

# Prophetic Basis of Adventism

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## Part 1: Beyond Disappointment

The historical and theological roots of the Seventh-day Adventist Church lie in the Millerite movement of the 1830s and the 1840s. William Miller was a Baptist farmer in Low Hampton, New York. Through an intensive study of the books of Daniel and Revelation, commencing in 1818, he concluded that Christ was to return to the earth "about the year 1843." Accordingly, he felt a deep sense of responsibility to warn people to get ready to meet the Lord.<sup>[1]</sup>

A key passage of Miller's was Daniel 8:14: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Accepting the common rules of prophetic interpretation of his own time, especially the "year-day principle,"<sup>[2]</sup> Miller arrived at the conclusion that the 2300 days of the vision of Daniel 8 represented 2300 literal years. And using as his starting point the date for the commencement of the 490 years in Daniel 9:24-27, namely 457 B.C.,<sup>[3]</sup> he reckoned that the 2300-year period would climax in 1843.

Miller believed that the sanctuary mentioned in Daniel 8:14 was the *worldwide* "spiritual sanctuary," or *church*, of the Christian Age. Accordingly, he concluded that in 1843 Christ would return to cleanse the earth of papal abominations through the fire of divine judgment.<sup>[4]</sup>

Miller's basic principle of prophetic interpretation was derived from the Old Testament.<sup>[5]</sup> He rejected the popular belief, in both England and America, that the Jewish people would return to Palestine as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Such futuristic expectations were based on a *literalistic* application of the term *Israel* (in Old Testament prophecy) to only *ethnic* Israelites. This principle of absolute literalism in prophetic interpretations, futurism, had become characteristic of both European and American Protestantism.<sup>[6]</sup> Miller reintroduced rather the old Protestant Christ-centered interpretation of *Israel* in prophecy, which saw true

Christian believers (and not Jews as such) at the heart of the biblical end-time prophecies.

But beyond that, Miller stressed the imminent, premillennial return of Christ, an emphasis that brought further controversy with those Protestants (like Charles Finney) who espoused postmillennialism, the theory that Christ will return *after* a millennium of world peace.

But the breaking point with the institutional churches came over Miller's contention that the second coming of Christ was to take place in 1843 or 1844; and even more shockingly, his subsequent focus on a definite day (October 22, 1844) as the date of the Advent. The result was far-reaching. As W. L. Emmerson states it, "Some 100,000 people were expelled or withdrew from their churches and began to organize themselves as Adventist churches, dedicated to the proclamation of the imminent personal return of Christ."<sup>[7]</sup>

### **Firm Foundation Emerges**

The six Sabbath Conferences of 1848 in states of New England and in New York State created a united doctrinal platform for the emerging movement. Two of the principals at those conferences were Joseph Bates (1792-1872) and James White (1821-1881). Bates gave emphasis to the law and the Sabbath, while White focused on the significance of the third angel's message, of Revelation 14:9-12, as "the sealing message." Another principal, Hiram Edson (1806-1882), presented his insight on the typology of the ancient cleansing of the sanctuary of Israel. For him this explained why Christ had not returned on October 22, 1844, but also what actually did happen on that date. For Edson, 1844 signaled Jesus' entrance upon the final phase of His intercessory ministry in heaven.

The 1848 Sabbath Conferences established five important doctrinal landmarks of Seventh-day Adventism, dealing not with prophetic minutiae, but with the fundamentals of the faith:

1. The second coming of Christ.
2. The binding claims of the seventh-day Sabbath.
3. The third angel's message in its fullness, in correct relationship to the first and second

angels' messages.

4. The ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, specifically since 1844 in antitype of the ancient Day of Atonement in the Most Holy Place.

5. The nonimmortality of the soul.<sup>[8]</sup>

Ever since 1848 these five basic doctrines have constituted the "solid, immovable platform" on which all Adventists stand united as the remnant church.<sup>[9]</sup>

### **Affirming the Millerite Connection**

The Seventh-day Adventist movement was the direct outgrowth of the Advent movement under William Miller. James White, Joseph Bates, and Hiram Edson had all been leaders or promoters in the Millerite movement. So also was Ellen Harmon (1827-1915), who became the wife of James White in 1846. They saw themselves as the true successors of William Miller and labored from 1844 to 1851 exclusively to lead their former associates in the Millerite movement into an advanced understanding of prophetic truth. They hoped thus to revive the expectation of an imminent Advent, which was the burden of Miller's message. In the first issue of the *Review and Herald* (1850), these pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church appealed emphatically to the writings of the Millerite movement to prove this point.<sup>[10]</sup>

Prominent Adventist pioneer and scholar Uriah Smith (1832-1903) claimed that Seventh-day Adventists were the only Advent believers since 1844 "who adhere to the original principles of interpretation on which the whole Advent movement was founded, . . . the only ones . . . following out that movement to its logical results and conclusions."<sup>[11]</sup>

Thus instead of trying to distance themselves from the Millerite movement, our pioneers sought to confirm it, including the Midnight Cry of 1844, as the authentic fulfillment of Bible prophecy. In particular, they claimed that Revelation 10 had been fulfilled in the Millerite movement. The chapter describes John's visionary experience of tasting the *sweetness* of the

open "little book" in the hand of the mighty angel, followed immediately by his sense of a disappointing *bitterness*. They applied this to the sweet hope, followed by the bitter disappointment, of the Millerites.

Continuing the application, the pioneers understood the appeal of the angel in Revelation 10:11, to "prophesy *again* before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings," as a sacred and urgent commission to them to proclaim the correct interpretation of Daniel's end-time prophecies, specifically Daniel 8:14.

But how could they still take Daniel 8:14 seriously? Because they recognized that the error was *not in the conclusion* that the 2300 years ended in 1844, *but rather in the interpretation* of the antitypical cleansing of the new covenant sanctuary. Connecting Daniel 8:14 with the angel's announcement that during the seventh trumpet "*there should be time no longer*" (Rev. 10:6), Ellen White declared that prophetic time had irrevocably ended in 1844: "The people will not have another message upon definite time."<sup>[12]</sup>

### **Application to Their Own Time**

The pioneers generally agreed that both the "mighty angel" of Revelation 10 and the first angel of Revelation 14 present the divine mandate and mission to proclaim the last warning of prophecy "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev. 14:6; cf. Rev. 10:11). Our pioneers were convinced that the prophecy of the first angel's message, with its announcement of the heavenly judgment hour (Rev. 14:7), had found "its most direct fulfillment" in the Spirit-filled messages of William Miller and his associates, whose writings were carried to distant lands.<sup>[13]</sup> This initial historic fulfillment of the first angel's message of Revelation 14 in America binds the Seventh-day Adventist Church inextricably to the Millerite movement.

The Spirit of God had transformed countless hearts and lives of Advent believers in a genuine revival similar to that of the day of Pentecost. The Seventh-day Adventist pioneers

"dared not deny that the power of the Holy Spirit had witnessed to the preaching of the second advent, and they could detect no error in their reckoning of the prophetic periods."<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Second Angel's Message Fulfilled**

The announcement of the first angel is indissolubly united with a second message that announces the fall of a worldwide Babylon (vs. 8). This prophetic message likewise found an initial historic fulfillment in the Millerite movement. The proclamation of a specific day, October 22, 1844, as the end of Daniel's longest time prophecy formed the catalyst that caused thousands to take their preparation for the advent of Christ with utter seriousness.

A prime example is the experience of young Ellen G. Harmon. When she testified in her Methodist church meeting that the "stirring truths concerning the personal appearing of Jesus" had brought a new blessing to her heart and that she looked forward with ardent hope for the soon appearing of Christ, she was reprovved for her "erroneous theory."<sup>[15]</sup> Shortly thereafter, with her parents, she was disfellowshipped from the Methodist Church.<sup>[16]</sup>

Many other Advent believers were likewise excommunicated from their Protestant churches during the summer of 1844. This caused the Millerite preachers to describe all organized churches as Babylon and to call the waiting saints out of all church denominations in America.

John N. Andrews (1829-1883) and Ellen G. White interpreted the fall of Babylon as "*a moral fall*," because of the refusal of the established churches to accept the light of the Advent message.<sup>[17]</sup>

However, they saw this moral fall as a process that was not yet complete. Only when the Christian churches in *all* nations on earth will have rejected the everlasting gospel message of the first angel, and thus will have united with the world, will universal Babylon have fallen completely. Ellen White wrote in 1888: "The change is a progressive one, and the perfect

fulfillment of Revelation 14:8 is yet future."<sup>[18]</sup> This final apostasy is described more fully in Revelation 18.

### **Third Angel Brings Focus**

The final verdict on Babylon is announced in the third angel's message (Rev. 14:9-12). It contains the most dreadful warning ever sent from Heaven to mortal beings, the warning concerning the wrath of God in the seven last plagues (Rev. 15 and 16).

In the post-1844 period the conviction grew among a number of Advent believers that *all Bible truth* must be restored among God's people *before* the Second Advent could take place. Thus, the seventh-day Sabbath was adopted-from the Seventh Day Baptists. The Sabbath reformation was given a new relevancy and urgency, however, by viewing the Sabbath as the testing truth of the end-time restoration of the gospel and the law, according to Revelation 14.

The clinching argument for the vital importance of the Sabbath restoration was specifically the third angel's message of Revelation 14. This announcement stressed obedience to God's commandments in contrast to following apostate traditions and enactments. And central to it was the statement "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (vs. 12).

Ellen White stressed the inextricable union of the Sabbath and the third angel's message as follows: "Separate the Sabbath from the messages, and it loses its power; but when [the Sabbath is] connected with the message of the third angel, a power attends it which convicts unbelievers and infidels, and brings them out with strength to stand, to live, grow, and flourish in the Lord."<sup>[19]</sup>

Thus to accept the seventh-day Sabbath, according to Seventh-day Adventist theology, implied the acceptance of the eschatology of the threefold message of Revelation 14, and vice versa. The connection of the Sabbath with the everlasting gospel would prove, in time, to be of fundamental significance.

## Continuing Relevance

The three angels' messages are ever new. With every passing year they become more timely and increasingly more urgent. The three angels keep flying *together* in irreversible order, heralding first the everlasting gospel of God's grace, and then presenting the binding claims of God's holy law on all mankind. Thus, together they prepare a people to stand in the time of Jacob's trouble and in the day of God's wrath.

Ellen White believed that "the true understanding of these messages is of vital importance. The destiny of souls hangs upon the manner in which they are received."<sup>[20]</sup> The Adventist understanding of divine law and gospel as united in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 was to our pioneers the *truth*, as sure as God lives. By adherence to it the remnant church was standing "upon a solid, immovable platform."<sup>[21]</sup>

## Part 2: For Such an Hour

The focus of the Advent awakening, both before and after 1844, was on the end-time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. And it was in the light of these prophecies that our pioneers began to develop their theological self-understanding as a new movement in Christian history. Believing they were a specially chosen people, they employed for themselves such designations as "the remnant church," "the remnant people of God," or simply "the remnant."<sup>[22]</sup>

Through these designations they gave evidence of their belief that they were, indeed, the final segment of the church foreseen in Revelation 12. In figurative language John described the faithful remnant of the Christian Era, living in the last generation before Christ returns: "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (vs. 17).

From their inception, Seventh-day Adventists have claimed that they constitute the historical fulfillment of that prophecy.

### **The Historical Approach**

The question immediately arises, How can this claim be justified? How can it be established that Revelation 12 deals specifically with the end of the Christian Era and with the final crisis of the Christian Age? According to what principle of Bible interpretation do Adventists determine "the time of the end" of Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies (Dan. 8-12)? And what, essentially, are the implications of this remnant theology?

Traditional Protestant interpretation of prophecy applies the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation to the history of Israel and the Christian church; and William Miller adopted this approach. On the basis of this Protestant historical method (as it is properly called), the Millerites associated Daniel's "time of the end" with the French Revolution and the subsequent captivity of the pope in 1798. Furthermore (and this was a crucial issue for them), the little horn of Daniel 8 was identified as Rome in its pagan and papal phases.<sup>[23]</sup>

Sabbathkeeping Adventists inherited this historicist approach to the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation-the same method followed by the Church Fathers and by the Protestant Reformers and expositors since the sixteenth century. These early church leaders had all applied the apocalyptic prophecies to the history of God's covenant people through the ages, from Daniel's time to the second advent of Christ. And this traditional approach came to be known as "the standard Protestant interpretation."<sup>[24]</sup>

Daniel's forecast of four consecutive world empires was invariably recognized, by both Jewish and Christian expositors following this method of interpretation, as pointing (in sequence) to Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.<sup>[25]</sup>

This view of an unbroken succession of world powers identifies imperial Rome as the fourth world power to have dominion over God's covenant people since Daniel's day. Rome

dominated from 168 B.C. to A.D. 476, and persecuted not only Jews but also Christians, until Emperor Constantine officially adopted Christianity as the state religion. When the Roman Empire finally collapsed and broke up into independent small nations (A.D. 476), Europe gradually came under the religious and political rulership of the papal government. Roman emperors were succeeded by papal rulers.

### **The Accepted Interpretation**

For more than 300 years Protestant Bible expositors have pioneered the general interpretation of certain key elements of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

For example, the apostate "little horn" of Daniel 7 and 8 and the self-willed "king" of Daniel 11 have been identified with the papacy, in view of that power's religio-political claims and persecutions during the long Middle Ages. An integral part of this line of prophetic interpretation was the symbolic time prophecy of the three and one-half "times" (Dan. 7:25; 12:7). Protestant expositors viewed this period (also identified with the 1260 "days" of Revelation 12:6, 14 or the 42 "months" of Revelation 11:2) as the predicted time of oppression of the gospel and its proponents. Most considered this prophetic time period as the age of papal supremacy from A.D. 533/538 to 1793/1798.<sup>[26]</sup>

LeRoy Froom notes that the year-day principle of prophetic calculation also "came to be well-nigh universally accepted by Christian expositors."<sup>[27]</sup> Furthermore, it was the common understanding of European and American expositors that Paul's prophetic outline in 2 Thessalonians 2 was progressively fulfilled in pagan and papal Rome.<sup>[28]</sup> For more than three centuries Protestant Bible expositors agreed that the dark Middle Ages fell within the scope of Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies.

It remained for the nineteenth-century Advent awakening in both Europe and America to shift the general attention of Christian expositors from Daniel 7, with its focus on the symbolic three and one-half times, or 1260 years, of the Middle Ages, to Daniel 8, with its

emphasis on the 2300 prophetic days and its appointed "time of the end" (Dan. 8:14, 17, 19).<sup>[29]</sup> The crucial linchpin for the certainty that the 2300-year period of Daniel 8 did end in 1844 was the conclusion that its beginning date was identical to that of the 70 weeks of Daniel 9. This connection became accepted widely in the nineteenth century.<sup>[30]</sup>

The historicist method thus required a thorough knowledge of both Scripture and history.

Parallel to this development in their progressive understanding was a shift of focus from Revelation 13, with its persecuting beast, to Revelation 14, with its flying angels announcing the judgment hour and the end of the world.

### **Time of the End**

The phrase "the time of the end" is found only in the apocalyptic section of the book of Daniel (five times in Daniel 8-12). Daniel's unique expression is not completely identical with the familiar phrase "the last days" or "the latter days," which is used 14 times by the Old Testament prophets. While the classical prophets usually connect their own time and place directly with the future age of the Messiah, Daniel leads his readers from his time on down through the ages of redemption history. He goes past the violent death of Messiah (Dan. 9:25-27) to the emergence of the anti-Messiah, or antichrist. He also predicts God's judgment upon that evil power.

Daniel's sacred foreview covers the history of God's people under both the old and new dispensations. Its unique characteristic is the feature of determinism with respect to the time period allotted to the antichrist supremacy. In this context Daniel uses the term "the time of the end" to designate, not the end of time, but rather an indefinite timespan that *precedes* the final judgment by Messiah (Dan. 12:1) and the resurrection of the dead (vs. 2).

The *beginning* of this final apocalyptic "time of the end" will come, however, at the appointed time (Dan. 11:35). This point of time seems to coincide with the completion of the 1260 years of papal dominion, in 1798 (Dan. 7:25), and with the consequent restoration,

beginning in 1844, of the downtrodden sanctuary truth, with the knowledge of the priestly ministry of Christ.

### **End-Time Unsealing**

The symbolic visions of Daniel were not fully understood by the prophet himself (Dan. 12:8) and could not be comprehended before the time of the end. The interpreting angel said, "But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge" (vs. 4, NIV).

It helps to know that in the Hebrew the definite article is given with the word *knowledge*, and therefore indicates that the knowledge of the book of Daniel, which had been sealed, was later to be understood in its true import.<sup>[31]</sup> The angel further stresses that "none of the wicked will understand, but those who are *wise* will understand" (vs. 10, NIV). Earlier the angel had made a divine connection between Daniel 8 and 9 by means of the 70 weeks of years in Daniel 9 (see Dan. 9:22-24; cf. 8:14).

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that God had hidden in Daniel 9 to 12 a sealed or coded message intended exclusively for the time of the end. The purpose of that message would be to prepare a people to stand before God, purified from false worship and wickedness, and ready to meet their God.

If the prophetic visions of Daniel 8-12 point distinctly to the period immediately preceding the Second Advent, then the divine end-time unsealing of Daniel's apocalyptic prophecies will have a very practical consequence. The increase of the knowledge of Daniel's book will result in a true revival of apocalyptic studies and in a renewed hope of the nearness of the day of deliverance.

Froom said of Daniel 12:4, "It obviously is a forecast of the . . . revival in prophetic exposition that came under the simultaneous awakening in the nineteenth century, in both the Old World and the New."<sup>[32]</sup>

And decades ago James White had noted that the promised increase of knowledge in Daniel 12:4, 10 did "not refer to the progress in scientific discoveries, but to the subject of the end." He pointed out that "the truly wise, the children of God, understand the subject upon which knowledge increases in the time of the end, while the wicked, however scientific, do not understand. The facts in the case are . . . against the position that the prophetic statement relative to the increase of knowledge in the time of the end has reference to the discoveries of the scientists."<sup>[33]</sup>

### **Worldwide Awakening**

The promise of Daniel 12:4 points to the thrilling rise of a worldwide awakening of the prophetic end-time message of Holy Scripture. The significance of this text dawned upon the Christian consciousness as soon as the year 1844, with its bitter experience, had passed. Only then did they understand the meaning of the threefold reforming message of Revelation 14.

From the start Seventh-day Adventists considered themselves as reformers whose unique foundational platform was Bible prophecy. As the remnant people of God, they felt charged before God, as was ancient Israel, to enlighten the whole world with the gospel in its fullness. It is their calling to be the last gospel movement that restores the apostolic faith and completes the Reformation under the end-time banner of "the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12; cf. 12:17).

Thus God took care that history and prophecy agree. And prophecy for Adventism, in the words of Froom, was and is "the rainbow of promise, painted by the fingers of God."

### **Part 3: In the Spirit of Elijah**

Two major biblical events provided early Adventists an avenue through which to understand their message and mission. One was the Exodus. The other, the ministry of Elijah the prophet.

#### **Parallels With the Exodus**

In the exodus of Israel from Egypt, bound for the Promised Land, our pioneers saw the prophetic call of the three angels of Revelation 14 to leave the nominal churches, with their creedalism, and to accept the commandments of God as the end-time Israel.

Making use of Exodus language, Hiram Edson in 1850 referred to 1844 as "our pillar of light . . . behind us" (see Exod. 13:21; 14:19).<sup>[34]</sup> He saw a parallel between God's restoration of the Sabbath soon after Israel's exodus from Egypt (see Exod. 16:23-30) and the adoption of the Sabbath truth by those then awaiting the imminent coming of Christ in the 1840s and 1850s. Said he, "The first important truth brought to our minds after we came into the wilderness of the people, this side of 1844, was the Sabbath truth."<sup>[35]</sup>

A few years later, Augustin C. Bourdeau drew a connection between God's care for Israel's healthful living (Exod. 15:26) and the Adventist health reform message.<sup>[36]</sup>

In 1867 Ellen G. White endorsed this typological approach when she applied 1 Corinthians 10:11 to the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist movement: "Modern Israel are in greater danger of forgetting God and being led into idolatry than were His ancient people. Many idols are worshiped, even by professed Sabbathkeepers"<sup>[37]</sup>

These were some of the major parallels drawn by our Adventist pioneers between Israel's exodus from Egypt and what they saw as their own exodus from the nominal churches. But it is evident that to Ellen White, comparison of the Advent movement to ancient Israel was no ground for a triumphalistic attitude or any feeling of superiority. Rather, it was to be an

incentive to self-criticism. And indeed, this typological connection did serve to heighten their sense of responsibility and watchfulness.

### **Parallels With Elijah**

In 1 Kings 16:31 we read of the marriage of King Ahab and "Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians." Marriage to a pagan was forbidden for Israel's kings on the grounds that with that marriage partner often came also a pagan religion. And so it was. Baal worship was introduced, then amalgamated with the true worship of Yahweh.

In its undiluted state, it was a form of sun worship. The people worshiped "all the host of heaven," burning "incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven" (2 Kgs. 23:5). In Israel, however, Baal worship blended with elements of Hebrew religion. The result was that the 10 northern tribes "left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal" (2 Kgs. 17:16).

Elijah's mission was to call Israel out of apostasy, back to God and His commandments. God cannot be separated from His commandments; it is through them that He expresses His will. Thus, to reject God's law is to reject God Himself.

As a judgment on Israel's apostasy, God brought drought upon the land (see Deut. 11:13-17). For three and one-half years, no rain fell. Yet Israel remained impenitent, led by a hardened royal couple, Ahab and Jezebel.

At the end of the period, God sent Elijah back to Israel's apostate leaders and people with a final appeal: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kgs. 18:21, NIV). But the people "did not answer him a word" (vs. 21, RSV).

What a dramatic hour! And what a sad result. But as the one who was to "restore all things" (Matt. 17:11), Elijah pressed ahead. The true religion of Israel must be restored according to

the original pattern. Accordingly, as Scripture indicates, "he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down" (1 Kgs. 18:30, RSV). Yes, he took 12 stones and restored the altar of Israel's God. And by so doing he revived the way of salvation by grace (see Lev. 17:11), emphasizing in the process the unity of the 12 tribes, making no concession to their division into 10 northern tribes and two southern tribes. Surely here is a message of unity and of the restoration of law and gospel.

### **Parallels Clarify Mission**

The lesson of Elijah's encounter with Baal worship is now clear: This pagan religion had distorted the worship of Jehovah, virtually supplanting it. It had destroyed God's way of salvation. This point is essential to understanding the Elijah message for today.

Shortly after the disappointment on October 22, 1844, several Adventist writers expressed their conviction that the restoration of the biblical Sabbath was basically similar to the restoration of Israel's worship under Elijah in a time of general apostasy. They noted that the prophet Malachi had predicted that God would send Elijah again as the forerunner of the last judgment (Mal. 4:4, 5). They recalled Jesus' emphasis that Elijah would come to Israel to "restore all things" (Matt. 17:11). They remembered Gabriel's description of the urgency of Elijah's prophetic mission: "*to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*" (Luke 1:17). And John the Baptist was the fulfillment, as far as the first advent of Messiah was concerned (Matt. 17:10-13). He was the appointed forerunner of Christ. God's timing was perfect.

Also, Joseph Bates combined the ideas of restoration and preparation: "I understand that the seventh day Sabbath is not the *least* one, among ALL things that are to be restored before the second advent of Jesus Christ."<sup>[38]</sup> Bates appealed, in particular, to the divine promise in Isaiah, directed to those who would return from the Babylonian captivity: "You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In" (Isa. 58:12, NKJV).

Bates interpreted the rejection of the Sabbath truth by the churches, and its obstruction by nominal Adventists, as the "mighty struggle" of the remnant church for the restoration of the covenant law and the true worship of God. For our pioneers, the Sabbath truth became a testing truth in the final war of Satan against the remnant people of God, as described in Revelation 12:17.

It is interesting that the youthful Ellen G. Harmon initially felt that Bates dwelt too much on the fourth commandment at the expense of the other nine. But she took her stand firmly with Joseph Bates when she saw that of the Ten Commandments, only the fourth defined the living God as the Creator. She came to see it as the center of the holy law enshrined in the temple of God in heaven (Rev. 11:19). She wrote, "Just prior to the great day of God, a message is sent forth to warn the people to come back to their allegiance to the law of God, which antichrist has broken down. Attention must be called to the breach in the law, by precept and example. I was shown that the precious promises of Isaiah 58:12-14 apply to those who labor for the restoration of the true Sabbath."<sup>[39]</sup>

### **Practical Implications**

Like Joseph Bates and others, Ellen G. White saw an intimate connection between worship and *preparation* for the soon-coming Lord. She saw the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 as an elaboration and fulfillment of the mission of the promised Elijah. For this threefold warning immediately precedes the harvest of the world (verses 14-20), and thus makes "ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

The third angel, in particular, warns the entire world against the coming day of wrath (Rev. 14:9-11), or the judgment of the seven plagues. His message leads all people to the moment of decision for or against the revealed will of God. The final outcome of this proclamation will be the emergence of a people, among *all* nations, "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (vs. 12, RSV). This text, for our Sabbathkeeping pioneers, was the essence

and summary of the Elijah message. It motivated their missionary zeal and their sense of urgency to be ready for the soon-coming Lord and for the hour of His judgment.

Ellen G. White sought to keep alive among Adventists this concept of their identification with the end-time Elijah. She wrote, "In this time of well-nigh universal apostasy, God calls upon His messengers to proclaim His law in the spirit and power of Elias. . . . With the earnestness that characterized Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist, we are to strive to prepare the way for Christ's second advent."<sup>[40]</sup>

She included in the preparation message the practical reformation of a new lifestyle: "Temperance in all things is to be connected with the message, to turn the people of God from their idolatry, their gluttony, and their extravagance in dress and other things."<sup>[41]</sup> She called upon fellow believers to raise their voices "against the curse of drunkenness," and to "strive to warn the world against its seductive influences. Let us portray before young and old," she said, "the terrible results of indulgence of appetite."<sup>[42]</sup> She saw temperance as a part of the gospel claim, and vigorously insisted "that total abstinence is the only platform on which God's people can conscientiously stand."<sup>[43]</sup>

Thus Ellen White's assessment was that the modern world was in a state of general apostasy, both religiously and morally. She identified the present-day Baals as follows: "In the exaltation of the human above the divine, in the praise of popular leaders, in the worship of mammon, and in the placing of the teachings of science above the truths of revelation, multitudes today are following after Baal."<sup>[44]</sup>

In this comprehensive sense Adventist leaders saw the history of the Exodus and Elijah's encounter with national apostasy repeated in their time. Through a restoration of the Sabbath and a return to the apostolic forms of worship in terms of simple godliness, our pioneers reminded all other Christians of their accountability to God as Creator and Redeemer. Like Elijah of old, the preachers of the third angel's message summoned the world to "Mount Carmel," urging all to choose whom they will worship. "Today, as in the days of Elijah, the

line of demarcation between God's commandment-keeping people and the worshipers of false gods is clearly drawn."<sup>[45]</sup>

### **The Last Remnant**

In the ancient story Elijah, after his heroic stand for God on Mount Carmel, fled in fear of Jezebel's threats. Hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb, he complained, "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kgs. 19:10, 14, NIV). But the Lord gave him a revelation from which we today might draw courage: "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (vs. 18, NIV).

These 7,000 Israelites who remained faithful and loyal to the covenant of God-to His sacred law and His way of salvation-constituted the remnant in the time of Elijah. They might be seen as a type or prophecy of all future remnants who would choose to remain faithful to the God of Israel in times of apostasy. The apostle Paul declared, after his reference to the 7,000 loyal ones in Elijah's time, "*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace*" (Rom. 11:5, NIV).

The book of Revelation teaches that there will emerge again a faithful remnant in the time of the end. After the 1,260 years of the dark Middle Ages, this remnant will become visible as those who keep the sacred commandments of God and persevere in the faith of Jesus (Rev. 12:17). They will come out of spiritual Egypt, or "Babylon," as the result of the threefold reformation message of Revelation 14. In the final crisis brought on the world by the totalitarianism of the antichrist (Rev. 13:15-17), God will again have His loyal ones from all the nations. John heard their number: 144,000 true Israelites in whom there is no deceit (see Rev. 7:1-4; cf. John 1:47). They will stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, the mountain of salvation. They have the name of the Father and of the Son written on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1), signifying to whom they belong.

This end-time remnant people constitute the perfect antitype of the first Elijah. When the latter had fulfilled his mission as a reformer and as a restorer of God's covenant, the Lord sent His chariot and took him up to heaven (see 2 Kgs. 2:11).

So will it be with the remnant of the end-time. When they have completed the restoration of the true worship of God, the chariots of God will descend from heaven and the saints will be translated into indescribable glory (cf. Ps. 68:17, 18; Rev. 19:14; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17). We have this hope that burns within our hearts. May each reader be able to say with Paul, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18, NIV).

#### **Part 4: The Final Reformation**

No theme stands out more prominently in Scripture than the revelation that the God who created heaven and earth will judge with equity both the righteous and the wicked, both the living and the dead (see Num. 24:17-19; Pss. 11; 96:10-13; Eccl. 3:17; Jer. 25:30-38; Mal. 4; Matt. 16:27). The apostle Paul urged this truth on his Greek audience as an essential part of the Christian gospel: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance [of pagan idolatry], but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30, 31).<sup>[46]</sup>

Here, as a vital part of his gospel presentation, Paul cites the reality of the final judgment as an important incentive for repentance and reconciliation with God through faith in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:18-21).

#### **Are Christians Exempted?**

Many Protestant Christians have come to believe that their profession of faith in Christ as the Lamb of God slain as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world exempts them from the

last judgment. This belief, popularly known as the doctrine of "once saved, always saved,"<sup>[47]</sup> has its roots in the teachings of the Church Father Augustine and the Protestant Reformer Calvin.

Calvin taught that God by a secret decree had predestined some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation.<sup>[48]</sup>

The apostle Paul, however, *includes* all Christian believers in the final day of reckoning: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). And to the self-righteous and judgmental church members at Rome Paul said, "God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.' . . . For God does not show favoritism. . . . For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (Rom. 2:6-13; cf. Ps. 62:12). One cannot deny that the apostle Paul taught the certainty of a future judgment involving Christians.

This eschatological aspect of God's judgment of all people, including Christian believers, has been devalued or ignored by many Protestant theologians and preachers. Yet it forms an essential part of the gospel. Paul's message of salvation in Jesus Christ maintains a dynamic tension between the blessed assurance of *present* redemption (Rom. 8:1) and the promised hope of *future* redemption (vs. 23) after judgment, between *present* justification by faith (Rom. 3:28; 4:4-8) and *future* justification in hope (see Gal. 5:5). Paul's idea of a future justification as the ultimate verdict of God is in harmony with Christ's words "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21; see also John 5:28-29; Matt. 25:34-40).

### **Basis of Reward**

Justification does not imply for Paul the idea of once justified, always justified. Present justification has to be confirmed at the final judgment. This inevitably implies an

examination. On the day of judgment the Christian's sanctification will be assessed, not as human merit that earns eternal life, but as the necessary *evidence* of saving faith (see Rom. 2:5-11). Jesus confirms that at His return in glory, He will "reward each person according to what he has done" (Matt. 16:27; cf. Rev. 22:12). Consequently, present justification does not exempt the Christian from that future judgment, when Christ brings in His final verdict.<sup>[49]</sup> The message of a future judgment for both believers and unbelievers is a foundational axiom of the apostolic gospel.

Unfortunately, some evangelical scholars argue that the future judgment will *not* deal with the eternal destiny of believers at all. It will be only an "awards podium" in which believers may suffer, at worst, "some kind of divine chastisement for slothful, careless lives."<sup>[50]</sup>

But the Methodist Bible scholar Stephen H. Travis arrives at a more adequate conclusion: "At the final judgment they [the believer's works] will be the evidence that . . . [his] faith and justification are real, and so his destiny to salvation will be confirmed. . . . Its primary function will be to disclose whether he belongs to Christ or not and to determine his destiny accordingly."<sup>[51]</sup>

According to Paul, Christian believers, including himself, *could* fall away, the same as ancient Israel did (1 Cor. 10:1-13; 9:27). This warning of his to some Christians is fraught with meaning: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; *you have fallen away from grace*" (Gal. 5:4).

### **Judgment's Positive Side**

One modern Bible scholar strives to counteract the popular fear of the last judgment by stressing its positive, biblical meaning: "When God's judgment falls," he says, "in time and out of time, it is mercy to those wronged, and it is doom for those who have done wrong or perpetuated and profited from the wrong of others. Judgment is thus a double-edged reality—with mercy and vindication, doom and condemnation, both held within it."<sup>[52]</sup>

This double-edged concept—the biblical teaching that God's final judgment will bring *both* justification and condemnation—has been part of the core of the Adventist faith and message from the beginning. It lies embedded within the Adventist sanctuary theology with its concept of an antitypical day of atonement, foreshadowed in Israel's ritual day of judgment (Lev. 16). The reality of this final judgment is a central emphasis of the last gospel message for all nations in the end-time. The call is to "fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev. 14:7).

As far as John is concerned, the first angel's message of Revelation 14:6 constitutes in essence "the eternal gospel." This unique expression calls attention to the unchanged and unchanging nature of the good news taught in type and shadow before the cross (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:8), and in full clarity through Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1, 2; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

### **Partial Restoration**

The expression "eternal gospel" contains, however, an implicit reference to the threat of perversion and falsification of the genuine apostolic gospel, to arise between apostolic times and the time of the end. And indeed, serious apostasy was expressly foretold by the prophet Daniel (Dan. 7 and 8), and also by Paul (2 Thess. 2:3-10).

The Protestant Reformation rose in protest against the great Latin apostasy of the Middle Ages that imposed on all people a false gospel permeated with unbiblical doctrines such as transubstantiation, the celebration of the Mass, the worship of Mary, the meritoriousness of good works before God, and purgatory. While the Reformers restored the central truth of the gospel—justification by faith alone—the aspects of a final judgment and the believer's preparation for the second coming of Christ were not brought into proper focus.

Moreover, most Protestant creeds retained certain fundamental papal errors—for example, the natural immortality of the soul, the eternal torture of the wicked, double predestination,

and infant "baptism." Protestantism also failed to restore the sacredness of the *biblical* Sabbath, ordained by God for His covenant people.

The sixteenth-century Reformation had stopped dead in its tracks both religiously and geographically, and soon fell prey to a dry scholasticism that majored in excessive doctrinal formulations. Accordingly, the Reformation did not constitute the complete apocalyptic fulfillment of the first angel's message (Rev. 14:6-7), directed to all nations. Further, as William Cunningham pointed out during the nineteenth-century Advent awakening, the restricted regional influence of the Protestant Reformers did not fulfill the end-time prediction of Revelation 14.<sup>[53]</sup>

### **Complete Restoration**

Neither Luther, Calvin, Knox, nor Wesley ever claimed to fulfill the prophetic angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12. They never announced that the hour of God's judgment had come, as was designated by the time prophecies of Daniel 7 and 8. Only a universal proclamation of the full gospel among all nations of the world could be considered the consummate fulfillment of the threefold message of Revelation 14.

The angel of Revelation 14:6, 7 announces the restoration of the apostolic gospel in the time of the end. The angel's specific purpose is to prepare a people to stand as God's faithful remnant in the day of judgment and to welcome the glorious advent of Christ. Seventh-day Adventists are convinced that they have been raised by God with the mission and mandate to complete the arrested Protestant Reformation and to fully and finally restore the true worship of God, in the context of the eternal gospel.

This end-time application of the gospel forms the distinctive credentials of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a separate religious movement. The following statement expresses their belief: "We hold the 'everlasting gospel' of Revelation 14:6 [KJV] to be the apostolic gospel, *understood and emphasized in the setting of God's great last-day judgment hour*, and

designed for the preparation of a people completely clad in the righteousness of Christ and fully following the revealed will of God as they prepare to stand in His presence at His imminent glorious appearing."<sup>[54]</sup>

The mandate to preach the everlasting gospel to all nations in the end-time implies the renewed proclamation of the biblical Christ—that is, of the God-man who embodies in Himself both the law of God and the grace of God. The mandate calls for a revival of the unadulterated apostolic gospel in its fullness.

The end-time thrust of the everlasting gospel requires also a contextual appeal to all non-Christian religions, and to all forms of pseudo-Christianity, just as the apostles confronted Judaism and Christian Gnosticism in the first century (see 2 Cor. 11:4-15; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3). Whenever the gospel of truth is revived, false religion and human philosophy are exposed as works of darkness (2 Cor. 4:2-5).

### **Emphasis on Obedience**

The proclamation of God's holiness and man's sinfulness demands a firm stand against error and falsehood. Many no longer appreciate the biblical distinctions between truth and error, between law and love, between divine ethics and secular human ethics. But man is called to be in character what the God of Israel is: "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45; cf. Lev. 19:1; 1 Peter 1:15). God's holiness, however, is a holy love that includes *both* His forgiving grace and His justice. This is explained with profound insight by Ellen G. White: "God's love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy. Justice is the foundation of His throne, and the fruit of His love. It had been Satan's purpose to divorce mercy from truth and justice."<sup>[55]</sup>

However, the sacred moral law is not capable of reflecting by itself this awesome atoning holiness. And so a Divine Person was sent from heaven to reveal God's essential nature to man. In Christ we behold the perfect union of justice and mercy, of wrath and grace, of gospel

and law. This symmetrical character of God will shine forth increasingly from the waiting remnant people. They are "being transformed into his likeness" (2 Cor. 3:18).

The revelator describes the last generation of God's children as "saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus" (Rev. 14:12; cf. Rev. 12:17). The revived eternal gospel creates this faithful remnant people.

From heaven the solemn trumpet call "Fear God and give him glory," in an age of secularism and humanism, arouses a faith that is living and faithful, that both saves and sanctifies. In a time of apostasy and lukewarmness, when popular Christianity has reduced saving faith to an orthodox doctrine about Christ, Mrs. White sounded this important corrective: "Many are continually saying, 'All that we have to do is to believe in Christ.' They claim that faith is all we need. *In its fullest sense, this is true*; but they do not take it in the fullest sense. *To believe in Jesus is to take Him as our Redeemer and our Pattern*. If we abide in Him and He abides in us, we are partakers of His divine nature, and are doers of His word."<sup>[56]</sup>

This gospel message unites Christ's perfect atoning sacrifice and His present intercession for the sanctification of the believers. Christ cannot be divided. He is at once Saviour and Lord, Justifier and Sanctifier. And ultimately He will be the judge of all.

This essential and inalienable part of the everlasting gospel has been ignored and neglected too long by the traditional churches. The time has come for its full and final restoration through the Elijah message. Nothing is so powerful as a truth whose time has come.

### **Part 5: Announcing the Fall of Babylon**

The second angel of Revelation 14 utters a solemn announcement: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (Rev. 15:8). The warning is part of God's last message of mercy to a rebellious world. But what does it mean? To answer this, we must consider first the Old Testament background of

Revelation and see how this affects the meaning of certain key terms and concepts in the apocalypse.

### **Old Testament Background**

The Old Testament forms the backdrop of the book of Revelation. Its terms and imagery underlie the message of the exiled prophet of Patmos. Thus we cannot understand Revelation apart from the Old Testament.

In his inaugural vision of Christ, John presents the key to unlock the inspired meaning of the book of Revelation. He sees the risen Christ standing among "seven golden lampstands," "dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest" (Rev. 1:12, 13). This Old Testament sanctuary imagery presents Christ as the true Lamb of God and our heavenly high priest. Thus the book of Revelation opens with the heavenly announcement that Israel's sacrificial offerings and her Levitical priesthood have found their Messianic fulfillment in the crucified and risen Christ.

As the new covenant high priest, Christ creates a new Israel-"a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (vs. 6). He accomplished this critical transition from national Israel to the new covenant Israel through His death and resurrection as Messiah-king.

The seven golden lampstands in the heavenly sanctuary thus symbolize Christ's universal church as the light of the world-not ethnic Israel. And in explaining to John that "the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (vs. 20), Christ offered the key to understanding the whole book of Revelation: Its symbolisms refer to Christ and His new covenant people.

This thematic connection between Israel of old and the end-time people of God is of fundamental importance for the interpretation of the book of Revelation. It implies more than an isolated allusion to Israel's covenant history, more than an incidental correspondence between the past and the future. Rather it projects the culmination and consummation of Israel's history into the end-time. E. G. White strongly indicated this concept of completion

and consummation: "In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end."<sup>[57]</sup>

The above considerations prohibit any effort to interpret Old Testament names and places according to their geographic or old covenant restrictions. Revelation conveys Christ's message to spiritual Israel. This important principle of prophetic interpretation forms the basis of the threefold message of Revelation 14.<sup>[58]</sup>

### **Meaning of Babylon**

The dangers and struggles of the true church are portrayed in the contrasting symbolism derived from the conflict between Israel and such national foes as Egypt, Babylon, Edom, and Tyre. These hostile powers are mentioned only because they are the avowed enemies of God and His people. Louis F. Were states pointedly: "Babylon is mentioned in the prophecies of the Apocalypse only because of her opposition to Jerusalem."<sup>[59]</sup> Therefore, Babylon must be defined theologically-as an archenemy of Zion, the true people of God. The old national terms are applied in Revelation *on a universal scale* in relation to the worldwide church of Christ.

Because Revelation uses so consistently the imagery of Israel and her enemies, futurists insist that this book pertains mostly to literal Jews in Palestine today. This principle of absolute literalism thus places the Old Testament above the New Testament. It ignores the decisive significance of the cross of Christ, and stands in direct conflict with the inspired key given by Christ Himself in Revelation 1.

But if the tribes of Israel or Zion must be applied to Christ's universal church, then Babylon must refer to the universal enemy of the church of Christ. As ancient Babylon invaded the land of Israel, destroyed its Temple, and carried away its people into captivity, so modern Babylon attacks and enslaves the universal church of Christ, blasphemes the new covenant temple in heaven, and nullifies Christ's divine intercession through a counterfeit method of salvation and worship (see Rev. 14:6, 7; 17:4; 14:8).

## **Babylon's Apostasy**

The divine charge against apostate Christianity, or Babylon, is serious: she "made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (Rev. 14:8). What is this intoxicating "wine" that the harlot Babylon forces all the nations to drink? "False doctrine," replied our early writers.<sup>[60]</sup> Just as human consumption of strong drink confuses the mind and blurs the distinction between reality and fiction, between right and wrong (see Prov. 23:29-33), so do the doctrinal errors and false dogmas of church tradition confuse the true insight into biblical truth and blur the distinction between the holy and the profane.

Our pioneers saw the beginning of this departure from the biblical standard of truth take place early in Christian history as the result of the compromise between Christianity and paganism. This historic compromise, which began to develop shortly after the apostles had all died, led to the development of the "man of sin," or the antichrist, as foretold by Daniel, Paul, and John.

Ellen White interpreted the effort of the early church to secure worldly gains and favors from the political rulers of the Roman Empire as the source of the worldly power of the papacy in Rome, and its cruel persecutions of dissenters. "That gigantic system of false religion," she said, "is a masterpiece of Satan's power—a monument of his efforts to seat himself upon the throne to rule the earth according to his will."<sup>[61]</sup>

J. N. Andrews saw the confusion of the distinction between the church and the world as perhaps the most fundamental perversion of the sacred gospel: "This confusion of [the distinction between] the church and the world is one of the essential errors which made a Babylon of the Catholic Church."<sup>[62]</sup>

The revelator had pointed explicitly to the illicit union of church and state as the reason that the original bride of Christ had become an abominable prostitute among the nations, deserving of the divine judgment: "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and

the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries" (Rev. 17:1, 2).

In this respect also the mainline Protestant church bodies were found wanting. One of the saddest comments that Philip Schaff had to make in his monumental *History of the Christian Church* concerned the great Protestant Reformers: "After having secured liberty from the yoke of popery, they acted on the persecuting principles in which they had been brought up."<sup>[63]</sup>

Accordingly, Adventist writers concluded that modern Babylon consists of both the mother church and the various daughter churches. They saw this in the phrase "Babylon the Great, the *mother* of prostitutes" (vs. 5).

### **Babylon's Double Fall**

Our pioneers held a dual conception of the fall of Babylon: an *ongoing moral fall* (in reference to apostate Christianity's rejection of the message of Revelation 14:6-7), and a future (final) fall under the seventh plague (Rev. 16:17-20). They identified the apocalyptic harlot Babylon (Rev. 14:8; 17:1-6) with contemporary Christianity, through appeal to biblical imagery. Such imagery portrays Israel as the bride of the Lord, who turns to harlotry by seeking unlawful connections with the kings of the earth (Jer. 2; 3; 31:32; and especially Ezek. 16).<sup>[64]</sup>

Thus J. N. Andrews insisted that "Babylon" in Revelation is *not* a civil power or nation, but rather a *religious* body "distinct from, though unlawfully united with, the kings of the earth," as seen in Revelation 17:1, 2.<sup>[65]</sup> He designated the end-time announcement of the fall of Babylon in Revelation 14 as a "moral fall" that preceded her final destruction. He argued that "the people of God are called out of her after her fall, and while her destruction is yet pending (Rev. 18)."<sup>[66]</sup>

Hence the reason for that voice from heaven, calling with apocalyptic urgency prior to Babylon's destruction: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so

that you will not receive any of her plagues, for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes" (Rev. 18:4, 5). The announcement of the moral fall of Babylon was a present truth both to the Millerites and to Sabbatarian Adventists, because the professed churches rejected the judgment hour message sounded by the first angel of Revelation 14.

In 1858 Ellen G. White explained the rationale for calling this rejection of truth a "moral fall": "The churches would not receive the light of the first angel's message, and as they rejected the light from heaven they fell from the favor of God. They trusted in their own strength, and placed themselves by their opposition to the first message where they could not see the light of the second angel's message. But the beloved of God, who were oppressed, answered to the message, Babylon is fallen, and left the fallen churches."<sup>[67]</sup>

Mrs. White considered the fall of Babylon to be a progressively downward fall into greater error and falsehood. It would not be *complete* until the end of probation. This makes room for a final call to come out of the fallen churches, which points to the "loud cry" of Revelation 18:1-5. Consequently, the Adventist pioneers acknowledged that many of God's people still remained within the fallen churches. Ellen White wrote in 1858:

"I saw that God had honest children among the nominal Adventists, and the fallen churches, and ministers and people will yet be called out from these churches, before the plagues shall be poured out, and they will gladly embrace the truth."<sup>[68]</sup>

### **Universal Warning**

Adventists envision two specific calls to leave the apostate churches. The reasoning suggests that since, according to the Gospels, Jesus *began* and *ended* His public ministry on earth by cleansing the Temple of Jerusalem from its religious profanation, "so in the last work for the warning of the world, two distinct calls are made to the churches."<sup>[69]</sup>

But while the 1844 proclamation of the fall of Babylon concentrated largely in America, the final call for God's people to come out of Babylon goes worldwide. It will move with

"unwonted power," under the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the "latter rain."<sup>[70]</sup> The inhabitants of the world will be compelled to take their stand in the midst of powerful miracles and signs, such as characterized the "early rain" at the opening of the gospel.

### **Part 6: Final Warning**

The messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12 are inextricably connected. Not only do they form an unbreakable unit; they also follow a very significant sequence.

First in the divine ranking comes the proclamation of the "everlasting gospel" (Rev. 14:6), emphasizing God's free and justifying grace. Then follows a universal summons to "fear God" and glorify Him as Creator and Judge (vs. 7). Only after these important preparatory messages comes Heaven's solemn verdict that Babylon's apostasy has gone beyond remedy-that she is condemned to drink the wine of God's wrath (vs. 8-11). This is the irreversible order of God's ultimatum in the time of the end. It contains, however, the divine assurance that a faithful remnant people will emerge from this final crisis in the history of the church (vs. 12).

#### **Initial Fulfillment**

Adventists believe that the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14 found their initial fulfillment in the Millerite movement and in the subsequent Sabbathkeeping Advent movement. Our pioneers considered this historical fulfillment of vital importance in maintaining our sense of mission in the world. That is why Ellen White was so concerned about the "great lack of knowledge in regard to the rise and progress of the third angel's message" among our church members.<sup>[71]</sup> For her, the fulfillment of the three angels' message in the experience of the Advent people gave validity to our faith. Without hesitation, she declared, "Ministers should present the sure word of prophecy as the foundation of the faith of Seventh-day Adventists."<sup>[72]</sup>

The solemn warning of the third angel in Revelation 14 constitutes a specific mandate for the end-time church. It allows the church to face the totalitarian claims of Babylon and her imposition of the mark of the beast on all the inhabitants of the earth. The warning message specifically alerts all true believers to the inexorable consequences of drinking the wine of Babylon. Whoever does, it says, "will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath" (14:10).

### **The Wrath of God**

The wrath of God is not *just* a metaphor that can be explained away as the outworking of the natural law of cause and effect. Nor does it simply stand for a divine emotion telling us how God feels. Rather it symbolizes the way God *has acted* and *will act* against sin and impenitent sinners. The wrath of God is an awesome historical reality.

If God's wrath does not represent a real retribution of sin, Christ's sacrifice on the cross was not necessary for our atonement and our reconciliation with God. The *need* for atonement is based on the reality of the wrath of God against sin. God's love and God's wrath both point to a divine reality. George E. Ladd pointedly expressed their mutual relation: "Atonement is necessary because men stand under the wrath and judgment of God."<sup>[73]</sup> Consequently, all who deliberately and ultimately reject the atoning blood of Christ will incur "the wrath of the Lamb!" (Rev. 6:16).

If those in Israel who rejected the law of Moses were sentenced to death "without mercy" (Heb. 10:28), "how much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (vs. 29; see also John 3:36). According to Ellen White, "the death of Christ brings to the rejecter of His mercy the wrath and judgments of God, unmixed with mercy. This is the wrath of the Lamb."<sup>[74]</sup>

## Unmixed With Mercy

The earnest warning against the "unmixed" wrath of God (Rev. 14:10, RSV) suggests that this coming judgment will no longer contain the mitigating mercy of God, as in the past (Hab. 3:2; Dan. 9:11, 12, 16-18). Rather one is reminded of the ancient institution of Israel's holy war, by which a dangerous enemy was to be placed "under ban" (Hebrew: *cherem*). That meant he was to be destroyed totally and without mercy (Deut. 7:2, 5, 6; 20:16-18). Also, false prophets who had incited Israel to worship gods other than Yahweh were to be executed without pity (Deut. 13:8).

In his day Ezekiel shocked Israel with his prediction that apostate Jerusalem would soon experience the horrible judgment of the wrath of God. The only comforting light in his dark prophecy was the vision of a priestly angel, clothed in linen, advancing ahead of the angels of wrath (Ezek. 9). The executioners were not to touch any of those who bore the divine "mark" of protection on their foreheads—a sign of sincere repentance of spiritual apostasy and social injustice (vs. 6). But for those *not* found faithful in this preliminary investigative judgment, the ultimate judgment applied: "I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done" (vs. 10).

Jerusalem experienced the horrible reality of this divine judgment in 586 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, totally destroyed the city, sparing only a small remnant (see 2 Chr. 36:15-20). The chronicler assessed Jerusalem's spiritual condition prior to this punishing judgment as follows: "They mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy" (vs. 16).

This horrendous destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon constitutes a prophetic type of God's more severe judgment on the holy city because of her rejection of the Messiah-King at His coming (see Dan. 9:26, 27). The New Testament explicitly confirms that the second destruction of Jerusalem, in A.D. 70 by the Roman armies, came for the ultimate sin of

rejecting the Messiah (Matt. 23:32-39). Jesus had warned: "They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you" (Luke 19:44).

And what happened to the Jews serves as a warning to all mankind. Paul speaks about "those who are self-seeking," who "reject the truth and follow evil." For them, he says, "there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. . . . For God does not show favoritism" (Rom. 2:8, 9-11).

The decisive point for Paul, then, is not whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, but whether one accepts or rejects Jesus Christ and His everlasting gospel.

Moreover, the apostle's concept of the wrath of God is primarily eschatological. Its full manifestation takes place at the second advent of Christ. In this vein he addressed his countrymen: "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (vs. 5).

In order to warn all people of the impending danger and to command their attention, we need to have a *clear* message concerning this vital matter. In Revelation 15 John sees a great and marvelous sign: "seven angels with the seven last plagues-last, because *with them God's wrath is completed*" (vs. 1).

In other words, the third angel announces the certainty of the seven last plagues as the outpouring of God's wrath on Babylon. At that time human probation will have ended, for "no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed" (vs. 8). Revelation 16 explains in further detail that the plagues are intended exclusively for those who follow the beast and the false prophet in the time of the end, for all who accept their specific mark of loyalty and allegiance.

## Final Warning

The understanding of this thematic unfolding in Revelation 14-16 caused the founding fathers of Adventism to include the seven last plagues as "an integral part of the third angel's message."<sup>[75]</sup> And the angel's reference to the specter of restless torment "with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10) led James White to the conclusion that more than death is involved. He saw in this judgment the terrors of "the second death at the end of the 1,000 years of Revelation 20."<sup>[76]</sup> Indeed, only at the end of the millennium, when the hosts of "Gog and Magog" gather around the camp of God's people, will fire come down from heaven and devour the wicked (Rev. 20:7-9).

No wonder Ellen White called this grave and solemn warning concerning the coming wrath of God by the third angel "the last invitation of mercy to the world."<sup>[77]</sup> To her, the true understanding of this threefold message was of vital importance: "The destiny of souls hangs upon the manner in which they are received."<sup>[78]</sup>

This message will ripen the harvest of the whole earth, either for immortality or for the seven last plagues. It is the divine standard by which the worshipers of God are now to be tested and sealed. But the assurance is added that a final remnant of *true* Israelites will stand the test before God, because they "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12, RSV; cf. Rev. 7:1-4; 14:1-5).

Thus the third angel conveys also the urgent call to all seekers of God to choose Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour and to remain loyal to Him through the final crisis. Jesus alone "rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess. 1:10).

The seven punitive judgments of Revelation 16 are not the vindictive and capricious outburst of an offended God. Rather they constitute a well-ordered demonstration of the final covenant curses meted out to a persistently apostate covenant people.

Leviticus 26 presents a prototype of these judgments. There the Lord warned Israel of the consequences of her idolatry and willful rejection of His law, notwithstanding repeated calls

for repentance (vss. 1, 14-16). The text refers to a *sevenfold punishment* and a virtual divine declaration of war against the covenant people (vss. 18, 21, 24, 28-33).

It is remarkable that the Septuagint version of the Old Testament translates Leviticus 26:21 as follows: "And if after this you should walk perversely, and not be willing to obey me, I will further bring upon you *seven plagues [plegas hepta] according to your sins.*"<sup>[79]</sup> These are called the expression of God's "anger" (vs. 28).

### **Purpose of Judgment**

But if the divine purpose of the seven last plagues is not to evoke repentance, as was the case with the seven trumpets (Rev. 11:13), what then, could be the divine intention in this final pouring out of His "unmixed" wrath? We list at least three purposes.

1. To awaken recognition on the part of Babylon that by her imposition of the mark of the beast and her persecution of dissenters, she has wickedly set herself in opposition to the almighty Creator Himself. However, this recognition results in stubborn blasphemy of the name of God and obdurate refusal to repent and glorify Him (Rev. 16:9, 11, 21)-a development that points to a second purpose for God's fearful judgment.

2. To reveal Babylon's hidden hostility against God and His faithful covenant people. Three times the text emphasizes Babylon's mysterious hardening of the heart. She appears even more indurate than the ancient Egyptian pharaoh. As Heinrich Kraft says, "The stubborn continuation of sin punishes itself in that it bars its own way to repentance."<sup>[80]</sup>

3. To bring into the public light the fruitage of a heart that worships the beast (Rev. 13:4, 8, 12) and refuses to respond to the divine appeal (Rev. 14:6, 7; 18:1) or to the severity of God's judgments (Rev. 16:11, 21). The wicked impute the evil that befalls them to God the Judge, and curse Him as if He were a tyrant (vss. 9, 11). Thus they give evidence that they never understood the love of God and His atoning sacrifice. Babylon hereby condemns herself and declares herself lost.

So the plagues disclose the hearts and the works of men and their real attitude to Christ. The divine intention becomes all the more apparent in that God incites the works of humanity to bear their own fruits. Babylon will then suffer the consequences of what she has done. She is judged according to her own works.

"Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. . . . Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you" (Rev. 18:6-20)

And so at last justice triumphs, and the cry from under the altar-for judgment and vindication-is finally answered. At last the universe is secure.

### **Part 7: The Drying of Euphrates**

The three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 warn against the coming judgment of the seven last plagues (Rev. 15:1). These plagues culminate in the cosmic war of Armageddon and the destruction of spiritual Babylon (Rev. 16:13-21). Consequently, they form an essential part of the message of the three angels, and cannot be omitted for the sake of convenience. Ignorance or uncertainty of their proper significance would render us unfaithful to the commission of preparing a people for the final conflict. The proclamation of the "eternal gospel" (Rev. 14:6) specifically includes the warning against Armageddon, that cosmic battle in which the "wrath of God" pours out without mercy. In order to understand the biblical meaning of Armageddon, we need to study the typological connection between the fall of ancient Babylon and its end-time counterpart, modern (or spiritual) Babylon.

#### **Fall of Ancient Babylon**

The accounts of two Greek historiographers-Herodotus (born about 484 B.C.) and

Xenophon (born about 431 B.C.)-support the historical accuracy of Babylon's fall through the deliberate and sudden diversion of the flow of the Euphrates.<sup>[81]</sup> It is important to note the *manner* of Babylon's historical fall, and how accurately prophecy had predicted it. Cyrus, the Persian army general, indeed came from the *east* as predicted (Isa. 41:2, 25). According to the Cyrus cylinder, he took Babylon "without any battle."<sup>[82]</sup> His surprise entry into the city by means of diverting the incoming Euphrates took place in literal fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 44:27, 28; Jer. 51:13, 36; 50:38). The Lord would even "open doors before him so that gates will not be shut" (Isa. 45:1).

Isaiah had stressed the redemptive purpose of it all: "For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen" (verse 4). And again, "He [Cyrus] will rebuild my city and set my exiles free" (vs. 13) and restore the Temple (Isa. 44:28). Accordingly, God bestowed on Cyrus the honorable titles of "his anointed" and "my shepherd" (Isa. 45:1; 44:28). These titles elevate his conquest of Babylon and his subsequent redemption of Israel (see Ezra 1:1-4) to a symbol of the Messiah's final battle against the end-time Babylon.

Already, in the type, it was the Lord who spoke to the Euphrates: "Be dry, and I will dry up your streams" (Isa. 44:27). Cyrus was God's agent only in the judgment on Babylon. Just as the Lord and His covenant people were at the center of the fall of Babylon, so Christ and His covenant people-His faithful church-stand at the center of the fall of modern Babylon during Armageddon.

### **Significant Parallels**

The details surrounding the fall of ancient Babylon are essential in attempting to understand the significance of the fall of spiritual Babylon.

1. Babylon functioned as the enemy of the Lord and as the oppressor of Israel.
2. The Euphrates was an integral part of Babylon, supporting and protecting it as a wall. As such, then, it was itself hostile to Israel.

3. The drying up of the Euphrates was the prelude to God's judgment on Babylon, leading to its sudden downfall. The drying up, therefore, signified the preparation for Israel's deliverance.

4. Cyrus and his allied kings of the Medes and Persians (Jer. 50:41; 51:11, 28) came as the predicted kings from the east to Babylon to fulfill God's purposes. They were enemies of Babylon and the deliverers of Israel. Cyrus was "anointed" by the Lord to defeat Babylon and set Israel free.

5. Daniel and the rest of God's faithful people living as captives in Babylon constituted the repentant, faithful covenant people of God (see Dan. 9).

### **Modern Babylon**

These historical details are crucial for understanding the references to the fall of Babylon that we find in the Apocalypse.

In the book of Revelation, Babylon represents the archenemy of Christ and of His church. In the end-time, both Babylon and Israel are universal. Their territorial scope is worldwide. The gospel is explicitly sent out "to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev. 14:6), the fourfold emphasis suggesting its universal radius. The subsequent announcement that Babylon the great is fallen rests on the fact that she has "made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (vs. 8). The whole world has finally come under her spell (Rev. 13:3, 4, 7).

In harmony with this universal scope of end-time Babylon, Inspiration also gives to Babylon's river, the Euphrates, a universal application: "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages" (Rev. 17:15). Those who insist that the "Euphrates" represents only the people that live in the actual geographic location of the actual Euphrates River are bound to follow the same restrictive interpretation for "Babylon," "Israel," "Mount Zion," and other such terms in the book of Revelation. This would represent a failure to grasp the Christocentric character of biblical typology. The

gospel, in so far as it applies to the Messianic era, moves away from the restrictions of ethnic and geographic literalism.

Theologically, we may define Babylon by its relation to (1) the God of Israel and His way of salvation in the sanctuary, and (2) God's covenant people.

The Old Testament records Babylon's important role in the life of God's covenant people. It destroyed the Temple of God in Jerusalem, trampled upon His religious truth, blasphemed the name of the Lord, and ravished His covenant people (2 Chr. 36:5-20; Dan. 5:1-5). This historical portrait of Babylon helps to clarify the picture we find in the book of Revelation. Babylon's rebellion against God's authority operated in two dimensions: *vertically*, against God's sovereign and saving will, and *horizontally*, against God's covenant people and their sacred sanctuary worship. Babylon was at war on a double front-against the God of Israel, and against the Israel of God. (See Rev. 14:18; 17:1-6; 18:1-8.)

The hatred that inspired Babylon of old will motivate the end-time Babylon in a more intensified measure. God is now inseparably united with the *risen* Christ. Modern Babylon must therefore be defined as the archenemy of Christ and of His people.<sup>[83]</sup> The New Jerusalem is explicitly called the bride or "wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9), while "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (vs. 22). Only those may enter it "whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (vs. 27). The center of command in the Apocalypse is emphatically "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1, 3), and Christ is honored with full divine prerogatives (vs. 13).

Apocalyptic Babylon directs its blasphemy and hatred against God, against His Christ, and against His faithful people (Rev. 12:5-12). It attacks and enslaves the universal church and distorts her teaching concerning the way of salvation and of true worship (Rev. 14:6, 7; 17:4; 14:8).

## **Destruction of Babylon**

The thrust of John's message in the Apocalypse is that Christ will judge the end-time Babylon once and for all, and will vindicate the end-time Israel with a glorious rescue. The impending fall of Babylon will resemble that of ancient Babylon. The theological essentials remain the same. However, the ethnic and geographic restrictions no longer apply. The modern counterpart is of cosmic and universal proportions.

As God's judgment fell *suddenly* on ancient Babylon (Isa. 47:9, 11; Jer. 51:8), so will judgment come *suddenly* upon the anti-Christian kingdom of modern Babylon (Rev. 18:8, 10, 19). Moreover, the end-time fall of Babylon will be much more devastating and infinitely more spectacular than that of its historical counterparts.

It is helpful to see that while John describes the gathering of all political powers to Armageddon under the *sixth* plague, which announces the sudden drying up of the great river Euphrates (Rev. 16:12-16), he describes under the *seventh* plague nothing but the final demolition of Babylon (vss. 17-21). This clearly suggests that Armageddon and the destruction of end-time Babylon are identical.

## **The Drying of Euphrates**

In the Old Testament, whenever God dried up a literal river or a "flood" of enemies-like the Red Sea or the Jordan River, or the flood of enemy invaders (Isa. 8:7, 8)-it always signified a providential judgment on the enemies of God's people. The drying up of Babylon's great river during the sixth plague (Rev. 16:12) will be no exception.

This judgment is set in motion when, in the wake of divine condemnation, nations and political rulers suddenly and unitedly withdraw their allegiance and support from Babylon. They will even hate and despise Babylon. This is the sudden dissolution of Babylon that, in God's providence, destroys her.

Revelation 17, which explains the sixth and seventh plagues, reveals the surprising shift

from loyal support of Babylon by her political followers to absolute hatred against her religious leadership as a result of God's own verdict (vs. 17). The waters of the Euphrates (the persecuting multitudes [vs. 15]) will suddenly dry up. This points to the withdrawal of allegiance, obedience, and support. The harlot's former lover, the beast with 10 horns, will suddenly become her enemy, and will destroy her completely (verse 16). This unexpected *reversal* of the unholy union will occur only at the *hour* when Babylon attacks the Messianic remnant in the time of the end (see Rev. 17:14; 12:17; 13:15.).

When Cyrus had dried up the waters of the Euphrates, *the way was prepared* for all the kings from the east to enter Babylon's capital city and to take over her world government. Thus the handwriting on Belshazzar's banquet wall was fulfilled: "Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:28).

However, the prophecies of Babylon's fall did not yet find their complete and exhaustive consummation when Cyrus overthrew ancient Babylon or when Israel (subsequently) returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-5). The spectacular cosmic signs and the everlasting destruction of Babylon will be fulfilled only when the Messiah personally enters the scene as the holy warrior to overthrow Babylon, because her crimes against the Israel of God have "piled up to heaven" (Rev. 18:5).

The fact that Christ will bring divine judgment from the heavenly temple on spiritual Babylon (Rev. 15-19) is more than a striking analogy to Cyrus' victorious overthrow of ancient Babylon. Christ's final mission is to consummate those types and prophecies relating to the deliverance of "Israel" from "Babylon" on a universal or cosmic scale. Christ's coming will not originate from any earthly place, but directly from the throne of God in heaven—from the direction of the cosmic east. This will be the greatest theophanic glory ever displayed to the world, the most spectacular liberation of God's covenant people ever experienced.

"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. . . . The armies of heaven were

following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean" (Rev. 19:11-14).

When Christ our king will appear in the eastern skies, with a great white cloud as His war chariot, He will be escorted by "a retinue of holy angels, with bright, glittering crowns upon their heads," all of them riding on white horses.<sup>[84]</sup> The fall of Babylon has prepared His way to descend and to take over the government of Planet Earth as the rightful king. Thus the apocalyptic statement, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Crown Him with many crowns,  
The Lamb upon His throne;  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
All music but its own!  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
Of Him who died for thee;  
And hail Him as thy matchless King  
Through all eternity.<sup>[85]</sup>

### **Part 8: On the Road to Righteousness**

Soon after the emergence of Sabbathkeeping Adventists, certain disturbing characteristics of spiritual Babylon began to develop among them. They began to reflect more and more the spirit of the Laodicean church of Revelation 3. Love and zeal for the Lord gave way to self-exaltation and self-righteousness.

#### **Not Yet Ready**

This state of affairs provided sure evidence that the remnant people as a whole were not yet

ready for the final seal of divine approval needed to protect them against the punitive judgment of the last plagues.

In 1851 Ellen G. White stated frankly that *most* of the Sabbatarian Adventists were not ready for the final events. They dwelled too long on "little trials," "picking at straws," she said, and were motivated too much by self-justification. She heard this heavenly rebuke of God's people: "Sabbathkeepers will have to die to self, die to pride and love of approbation. . . . Those who profess His name are not ready."<sup>[86]</sup>

James White, adding his voice to that of his wife, warned that many who professed the truth were not real Bible Christians. Evidencing a significant turn in the self-understanding of the emerging movement, he identified Sabbathkeeping Adventists with the *Laodicean* church of Revelation 3. He urged that the remnant church be "stripped from self-righteous views and feelings,"<sup>[87]</sup> that it recognize its own need for thorough repentance. Like Daniel of old, James White confessed: "We, as a people, have evidently rested down upon the theory of truth, and have neglected to seek Bible humility, Bible patience, Bible self-denial, and Bible watchfulness, and sacrifice, Bible holiness, and the power and gifts of the Holy Ghost. . . . Hence it is said, 'And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked' [Rev. 3:17]. What a condition!"<sup>[88]</sup>

Ellen White even announced the shocking fact, new in Adventist eschatology, that the modern Sabbathkeeping people were basically *repeating* the history of Israel in the wilderness: "Modern Israel are in greater danger of forgetting God and being led into idolatry than were His ancient people. Many idols are worshiped, even by professed Sabbathkeepers."<sup>[89]</sup>

The purified remnant would become visible only in the final "shaking" of the church by means of the straight preaching of Christ's message in Revelation 3 to the Laodicean church. All depends on this "straight testimony" of the risen Christ to the end-time church: "I saw that the testimony of the True Witness has not been half heeded. The solemn testimony upon

which the destiny of the church hangs has been lightly esteemed, if not entirely disregarded. This testimony must work deep repentance; all who truly receive it will obey it and be purified."<sup>[90]</sup>

This humbled remnant will receive the latter rain of the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim the truth with unprecedented pentecostal power. As a result, many souls will be harvested.<sup>[91]</sup>

The Laodicean message was to become increasingly timely for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A significant milepost and turning point came in the Bible messages of Elders Jones and Waggoner, when they presented righteousness by faith in Christ to the General Conference session of 1888.<sup>[92]</sup> They transformed the traditional doctrinal preaching into Christ-centered, Spirit-filled gospel preaching.

This emphasis elicited Ellen White's moral support, because, as she said, "many had lost sight of Jesus."<sup>[93]</sup> Protesting against the trend to seek our security in sanctification, she stated boldly: "We are not to be anxious about what Christ or God thinks of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute. Ye are accepted in the Beloved."<sup>[94]</sup>

However, some leaders feared that such a strong emphasis on justification by faith would obscure the teaching of "the good old doctrines" of the third angel's message. But Mrs. White rejected this assumed competition between law and gospel as a false dilemma. In an inspiring article on the Laodicean message, entitled "Repentance, the Gift of God," she wrote, "Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, 'It is the third angel's message in verity.'<sup>[95]</sup>

In this thought-provoking announcement she intimately unites the third angel's message of Revelation 14 with Christ's message to the Laodicean church. This is a profound insight, which has far-reaching implications for the central focus of the three-angels' messages.

Arthur G. Daniells explained it as follows: "All who accept the third angel's message should enter into the experience of justification by faith. . . . They should know by personal experience the work of regeneration. . . . They should know that their guilt has been canceled,

that they have been delivered from the condemnation of the law, and are thus ready to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. They should know by victorious experience that they have laid hold of, and are being kept by, 'the faith of Jesus,' and that by this faith they are empowered to keep the commandments of God."<sup>[96]</sup>

Can this fundamental gospel appeal ever become obsolete? The experience of such a victorious faith in Christ will be evident at the outpouring of the Spirit of God in the latter rain.<sup>[97]</sup> The result of such Christ-centered and Spirit-filled preaching of the gospel in its fullness will be a true revival: "The loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer. This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth."<sup>[98]</sup>

So no matter whether we preach the Sabbath, or Armageddon, or repentance and humility, Christ must be uplifted always as our Lord and Saviour. Ellen White declared, "Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world."<sup>[99]</sup>

### **Maintaining the Breakthrough**

A theory of truth is not enough. Each preacher needs to know personally the saving and sanctifying power of Christ.

William W. Prescott (1855-1944) sought to safeguard the Minneapolis revival by restructuring our whole doctrinal system into a Christ-centered gospel message. He realized that if Adventism was to have a Christocentric message, it needed to be more Bible centered than doctrine centered. This was the purpose of *The Doctrine of Christ*,<sup>[100]</sup> a textbook he wrote for use in the Battle Creek College curriculum.

For Prescott, justification by faith was a fundamental gospel truth in both Scripture and Protestantism: "It was *the* message of Saint Paul, and *the* truth that lay at the heart of the distinctive messages of the non-Pauline Epistles too, and . . . it was *the* truth of the great

Reformation of the Western church."<sup>[101]</sup>

Gripped by this message of revival and reformation, Arthur G. Daniells (1858-1935) wrote his epochal book *Christ our Righteousness*. His emphasis was that Christianity is basically a personal relationship to a Person, Jesus Christ. Jesus was to be the attracting power, the living heart of the Adventist message.

Daniell's emphasis led LeRoy Froom (1890-1974) to a soul-searching confession: "I saw that I had too often been believing and trusting in a message rather than a Person. . . . I had placed my affection and my allegiance in a movement ordained of God rather than in the living Christ of that movement."<sup>[102]</sup>

This burden was revived again during the pre-session council of the Ministerial Association in San Francisco in 1950. Arthur S. Maxwell underscored the point: "What is this that I hear? The preaching of Christ more important than the preaching of doctrine? The uplifting of Jesus more efficacious than the interpretation of prophecy? Can it be possible that we have stumbled at last upon God's primary purpose for His church, the fundamental secret of successful evangelism?"<sup>[103]</sup> Maxwell then exclaimed: "Thank God for this new emphasis upon Jesus!"<sup>[104]</sup>

### **The Assurance of Ultimate Victory**

Christ counsels His people to buy from Him-at the price of self-surrender-"gold refined by fire," "white garments to clothe you," and "salve to anoint your eyes" (Rev. 3:18, RSV). Christ offers to us His righteousness-imputed and imparted-in all its fullness. To fall daily on the Rock in self-denial, to wrestle with God like Jacob at the Jabbok, to hide behind the Man of Calvary, to obey all His commandments by faith alone, to manifest love to all-this will be our righteousness.

"Those who come up to the point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation."<sup>[105]</sup>

Christ promises to all His trusting disciples a life of "uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but recognized as such in the great hereafter."<sup>[106]</sup> The 144,000 reveal Christ's righteousness in their conquest over the "beast and its image" (Rev. 15:2, RSV).

Although this divine vindication has been accomplished in the true Israel since the day of Pentecost, the book of Revelation points to a specific climactic fulfillment in the 144,000.

### **The Vital Preparation**

Our responsibility today is to make the needful *preparation* to receive the latter rain. This "refreshment" *fits* us to live in the sight of a holy God during the time of trouble and to stand in the battle of the day of the Lord.<sup>[107]</sup> We need His power in order to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and "to impress His own character upon His church."<sup>[108]</sup>

The latter rain can bring no seed to perfection "unless the early showers have done their work."<sup>[109]</sup> To expect that the latter rain power will supply the *lack* of continual character growth is "a terrible mistake."<sup>[110]</sup> Now, daily, it is our privilege and duty to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, constantly "offered in infinite plenitude."<sup>[111]</sup>

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- [1]. See William Miller, *Evidence From Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, About the Year 1843* (Boston: B. B. Mussey, 1840), 8. In 1833 Miller received a Baptist license to preach.
- [2]. Miller claimed to be "in accordance with the opinions of all the standard Protestant commentators" for the year-day symbolism. See L. E. Froom, *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946-1954): 472-73.
- [3]. The year 457 B.C. is the date of King Artaxerxes' decree to rebuild Jerusalem, the event pinpointed in Daniel 9:25.
- [4]. See Miller, 39-58.
- [5]. Froom, 473.
- [6]. See *ibid.*, 3:256.
- [7]. W. L. Emmerson, *The Reformation and the Advent Movement* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1983), 197.
- [8]. These five fundamentals are cited from A. L. White, *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Washington, DC: Board of Trustees of E. G. White Pubs., 1954), 40.
- [9]. See *Early Writings*, 258-61; Ellen G. white, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 30-31.
- [10]. See *Review and Herald* 1, No. 1, 7-8.
- [11]. Uriah Smith, *The Sanctuary and the Twenty-three Hundred Days of Daniel VIII 14* (Battle Creek, MI: SDA Pub. Assn., 1877), 102.
- [12]. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary* 7:971.
- [13]. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 368.
- [14]. *Ibid.*, 405.
- [15]. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies* 1:37.
- [16]. *Ibid.*, 43.
- [17]. *The Great Controversy*, 389 (italics supplied); cf. J. N. Andrews, *The Three Messages of Revelation XIV, 6-12* (Battle Creek, MI: SDA Pub. Assn., 1872), 48-50.
- [18]. *The Great Controversy*, 390.
- [19]. *Testimonies* 1:337.
- [20]. Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* 1:168.
- [21]. *Ibid.*, 169.
- [22]. See documentation in P. G. Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), 243.
- [23]. See Damsteegt, chap. 2.
- [24]. A. Pieters, *Studies in the Revelation of Saint John*, 43; as cited in D. F. Neufeld, "Biblical Interpretation in the Advent Movement," in G. M. Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1974), 112.
- [25]. See LeRoy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*.
- [26]. See *ibid.*
- [27]. *Ibid.*, 3:11.
- [28]. See *ibid.*, vol. 4, charts on 393, 397.
- [29]. *Ibid.*, chap. 9.
- [30]. *Ibid.*, 389-90.
- [31]. See *ibid.*, 4:1209-1210, Appendix A.
- [32]. *Ibid.*, 1209.
- [33]. James White, *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1880, 330. See James White, *Bible Adventism* (Battle Creek, MI: SDA Pub. Assn., n.d.; repr. Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1972), 70-76.
- [34]. Hiram Edson, "An Appeal to the Laodicean Church," *Adventist Review Extra*, September 1850; as quoted in P. G. Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), 249.

- [35]. Ibid.
- [36]. Augustin C. Bourdeau, "Our Present Position, in the Waiting, Tarrying Time," *Review and Herald*, May 28, 1867, as noted in Damsteegt, 249.
- [37]. *Testimonies* 1:609. Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath a Perpetual Sign* (New Bedford, MA, 1846), 2, as quoted in Damsteegt, 138.
- [38]. Ibid.
- [39]. Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 96.
- [40]. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary* 4:1184.
- [41]. *Testimonies* 3:62.
- [42]. Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, 238.
- [43]. *Testimonies* 7:75.
- [44]. Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 170.
- [45]. Ibid., 187-88.
- [46]. Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural references in this section are from the NIV.
- [47]. See P. Lassiter, *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1975).
- [48]. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), vols. 20, 21, bk. 3, chap. 23, sec. 7.
- [49]. See the important contribution by Ivan T. Blazen, "Justification and Judgment," in F. B. Holbrook, ed., *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 339-88.
- [50]. A. Sproule, " 'Judgment Seat' or 'Awards Podium'?" *Spire*, Spring 1984, 3-5. He stresses, on the basis of 1 Cor 3:15, "that a believer's salvation and eternal destiny is in no way endangered."
- [51]. H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God* (Southampton, England: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1986), 62-64.
- [52]. K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 103.
- [53]. William Cunningham, *A Dissertation on the Seals and Trumpets of the Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1817), 280 (in the 3rd ed. [1849], 255). Cunningham says, "So far were they [the Reformers] from preaching to all the inhabitants of the earth that they did not even preach through the whole of Christian Europe. The Reformation was not permitted to enter into some of the most extensive kingdoms of the Romish jurisdiction. It was entirely excluded from Spain, Portugal, and Italy."
- [54]. *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, 617.
- [55]. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 762.
- [56]. Quoted in Ellen G. White, *Historical Sketches* (Basel: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), 189 (italics supplied).
- [57]. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 585.
- [58]. See L. F. Were, *The Certainty of the Third Angel's Message* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1979), chap. 9, for an extensive treatment of the Hebrew symbolism in Revelation.
- [59]. See L. F. Were, *The Fall of Babylon in Type and Antitype* (Melbourne, Australia: 1952), 14.
- [60]. J. N. Andrews, *The Three Messages of Revelation 14* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1892), 51; *The Great Controversy*, 388-89, 536.
- [61]. *The Great Controversy*, 50.
- [62]. Andrews, 68
- [63]. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* 6 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898): 51. See his larger indictment of the Protestant state churches as persecutors on pp. 50-86.
- [64]. Andrews, 51, 54, 65, 67.
- [65]. P. G. Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*

- (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), 180.
- [66]. *Ibid.*, 181.
- [67]. *Spiritual Gifts* 1:140.
- [68]. *Ibid.*, 172.
- [69]. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary* 7:985.
- [70]. *The Great Controversy*, 611.
- [71]. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 2, 392.
- [72]. Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, 148.
- [73]. G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974), 425.
- [74]. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary* 5:1107.
- [75]. Documentation in P. G. Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), 214.
- [76]. *Ibid.*, 214, 215.
- [77]. *The Great Controversy*, 609.
- [78]. *Spiritual Gifts* 1:168. James White had written already in 1850 that the threefold message of Revelation 14 will decide the eternal destiny of this generation (see Damsteegt, 217).
- [79]. J. M. Ford, *Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 255, counts exactly seven punishments in Leviticus 26:18-34 (if no repentance).
- [80]. *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Hb.z.N.T. 16a (Tübingen: 1974), 207.
- [81]. Herodotus Book I, 191, in *Herodotus*, A. D. Godley, trans., Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946): 239-40; Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 7.5.7-34, in *Xenophon's Cyropaedia*, W. Miller, trans., Loeb Classical Library, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1943): 265-75. H.W.F. Saggs, *The Greatness That Was Babylon* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962). 152, comments, "There is no reason to reject the story."
- [82]. J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 315, states, "Without any battle, he [Marduk] made him enter his town Babylon, sparing Babylon any calamity."
- [83]. See H. K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*. Andrews University Monograph Series, vol. 13 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), chaps. 5, 7.
- [84]. *Early Writings*, 286.
- [85]. Matthew Bridges, 1851.
- [86]. *Early Writings*, 119-21.
- [87]. James White, *Review and Herald*, November 13, 1856, 13.
- [88]. *Ibid.*, October 16, 1856, 189.
- [89]. *Testimonies* 1:609, in 1867.
- [90]. *Early Writings*, 270.
- [91]. *Ibid.*, 271.
- [92]. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 91-92.
- [93]. *Ibid.*, 92.
- [94]. *Selected Messages*, Book 2, 32-33.
- [95]. *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890, 193.
- [96]. A. G. Daniells, *Christ Our Righteousness* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1926), 84-85.
- [97]. See *Early Writings*, 71.
- [98]. Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1892, 722.
- [99]. *Gospel Workers*, 156.
- [100]. William W. Prescott, *The Doctrine of Christ* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald

Pub. Assn., 1920).

[101]. *The Doctrine of Christ*, 120.

[102]. LeRoy Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1971), 397-98. See also G. Land, ed., *Adventism in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 164-67.

[103]. Arthur Maxwell, *Aflame for God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1951), 111.

[104]. *Ibid.*, 113.

[105]. *Testimonies* 1:187.

[106]. *The Desire of Ages*, 679.

[107]. See *Early Writings*, 71.

[108]. *The Desire of Ages*, 671.

[109]. *Testimonies to Ministers*, 506.

[110]. *Ibid.*, 507.

[111]. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 50.

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