

# Ellen G. White and Time Setting: A Warning

## Introduction:

1. The Advent Movement spawned by William Miller and his associates in the 19th Century numbered somewhere between 50,000-150,000 adherents on Oct. 22, 1844, when they expected to see the return of Jesus Christ to this earth.
2. In *Selected Messages*, Book Two, the first hundred pages of text is devoted to a delineation of extremism, fanaticism, and false teaching in the 1844 and post-1844 Advent Movement (Sec. I: “Fanaticism and Deceptive Teachings,” pp. 13-60; Sec. II: “Erroneous and Subversive Movements,” pp. 63-118). And, repeatedly, EGW declares that all of these things that happened then will resurface in the SDA Church at the very end of time.
3. Time-setting was prominent among problems faced:
  - a. In the 1844 and post-1844 period
  - b. Again in the 1890's
  - c. EGW predicted it would resurface among SDAs at the very end of time.

## I. The Counsels (in Chronological Sequence):

### A. 1851:

“Time has not been a test since 1844, and it will never again be a test. The Lord has shown me that the message of the third angel must go, . . . but it must not be hung on time. I saw that some were getting a false excitement, arising from preaching time; but the third angel’s message is stronger than time can be.” (EW 75)

### B. 1864:

“I saw that they [Millerites] were correct in their reckoning of the prophetic periods; prophetic time closed in 1844, and Jesus entered the most holy place to cleanse the sanctuary at the ending of the days.” (EW 243)

### C. 1888:

1. Concerning post-1844 Adventists, EGW wrote: “Some were led into the error of repeatedly fixing upon a definite time for the coming of Christ. The light which was now shining on the subject should have shown them

that no prophetic period extends to the second advent; that the exact time of this advent is not foretold. But turning from the light, they continued to set time after time for the Lord to come, and as often they were disappointed.”

“The apostle’s admonition to the Thessalonians contains an important lesson for those who live in the last days. Many Adventists have felt that unless they could fix their faith upon a definite time for the Lord’s coming, they could not be zealous and diligent in the work of preparation. But as their hopes are again and again excited, only to be destroyed, their faith receives such a shock that it becomes well-nigh impossible for them to be impressed by the great truths of prophecy.

“The preaching of a definite time for the judgment, in the giving of the first [angel’s] message, was ordered of God. The computation of the prophetic periods on which that message was based, placing the close of the 2300 days in the autumn of 1844, stands without impeachment. The repeated efforts to find new dates for the beginning and close of the prophetic periods, and the unsound reasoning necessary to sustain these positions, not only lead minds away from the present truth, but throw contempt upon all efforts to explain the prophecies. The more frequently a time is set for the second advent, and the more widely it is taught, the better it suits the purposes of Satan. After the time has passed, he excites ridicule and contempt of its advocates, and this casts reproach upon the great advent movement of 1843 and 1844. Those who persist in this error will at last fix upon a date too far in the future for the coming of Christ. Thus they will be led to rest in a false security, and many will not be undeceived until it is too late.” (GC 456-57)

2. “There were many proclaiming a new time after this [1844], but I was shown that we should not have another definite time to proclaim to the people . . . . I have borne but one testimony in regard to the setting of time . . . .

“I have been repeatedly urged to accept different periods of time proclaimed for the Lord to come, [but] I have ever had but one testimony to bear: the Lord will not come at that period, and you are weakening the faith even of Adventists, and fastening the world in their unbelief . . . .

“But their [time-setters] oft-repeated message of definite time was exactly what the enemy wanted, and it served his purpose well to unsettle the faith in the first proclamation of time, that was of heavenly origin . . . .

“Ever since 1844 I have borne my testimony that we are now in a period of time in which we are to take heed to ourselves lest our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon us unawares. Our position has been one of waiting and watching, with no time proclamation to intervene between the close of the prophetic periods in 1844 and the time of the Lord’s coming . . . .

“We have not cast away our confidence, neither have we a message dependent upon definite time . . . .”

(Letter 38, 1888 [Manuscript Release #1210])

**D. 1891:**

1. 1SM 185-91 (From a sermon delivered Sept. 5, 1891, at Lansing, MI, entitled “It Is Not for You to Know the Times or the Season”; reported in RH March 22, 1892.

EGW counseled her hearers to “do present duties instead of exhausting the powers of our mind in speculations in regard to the times and seasons which the Lord has placed in His own power, and withheld from men.” (1SM 186)

“Satan is ever ready to fill the mind with theories and calculations that will divert men from the present truth, and disqualify them for the giving of the third angel’s message to the world. It has ever been thus; for our Savior often had to speak reprovably to those who indulged in speculations and were ever inquiring into those things which the Lord had not revealed.” (1SM 186)

“We are in continual danger of getting above the simplicity of the gospel. There is an intense desire on the part of many to startle the world with something original . . . .” (1SM 187)

“ . . . Truth . . . will never develop in any line that will lead us to imagine that we may know the times and seasons which the Father has put in His own power. Again and again I have been warned in regard to time setting. There will never again be a message that will be based on time. We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ.” (1SM 188)

2. [In a vision at Camden, NY, June 21, 1851] ‘The Lord showed me that the message must go, and that it must not be hung on time; for time will never be a test again. I saw that some were getting a false excitement, arising

from preaching time.” (ISM 188)

“The times and the seasons God has put in His own power. And why has God not given us this knowledge?--Because we would not make a right use of it if He did. A condition of things would result from this knowledge among our people that would greatly retard the work of God in preparing a people to stand in the great day that is to come. We are not to live upon time excitement. We are not to be engrossed with speculations in regard to the times and the seasons which God has not revealed . . . . No one will be able to predict just when that time [second coming] will come . . . . You will not be able to say that He will come in one, two, or five years, neither are you to put off His coming by stating that it may not be for ten or twenty years.” (ISM 189)

**E. 1892:**

“I have no specific time of which to speak when the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will take place . . . . My message is that our only safety is in being ready for the heavenly refreshing . . . . O, how much time has been wasted through giving attention to trifling things.” (ISM 192, from RH, March 29, 1892)

**F. 1893:**

EGW wrote about Satan seeking out extremists to whom “he will suggest ideas and false theories, and make them zealous in advocating error . . . . Jesus has warned us to beware of false teachers. From the beginning of our work, men have arisen from time to time, advocating theories that were new and startling . . . .

“Let all our brethren and sisters beware of anyone who would set a time for the Lord to fulfill His word in regard to His coming, or in regard to any other promise He has made of special significance. ‘It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in His own power.’ False teachers may appear to be very zealous for the work of God, and may expend means to bring their theories before the world and the church; but as they mingle error with truth, their message is one of deception, and will lead souls into false paths. They are to be met and opposed, not because they are bad men, but because they are teachers of falsehood and are endeavoring to put upon falsehood the stamp of truth.

“What a pity it is that men will go to such pains to discover some theory of error . . . . Instead of teaching truth they let their imagination dwell upon that which is new and strange, and throw themselves out of harmony with those whom God is using to bring the people up upon the platform of truth . . . . They go off on a tangent,

and, Jehulike, call to their brethren to follow their example of zeal for the Lord.”  
(TM 54, 55 from RH, Sept. 12, 1893)

**G. 1894:**

“God has not revealed to us the time when this message will close, or when probation will have an end. Those things that are revealed we shall accept for ourselves and for our children [Deut. 29:29]; but let us not seek to know that which has been kept secret in the councils of the Almighty.” (1SM 191)

In response to letters of enquiry asking if she had received special light as to the date for probation to close, “I answer that I have only this message to bear, that it is now time to work while the day lasts, for the night cometh in which no man can work . . . . But there is no command for anyone to search the Scripture in order to ascertain, if possible, when probation will close. God has no such message for any mortal lips. He would have no mortal tongue declare that which He has hidden in His secret councils.” (1SM 191-92)

**H. 1896:**

1. “A crisis has arrived in the government of God on earth . . . .

“God gives no man a message that it will be ten years or twenty years before this earth’s history shall close. If it were forty or one hundred years, the Lord would authorize no man to proclaim it. He would not give any living being an excuse for delaying the preparation for His appearing . . . for this leads to reckless neglect of opportunities and privileges to prepare for that great day. Every soul who claims to be a servant of God is called to do his service as if every day might be his last . . . .

“Let him be guarded that he does not presume to feed the flock of God with food that is not appropriate for the time . . . .

“Jesus says, ‘Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.’ [Rev. 16:15] Here is the great burden to be carried away by every individual. Are my sins forgiven? Has Christ, the Burden-bearer, taken away my guilt? Have I a clean heart, the righteousness of Christ, by faith? Woe be to any soul who is not seeking a refuge in Christ, and conforming the character to the character of Christ. Woe be [to] all who shall in anywise divert the mind from this work, and cause any soul to be less vigilant now . . . .

“There must be no long discussions presenting new theories in regard to prophecies which God has already made plain . . . .”  
(Manuscript 32a, 1896 [Manuscript Release #1308])

2. [A testimony to a Brother T who misapplied Scripture by taking events from prophecy which were already fulfilled and then making a further, future application of them]

“The peculiar views he holds are a mixture of truth and error . . . . The great waymarks of truth, showing us our bearings in prophetic history, are to be carefully guarded, lest they be torn down and replaced with theories that would bring in confusion rather than genuine light. I have been cited to the very erroneous theories that have been presented over and over again. Those who advocated these theories presented Scripture quotations, but they misapplied and misinterpreted them. The theories supposed to be correct were incorrect, and yet many thought them the very theories to be brought before the people. . . (2SM 101, 102)

“The people now have a special message to give to the world, the third angel’s message. . . .”

“There have been one after another who in studying their Bibles thought they discovered great light, and new theories, but these have not been correct. The Scripture is all true, but by misapplying the Scripture men arrive at wrong conclusions . . . .”

“Some will take the truth applicable to their time, and place it in the future. Events in the train of prophecy that had their fulfillment away in the past are made future, and thus by these theories the faith of some is undermined. (2SM 102)

“From the light that the Lord has been pleased to give me, you [Brother T] are in danger of doing the same work, presenting before others truths which have had their place and done their specific work for the time, in the history of the faith of the people of God. You recognized these facts in Bible history as truth, but apply them to the future.” (2SM 102, 103)

## **I. 1900:**

EGW wrote concerning the passage in Rev. 10 where an “angel” (Jesus, in reality) solemnly declares that “time shall be no longer.” Said EGW: “This time . . . is not the end of this world’s history, neither of probationary time, but of prophetic time, which should precede the advent of our Lord. That is, the people will not have

another message upon definite time. After this period of time, reaching from 1842 to 1844, there can be no definite tracing of the prophetic time. The longest reckoning reaches to the autumn of 1844.” (Ms. 59, 1900, in 7BC 971)

## II. SUMMARY-SYNTHESIS OF THE PASSAGES

### A. Counsels to the Church:

1. All historical time, as far as Bible prophecy is concerned, ended on Oct. 22, 1844, with Christ’s entry into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary (EW 243):
  - a. No historical date can be established from Scripture beyond that terminal point. (9BC 971)
  - b. Time has not been a test since that date; time will never again be a test. (1SM 188; EW 75)
  - c. There will never again be a message for the people of God based upon definite time. (1SM 188; 9BC 971)
  - d. The Third Angel’s Message must not be “hung” on time. (1SM 188; EW 75)
  
2. EGW’s warnings/reproofs regarding time-setting are often couched in the context of Acts 1:6-7 (where the resurrected Lord told disciples inquiring if He were now to establish His kingdom, “It is not for you to know . . . .”)  
(1SM 186-91).
  - a. God has not revealed the time for any event beyond Oct. 22, 1844.
  - b. God, furthermore, does not intend for any human being to possess such information:
    - (i) Don’t exhaust your mental powers in such speculation. (1SM 186)
    - (ii) God has no such message for men. (1SM 192)
    - (iii) He would have no mortal tongue declare such secrets. (1SM 192)
  - c. The things God has already revealed are for us and our children; the secret, unrevealed things, belong to Him alone. (Duet. 29:29)
  
3. EGW expressly warned the church (“we are not to know”) against the effort to determine the dates for such events as:
  - a. Outpouring of the Holy Spirit/Latter Rain (1SM 188, 192)

- b. The close of the giving of the 3rd Angel’s Message (1SM 191)
  - c. The close of human probation (1SM 191, 192)
  - d. The Second Advent (1SM 188; TM 55):
    - (i) We are not to say that He will come in 1, 2, or 5 years.
    - (ii) Neither are we to put it off for 10-20 years (1SM 189)
  - e. Any other eschatologically-related event “of special significance” which is the subject of promise by Christ (TM 55)
4. The attitude of the church toward time-setters is stated:
- a. We are to “beware of anyone who would set a time . . . .” (TM 55)
  - b. They are to be “met and opposed” actively:
    - (i) Not because they are “bad” people (often they are viewed by fellow-members as good, zealous, financially-generous workers for the Lord); but, rather
    - (ii) Because they are wrong, and are leading souls into false paths, thus undermining faith and causing eternal loss (TM 55).
5. Historically, such speculation:
- a. Was a perennial problem in Christ’s earthly ministry (1SM 186)
  - b. Was a recurring problem in the post-1844 Advent movement (TM 54)
  - c. Will be a problem in the church again just before Jesus returns.
6. Why God withholds this information from His people:
- a. They would make an improper use of it. (1SM 189)
  - b. Instead of advancing the work of the 3rd Angel’s Message, it would actually retard its progress in preparing a people to meet Jesus in peace (1SM 189):
    - (i) It generates an unhealthy, false excitement, pandering to sensationalism, whereas the Christian is not to live on “time excitement.” (1SM 189)
    - (ii) We are not to waste time in being engrossed in speculation on unrevealed issues. (1SM 189)
    - (iii) Our only safety is found in living in a state of continual



readiness. (1SM 186, 187, 190, 191)

- c. The ultimate effect is to place God's people above the simplicity of the gospel. (1SM 187)

7. Time-setting practitioners and their work/message are characterized as:

- a. False teachers (TM 54, 55); teachers of falsehood (TM 55)
- b. They waste much time on trifling things. (1SM 192)
- c. They are zealous in advancing error. (TM 54)
- d. They are unwilling to have a humble, teachable spirit, or to study the Word of God objectively, or to counsel with experienced workers in the cause of God. (TM 54-55)
- e. They mingle error with truth (TM 55), basing it upon unsound reasoning. (GC 457)
- f. Their message is one of deception. (TM 55)
- g. They allow their imagination to dwell upon (and then they advocate) "new," "strange," "startling," and "false" theories. (TM 54, 55)
- h. They are thus out of harmony with and His church and its leadership. (TM 55)
- i. They cast aside the Bible teaching on Christian unity, and "trample" upon it. (TM 55)
- j. They tend to go off on tangents, like Jehu, and then call upon their brethren to follow their example. (TM 55)
- k. They have turned from the light of God now shining upon this subject. (GC 456)
- l. They are possessed of an intense desire to startle the world with something original to raise the people into a state of spiritual ecstasy. (1SM 187)
- m. Their "theories" and "calculations" divert those who study such from present truth. (1SM 186)

**B. Satan's strategy in Encouraging Time-Setting--Why He Promotes Idea:**

- 1. It diverts the attention from the study of present truth and the performance of present duty by focusing on expectations of some future "special season of excitement." (1SM 186, 188-90)
  - a. The Christian, instead, should yield himself to the control of the Holy Spirit to do present duties. (1SM 186)
  - b. Our work is to watch, work, wait, and labor. (1SM 191)
  - c. Our only safety is living in a state of continual readiness for the

Lord's appearing. (1SM 192)

2. This study generates false excitement (1SM 188; EW 75), and thus disqualifies the Christian from effectively giving the 3rd Angel's Message. (1SM 186)
3. When a Christian repeatedly has his hopes excited, only to be subsequently dashed in disappointment at non-fulfillment, this very traumatizing of faith makes it impossible for the Christian to have the Holy Spirit properly impress the great truths of God's word upon his mind. (GC 457)
4. The critics exploit the failure of such predictions by using them to cast contempt/ridicule and to destroy the credibility of:
  - a. The person so believing
  - b. The 1843-44 movement (GC 457)
5. Some, influenced by time-setting theories, tend to fix a date for the Lord's return so far into the future that they then rest in a false security, and do not become undeceived until it is too late for them to be saved. (GC 457)

#### **CONCLUSION:**

1. After Oct. 22, 1844, "there can be no definite tracing of the prophetic time." (7BC 971)
2. "There will never again be a message for the people of God that will be based on time." (1SM 188).
3. "We are not to know the definite time for . . . any . . . promise He has made of special significance" in the area of eschatology." (1SM 188; TM 55)
4. Those who pursue this forbidden computation are characterized as "false teachers."
  - a. The church is to "beware" of these time-setters.
  - b. Such "may appear to be very zealous for the work of God, and may expend means to bring their theories before the world and the church;" but, nevertheless--"They are to be met and opposed" by the church:
    - (i) "Not because they are bad men, but because they are teachers of falsehood and are endeavoring to put upon falsehood the stamp of truth."

- (ii) “They mingle error with truth, their message is one of the deception, and will lead souls into false paths.” (TM 55)

**ADDENDUM:**

In *Selected Messages*, Book Two, there are several references to time-setting:

Anna Garmire, who claimed the gift of prophecy in Battle Creek in the 1880s, and her father who promoted and exploited his daughter’s “gift,” claimed that probation would close in Oct., 1884 (2SM 65, 73). They also set a date for the second coming of Christ, and “other events to take place” in conjunction with the last-day-events. (2SM 76)

Ellen White characterized such views as “a delusion of Satan” and “heresy.” And in meeting it in person, declared “that the Lord had been pleased to show me that there would be no definite time in the messages given of God since 1844 . . . .” (2SM 73)

In 1896, from Australia, she wrote of her personal experience in having to deal with a dying man who had prepared a chart of eschatological events, in which he tried to reason from Scripture that Christ would come in 1894. Many of his ecstatic followers thought him inspired; EGW drily remarked that the source of his “inspiration” was the morphine given to help relieve his pain. (2SM 113)

Then she refers to her Lansing, MI camp meeting sermon (Sept. 5, 1891, “It Is Not for You to Know the Times and the Seasons,” reported in RH March 22, 1892 and cited in 1SM 185-91) where “I had to speak plainly in regard to this new light” of time-setting. In that sermon she stated that this time-setting was “not the truth of inspiration” or “wonderful light” or “a show of truth,” but, rather, it was the result of “a misapplication of Scripture.” Then she made a direct reference to “the word of the Lord to me . . . : This is not truth, but will lead into strange paths and some will become confused over this representation, and will give up the faith.” (*Ibid.*)

She adds further “no one has a true message fixing the time when Christ is to come or not to come. Be assured that God gives no one authority to say that Christ delays His coming five years, ten years, or twenty years.” Instead, the work for the SDA Church now is to preach the Three Angels’ Messages of Rev. 14. And she also predicts that in this context of setting false times for last-day events, “Division will come in the church. Two parties will be developed. The wheat and tares grow up together for the harvest. (2SM 113, 114, from Ms. 32, 1896)