in the churches of God had their minds so set on 1844 that they could not give up the date. They looked for some new explanation. What, they asked themselves, really happened in 1844?

They thought they found the answer in the visions of Ellen Harmon. The visions seemed so spiritual.

Only one problem. Ellen Harmon's visions said nothing about the proclamation of the Kingdom of God being set up on this earth for the 1,000 years. Her visions, in fact, were revealing something altogether different. That salvation for the world closed in October, 1844. That everyone who, up to that point, had lived and died was judged by that date. And since 1844 *all* who are living *are being judged*. There would, therefore, be no need for the Kingdom of God to be established and the nations to be judged during the 1,000 years.

God, the majority began to conclude, must have changed His plan of salvation as revealed through the prophets.

The prophets indeed foretold a time when "in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains . . . and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from

Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Mic. 4:1-3).

No matter what this and other scriptures say, the majority in the churches of God in the last century concluded these prophecies were not to be believed. God had changed His plan. Israel had failed to do its part; now God could not do His part as planned. Utter nonsense!

Isaiah the prophet declared, "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old" — the former failures and sins. "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me . . . because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; *they shall shew forth my praise*" (Isa. 43:18-21).

Israel and Judah haven't been willing yet, but God *will* convert them and they shall show forth God's praise. It is a divine promise! It will happen! This is not a prophecy for the new earth, but for the time when God's government will be restored in the 1,000 years. Will you believe it, as did William Miller and as does God's Church today? Or will you knowingly disbelieve it?

And so it was that the majority who fellowshipped in the churches of God in the middle of the last century focused their minds on the Sabbath and the Second Advent (Second Coming) of Jesus Christ, but got their minds off the announcement of the Kingdom of God and on the visions of Ellen (Harmon) White.

The visions continue

Back to the story of the visions that split "God's people" asunder.

On March 24, 1849, Ellen — now Ellen G. White after her marriage to James White, a minister and publisher for the scattered churches of God — had a vision. In it, she claimed,

Jesus testified to her that He had been mediating for the salvation of the world from A.D. 31 till 1844. "Our work for the world closed in 1844." Then, for the first time, according to the visions of Ellen White, was the door in heaven opened to the Holy of Holies and Jesus entered into the presence of God the Father.

Ellen White put her vision into these words: "This door was not opened, until the mediation of Jesus was finished in the Holy Place of the Sanctuary in 1844. Then, Jesus rose up, and shut the door in the Holy Place, and opened the door in the Most Holy, and passed within the second veil, where he now stands by the ark. . . .

"I saw," she concluded, "that Jesus had shut the door in the Holy Place, and no man can open it; and that he had opened the door in the Most Holy, and no man can shut it: (See Rev. iii: 7, 8:)."

In a salvo against those who had questioned the source of her visions, she wrote in the August, 1849, issue of *The Present Truth*: "I saw that the enemies of the present truth have been trying to open the door of the Holy Place, that Jesus has shut; and to close the door of the Most Holy Place, which he opened in 1844."

What she meant was that the minority 130 years ago who understood the Gospel — good news — of the Kingdom of God were attempting to reopen the door of salvation for those who had lived and died in ignorance. Her visions declared their opportunity was past. Their judgment was completed.

There would be no Millennium in which the nations would learn the ways of God and live in peace. There would be no second resurrection, according to her visions, after the 1,000 years, in which all who lived and died in ignorance — the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, Nineveh, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Queen of the south and Israel and Judah — would rise in the judgment to be judged and to be offered spiritual salvation for the first time.

Jesus said these people would rise in the judgment (read it for yourself in Matthew 10:15, 11:22, 24, 12:41-

42, Mark 6:11, Luke 10:14, 11:31-32 and Ezekiel 16:53-55). But Ellen White's visions quoted a Jesus who claimed to have changed the plan of God and nullified the prophecies of the Bible.

Ellen White, in her August, 1849, salvo against those who questioned her visions, also meant that the minority 130 years ago in the churches of God were teaching that this is not the only day of salvation for all those now living.

She claimed that the Jesus of her visions had entered the Holy of Holies in 1844 and was *now judging all* who remained on earth. The Jesus who spoke to her claimed this is the only day of salvation. That the nations living at the Second Coming of Jesus will all be destroyed. No mortal human beings will be left alive, she was told in vision. God has changed His plan. The prophets foretold what could have happened, not what will happen.

Furthermore, Ellen White claimed that Revelation 3:7-8 was a reference to what was fulfilled, according to her vision, in 1844. This passage is found in the prophetic letter to the "church in Philadelphia." Those who believed her visions concluded that the end of the Philadelphian church occurred in 1844 and that since that day Laodicea is extant.

The visions Ellen White received were the ultimate cause of the split that developed during the 1850s and culminated in 1860. In that year those who accepted her visions organized themselves under the name Seventh-day Adventists.

The remainder continued to call themselves by the name "Church of God." They had a name that declared they were spiritually alive; they were *God's Church*. But they were spiritually dead (Rev. 3:1). Only a few individuals (verse 4) among them were righteous. The works of that church were not perfect before God (verse 2).

These verses clearly indicate that the state of the Church of God in the last century was prophetically characterized by the message to the church in Sardis. Verses 1, 3 and 4 are all part of the message to Sardis. Philadelphia (verses 7 through 13)

was yet to come. And so, too, Laodicea (verses 14-22).

Thus the Jesus who communed with Ellen White in her visions misapplied the message to the church at Philadelphia to the year 1844. In addition, that Jesus who appeared to her in vision misapplied the message to the church of Laodicea to the Seventh-day Adventists. Her visions claimed that the Seventh-day Adventists are a Laodicean Church of God. They could not be such, because they rejected the name "Church of God" in 1860 and, further, because the Laodicean period of the Church of God had not then arrived.

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Who, then, was the Jesus who appeared to Ellen (Harmon) White? Who were the angels that appeared to her? What spirit manifested itself in her visions? How did the Church of God know to reject her visions in the last century?

"Another Jesus" — "another spirit"

The apostle Paul dealt with a problem at the Greek church in Corinth that paralleled the crisis that beset the churches of God in the last century.

"I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the

serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough" (II Cor. 11:2-4, RSV).

Both the Greeks and the brethren in the last century accepted readily a different gospel! And therefore a different spirit and a different Jesus!

"And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (verses 14-15).

And in Galatians 1:6-8, RSV, we read: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel — not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed."

Paul's Gospel announced the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:31). The Gospel of Jesus announced the good news of world peace (Acts 10:36), declared Peter. Mark said Jesus proclaimed "the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:15). Over the centuries this same message was announced in limited areas of the world. William Miller announced it.

The Jesus who appeared in vision to Ellen White proclaimed as good news an empty, desolate world for 1,000 years, with Satan and his demons brooding over the utter emptiness. That is not good news. That is a perversion of the Gospel. Its author is one who transforms himself into an angel of light! He was another Jesus! A false one!

The Worldwide Church of God proclaims the true Gospel of the Kingdom of God to rule this world in peace for 1,000 years! It rejects the false testimony of another Jesus who masqueraded as Jesus in the middle of the last century to try to deceive the very elect! □