

Within Seventh-day Adventism today, probably because Jesus has not yet returned, there are those who are denying the basic signs that our Saviour said would herald His second advent. In this article we shall be taking a look at these signs. We shall also see what we have been told about them through the spirit of prophecy.

Jesus gives us signs of His return

We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 2 Peter 1:19

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Matthew 24:29-30

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. Mark 13:24-26

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. Luke 21:25-28

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Revelation 6:12-14

A timely reminder

Contained in Matthew chapter 24 is the discourse that Jesus held with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. This was probably on the Tuesday prior to the crucifixion. This discussion concerned the question of **when** Jesus would return. It is paralleled in Mark's gospel chapter 13 and Luke's gospel chapter 21.

Jesus did not give the exact date of His second advent. Instead He gave signs to show when His return was very near.

When this discourse of Christ is read, the one thing that stands out is that He warned His followers of the dangers of deception. His words consistently speak of it. We need therefore to heed the warning He gave "... **Take heed that no man deceive you**" (Matthew 24:4)

In this brief but very important essay you are now reading, it is not the author's purpose to cover all of the signs of which Jesus spoke at that time but rather the ones that He said would appear in the sun, moon and stars (see Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24-25 and Luke 21:25). It will also include a sign that is revealed in the opening of the sixth seal in Revelation 6:12-13. This is a great earthquake.

My prayer is that you will not be amongst those who will be deceived by Satan's misinterpretations of these harbingers of the return of Jesus. God bless you as you read of these things.

Signs in the sky and earth

As can clearly be seen from the Scriptures at the beginning of this essay, Jesus gave signs in the sky that He said would show His return to be very near. These are obviously very important. We dare not misinterpret them. As we will soon realise, they are transparently relevant to the time we are living in today.

Satan is a very wily foe. He knows that his time is short and will do everything he can to take down with him as many people as possible. We need to be very careful that we do not get caught up with his deceptions. He will do all that he can to have the people of this earth unprepared for the return of Jesus. This is one of his main objectives.

God is doing the very opposite. He is attempting to have everyone realise the times in which they are living and is doing all that He can to save as many people as possible. This is why He has given us harbingers (signs in the sky and earth) of the return of Jesus. He expects those who know of them to share this knowledge with others.

Needless to say there will be different understandings of these signs but whatever the interpretation, the one thing that they must all have in common, at least if they are to achieve what God intends them to achieve, is that they must sharpen the awareness of the soon return of our Saviour. If this is not achieved then we can be sure that the interpretation is not of God.

This essay was written with Seventh-day Adventists in mind. In a very special sense, God has given to them the privilege of being the guardians of His last day message for this world. As a token of His pleasure (approval) He gave this church a messenger to guide them in their endeavours. It was also to keep them on course to the finishing of His work.

This messenger was Ellen G. White. Seventh-day Adventists believe that God gave to her the very same gift that He gave to all the Bible writers. This gift is the spirit of prophecy.

We will now take note of what we have been told through this messenger of God and in so doing compare what she says with the passages of Scripture quoted above.

The time fixed

In her much-loved book 'The Desire of Ages', Ellen White wrote of the signs in the sky that Jesus gave to His disciples.

"The Saviour gives signs of His coming, and more than this, He fixes the time when the first of these signs shall appear:" (Ellen G. White, 'The Desire of Ages, pages 631, 'On the Mount of Olives')

This fixing of the time is very important. She continues by telling us of this time

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that the time of the first of these signs (the sun darkened) had been fixed by Jesus. As this was the first of these signs, we know that the others will follow in their order. This starting point is "Immediately after the tribulation of those days".

So to which tribulation is Jesus referring? Ellen White explains

"At the close of the great papal persecution, Christ declared, the sun should be darkened, and the moon should not give her light. Next, the stars should fall from heaven. And He says, "Learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that He is near, even at the doors." Matt. 24:32, 33, margin." (*Ibid* page 632)

These portents in the sky were to come "At the close of the great papal persecution". This is the **fixed starting point** for the first of the signs in the sky (the dark day).

According to the historic Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of prophecy (and as we shall see later by Ellen White herself), this papal persecution waned in the early 1700's. The latter was the century in which was brought to a close the 1260 years of Papal supremacy. This had existed from AD 538 until 1798 (see Daniel 7:25, Revelation 11:2, 11:3, 12:6, 12:14, 13:5).

Now notice the **purpose** of these signs. We have been told through the spirit of prophecy

“Christ has given signs of His coming. He declares that we may know when He is near, even at the doors.” *(Ibid)*

If these signs in the sky are to tell us that Jesus is returning soon (which Jesus said were their entire purpose) they would need to have a specific (fixed) time for their happening. This is because if each passing generation experiences them in their time, they would never be a sign of anything to anyone let alone show the soon return of Jesus. This much should be reasonably obvious. As Ellen White said above “The Saviour gives signs of His coming, and more than this, He fixes the time when the first of these signs shall appear”.

Ellen White continued (remember this was in 1898 when ‘The Desire of Ages’ was published)

“These signs have appeared. Now we know of a surety that the Lord's coming is at hand. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," He says, "but My words shall not pass away." *(Ibid)*

Ellen White did not say that these signs were for sometime in the future but that by 1898 they were already in the past (“have appeared”). For very apparent reasons this is very important.

She also said two pages later

“After He had given the signs of His coming, Christ said, "When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." "Take ye heed, watch and pray." God has always given men warning of coming judgments. Those who had faith in His message for their time, and who acted out their faith, in obedience to His commandments, escaped the judgments that fell upon the disobedient and unbelieving.” *(Ibid page 634)*

Perhaps here Ellen White had in mind the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. It certainly would be a prime example of Christians heeding warnings (see Luke 21:20-24) and escaping judgements because of acting out their faith. Those who heeded the signs did vacate the city and were saved from the ensuing slaughter. Those who ignored the signs suffered the consequences of their actions.

We are also told on the next page

"If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." Rev. 3:3. The advent of Christ will surprise the false teachers. They are saying, "Peace and safety." Like the priests and teachers before the fall of Jerusalem, they look for the church to enjoy earthly prosperity and glory. The signs of the times they interpret as foreshadowing this. But what saith the word of Inspiration? "Sudden destruction cometh upon them." 1 Thess. 5:3. Upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth, upon all who make this world their home, the day of God will come as a snare. It comes to them as a prowling thief." (*Ibid page 635*)

As far as waiting for the return of Jesus is concerned, watching and heeding is very important. From these words of Jesus we can see that those taken by surprise will be overtaken. We need to be careful therefore not to heed these "false teachers" who by their specious reasoning attempt to put 'afar off' the return of Jesus.

In the first chapter of 'The Great Controversy', Ellen White wrote of the signs that were given to know when to vacate Jerusalem. She paralleled them with the signs that Jesus gave of His return.

"Let men beware lest they neglect the lesson conveyed to them in the words of Christ. As He warned His disciples of Jerusalem's destruction, giving them a sign of the approaching ruin, that they might make their escape; so He has warned the world of the day of final destruction and has given them tokens of its approach, that all who will may flee from the wrath to come." (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page 37, 1911 edition, 'The Destruction of Jerusalem'*)

She then added regarding these God-given tokens

"Jesus declares: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations." Luke 21:25; Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-26; Revelation 6:12-17. Those who behold these harbingers of His coming are to "know that it is near, even at the doors." Matthew 24:33. "Watch ye

therefore," are His words of admonition. Mark 13:35. They that heed the warning shall not be left in darkness, that that day should overtake them unawares. **But to them that will not watch, "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."** 1 Thessalonians 5:2-5." (*Ibid*)

Heeding these signs, like heeding the other signs that God has been so gracious to give, is extremely important. They are for our benefit. This is why we need to understand **when** they happened. A failure to understand them could be fatal. It is no wonder Jesus said "Take heed that no man deceive you".

Now notice **when** the Papal persecution came to an end. This really is very interesting. We are told in 'The Great Controversy'

"The persecution of the church **did not continue throughout the entire period of the 1260 years.** God in mercy to His people **cut short the time of their fiery trial.** In foretelling the "**great tribulation**" to befall the church, the Saviour said: "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Matthew 24:22." (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, 1911 edition, page 266, 'The Bible and the French Revolution'*)

The persecution of the true church of God (the church in the wilderness – see Revelation 12:6 and 12:14) did not last for the entire 1260 years. It came to an end **before** the 1260 year time period ended. Most historians would agree with this reasoning.

Take note now what Ellen White says brought it to a close.

"**Through the influence of the Reformation the persecution was brought to an end prior to 1798.**" (*Ibid*)

Here we are told that during the 1260 years of Papal supremacy, it was the preaching of the Word of God (the reformation) that "**cut short**" the "**great tribulation**" that was experienced by the church in the wilderness (God's true church). Note again she says the persecution (tribulation) came to an end "**prior to 1798**".

It is important not to confuse this time of 'papal persecution' with 'the time of trouble' of Daniel 12:1. The latter is when Michael (Christ) stands up, thus signifying that the pre-advent (investigative) judgment is finished and God's people are finally delivered from the deceptions and snares of Satan. This is immediately prior to the return of Jesus. It is quite possible that the signs in the sky that were fulfilled in the 18th and 19th centuries will then be repeated. At this time they will not, as they are to us today, be signs of mercy because the door of probation will then be closed forever. It is for this reason that today we need to heed the signs. This is because the day will come when it will be too late to do so.

There is something else to consider here.

This is that if these signs only appear after Jesus vacates the heavenly sanctuary (as in the time of trouble of Daniel 12:1), then of what earthly value are they to the redeemed, except of course if they tell us of this fact? There is no way, if that was the case, that these signs can be said to be of any preparatory value. In other words, by then, all the preparation for the return of Jesus would have been completed. To this end, any preparatory signs would have already accomplished their work

The witness of the Word of God

On the next page of the same chapter in 'The Great Controversy, Ellen White spoke of the two witnesses, meaning the Old and New Testaments (see Revelation 11:3-4).

"They shall prophecy **a thousand two hundred and three-score days**, clothed in sackcloth." During the greater part of this period, God's witnesses remained in a state of obscurity. The papal power sought to hide from the people the word of truth, and set before them **false witnesses to contradict its testimony**. When the Bible was proscribed by religious and secular authority; **when its testimony was perverted, and every effort made that men and demons could invent to turn the minds of the people from it;** when those who dared proclaim its sacred truths were hunted, betrayed, tortured, buried in dungeon cells, martyred for their faith, or compelled to flee to mountain fastnesses, and to dens

and caves of the earth--then the faithful witnesses prophesied in sackcloth. Yet they continued their testimony throughout the entire period of 1260 years. In the darkest times there were faithful men who loved God's word and were jealous for His honor. To these loyal servants were given wisdom, power, and authority to declare His truth during the whole of this time." (*Ibid* page 267)

On the next page came a dire warning. It said

"And if any man will hurt them [the two witnesses], fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed." Revelation 11:5. Men cannot with impunity trample upon the word of God. The meaning of this fearful denunciation is set forth in the closing chapter of the Revelation: "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Revelation 22:18, 19." (*Ibid* page 268)

Ellen White added

"Such are the warnings which God has given to guard men against changing in any manner that which He has revealed or commanded." These solemn denunciations apply to all who by their influence lead men to regard lightly the law of God. They should cause those to fear and tremble who flippantly declare it a matter of little consequence whether we obey God's law or not. All who exalt their own opinions above divine revelation, all who would change the plain meaning of Scripture to suit their own convenience, or for the sake of conforming to the world, are taking upon themselves a fearful responsibility. The written word, the law of God, will measure the character of every man and condemn all whom this unerring test shall declare wanting." (*Ibid*)

She concluded

"When they shall have finished [are finishing] their testimony." The period when the two witnesses were to prophesy clothed in sackcloth, ended in 1798. As they were approaching the termination of their work in obscurity, war was to be made upon them by the power represented as "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit." In many of the nations of Europe the powers that ruled in church and state had for centuries been controlled by Satan through the medium of the papacy. But here is brought to view a new manifestation of satanic power." (*Ibid* page 268)

There is a very big danger that by some, the signs given by Jesus to show His return to be near will be misinterpreted. We must do all that we can to give them a correct interpretation. To make them say other than Jesus intended could bring about very serious consequences. This is not only to those who are doing the misinterpreting but also for those who are in the process of being misled. Those in responsible positions should do all they can to ensure no misrepresentations are made but if they are made then before any lasting damage can take hold they should seek to correct this error. This is the least that God expects.

Ellen White then went on to expound Revelation chapter 11 and the French Revolution, also how human 'reason' (by the French authorities) was exalted above God. This was atheism in its most basic and evil sense.

In the next chapter, Ellen White spoke of the Pilgrim Fathers and their settling upon the shores of America. She also spoke of the framing of the Declaration of Independence etc but these things are not directly relevant to our essay. We shall therefore move on to see what she said concerning the time period when the signs that Jesus gave actually happened.

Heralds of the morning

It is the next chapter of 'The Great Controversy' to which I particularly draw your attention. This chapter is called 'Heralds of the Morning'. It has everything to do with the time period in which the Seventh-day

Adventist Church was brought into existence. As God's remnant people living in these final days of earth's history, it is imperative that we do not misunderstand what God has revealed to us. We need to remember that Satan is rampant. He is still like a roaring lion seeking those whom he may devour. He majors in deception.

In this chapter, Ellen White focuses on the second coming of Jesus. She particularly refers to the signs that we are to look for to show His return to be near. These signs are as found in Matthew 24 and its parallel chapters of Mark 13 and Luke 21, also as in Revelation chapter 6 under the sixth seal. As has been said above, these were signs in the sky such as in the sun, moon and stars, also a great earthquake.

First we see Ellen White referring to the signs in the sun and the moon.

“Prophecy not only foretells the manner and object of Christ's coming, but presents tokens **by which men are to know when it is near**. Said Jesus: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars." Luke 21:25. "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." Mark 13:24-26. **The revelator thus describes the first of the signs to precede the second advent:** "There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood." Revelation 6:12.” (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, page 304, 'Heralds of the Morning', 1911 edition*)

Ellen White equates the signs given by our Saviour (as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21) with the events of the sixth seal of Revelation chapter 6. The latter was as He gave them to John in vision on the Isle of Patmos (late 1st century).

She continues in very lengthy detail concerning the great earthquake in 1755

“These signs were witnessed **before the opening of the nineteenth century**. In fulfillment of this prophecy there occurred, **in the year 1755**, the most terrible earthquake that has ever been recorded. Though commonly known as the earthquake of Lisbon, it extended to the greater part of Europe, Africa, and America. It was felt in Greenland, in the West Indies, in the island of Madeira, in Norway and Sweden, Great Britain and Ireland. It pervaded an extent of not less than four million square miles. In Africa the shock was almost as severe as in Europe. A great part of Algiers was destroyed; and a short distance from Morocco, a village containing eight or ten thousand inhabitants was swallowed up. A vast wave swept over the coast of Spain and Africa engulfing cities and causing great destruction.

It was in Spain and Portugal that the shock manifested its extreme violence. At Cadiz the inflowing wave was said to be sixty feet high. Mountains, "some of the largest in Portugal, were impetuously shaken, as it were, from their very foundations, and some of them opened at their summits, which were split and rent in a wonderful manner, huge masses of them being thrown down into the adjacent valleys. Flames are related to have issued from these mountains."-- Sir Charles Lyell, Principles of Geology, page 495.

At Lisbon "a sound of thunder was heard underground, and immediately afterwards a violent shock threw down the greater part of that city. **In the course of about six minutes sixty thousand persons perished**. The sea first retired, and laid the bar dry; it then rolled in, rising fifty feet or more above its ordinary level." "Among other extraordinary events related to have occurred at Lisbon during the catastrophe, was the subsidence of a new quay, built entirely of marble, at an immense expense. A great concourse of people had collected there for safety, as a spot where they might be beyond the reach of falling ruins; but suddenly the quay sank down with all the people on it, and **not one of the dead bodies ever floated to the surface**."-- Ibid., page 495.

"The shock" of the earthquake "was instantly followed by the fall of every church and convent, almost all the large public

buildings, and more than one fourth of the houses. In about two hours after the shock, fires broke out in different quarters, and raged with such violence for the space of nearly three days, that the city was completely desolated. **The earthquake happened on a holyday, when the churches and convents were full of people, very few of whom escaped.**"-- Encyclopedia Americana, art. "Lisbon," note (ed. 1831). "The terror of the people was beyond description. Nobody wept; it was beyond tears. They ran hither and thither, delirious with horror and astonishment, beating their faces and breasts, crying, 'Misericordia! the world's at an end!' **Mothers forgot their children, and ran about loaded with crucifixes.** Unfortunately, many ran to the churches for protection; but in vain was the sacrament exposed; in vain did the poor creatures embrace the altars; images, priests, and people were buried in one common ruin." **It has been estimated that ninety thousand persons lost their lives on that fatal day.**" (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 1911 edition, pages 304-305, 'Heralds of the Morning')

All of this happened in 1755. Now take particular note what Ellen White says next.

"Twenty-five years later appeared the next sign mentioned in the prophecy -- the darkening of the sun and moon. What rendered this more striking was the fact that the time of its fulfillment had been definitely pointed out. (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 1911 edition, page 306, 'Heralds of the Morning')

There can be no mistaking what is being said here. The time of the fulfillment of the darkening of the sun and the moon "had been definitely pointed out". This said Ellen White happened around a quarter of a century after the Lisbon earthquake. She added

"In the Saviour's conversation with His disciples upon Olivet, after describing the long period of trial for the church, -- the 1260 years of papal persecution, concerning which He had promised that the tribulation should be shortened, -- He thus mentioned certain events to precede His coming, and fixed the time when the first of these should be witnessed: "In those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not

give her light." Mark 13:24. The 1260 days, or years, terminated in 1798. A quarter of a century earlier, persecution had almost wholly ceased. Following this persecution, according to the words of Christ, the sun was to be darkened. (*Ibid*)

Notice what she says again about Jesus fixing the time of the first of the signs (the darkening of the sun), also that persecution had ceased a quarter of a century earlier. She then added

"On the 19th of May, 1780, this prophecy was fulfilled." (*Ibid*)

There can be no mistaking these words. We have been told that on May 19th 1780, the prophecy given by Jesus with respect to the darkened sun "was fulfilled".

Ellen White then continued with a detailed and lengthy description of this dark day.

"Almost, if not altogether alone, as the most mysterious and as yet unexplained phenomenon of its kind, . . . stands the dark day of May 19, 1780,--a most unaccountable darkening of the whole visible heavens and atmosphere in New England."--R. M. Devens, *Our First Century*, page 89.

An eyewitness living in Massachusetts describes the event as follows: "In the morning the sun rose clear, but was soon overcast. The clouds became lowery, and from them, black and ominous, as they soon appeared, lightning flashed, thunder rolled, and a little rain fell. Toward nine o'clock, the clouds became thinner, and assumed a brassy or coppery appearance, and earth, rocks, trees, buildings, water, and persons were changed by this strange, unearthly light. A few minutes later, a heavy black cloud spread over the entire sky except a narrow rim at the horizon, and it was as dark as it usually is at nine o'clock on a summer evening. . . .

"Fear, anxiety, and awe gradually filled the minds of the people. Women stood at the door, looking out upon the dark landscape; men returned from their labor in the fields; the carpenter left his tools, the blacksmith his forge, the tradesman his counter.

Schools were dismissed, and tremblingly the children fled homeward. Travelers put up at the nearest farmhouse. 'What is coming?' queried every lip and heart. It seemed as if a hurricane was about to dash across the land, or as if it was the day of the consummation of all things.

"Candles were used; and hearth fires shone as brightly as on a moonless evening in autumn. . . . Fowls retired to their roosts and went to sleep, cattle gathered at the pasture bars and lowed, frogs peeped, birds sang their evening songs, and bats flew about. But the human knew that night had not come. . . .

"Dr. Nathanael Whittaker, pastor of the Tabernacle church in Salem, held religious services in the meeting-house, and preached a sermon in which he maintained that the darkness was supernatural. Congregations came together in many other places. The texts for the extemporaneous sermons were invariably those that seemed to indicate that the darkness was consonant with Scriptural prophecy. . . . The darkness was most dense shortly after eleven o'clock."-- The Essex Antiquarian, April, 1899, vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 53, 54. "In most parts of the country it was so great in the daytime, that the people could not tell the hour by either watch or clock, nor dine, nor manage their domestic business, without the light of candles. . . .

"The extent of this darkness was extraordinary. It was observed as far east as Falmouth. To the westward it reached to the farthest part of Connecticut, and to Albany. To the southward, it was observed along the seacoasts; and to the north as far as the American settlements extend."--William Gordon, History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the U.S.A., vol. 3, p. 57.

The intense darkness of the day was succeeded, an hour or two before evening, by a partially clear sky, and the sun appeared, though it was still obscured by the black, heavy mist. "After sundown, the clouds came again overhead, and it grew dark very fast." "Nor was the darkness of the night less uncommon and terrifying than that of the day; notwithstanding there was almost a full moon, no object was discernible but by the help of

some artificial light, which, when seen from the neighboring houses and other places at a distance, appeared through a kind of Egyptian darkness which seemed almost impervious to the rays."--Isaiah Thomas, Massachusetts Spy; or, American Oracle of Liberty, vol. 10, No. 472 (May 25, 1780). Said an eyewitness of the scene: "I could not help conceiving at the time, that if every luminous body in the universe had been shrouded in impenetrable shades, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete."--Letter by Dr. Samuel Tenney, of Exeter, New Hampshire, December, 1785 (in Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, 1792, 1st series, vol. 1, p. 97). Though at nine o'clock that night the moon rose to the full, "it had not the least effect to dispel the deathlike shadows." After midnight the darkness disappeared, and the moon, when first visible, had the appearance of blood.

May 19, 1780, stands in history as "The Dark Day." Since the time of Moses no period of darkness of equal density, extent, and duration, has ever been recorded. The description of this event, as given by eyewitnesses, is but an echo of the words of the Lord, recorded by the prophet Joel, twenty-five hundred years previous to their fulfillment: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come." Joel 2:31.

Christ had bidden His people watch for the signs of His advent and rejoice as they should behold the tokens of their coming King. "When these things begin to come to pass," He said, "then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." He pointed His followers to the budding trees of spring, and said: "When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." Luke 21:28, 30, 31.

But as the spirit of humility and devotion in the church had given place to pride and formalism, love for Christ and faith in His coming had grown cold. Absorbed in worldliness and pleasure seeking, the professed people of God were blinded to the Saviour's instructions concerning the signs of His appearing. The

doctrine of the second advent had been neglected; the scriptures relating to it were obscured by misinterpretation, until it was, to a great extent, ignored and forgotten. Especially was this the case in the churches of America. The freedom and comfort enjoyed by all classes of society, the ambitious desire for wealth and luxury, begetting an absorbing devotion to money-making, the eager rush for popularity and power, which seemed to be within the reach of all, led men to center their interests and hopes on the things of this life, **and to put far in the future that solemn day when the present order of things should pass away.**

When the Saviour pointed out to His followers the signs of His return, He foretold the state of backsliding that would exist just prior to His second advent. There would be, as in the days of Noah, the activity and stir of worldly business and pleasure seeking--buying, selling, planting, building, marrying, and giving in marriage--with forgetfulness of God and the future life. For those living at this time, Christ's admonition is: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." **"Watch ye therefore,** and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." Luke 21:34, 36.

The condition of the church at this time is pointed out in the Saviour's words in the Revelation: **"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."** And to those who refuse to arouse from their careless security, the solemn warning is addressed: "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." Revelation 3:1, 3.

It was needful that men should be awakened to their danger; that they should be roused to prepare for the solemn events connected with the close of probation." (*Ibid, pages 306-310*)

This indeed was a very lengthy explanation and as we can see from the above, Ellen White quoted R. M. Devens as saying that this dark day was "the most mysterious and as yet unexplained phenomenon

of its kind". His book ('Our Century') was published in 1877 and had at least 25 different editions, the last one being (as far as I know) in 1885. This was over 100 years after the event of the dark day. It was a most popular book.

In Noah Webster's Dictionary it said

"The Dark Day, May 19, 1780 -- so-called on account of a remarkable darkness on that day extending over all New England ... The obscuration began about ten o'clock in the morning, and continued till the middle of the next night, but with difference and duration in different places ... **The true cause of this remarkable phenomena is not known.**" (*Noah Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, Vocabulary of the Names of Noted ... Persons and Places, ed. 1869, 1882 & 1883*)

It also said regarding the darkness

"Birds sang their evening songs, disappeared, and became silent; fowls went to roost; cattle sought the barnyard; and candles were lighted in the houses." (*Ibid 1869 edition as quoted in 'Your Bible and You' by Arthur S. Maxwell*)

Ellen White spoke extensively of the dark day of May 19th 1780. To her this was no small matter. It was extremely important. She said concerning what Jesus had told His disciples regarding the sun being darkened, "**On the 19th of May, 1780, this prophecy was fulfilled**" (see above). As to what is being said, again there is no room for conjecture or misunderstanding.

The three angel's message

On the next page, Ellen White went on to write about the message that God has declared is to be given to the world in the last days of its history. It is what we know as the three angel's message of Revelation chapter 14.

"To prepare a people to stand in the day of God, a great work of reform was to be accomplished. God saw that many of His professed people were not building for eternity, and in His mercy

He was about to send a message of warning to arouse them from their stupor and lead them to make ready for the coming of the Lord.

This warning is brought to view in Revelation 14. Here is a threefold message represented as proclaimed by heavenly beings and immediately followed by the coming of the Son of man to reap "the harvest of the earth." **The first of these warnings announces the approaching judgment.** The prophet beheld an angel flying "in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Revelation 14:6, 7.

This message is declared to be **a part of "the everlasting gospel."** The work of preaching the gospel has not been committed to angels, but has been entrusted to men. Holy angels have been employed in directing this work, they have in charge the great movements for the salvation of men; **but the actual proclamation of the gospel is performed by the servants of Christ upon the earth.**

Faithful men, who were obedient to the promptings of God's Spirit and the teachings of His word, were to proclaim this warning to the world. They were those who had taken heed to the "sure word of prophecy," the "light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar arise." 2 Peter 1:19. They had been seeking the knowledge of God more than all hid treasures, counting it "better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold." Proverbs 3:14. And the Lord revealed to them the great things of the kingdom. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant." Psalm 25:14.

It was not the scholarly theologians who had an understanding of this truth, and engaged in its proclamation. Had these been faithful watchmen, diligently and prayerfully searching the

Scriptures, they would have known the time of night; the prophecies would have opened to them the events about to take place. **But they did not occupy this position, and the message was given by humbler men.** Said Jesus: "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." John 12:35. **Those who turn away from the light which God has given, or who neglect to seek it when it is within their reach, are left in darkness.** But the Saviour declares: "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John 8:12. **Whoever is with singleness of purpose seeking to do God's will, earnestly heeding the light already given, will receive greater light; to that soul some star of heavenly radiance will be sent to guide him into all truth."** (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, 1911 edition, pages 311-313, 'Heralds of the Morning'*)

More often than not, God will bypass the highly esteemed intellectual, also the much celebrated theologian, and instead will choose humble servants to whom He can convey the truth. Even those regarded as not so well educated can become, if they would dedicate their lives to serving their Creator, a mighty tool in His hand for the proclamation of the gospel. God is not dependant on the learned or the intellectual to spread the truth of His word. All that He needs are those who are willing and humble enough to accept it.

The great advent awakening

In the next chapter of 'The Great Controversy', Ellen White speaks of the great advent awakening, also the work of William Miller. There are many who do not realise how radical was the belief and teaching of this great man. All that they see is that he preached of the nearness of the return of Jesus but this is only half of the story.

William Miller, a farmer by occupation, lived in a time when the popular belief was that before Christ returned there would be on earth 1000 years (a millennium) of peace. His preaching therefore of a 'soon coming Christ' was totally contradictory to what was believed by much of Christendom. Notice here how Ellen White describes this situation.

“Taking the manner in which the prophecies had been fulfilled in the past as a criterion by which to judge of the fulfillment of those which were still future, he became satisfied that the popular view of the spiritual reign of Christ -- **a temporal millennium before the end of the world -- was not sustained by the word of God.** This doctrine, pointing to a thousand years of righteousness and peace **before the personal coming of the Lord, put far off the terrors of the day of God.** But, pleasing though it may be, it is contrary to the teachings of Christ and His apostles, who declared that the wheat and the tares and to grow together until the harvest, the end of the world; that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse;" that "in the last days perilous times shall come;" and that the kingdom of darkness shall continue until the advent of the Lord and shall be consumed with the spirit of His mouth and be destroyed with the brightness of His coming. Matthew 13:30, 38-41; 2 Timothy 3:13, 1; 2 Thessalonians 2:8.” (*Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, 1911 edition, pages 321, ‘An American Reformer’*)

The messenger of God continued

“The doctrine of the world's conversion and the spiritual reign of Christ was not held by the apostolic church. It was not generally accepted by Christians until about the beginning of the eighteenth century. Like every other error, its results were evil. It taught men **to look far in the future for the coming of the Lord and prevented them from giving heed to the signs heralding His approach.** It induced a feeling of confidence and security that was not well founded and **led many to neglect the preparation necessary in order to meet their Lord.**” (*Ibid*)

Although as a church we may not teach the millennium as taking place prior to return of Jesus, it is very possible, by ill prepared words, to make the signs that Jesus spoke of (as in the sun, moon and stars etc) to be of non-effect. We must be guarded from doing such a thing or falling for such deceptions. We must be wide awake as to the ploys of Satan to have us ignore these portents.

Just as Jesus intended, these signs show His return to be very near. This is why He gave them. They are not to be ignored as though they

have no relevance today but rather they are to be heeded. This was their intended purpose.

To the unbeliever, these signs, coupled with other fulfilled prophecies, can be very convincing evidence not only of the existence of God but also His love for fallen humanity. They can often persuade where other means fail. In defeating the purposes of Satan, fulfilled prophecy is a very persuasive argument in God's arsenal of weaponry. We need to use it wisely to bring our present worldwide condition to the attention of those around us. This is an invaluable aid in winning people to the side of Christ. This is one of the reasons why God has given us prophecy. Let us do everything in our power to ensure that we never in any way demean or misinterpret it.

Falling stars

If space were to permit, it would be good to detail here the entire chapter from which we have been quoting (An American Reformer) but the purpose of this brief essay is to bring to your attention these signs in the sky that Jesus told His followers to look for and to heed.

On page 333, in the very same chapter, Ellen White wrote (notice how again she ties in these signs, fulfilled in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the sixth seal of Revelation chapter 6)

"In 1833, two years after Miller began to present in public the evidences of Christ's soon coming, **the last of the signs appeared which were promised by the Saviour as tokens of His second advent.** Said Jesus: "The stars shall fall from heaven." Matthew 24:29. And John in the Revelation declared, as he beheld in vision the scenes that should herald the day of God: "The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind." Revelation 6:13. **This prophecy received a striking and impressive fulfillment in the great meteoric shower of November 13, 1833.** That was the most extensive and wonderful display of falling stars which has ever been recorded; "the whole firmament, over all the United States, being then, for hours, in fiery commotion! No celestial phenomenon has ever occurred in this country, **since its first settlement,** which was viewed with such intense admiration

by one class in the community, or with so much dread and alarm by another." "Its sublimity and awful beauty still linger in many minds. . . . Never did rain fall much thicker than the meteors fell toward the earth; east, west, north, and south, it was the same. In a word, the whole heavens seemed in motion. . . . The display, as described in Professor Silliman's Journal, was seen all over North America. . . . From two o'clock until broad daylight, the sky being perfectly serene and cloudless, an incessant play of dazzlingly brilliant luminosities was kept up in the whole heavens."--R. M. Devens, *American Progress; or, The Great Events of the Greatest Century*, ch. 28, pars. 1-5." (*Ibid* page 333)

Just as she did with the dark day of 1780, Ellen White then enters into a detailed description of these 'falling stars'.

"No language, indeed, can come up to the splendor of that magnificent display; . . . no one who did not witness it can form an adequate conception of its glory. It seemed as if the whole starry heavens had congregated at one point near the zenith, and were simultaneously shooting forth, with the velocity of lightning, to every part of the horizon; and yet they were not exhausted--thousands swiftly followed in the tracks of thousands, as if created for the occasion."--F. Reed, in the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, Dec. 13, 1833. "A more correct picture of a fig tree casting its figs when blown by a mighty wind, it was not possible to behold."--"The Old Countryman," in *Portland Evening Advertiser*, Nov. 26, 1833.

In the *New York Journal of Commerce* of November 14, 1833, appeared a long article regarding this wonderful phenomenon, containing this statement: "No philosopher or scholar has told or recorded an event, I suppose, like that of yesterday morning. A prophet eighteen hundred years ago foretold it exactly, if we will be at the trouble of understanding stars falling to mean falling stars, . . . in the only sense in which it is possible to be literally true."

Thus was displayed the last of those signs of His coming, concerning which Jesus bade His disciples: "When ye shall see

all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." Matthew 24:33. After these signs, John beheld, as the great event next impending, the heavens departing as a scroll, while the earth quaked, mountains and islands removed out of their places, and the wicked in terror sought to flee from the presence of the Son of man. Revelation 6:12-17.

Many who witnessed the falling of the stars, looked upon it as a herald of the coming judgment, "an awful type, a sure forerunner, a merciful sign, of that great and dreadful day." --"The Old Countryman," in Portland Evening Advertiser, Nov. 26, 1833. Thus the attention of the people was directed to the fulfillment of prophecy, and many were led to give heed to the warning of the second advent." (*Ibid page 334*)

There can be no doubt that Ellen White regarded the words of Jesus ("and the stars shall fall from heaven" – Matthew 24:29) as being fulfilled on November 13th 1833. To speak out against what she has written is to speak out against the One who inspired her to write. If we do the latter we need to recall the words of Jesus concerning crediting the work of God to Satan (see Matthew 12:25-37).

The question is today, as the year 2009 approaches, are we heeding the signs that Jesus gave us to show the nearness of His return or in our understanding of current world events are we allowing them to grow dim? In 'The Desire of Ages' Ellen White wrote

"The crisis is stealing gradually upon us. The sun shines in the heavens, passing over its usual round, and the heavens still declare the glory of God. Men are still eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying, and giving in marriage. Merchants are still buying and selling. Men are jostling one against another, contending for the highest place. Pleasure lovers are still crowding to theaters, horse races, gambling hells. The highest excitement prevails, yet probation's hour is fast closing, and every case is about to be eternally decided. Satan sees that his time is short. He has set all his agencies at work that men may be deceived, deluded, occupied and entranced, until the day of probation shall be ended, and the door of mercy

be forever shut.” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 636, ‘On the Mount of Olives’)

She then adds

“Solemnly there come to us down through the centuries the warning words of our Lord from the Mount of Olives: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." (*Ibid*)

In closing I would bring to your attention a portion of a General Conference Bulletin called ‘God’s plan’. It is also included in Volume 9 of the Testimonies to the Church.

This is where Ellen White wrote (as published in Volume 9 of the Testimonies)

“We need now to take heed to ourselves. Warnings have been given. Can we not see the fulfillment of the predictions made by Christ and recorded in the twenty-first chapter of Luke? How many are studying the words of Christ? How many are deceiving their own souls and cheating themselves out of the blessings that others might secure if they would believe and obey? Probation still lingers, and it is our privilege to lay hold of the hope set before us in the gospel. Let us repent and be converted and forsake our sins, that they may be blotted out. "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." Luke 21:33-36.” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church Volume 9 page 268, ‘Timely Counsels’, see also General Conference Bulletin 1st June 1909, ‘God’s Plan’*)

She added

“Shall the warnings given by Christ be passed by unheeded? Shall we not make diligent work for repentance now, while Mercy's gracious voice is still heard?” (*Ibid*)

One final warning from Ellen White

It should be no surprise to realise that as time goes on, Satan is becoming more and angrier. As the Scriptures tell us “... the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”. It is because of this that we can know that his deceptions are becoming not only more subtle but also that the ministry is allowing itself to be manipulated by him. As Ellen White once said

“Unsanctified ministers are arraying themselves against God. They are praising Christ and the god of this world in the same breath. While professedly they receive Christ, they embrace Barabbas, and by their actions say, "Not this man, but Barabbas." Let all who read these lines, take heed. Satan has made his boast of what he can do. He thinks to dissolve the unity which Christ prayed might exist in his church. He says, "I will go forth and be a lying spirit to deceive those that I can, to criticize, and condemn, and falsify." Let the son of deceit and false witness be entertained by a church that has had great light, great evidence, and that church will discard the message the Lord has sent, and receive the most unreasonable assertions and false suppositions and false theories. Satan laughs at their folly; for he knows what truth is.” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers – No. 11, page 8*)

She then added

“Many will stand in our pulpits with the torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan. If doubts and unbelief are cherished, the faithful ministers will be removed from the people who think they know so much. "If thou hadst known," said Christ, "even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." (*Ibid*)

Today we can expect ministers to be standing in the pulpits of Seventh-day Adventist churches preaching error concerning prophecy but notice particularly what Ellen White said about those ministers who have been preaching the truth. She said that they “[will be removed from the people who think they know so much](#)”.

We need to seriously think about these things.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the signs in the sun, moon and stars that Jesus gave us to show His coming near (as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21) have already met their primary fulfilment. Whilst this does not prohibit them happening again immediately prior to the return of Jesus (as mentioned above), their primary application is to their fulfilment in the 18th and 19th centuries. These are the signs that show us that Jesus is coming soon. If we make a correct application of them, they can also be very convincing to others.

As a timeline, these signs are of immense importance to those who are looking for and hastening the soon return of Jesus. Apart from anything else they will help to shield God’s people from the deceptions of Satan because they most clearly show that our Saviour’s return is imminent. When the time of the pre-advent judgment is included (1844), they give us a well ordered understanding of last day events.

First we have in this timeline (as the persecution of Papal supremacy waned in the early 1700’s) the great earthquake of Lisbon in 1755. There then followed the dark day of 1780, the falling stars of 1833 and in 1844 the commencement of the pre-advent (investigative) judgment. The latter is the last of the time prophecies of the Bible.

During these last days of earth’s history, because Satan knows his time is short, we can expect renewed efforts from him to attempt to have God’s people doubt these signs. Let us therefore not heed the voices that speak contrary to what we have been told in this brief essay but rather seek to share these signs with others so that they too may have the hope of a soon return of our glorious God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Please feel free to share this essay with others. I am sure that if you do so, God will not only bless you the giver but also those who receive it. "... freely ye have received, freely give" Matthew 10:8

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