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Early Adventist Timesettings and their Implications for Today

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A few Seventh-day Adventists interpret the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation in a futuristic way. They view “prophetic days,” not in years as historical Adventists, but in literal days. A major reason for this approach is that they do not see much relevance in the way the prophecies have been interpreted. Consequently, these individuals are looking with great anticipation to a flurry of current events that they integrate into a final events prophetic scenario. Through this futuristic method they feel confident that they are accurately predicting major events in the great controversy that will usher in the Second Advent within a very short time (usually thought to be before the year 2000).

These futuristic proposals have their parallels in similar occurrences among the Advent believers immediately following the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844. This study investigates the major timesetting thrust from 1843 to 1845 to better evaluate the present interpretations that are very confusing for believers unfamiliar with Adventist prophetic heritage. Ellen Harmon gave her first warning against timesetting during this time and we will briefly examine its context.

Timesettings from 1843 to the First Disappointment

During the first part of the 19th century many Protestants were studying the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation anticipating imminent climactic events in the history of salvation. They felt the

long-expected millennium was about to break upon humanity and bring a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity. To others the purification of the church and the destruction of false religions was imminent. Still others looked with eagerness to a personal Second Advent of Jesus Christ. The times that these events were generally anticipated to take place spanned 1843 to 1847.

Some have called these Christians who thus predicted Christ's return "Adventists" and their movement the "Second Advent Movement." Toward the end of 1843 a large contingent of believers were quite united in their belief that Christ would return in the Spring of 1844. This position was based on "the best chronological authorities" who held that the 1335 years (Dan 12:12), the 2300 years (Dan 8:14), the Seven Times, and the Great Jubilee "all point to about the Spring of A.D. 1844."¹ The following is a description of how they established their positions.

The Dating of the 1335 Years (Dan 12:12).

The prevailing views in 1843 of Daniel 12 advocated a close relationship between its time prophecies. Expositors felt the 1335 years and the 1290 years had the same beginning, while the 1290 years and the 1260 years the same ending: The "time of the end" (Dan 12:4-7, 9-11).

The 1260 years began in A.D. 538, when the armies of Justinian conquered the city of Rome and brought it under the jurisdiction of his famous Constitution which in A.D. 533 had legalized papal supremacy.² They ended when Rome was conquered by the armies of Napoleon and "the supremacy given to the Pope by 'the Justinian Code' was abolished." This event occurred in February of 1798 and marked the beginning of the "time of the end."³

Since both the 1260 and 1290 year periods ended in 1798 it followed that the 1290 years began in A.D. 50—30 years before the beginning of the 1260 years.

The 1335 years, therefore, began at the same time as the 1290 year period in A.D. 508. This particular year was significant in the rise of the Roman Catholic Church. Then "the balance, which had so long swung by turns in favor of Christianity and paganism,

preponderated finally in favor of the former in the reign of Clovis” achieved through his military victories as leader of “Catholic faction” in 508. Upon his return from the battlefield the ambassadors of Anastasius, the Emperor of the East [Roman empire], conferred on him the titles of Consul, Patrician, and August. From that time on the Franks devoted their powers to the “establishment of ‘Catholic’ Christianity.”⁴

The end of the 1335 years was expected in February of 1843, which is 45 years after the end of the 1290 years (February 1798).
The Dating of the 2300 Years (Dan 8:14).

The crucial chronological events in the dating of the 2300 years were the 70 weeks of Daniel 9, the year of the crucifixion, and its placement within the 70th week. These data were believed to point to the end of the 2300 years in the Spring of 1843.

The beginning of the 70 prophetic weeks or 490 years began with the decree to restore and build Jerusalem. Authorities like “Blair, Prideaux, Ferguson, Horne, Watson, Ptolemy, and the great majority of commentators” dated the issue of the decree in the 7th year of Artaxerxes Longimanus in 457 B.C.⁵ This date was established by the Canon of Ptolemy.⁶ The 69 weeks ended with the commencement of Christ’s ministry at His baptism. “Dr. Hales and others” placed this event in A.D. 27.⁷

In harmony with prominent expositors like “Ferguson, Prideaux, Bullinger, Blair and others,” Adventists terminated their 70 week calculations at the crucifixion. They also accepted the widespread view of Christ’s death in A.D. 33. This was advocated by authorities like “Scaliger, Usher, Pearson, Bacon, and others.”⁸
The Dating of the “Seven Times” (Dan 7:25).

Miller and others interpreted the Sabbatical cycle as a type of the good things to come (Col 2:16, 17). As, in the type, at the end of every seven year period the Israelites had to release their servants (Exod 21:2, Deut 15:1, 2), so Miller assumed that Christ would deliver His people from bondage at the end of these seven prophetic years (calculated as 2520 literal years—7 x 360). The Seven Times of oppression, Miller understood, began with the

scattering of Israel by Babylon, the first of Daniel's four Gentile kingdoms that were to dominate God's people. It would end with the coming of the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:22).⁹

Miller dated the scattering time from the year that the last of the ten kingdoms were carried away and Israel ceased to be a nation. This, he assumed, happened in the 22nd year of wicked Manasseh when, in harmony with prophecy (Isa 7:8) God began the final dispersion of His people with the captivity of the king into Babylon.¹⁰

The 22nd year of Manasseh's reign was dated by "Dr. Prideaux, Arch. Bishop Usher, Jackson, Playfair, Blair and others" in the year 677 B.C. (or the year 4037 of the Julian Period).¹¹ It was to terminate in 1843 (2520-677).

The Dating of the Great Jubilee.

The feast of Jubilee in the 50th year Miller saw as a type of the year of release and deliverance of the saints from all captivity, bondage, and death (Lev 25:8-13). The 50th Jubilee or Great Jubilee he viewed as the antitype of all Sabbaths and would begin at the conclusion of the 49th Jubilee after 2450 years (49×50 years). Considering Moses' prophecy on the captivity of God's people (Lev 26:33-35), Miller began the Jubilee period with the Babylonian captivity of Jehoiakim in the 4th year of his reign when the Jubilees could no longer be kept regularly.¹² Following "Ptolemy Petavius, Usher, &c." he dated this captivity from the year 607 B.C.¹³ and terminated it at the Great Jubilee in 1843 (2450-607) which was to be the complete release, deliverance and redemption of God's captives.¹⁴

The Spring Disappointment of 1844.

Most Adventists thought that the end of the Jewish year 1843 in which the time periods were to terminate would expire on March 21, 1844.¹⁵ When their expectations of Christ's return were not fulfilled the believers experienced a disappointment, often called the "first disappointment."

Timesettings from the First to the Second Disappointment

After this Spring disappointment Adventists intensively restudied the chronology of the time periods to find clues to enlighten them on why their predictions had failed. They soon discovered some flaws in their calculations. They felt these corrections placed the calculation of the 2300 years on a firmer Biblical foundation.

Corrections in the Calculations of the 2300 Years. The following improvements after the first disappointment especially involved the calculations of the 2300 years:

1. They noticed that there was no year zero when going from 1 B.C. to 1 A.D.

In order for the 2300 years to be fulfilled, 2300 full years must pass before there could be a fulfillment of Daniel 8. This meant they had to add one extra year to their previous calculations. This brought the end of the time period from 1843 to 1844.

2. They discovered that there were two methods to determine the Jewish year.

One method used astronomical calculations to determine the beginning of the new year. It was developed by Rabbis. It began the year with the first new moon nearest the vernal equinox and Jews living outside Palestine used it most. On the basis of this “Rabbinical” Jewish calendar chronologists had determined A.D. 33 as the year of the crucifixion because in that year the 14th of Nisan—the day of the crucifixion—fell on a Friday.

The second method was advocated by Karaite Jews, a strict community adhering to Biblical guidelines. These began the new year, as did the ancient priests of the Jerusalem temple, with the new moon nearest the barley harvest to be able to present the wave sheaf as the first fruit of the Spring harvest on the 16th of Nisan (Lev 23:10, 11). Favoring this more literal Scriptural approach, Adventists adopted the Karaite reckoning that moved the calculation of the end of the 2300 years up one month later than

the Rabbinical calendar.¹⁶

3. Other changes were hinged to the adoption of the Karaite calendar.

They realized that the year A.D. 33 could not be the year of Christ's death, and could not determine with absolute precision the crucifixion date through Karaite reckoning because no record remained of barley harvests in Judea during the time of Christ. Consequently, now Adventists adopted the more reliable position of Dr. Wm. Hales who advocated A.D. 31,¹⁷ which he linked to historical evidence of the supernatural darkness.¹⁸

4. Adventists fully endorsed Wm. Miller's insights into the chronology of the types of the Lord's feasts to determine the precise end of the 2300 years.

Miller had observed that the antitypes of the Spring festivals of the Lord's feasts (Passover, Feast of the First Fruits, and Pentecost) had been fulfilled at the First Advent as to the exact day in Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He concluded that the Fall types, which symbolized events connected with the Second Advent, would have their fulfillment with exactly the same precise manner. This meant that the antitype of the Day of Atonement and the cleansing of the sanctuary of Dan. 8:14 would have its fulfillment on the 10th day of the 7th month of the Jewish year in 1844. According to Karaite reckoning this was October 22.¹⁹

The Advent believers accepted these corrections as fully in harmony with Scripture and they readily incorporated them into their calculations. Hope and expectancy renewed as numbers grew of those expecting Jesus to come on October 22, 1844. These new insights caused such a surge of missionary enthusiasm that it was called the Seventh Month Movement.

The Fall Disappointment of 1844.

When at last October 22 arrived the anticipation of believers as well as unbelievers peaked. Would this be their last day? Would judgment break in upon the world? Would Jesus truly return? Believers answered all the above questions affirmatively. Others

took a “wait and see” attitude.

At the sound of the clock at midnight an indescribable feeling of disappointment came over the Advent believers. Many mourned throughout the night, weeping, praying, searching, and hoping for some quick answer to the truth about the prophetic time periods. Because their views were so closely connected to their Christian experience, the disappointment tore at their very fabric of faith. Their experiences of expectation had been so sweet, but had so utterly failed. Could Scripture even be relied upon now? What was the meaning of these prophetic time periods? Had they calculated wrong again?

Now we will consider the Adventist reaction to the Great Disappointment and the solutions that the leadership proposed to the disappointed faithful.

Reaction toward the Second or Great Disappointment

There was a mixed reaction among the Adventists. Some deplored their experience and refused to have anything to do with time calculations again. Others were so much shaken that they were thoroughly confused and afflicted with doubts. Many, however, were not yet ready to give up their prophetic time calculations.²⁰ It is with this last class that we will occupy ourselves.

Attitudes towards the Seventh Month Movement.

Adventists related to the Seventh Month Movement in different ways. Some considered it a fulfillment of prophecy.²¹ Other ones felt God’s approval even though Christ’s return did not occur.²² Others rejected it as inaccurate because the Bridegroom did not appear.²³ A few associated it with mesmerism.²⁴

Believers who continued to express confidence in prophetic time viewed the Seventh Month Movement in two conflicting ways. One group believed that the time calculations of the Seventh Month Movement were correct. They concentrated their attention

on the manner in which these prophecies were fulfilled. Yet even many of these continued further timesetting until one of them received a vision not to do so in the Fall of 1845. They based their calculations on the belief that October 22 was a fulfillment of prophecy.

By contrast, the other group approached Scripture with yet new timesettings on the presupposition that October 22 must not have been the end of the 2300 years because the anticipated event did not occur. This latter group continued to preoccupy themselves with a quest for the correct time.

The Seventh Month Movement was Correct.

Adventists with confidence in the calculations of the Seventh Month Movement did not wait long for an answer to their questions. The solution to their dilemma came on the morning of October 23. Following a prayer meeting for new light, Hiram Edson received an insight that proved the key to why Christ had not returned. He saw that the sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 was not the earth or church but the heavenly sanctuary. Instead of coming to earth on October 22, he observed that Christ had begun His final ministry of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary to fulfill the antitypical Day of Atonement in heaven.

The fog of confusion began to clear among believers who prayerfully pondered the heavenly ministry of their Lord. They discovered the significance of the prophetic periods to Christ's present intercessory ministry and full assurance of His Second Advent and their salvation. This was the essential theological framework for the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.²⁵

The Seventh Month Movement was Incorrect.

There were Adventists, however, who continued to express confidence in their prophetic predictions felt that something in the calculation of October 22, 1844, was incorrect. They continued further timesetting for the Second Advent. Because of the relevance of this movement to today's scenario we will now especially focus on this group's reaction to the Seventh Month

Movement and the solutions they offered through their new time settings.

Defense of Timesetting—Admission of Mistakes.

In response to the jubilant attitude of the critics, following the Great Disappointment, this group of Adventists defended their position by appealing to “the great Protestant principles of interpretation” and the best authorities of chronology.²⁶

On December 28-29, 1844, at the first Adventist conference after the Disappointment, Miller and others admitted a mistake in their previous timesetting, but they affirmed the correctness of their basic view on prophetic time.²⁷ They felt that their present problem was only a problem of minor discrepancies “as there are four of five years in dispute among our best chronological writers.”²⁸ Many were convinced that “it was only a matter of time” and the prophetic time periods would be fulfilled.²⁹

Reasons for Rejecting the Seventh Month Movement.

Adventists who had given up faith in the Seventh Month Movement used two major lines of reasoning to reject it as of God. The first objection was that the argument of the types must be incorrect; the second, that the previous calculations were faulty because the anticipated events did not take place.

a. *Arguments of the types were incorrect.* Three weeks after the Disappointment an editorial of the Advent Herald stated that because the antitypes of the Spring festivals were fulfilled exactly as to time, it did not necessarily follow that the antitypical fulfillment of Fall festival of the Day of Atonement had to occur in chronological sequence in the Fall. It favored the widely held view that Christ began His ministry in the Most Holy at His ascension and not more than 1800 years later.³⁰ Consequently the end of 2300 years was still in the future.

b. *Inaccuracies of previous calculations.* At the beginning of 1845 an editorial expressed the sentiment of many: As the end of the prophetic periods had been reached without Christ’s return “we must therefore acknowledge that we were either premature in those dates, or that human chronology is not perfectly accurate.”³¹ The

publication of the scholarly disagreements on the chronology of the events marking the beginning of the prophetic time periods of the 2520 years,³² 2450 years,³³ 1335 years,³⁴ 2300 years,³⁵ and the end of the 6000 years ³⁶ seemed to support this sentiment and did much to weaken the confidence of the believers in prophecy altogether.

The message was clear: In 1844 prophecy was not fulfilled because Christ the Bridegroom had not returned to earth.³⁷ Joshua Himes strongly warned that any other interpretation of Christ's coming was "mystical" and "would overthrow our hope entirely, and leave us little else than Swedenbourgianism!"³⁸

Timesettings from the Great to the Third Disappointment

During the next six months some Adventists developed another series of timesettings. Although many articles stressed the imminence of the Second Advent, this time the timesetting thrust was on events related to the antitype of the Great Jubilee year and Passover that symbolized the universal liberation of the captivity of God's people.

Anticipation of the Imminence of Christ's Return.

In the weeks and months following the Great Disappointment there was still a powerful sense of the imminence of the Second Advent. Faithful Adventists were "daily looking," for Christ could return any day, any hour, any moment.³⁹ Miller wrote: "I have a strong expectation that Christ will come before the Jewish year will expire; but let us all see to it, that we are ready every day."⁴⁰

Believers felt they were in "a waiting and watching position,"⁴¹ fully convinced that the great events predicted by the time periods were "now near, `even at the door."⁴²

Expectations of Christ's Return in the Spring of 1845.

Some Adventists expected the time periods to terminate at the end of the Jewish year 1844 "at the commencement of the next Jewish year, on the second day of the [New] Moon, April 7th,

according to the Caraites reckoning.”⁴³ Of special interest were the Great Jubilee year and Passover, events associated with the theme of liberty and redemption.

The Jubilee Year.

Miller now predicted that Christ’s return would be in April [1845] “before the Jewish year [of 1844] will expire.” He based his conviction on the assumption that (1) the present Jewish year of 1844 was the year of Jubilee; (2) the seventh trumpet began to sound in the seventh Jewish month Karaite reckoning (October 1844); (3) freedom from captivity came during the last month of the Jewish year (Adar); (4) the present deliverance is the antitype of that of what the Jews in the days of Esther experienced during the 13th and 14th day of the month of Adar (Esther 8 and 9).

Deliverance of God’s people would come at the end of the year of Jubilee.

The reason for this, he said, was that on the first and tenth day of the seventh month the trumpets (October 1844) were to proclaim liberty throughout the whole land (Lev 23: 24; 25: 8-10). This, however, was only a proclamation. Freedom from captivity came at the end of the year (Deut 15:1; Jer 34:14-18). Consequently “we cannot expect deliverance until the last month of the [Jewish] year.”⁴⁴

The editor of the Day Star, Enoch Jacobs, placed the deliverance at the beginning of the 50th Jubilee year. As the Jubilee trumpet sounded on the 10th day of the seventh month (Lev 25:9) so its antitype sounded a proclamation of liberty through the Midnight Cry in the 49th year of Jubilee. The actual deliverance however would not take place until six months after October 1844 with the arrival of the Great Jubilee.⁴⁵

In April, Appolos Hale modified Miller’s expectations by stating that it was the sealing of spiritual Israel, not Christ’s coming, that would begin “the present month—at the beginning of the [50th] Jubilee year.”⁴⁶

The Passover.

The theme of deliverance was also expressed by the Passover

feast. No wonder there were Adventists that had high hopes on the anniversary of the Passover day during the first month of the Great Jubilee of the Jewish year.⁴⁷ When that time also passed uneventfully, Jacobs wrote, “Our third disappointment was a trying one.”⁴⁸ Hale observed that this disappointment was to many “as great a trial as the passing of the seventh month.”⁴⁹ Jacobs, however, quickly saw beyond the trials and felt that this Passover was the beginning of a fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.⁵⁰

Timesettings from the Third to the Fourth Disappointment

Christ’s Return in the Fall of 1845.

The next season that drew the attention of the Adventists was the Fall. This timesetting was primarily derived from Christ’s exhortation to constantly watch for His return.

The Chronology of the Watches.

Christ’s encouragement to believers to watch during the four watches covering evening, midnight, the cock crowing, and the morning (Mark 13:35, Luke 12:38) some Adventists interpreted as four definite periods of watching for His return. This view made sense after the third disappointment. Looking back over their history Adventists could distinguish four major periods of watchfulness and expectation.

The fulfillment of the first watch was the time of anxious expectation at the close of the Jewish year 1843 in the Spring of 1844. The second or midnight watch was identified with the period of six months following the first disappointment when Adventists proclaimed the True Midnight Cry, “Behold the Bridegroom cometh.” It ended with the fulfillment of the antitype of the Jubilee trumpet on the 10th day of the seventh month (October). The third or cock-crowing watch covered a similar period of six months, culminating in a third period of “strong and general expectation of Christ’s return.” This was the anticipated Great Jubilee of the Spring of 1845. Thus, some Adventists felt they were

“unquestionably in the morning watch” and may with confidence expect that He would return before the morning watch would run out.⁵¹

The Day Star editor expected the morning watch to last six months and to close with “the 10th of 17th of the next seventh month, or in the latter part of October” 1845.⁵²

One month before the expected termination of the watches James White submitted a revision of the chronology of the watches to the Day Star. He had “strong objections” to the above view and said that the Advent experience clearly demonstrated that believers had been in the waiting, watching time since October 22. The period of watching, he expected to last for one year, which he divided into four equal watches of three months each.

The first, White said, began on October 22 and “reached to January, when we got light on the shut door. The second brought us to the Passover. (Midnight, or midway in this watching night.) The third brought us to the supposed end of the 1335 days in July, since we have been in the morning watch.”⁵³ With full confidence he wrote that “all who see this light will receive a certainty that before the 10th day of the 7th month 1845, our King will come, and we will watch, and like Noah, know the day (Rev 3:3). Awake, awake! awake!! ye heralds of the Jubilee, and tell the scattered flock, The morning cometh!”⁵⁴

Modifications of the Prophetic Periods.

When Fall approached, some adjusted the chronology of the 2300 years and the Jubilee year to have an October fulfillment, but there was definitely no wide-spread endorsement or consensus on the matter.

Throughout 1845 there were suggestions as to when the 1335 years would end. Would it be in the Spring, Summer, or Fall? All were sure about the fulfillment of these years before or at the Second Advent because most believers, following an ancient Christian tradition, connected the special blessing (Dan 12:12) with the first resurrection (Rev 20:6). Again Adventists disagreed on the precise historical details of the beginning and end of the

1290 years which determined the end of the 1335 years.

Christ's Return beyond 1845.

During 1845, besides the major timesetting thrusts, articles appeared pointing to the possibility of a Second Coming beyond the present year. The basis of these predictions was the minor differences among chronologists. These new time theories especially abounded in the Advent Herald, the leading paper of Adventists who had rejected the Seventh Month Movement as a fulfillment of prophecy.

Most of these articles pointed to the Fall of 1846 for Christ's return and focused on adjustments of the 2300, the 1335, and the 2520 years. Several correspondents mentioned the year 1847 as a result of further modification of the 2300 and 1335 years. However, it seemed that the Fall of that year was the extreme limit of the time periods.

In spite of these suggestions and cautions, others stretched the time periods to 1850.

A Prophetic Warning Against Timesetting

This climate of continuing timesetting and mounting disappointments brought confusion and uncertainty to many Adventists. What should they believe? Whom could they trust? Could one have confidence in the prophetic messages of the Bible? Was there any way to interpret prophecy with any kind of assurance? Prophecy was such an integral part of Scripture, if it was so obscure, what about the rest of Scripture? These and many other questions haunted the Adventists.

A few days before the passing of time in October 1845, in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, James White was preaching Christ's return in the seventh month. In Carver, just a few miles distant, another Adventist, Ellen Harmon, received a vision that warned that again they "should be disappointed."⁵⁵ A few years later she related another vision with a message on timesetting, warning against "false excitement arising from preaching time" because the

Lord had shown, “Time will never be a test again.” Believers should go “to God daily to know their present duty”⁵⁶ instead of looking into the future and being involved in speculations.

Most Adventists, however, did not pay attention to this warning. Their subsequent history showed the devastating effects that timesetting can have. Within a few years the once powerful missionary thrust of the Advent Movement had vanished.

Adventists who heeded her message against timesetting generally worked through the fanaticism and undue excitement accompanying these timesetting movements. Instead of focusing on time, they concentrated on the significance of the prophetic events that had transpired. These were of such relevance that they formed the core of one of the most active and successful missionary organizations the world has ever witnessed: The Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Impact of Time Settings on Adventist Lifestyle

In evaluating the role of timesettings on Adventist lifestyle one observes that there were significant differences between timesetting before the Great Disappointment and after that period. These can be helpful in understanding the characteristics of timesetting currents among Adventist futurists today.

The timesettings during 1843-1845 affected the believers’ lifestyle in several ways, the most prominent being the areas of unity and love, evangelism, and Christlikeness.

Unity and Brotherly Love.

The prophetic and theological messages of Adventists had a broad ecumenical appeal that attracted members from many different churches. The closer they came to 1843 the faster the movement grew and the stronger the opposition became. When churches closed doors against their message and many Adventists were disfellowshipped, they experienced such a bond of unity and love with one another that many compared themselves with the Philadelphia church of brotherly love. Thus instead of being

divisive, their prophecies and theology brought about a closeness, eagerness, and unity that was rare.

After the Fall 1844 disappointment, however, timesettings became a source of controversy. The Great Disappointment became a watershed among the believers. One group of Adventists based their approach to time on the understanding that the calculation of October 22 as the end of the 2300 years was incorrect and thus the cleansing of the sanctuary was still future. The other group accepted these calculations as indeed correct but admitted that the view of the cleansing of the sanctuary was incorrect. Instead of a cleansing of the earth the prophecy predicted the beginning of Christ's cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.

This fundamental difference led to constant strife and sharp divisions that destroyed loving fellowship that had made it previously so attractive.

An Evangelistic Lifestyle.

Before 1844 timesetting produced a powerful motivation for an evangelistic lifestyle. Within a few years Adventists had established a mission thrust that reached out on a world-wide scale through their publishing work.

It was not so much the time prophecies themselves but their connection with a Biblical message of Christ's imminent return that made the Adventist appeal so forceful and effective. Other Christians involved in similar time calculations predicting the end of their time periods during 1843 and 1845 failed to have the same significant impact on the population. Why? Their interpretations failed to arouse or captivate the attention.

The post-1844 timesettings had a negative affect on the evangelistic thrust of the movement. If in doubt, how could others be persuaded? Instead of an outward orientation there was a turn inward. Precious energies were used by in-fighting. How could they proclaim a message that lacked a solid prophetic foundation? Thus evangelism gave way to internal polemics.

Christlike Lifestyle.

At first Adventists longed to participate in Christ's Great

Commission by proclaiming the “hour of His judgment” to as many as they could reach before it was too late. Consequently the demands for funds were immense. Christ’s unselfish life of love and sacrifice for the salvation of humanity, coupled with the shortness of time, inspired many with such an attitude of love that they were willing to make any sacrifice.

During the Seventh Month Movement many, convicted by the prophetic message, were even willing to sacrifice their health destroying habits to live a more Christlike lifestyle in preparation for meeting Him.⁵⁷

After 1844, relentless attacks in most Adventist periodicals became common place on those who believed that the time-prophecy ended in Christ’s coming as the Bridegroom to the Ancient of Days. They accused them of being spiritualizers who were burning the truth of Christ’s literal return in the fire of spiritualism. Gone was the Christlike lifestyle of love to and self-sacrifice for fellow-believers.

Reflections on Adventist Futurists.

Among the Adventists who rejected the past fulfillment of prophecy there was no end to timesetting speculations. Each new disappointment left them in a more depressed condition. No wonder that many Adventists lost faith in the prophecies after 1844. At the end of this decade the movement had declined to a small and insignificant group.

The only Adventists who successfully emerged out of this climate of confusion and speculative timesettings were the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They continued to believe that the Lord was in the 1844 experience and accepted the warnings against timesetting by Ellen (Harmon) White. Their amazing history is the result of the promise: “Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper” (2 Chron 20:20).

Not all Seventh-day Adventists accepted the warning against

timesetting. Throughout their history some individuals or small groups have discarded that counsel and proposed new interpretations of the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. But they all failed.

The present interest of some in interpreting the prophetic time periods as literal time to be fulfilled in the near future instead of considering it symbolic time has a number of factors. It just could be that these sincere individuals have no clear understanding of the past experience of the Advent movement. Consequently they are repeating some of the same mistakes as the Adventists after 1844.

Again we see emerging the same sad results on the lifestyle of these modern futurists. Among them flourish many conflicting speculations that have a very destructive impact on the unity of the church. Their constant (and sometimes insidious) criticism of the historicist view of prophecy has fueled distrust toward the “way God has led us in the past” and thus the church and its leadership. This criticism has had a strong negative effect on their evangelistic focus because they are not turned outward.

One of the most powerful arguments against these speculations is to reveal what difference the Biblical view of the fulfillment of the prophetic time periods has made and continues to be making in our lives. If Adventists have the correct prophetic understanding they will reveal it in their lifestyle through their conversations, preaching, and writing. In all these things the matchless love of Christ will be the central focus. It is only in this light that others can see the relevance of the true interpretation of prophecy.

Endnotes

1 Editorial, “When do the Periods End?” *Advent Herald*, April 2, 1845, p. 61. All further references to this periodical are abbreviated as AH.

2 A. Hale, “The Last Experiment on Definite Time,” *AH*, June 18, 1845, p. 149.

3 Hale, “Definite Time,” p. 149.

4 Lt., J. Litch to Himes , *AH*, Nov. 27, 1844, 123; Hale, “Definite Time,” p. 149.

5 [Bliss], “The Termination of the Prophetic Periods,” *AH*, Jan. 1, 1845, p. 165.

6 Response to Lt., C. B. Hotchkiss to Himes, *AH*, Feb. 12, 1845, p. 8.

7 [Bliss], “Prophetic Periods,” p. 165.

8 Ibid.

9 William Miller, *A Lecture on the Typical Sabbaths and Great Jubilee*, (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), pp. 15-16.

10 Ibid., pp. 18-21.

11 Editorial, “Address to the Public,” *AH*, Nov. 13, 1844, 108; Editorial, “The Time Again,” “Dec. 18, 1844, 152. For the authorities see [Bliss], “Prophetic Periods,” p. 165.

12 Miller, *Typical Sabbaths and Great Jubilee*, pp. 27-31.

13 “Address to the Public,” p. 108; For authorities see [Bliss], “Prophetic Periods,” p. 165.

14 Miller, *Typical Sabbaths and Great Jubilee*, p. 31.

15 “Address to the Public,” p. 108; Lt, Barnet Matthias to Bliss, Nov. 27, 1844, 122; [Himes], *AH*, Feb. 12, 1845, p. 8.

16 [Bliss], “An Astonishing Ignorance of the Millerites,” *AH*, Nov. 27, 1844, p. 124.

17 [Bliss], “Prophetic Periods,” p. 165.

18 P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977; reprint ed., Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1990), p. 90.

19 “Address to the Public,” p. 109.

20 Lt., Hale to Bliss, *AH*, Sept. 10, 1845, p. 40.

21 Damsteegt, pp. 104-135.

22 Hale, “Definite Time,” *AH*, May 7, 1845, p. 100.

23 Editorial, *AH*, June 4, 1845, p. 136.

24 George Storrs in Hale, “Definite Time,” *AH*, May 21, 1845, p. 118.

25 Damsteegt, pp. 103-146.

26 J. V. Himes, "A Word to the Advent Brethren Scattered Abroad," *AH*, Feb. 19, 1845, p. 12.

27 Wm. Miller et. al., "Low-Hampton Conference," *AH*, Jan. 15, 1845, 183.

28 Ibid.

29 F. G. Brown, "The Safe Position," *AH*, Jan. 8, 1845, p. 178; Editorial, "Prophetic Time Not Expired," *AH*, Feb. 19, 1845, p. 12.

30 "Address To the Public," p. 110.

31 Editorial, "Prophetic Periods," *AH*, Jan. 1, 1845, p. 164.

32 [Bliss], "Prophetic Periods," pp. 164, 165; Himes, "Advent Brethren," p. 12.

33 [Bliss], "Prophetic Periods," p. 165; Himes, "Advent Brethren," p. 12.

34 Himes, "End of the Prophetic Periods," *AH*, Dec. 3, 1845, p. 133; Himes, "Advent Brethren," p. 12.

35 [Bliss], "Prophetic Periods," p. 165; F. G. Brown, p. 178; C. Bywater, "On Time," *AH*, Jan. 15, 1845, p. 184; [Himes], Response, p. 8; Editorial, "Time Not Expired," p. 12; Hale, "End of the Prophetic Periods," *AH*, March 12, 1845, p. 38; "Conference of Adventists at New York," *AH*, May 21, 1845, p. 118.

36 Editorial, "The Time in the Year of Creation," *AH*, Jan. 8, 1845, p. 174.

37 Himes, "Advent Brethren," p. 13.

38 Ibid.

39 "Address To the Public," p. 110; Editorial, "The Time," *AH*, Dec. 24, pp. 156-157.

40 Lt., Miller to Bliss, *AH*, Feb. 12, 1845, p. 3.

41 Himes, "Advent Brethren," p. 13.

42 Himes, "Prophetic Periods," p. 134. See also Brown, p. 178; Miller, "Elijah the Prophet," *AH*, Feb. 5, 1845, p. 203.

43 Editorial, "End of the Jewish Year," *AH*, April 2, 1845, p. 64. The Rabbinical year had ended on March 9 (Ibid.).

44 Lt., Miller to Himes, p. 2.

45 E. Jacobs, "Letter to Bro. Storrs," *Day Star*, Feb. 18, 1845, p. 4. All further references to this periodical are abbreviated as *DS*.

- 46 Hale, "Signs and Trials," *AH* April 16, 1845, p. 79.
- 47 [E. Jacobs], "The Passover," *DS*, April, 1845, p. 48.
- 48 See [Jacobs], "The Watches," *DS*, July 15, 1845, p. 38.
- 49 Hale, "Definite Time," p. 100.
- 50 [Jacobs], "Passover," *DS*, April, 1845, p. 48.
- 51 W. Thayer, "The Watches," *DS*, July 8, 1845, p. 34; [Jacobs], "Watches," *DS*, p. 38; Letter, J. Hamilton to Jacobs, *DS*, Aug. 18, 1845, 5; Letter, R. G. Bunting to Jacobs, *DS*, Sept. 6, 1845, p. 18; Samuel Pearce, "The Morning Watch," *DS*, Oct. 11, 1845, p. 49.
- 52 [Jacobs], "Watches," *DS*, p. 38.
- 53 James White, "Watchman, What of the Night?" *DS*, Sept. 20, 1845, pp. 25-26.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 55 James White, *A Word to the Little Flock*, [Brunswick, ME: J. White], 1847, p. 22.
- 56 Lt., Ellen G. White to Dear Brethren, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald Extra*, July 21, 1851, p. 4.
- 57 Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God*, New Bedford, [MA: J. Bates], 1849, p. 67.