

Understanding End-time Events: Session 1

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Underlying convictions for this series

(See Ellen G. White statements in Appendix.)

- ❖ The great Advent movement and the Bible teachings sustained by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, are that which the Lord, not man, has wrought.
- ❖ Christ has been and still is, our Leader.
- ❖ The teaching of *our* past history has been *His* teaching.
- ❖ A century ago, we were told that great changes, strange developments would come.
- ❖ A sidetrack is a teaching by a Seventh-day Adventist who becomes engrossed in collecting Scriptures to pile up/misapply around erroneous theories.
- ❖ We need the watchcare, counsel, and strength of the body.
- ❖ To pursue a theory independent of the body is to take a course directly contrary to the Bible.
- ❖ “New” light never contradicts “old” light.
- ❖ When considering that which is claimed to be “new” light, the discovery of elements of the teaching that directly contradict “old” light places us in a decided position in terms of our obligation to study the claim. We are commanded “not to entertain” the aftersuppositions, i.e. that which has been claimed to be new light. We are not to pursue its study further.
- ❖ That which we may call the conventional Seventh-day Adventist prophetic understanding is crucial, pregnant with meaning, and vital for us today. (By conventional, I mean the teachings unambiguously presented through Ellen G. White in *The Great Controversy*, *Early Writings*, etc. not tangents, theories, fragments, guesses, or inferences about what she taught.)

William Miller: Overview

William Miller (1782 - 1849) was the seminal source for what would become the Seventh-day Adventist Church—God’s designated agency to facilitate the living and giving of the Third Angel’s Message. Although Miller never became a Seventh-day Adventist, his life and experience stood at the root and beginning of the first and second angel’s messages. His outworking of the 2,300 day/year prophecy of Daniel 8:14 is the backbone of our understanding of the heavenly sanctuary.

The object of today’s presentation is to show some of the factors in thought and history that God combined to bring this movement into existence. In particular, we look at the life of Miller.

Timeline

I. Early life

- A. Birth in 1782: Just four months after the last battle for American Succession (known as the American Revolutionary War).
- B. Marriage at 21, Deism at 22. Civil and Military Life.

II. Interlude: Deism

A. Origin

- Thomas Hobbs (d. 1679). *Leviathan*, social contract.
- Lord Herbert of Cherbury (d. 1648). *De veritate*, 1624. Two books, Scripture but also the book of nature. Focus on “self-evident” truths. Pragmatic. End wars. Enlightenment.
- John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious* 1696). Authentic Christianity is discerned in nature by the rational mind. Discards canonical revelation.
- John Locke (not deist), led to empiricist deism.
- Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, 1730.
- David Hume (not deist) skeptical of miracles.
- Voltaire (d. 1778). Author of many Skeptical works.
- In America: Thomas Jefferson (d. 1826), Benjamin Franklin (d. 1790), Thomas Paine (d. 1809), etc.

B. Beliefs

Critical elements of deist thought included:

- Rejection of all religions based on books that claim to contain the revealed word of God.
- Rejection of reports of miracles, prophecies and religious “mysteries.”
- Rejection of the Genesis account of creation and the doctrine of original sin, along with all similar beliefs.
- Rejection of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other religious beliefs.

Constructive elements of deist thought included:

- God gave men reason.

- God exists, created and governs the universe.
- God wants human beings to behave morally.
- Human beings have souls that survive death; there is an afterlife.

C. Example

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which *the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them*, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be *self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights*, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness” (Deistic sentiments in italics, excerpt, U. S. Declaration of Independence, 1776).

III. William Miller’s conversion

A. Turning Point: 1814. Battle of Plattsburgh

The Battle of Plattsburg was in many ways, the most decisive engagement of the War of 1812. The failed British invasion of the United States ended British plans to seize more American territory. By the end of the summer of 1814, Prevost had assembled a massive strike force of close to 10,000 soldiers near Montreal. Many of these soldiers were well-trained, battle-hardened regular troops inspired by Wellington’s victory over Napoleon in Europe. On September 3, 1814, Prevost’s army crossed the border into New York State. While the British army moved down the western side of Lake Champlain, the American troops (1500 regulars plus 1900 mostly sick and disorganized militia) fell back to Plattsburg and prepared to make a stand. At the same time, the ships of the British Navy moved slowly down the lake. Badly outnumbered and realizing that the British had bigger ships and longer range guns, the Americans anchored in Plattsburg Bay and waited for the British Navy to come to them. Under tremendous pressure from George Prevost, who was waiting outside Plattsburg with his army, the British fleet sailed into battle before it was ready. For two hours the ships pounded each other with equal fury. Fifteen minutes into the battle British commander was killed. At a critical moment in the engagement, the Americans surprised the British. The USS Saratoga, with almost all of its starboard guns knocked out, was winched around on cables to bring a fresh broadside against the British fleet. The British realized they were beaten and surrendered. When Prevost learned of the defeat he called off his land assault and retreated back to Canada. For the United States, the victory against overwhelming odds at Plattsburg

provided an important boost to national morale (adapted from “An Overview of the Battle of Plattsburgh Bay,” <http://www.galafilm.com/1812/e/events/platts.html>, accessed 2009-01-07).

Miller’s reaction: “It seemed to me that the Supreme Being must have watched over the interests of this country in an especial manner, and delivered us from the hands of our enemies....So surprising a result, against such odds, did seem to me like the work of a mightier power than man” (*Memoirs of William Miller*, Sylvester Bliss, pp 52, 53).

B. Conversion

“Annihilation was a cold and chilling thought, and accountability was sure destruction to all. The heavens were as brass over my head, and the earth as iron under my feet. Eternity—what was it? And death—why was it? The more I reasoned, the further I was from demonstration. The more I thought, the more scattered were my conclusions. I tried to stop thinking, but my thoughts would not be controlled. I was truly wretched, but did not understand the cause. I murmured and complained, but knew not of whom. I knew that there was a wrong, but knew not how or where to find the right. I mourned, but without hope.

“In this state he continued for some months. ‘Suddenly,’ he says, ‘the character of a Saviour was vividly impressed upon my mind. It seemed that there might be a being so good and compassionate as to himself atone for our transgressions, and thereby save us from suffering the penalty of sin. I immediately felt how lovely such a being must be, and imagined that I could cast myself into the arms of, and trust in the mercy of, such a one. But the question arose, How can it be proved that such a being does exist? Aside from the Bible, I found that I could get no evidence of the existence of such a Saviour, or even of a future state. . . .’

“I saw that the Bible did bring to view just such a Saviour as I needed; and I was perplexed to find how an uninspired book should develop principles so perfectly adapted to the wants of a fallen world. I was constrained to admit that the Scriptures must be a revelation from God. They became my delight; and in Jesus I found a friend. The Saviour became to me the chiefest among ten thousand; and the Scriptures, which before were dark and contradictory, now became the lamp to my feet and light to my path. My mind became settled and satisfied. I found the Lord God to be a Rock in the midst of the ocean of life. The Bible now became my chief study, and I can truly say, I searched it with great delight. I found the half was never told me. I wondered why I had not seen its beauty and glory before, and marveled that I could have ever rejected it. I found everything revealed that my heart could desire, and a remedy for every disease of the soul. I lost all taste for other reading, and applied my heart to get wisdom from God.” —S. Bliss, *Memoirs of Wm. Miller*, pages 65-67 (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 318, 319).

C. Traces of Deistic thought in Miller (yet these are good)

- “The Bible was now to me a new book. It was indeed a feast of reason; all that was dark, mystical, or obscure to me in its teachings, had been dissipated from my mind before the clear light that now dawned from its sacred pages; and, oh, how bright and glorious the truth appeared! All the contradictions and inconsistencies I had before found in the word were gone; and although there were many portions of which I was not satisfied I had a full understanding” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 329).
- “The Bible is a system of revealed truths, so clearly and simply given that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein” (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 319, 320).

D. Rejection of the popular error of Postmillennialism, American exceptionalism:

- “This great American revolution, this recent political phenomenon of a new sovereignty arising among the sovereign powers of the earth, will be attended to and contemplated by all nations. . . . That prophecy of Daniel is now literally fulfilling—there shall be an universal traveling ‘to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.’ This knowledge will be brought home and treasured up in America: and being here digested and carried to the highest perfection, may reblaze back from America to Europe, Asia and Africa, and illumine the world with TRUTH and LIBERTY. . . . Light spreads from the dayspring in the west; and may it shine more and more until the perfect day” (Ezra Stiles, “The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor” 1783, op. cit. Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, p. 101, fn. p. 123).
- “Escaped from the house of bondage, we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. . . . God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race. . . . Long enough have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the Political Messiah had come. But He has come in *us*, if we would but give utterance to His promptings” (Hermann Melville, *White Jacket*, 1850, p. 144).
- See *The Great Controversy*, p. 321.

IV. Teaching Concerning 2300 Days/Years

A. Writing, traveling, preaching. Call to preach. See *The Great Controversy*, p. 330, 331.

B. Disappointment, October 23, 1844

C. Death and last beliefs

- Rejected Sabbath, Non-immortality of the soul. See *Early Writings*, p. 258.
- Continued to believe 2,300 period correct but correct placement must be wrong by a few years, died believing the Second Coming yet imminent.

Appendix

In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history (Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 196).

Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones (*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 11).

There will be strange developments (*The Great Controversy*, p. 608).

It is the enemy that leads minds off on sidetracks. He is pleased when those who know the truth become engrossed in collecting Scriptures to pile up around erroneous theories, which have no foundation in truth. The Scriptures thus used are misapplied; they were not given to substantiate error, but to strengthen truth (Manuscript Release No. 760, p. 23).

Individuals who will strike out upon some new light and some new truth, independent of the body, are pursuing a course directly contrary to the word of God. If they have any influence over others, it is to disaffect them and lead them away from the watchcare, counsel, and strength of the body (*Signs of the Times*, October 23, 1879).

When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No aftersuppositions, contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. The truth for this time, God has given us as a foundation for our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth. One will arise, and still another, with new light which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit (*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 32, 33).

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