

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE



ANOTHER
LOOK AT
ISRAEL DAMMAN

JAMES R. NIX

Another Look At Israel Damman (0000)

Ellen G. White

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About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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by James R. Nix

A talk given during the Ellen G. White Summit held at Avondale College, Cooranbong, N.S.W., Australia, February 2-5, 2004

I still remember my surprise at reading the account of the trial of Israel Damman (Dammon, or Damon) ¹ in Atkinson, Maine, as reported in the March 7, 1845, *Piscataquis Farmer* newspaper, and reprinted in *Spectrum* magazine in August, 1987. ² What's all this about, I recall wondering. I didn't care at all about Israel Damman, the person actually on trial, or even about Dorinda Baker, someone I had never heard of before. My questions revolved around Ellen Harmon (White), and to a lesser extent James White. What were they doing there in the midst of all that noise and confusion? And why was Ellen lying on the floor during a vision?—that's certainly not how I pictured her from the artist's paintings I had seen in various of our denomination's publications. Although the discussion by several Adventist historians that followed the account of the trial in *Spectrum* answered some of my questions, ³ what still remained was a radically different view of at least part of Ellen White's earliest ministry than I then knew anything about, and one that certainly did not fit my comfort zone.

Although I cannot stand here today and tell you that I have totally resolved every question that one might raise about Damman and what happened in Atkinson, Maine, I can say that after having spent considerable time reading and rereading the newspaper account of his trial, plus having looked at other information regarding that same time period, I believe that I now have a much better understanding of the circumstances surrounding those long ago happenings.

Before looking in detail at some of the points raised during the trial, let me give a brief overview of Israel Damman's life. He was born in 1811 ⁴ and died in 1886. ⁵ A Free Will Baptist-turned-Millerite preacher, ⁶ Damman associated briefly after 1844 with Ellen Harmon and James White in Maine. Later, Damman was an

¹Endnotes Spelled variously: Damman, Dammon, or Damon.

²*Spectrum*, vol.17, no. 5, [Aug. 1987], 29-36.

³*Ibid.*, 37-50.

⁴Ancestry.Com: "Israel Damon."

⁵The World's Crisis, Nov. 24, 1886, 90.

⁶*Ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1886, 102.

Advent Christian minister.⁷ According to Isaac Welcome, Damman was remembered as “one of the most noisy and unaccountable of men” whose preaching was “especially conspicuous by shouting and jumping.”⁸ In 1838 he married Lydia Rich;⁹ they had at least three children.¹⁰

Damman’s first recorded contact with Ellen and James was at Exeter, Maine, in early February, 1845.¹¹ Apparently, based upon Ellen’s vision of the “Bridegroom” given her there, Damman accepted the unfolding Shut Door understanding.¹²

From Exeter, James and Ellen traveled with Damman to Atkinson.¹³ There on Saturday night, February 15, 1845, at a meeting held in the home of James Ayer, Jr.,¹⁴ Damman was arrested. A newspaper account of the subsequent trial reported on the activities of various ones that evening, including James and Ellen,¹⁵ though Damman was the only person actually being tried.

⁷Wellcome, Isaac, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People*, Yarmouth, ME, 1874, p. 350; *The World’s Crisis*, December 15, 1886, 102.

⁸Wellcome, *Ibid.*; see also G. H. Wallace, “Memories of Israel Damman,” *The World’s Crisis*, January 24, 1904, 14; and Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, August 24, 1874, [Letter 2, 1874](#), p. 7.

⁹Ancestry.Com: “Israel Damon.”

¹⁰U.S. Federal Census; 1850, Penobscot County, Corinna Township, Maine, 65; U. S. Federal Census, 1860, Piscataquis County, Sangerville, Maine, 929.

¹¹Israel Dammon, “Letter from Bro. Dammon,” *The Jubilee Standard*, June 5, 1844, 104.

¹²Israel Dammon, “Letter from Bro. Dammon,” *The Jubilee Standard*, June 5, 1844, 104; Ellen G. White to Joseph Bates, July 13, 1847, [Letter 3, 1847](#); Merlin Burt, *The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White’s Role in Sabbatarian Adventism from 1844 to 1849*, Ph.D. diss, Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, December 2002, 131.

¹³Burt, *Ibid.*

¹⁴“Trial of Elder I. Dammon: Reported for the Piscataquis Farmer,” *Piscataquis Farmer* [Dover, Maine], March 7, 1845, 1; Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, [2:40, 41](#).

¹⁵“Trial of Elder I. Dammon: Reported for the Piscataquis Farmer,” *Piscataquis Farmer*, March 7, 1845, 1, 2 (all citations to the report by the newspaper reporter for the *Piscataquis Farmer* will be from the reprint edited by Frederick Hoyt, “Trial of I. Dammon Reported for the Piscataquis Farmer,” *Spectrum*, vol. 17, no. 5 [August 1987], 29-36.) For this reference, see Hoyt 32, testimony of James Ayer, Jr., starting toward bottom of col. 1; “The Horrors of Millerism: Trial of Israel Dammon,” *Eastern Argus* [Portland], March 13, 1845; “The Fruits of Millerism,” *New-York Observer*, March 22, 1845, 47.

Despite attempts to locate the original court transcripts, the only account found to date is from the March 7, 1845, *Piscataquis Farmer*. The reporter stated he had “abridged ...[the] testimony” having “omitted ...the most unimportant part, ...but [had] endeavored in no case to misrepresent” any witness. ¹⁶

Damman was charged with being “a vagrant and idle person, ...going about ...town ...begging: ...a common railer, or brawler, neglecting his calling, or employment, misspending his earnings, and ...not provid[ing] for the support of himself [or] family.” ¹⁷ By all accounts, the Saturday night meeting was a noisy one. ¹⁸ The stated purpose for the gathering was so that Ellen Harmon and Dorinda Baker, another visionary, could share their visions. ¹⁹

[2] Despite not being on trial, the activities of Ellen, James, and Dorinda all engendered considerable discussion by both prosecution and defense witnesses. ²⁰ Damman, during his own self-defense as summarized in the newspaper, did not mention any of the three. ²¹

Dorinda was known to several defense witnesses, though none previously knew Ellen. ²² Despite that, several testified to their

¹⁶Hoyt, op cit., 29. See opening comments in bottom of col. 1 and top of col. 2..

¹⁷*Ibid.*, see comments in bottom of col. 2 and top of col. 3.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of prosecution witness William C. Crosby, Esq. at top of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 31. See testimony of prosecution witness Dea. James Rowe in middle of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 31. See testimony of prosecution witness Joseph Mou2lton [arresting sheriff] toward bottom of col. 3; Defense witness Joel Doore recalled “there was not one tenth part of the noise Saturday night, that there generally is at the meetings I attend.” *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore about three fifths way down col. 2.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of prosecution witness Loton Lambert toward top of col 3; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of James Ayer, Jr., about four-fifths way down col. 2; *Ibid.*, 34. See testimony of Joshua Burnham about half way down col. 2.

²⁰*Ibid.*, although not always agreeing, a number of both prosecution and defense witnesses discuss the activities of Ellen Harmon, James White, and Dorinda Baker throughout the entire report of the trial.

²¹*Ibid.*, 35. See comments of Prisoner [Israel Damman] in bottom of col. 2 and top of col. 3.

²²*Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of James Ayer, Jr. under cross examination in lower half of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Jacob Mason about one-third down col. 1; *Ibid.*, 34. See testimony of Joshua Burnham in middle of col. 2. It is not surprising that some witnesses were previously acquainted with Dorinda Baker, but that none knew Ellen Harmon. Atkinson is only about 35 miles (56 km) from Orrington, Maine, where Dorinda lived, but it is about 165 miles (264 km) from Portland, Maine, Ellen’s home town.

belief in both women's visions.²³ One prosecution witness appeared particularly hostile to Ellen, stating that she was called "Imitation of Christ," something denied by all defense witnesses who spoke to the issue.²⁴

Differences also occurred regarding descriptions of Dorinda's activities that evening. Part of the time she was in a back room of the house making a "noise." Some claimed that men were in the room with her, including James White, though such charges were strongly denied by the defense witnesses. It was later confirmed that others rather than James went into the bedroom to assist Dorinda during her "exercise."²⁵ The one agreement among the witnesses pertained to what Ellen did that night. All stated that while in vision she lay quietly on the floor, except when she sat up to relate the vision.²⁶

Dorinda's main message was to a man she claimed thought badly of her.²⁷ In contrast, Ellen's comments all had a sense of urgency

²³*Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore cross examined toward bottom of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of George S. Woodbury about four fifths down col. 3.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of prosecution witness Loton Lambert about one third down col. 3; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony by James Ayer, Jr. at bottom of col. 1 refuting Lambert. *Ibid.*, 32. See cross examination testimony of James Ayer, Jr. in middle of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 32. Also see testimony of defense witness Isley Osborn toward middle of col. 3; *Ibid.*, 34. See testimony of defense witness John Gallison in middle of col. 1.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 30, 31. See testimony of Loton Lambert at bottom of col. 3 on p. 30, and top of col. 1 on p. 31; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of James Ayer, Jr. top of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Jacob Mason in col. 1; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of George S. Woodbury toward bottom half of col. 3; *Ibid.*, 34. See testimony of Abel S. Boobar starting at bottom of col. 1 and continuing at top of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 34. See Loton Lambert re-examined at bottom of col. 3; *Ibid.*, 34, 35. See testimony of Leonard Downes re-examined at bottom of col. 3 on p. 34, and top of col. 1 on p. 35; *Ibid.*, 35. See testimony of Thomas Proctor re-examined toward top of col. 1; *Ibid.*, 35. See testimony of A. S. Bartlett, Esq. re-examined about middle of col. 1; *Ibid.*, 35. See testimony of Levi M. Moore about middle of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 35. See testimony of Joel Doore, Jr. about middle of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 35. See testimony of James Boobar just over half-way down col. 2.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 30. See several places in testimony of Loton Lambert in col. 3; *Ibid.*, 31. See cross examination of Loton Lambert in middle of col. 1; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of Job Moody at bottom of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of Isley Osborn about middle of col. 3; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Jacob Mason in middle of col. 1; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore top of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 34. See testimony of John Gallison about one-third down col. 1; *Ibid.*,

²⁷*Ibid.*, 31. See testimony of Loton Lambert at top of col. 1; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of James Ayer, Jr/in top third of col. 3; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore in col. 2.

to them.²⁸ Due to the group's belief that Jesus would return within days,²⁹ it was reported that Ellen urged several to be baptized that night rather than risk going to "hell,"³⁰ a word possibly used by the reporter to summarize Ellen's comments since nowhere else in her writings does she use such strong language.³¹ Interestingly, despite being in the midst of all the extreme fanatical activities that evening, not once was either Ellen or James shown to be actually involved.

Of interest are the contrasting accounts given by the newspaper reporter and Ellen White regarding Damman's arrest that evening. The newspaper account reported that twice the sheriff sent for reinforcements in order to extricate Damman from the meeting.³² In contrast, Ellen White later recalled that despite twelve reinforcements, the sheriff could not free Damman until God's power released him.³³ Despite these unresolved differences, in *Spiritual Gifts*, book two, five witnesses attested to the accuracy of Ellen White's account regarding Damman's arrest.³⁴ At court, apparently his conviction was eventually overturned.³⁵

²⁸*Ibid.*, 31. See testimony of Loton Lambert several places in col. 1; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Isley Osborn cross examined about two thirds down col. 3; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of George S. Woodbury toward bottom of col. 3; *Ibid.*, 34. See testimony of John Gallison cross examined about two thirds down col. 1.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of prosecution witness J. W. E. Harvey about half way down col. 1; *Ibid.*, 31. See comment by Ebenezer Trundy toward top of col. 3 describing Damman's statement that Mr. Boobar "must live on them that had property, and if God did not come then we must all go to work together." *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of George S. Woodbury about three fifths down col. 3; *Ibid.*, 35. See testimony of Prisoner [Israel Damman] toward top of col. 3.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of Loton Lambert about half way down col. 3; and at bottom of col. 3; *Ibid.*, 32. See cross examination testimony of Isley Osborn just over half way down col. 3; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of George S. Woodbury toward bottom of col. 3.

³¹"Hell," *The Complete Published Writings of Ellen G. White*, see also Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, August 24, 1874, [Letter 2, 1874](#), p. 1; and Robert W. Olson to "The White Estate Board of Trustees, White Estate Staff, Research Center Directors," October 5, 1987, revised, October 21, 1987, 3, 4.

³²Hoyt, *op cit.*, 31. See testimony of Joseph Moulton [arresting sheriff] in middle of col. 3.

³³Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, [2:40, 41](#); Ellen G. White, "Notes from a Talk with Mrs. E. G. White, Dec. 12, 1906," EGWE-GC, DF 733-c, 2 (3).

³⁴Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, [2:302](#).

³⁵Israel Dammon, "Letter from Bro. Dammon," *The Jubilee Standard*, June 5, 1845, 104.

Soon after returning to Portland, James and Ellen, along with Israel Damman and others, met at the home of Stockbridge Howland in Topsham. There Damman was involved with the healing of Howland's daughter, Frances, from rheumatic fever.³⁶

The April 3, 1845, issue of *The Morning Watch*, a Millerite paper, warned Adventists against "Israel Dammon, and John Moody, two married men, and Miss DORINDA BAKER" who were traveling together to different places "teaching disgusting extravagances." Reference was made to the fact that "Dammon[']s] ...trial in Maine has been reported in all the papers."³⁷

About the same time Damman was again arrested regarding two other noisy meetings held in Garland. Apparently neither Ellen nor James were present, though Dorinda was mentioned in one warrant. However, she was not listed as appearing before the justice of the peace the following day.³⁸

Later that year, Ellen and James met Damman in Garland. Ellen would recall that there she had to oppose Damman's fanaticism. As a result, he rejected her testimonies and became her "enemy." Among other things, Damman believed both that Christ had returned and the dead had been raised spiritually.³⁹ Damman also reportedly carried for years a grudge toward James White over a letter White wrote Damman that the latter thought too strong. Also involved in the misunderstanding was White's followup letter.⁴⁰

The last time Ellen and James appear to have traveled with Damman, Joseph Bates was also present. Miraculously, the borrowed "partly broken colt" James was driving stood completely still the entire time Ellen was in vision, despite James' several attempts to make it proceed.⁴¹ The precise date of this story is unknown, though

³⁶Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:42, 43.

³⁷"Warning to Adventists," *The Morning Watch*, April 3, 1845, 111.

³⁸"State vs Damon," Penobscot County Court Records, April 8, 1845, April 25, 1845, and April 26, 1845. Damon states that he been in court five times. See Israel Dammon, "Letter from Bro. Dammon," *The Jubilee Standard*, June 5, 1845, 104.

³⁹Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, August 24, 1874, [Letter 2, 1874](#), pp. 6, 7, 9.

⁴⁰Defense of Elder James White and Wife. *Vindications of their Moral and Christian Character*, 1870, 109-111.

⁴¹J. N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists*, Battle Creek, Mich.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1892, 129, 130; W. C. White to Mrs. Mabel Workman, July 23, 1937, 1, 2.

apparently it was after the Whites were married. That seems late, however, given Ellen's own comments regarding her interactions with Damman.

- [3] In the mid-1870s Sundaykeeping Adventists launched several attacks against Ellen White. In one, Damman claimed that in vision years earlier she had seen him "crowned in the kingdom of God," but later she saw him "lost."⁴² Although acknowledging having seen him and others on the pathway toward the kingdom, Ellen White recalled having cautioned them "not ...[to] become exalted, lest they lose the crowns it was their privilege to gain."⁴³

Thus ends my brief biography of Israel Damman. Let's now look more carefully at some of the details surrounding that long-ago Saturday night in Atkinson, and the trial that followed two days later. The context for that evening included the passing of the time on October 22, 1844, when Christ did not return as expected by the Millerite Adventists, followed a few weeks later by Ellen Harmon-White's first vision sometime in December, 1844. After sharing her vision with the Advent band in Portland,⁴⁴ a little later—toward the end of January, 1845, Ellen rode in an open sleigh with her brother-in-law, Samuel Foss, the approximately 30 miles (45 km) out to her sister and brother-in-law's home in Poland, Maine. While there, Ellen took nearly two hours to share her vision,⁴⁵ probably in the home of John Megquier.⁴⁶

Returning to Portland, within days Ellen was off again. In vision she had been instructed to share what she had been shown.⁴⁷ The first opportunity that presented itself was when William Jordan and his sister invited Ellen to travel with them to Orrington in eastern Maine. Mr. Jordan needed to return a horse to its owner, a young

⁴²Miles Grant, *The True Sabbath. Which Day Shall We Keep? An Explanation of Mrs. Ellen G. White's Visions*, Boston: Advent Christian Publication Society, 1874, 70.

⁴³Ellen G. White, "Statement Regarding Israel Dammon," circa 1876, [Manuscript 7](#), 1876.

⁴⁴Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:35.

⁴⁵Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 1915, 72; Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: the Early Years 1827-1862*, 65.

⁴⁶Letter from John Megquier quoted by Miles Grant in "Visions and Prophecies," *The World's Crisis*, July 1, 1874. Megquier's name is variously spelled Megquier, McGuire, and Macguire.

⁴⁷Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:35.

Adventist minister named James White.⁴⁸ Apparently Ellen then joined James and a few others who traveled from Orrington to Garland and then on to Exeter, holding meetings in each place as they traveled. As previously noted, it was in Exeter where Damman lived,⁴⁹ and that Ellen Harmon and James White first met him.⁵⁰

While at Exeter Ellen had her second major vision; it was on the Bridegroom.⁵¹ As already mentioned, it was this vision that confirmed Damman, as well as James and Ellen in their growing understanding of the meaning of what had happened in 1844.⁵² It was also here in Exeter that Ellen recalled having to first denounce some fanatics.⁵³

What kinds of fanaticism did Ellen and James face, not just in Exeter, but also elsewhere in Maine during the months that followed? Since this is not a paper about fanaticism *per se*, I will not detour very far. But from Ellen's perspective "fanaticism" would have included not working, creeping and crawling, undue familiarity between men and women, mesmerism, mixed foot washing between men and women, foot kissing, false visionaries, touching hot stoves to prove you would not be burned, etc. Several prosecution witnesses at Damman's trial also included as part of fanaticism all foot washing, the Holy Kiss, rebaptism, and shouting as part of worship.

⁴⁸Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: the Early Years 1827-1862*, 69; Ellen White would later recall that this was the first time that she had met James White. See *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:38; *Life Sketches. Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors, of Elder James White, and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White*, 1880, 197; *Life Sketches*, 1915, 73. However, James White first recalled meeting Ellen White nearly two years earlier when he was in Portland, Maine. See *Life Sketches*, 1880, 126; Arthur L. White, *Ibid.*, 71. Toward the end of her life, in an interview dated December 12, 1906, Ellen White recalled, "I was introduced to James White by the Pearsons in Portland." White Estate Document File 733-c.

⁴⁹Frederick Hoyt, ed., "Trial of Elder I Dammon Reported for the Piscataquis Farmer," *Spectrum*, vol. 17, no. 5 [Aug. 1987], p. 33, col 1. See testimony of witnesses Abraham Pease and Gardner Farmer.

⁵⁰Israel Dammon, "Letter from Bro. Dammon," *The Jubilee Standard*, June 5, 1844, 104.

⁵¹Burt, *op cit.*, 130; see also Arthur L. White, *op cit.*, 78.

⁵²Israel Dammon, "Letter from Bro. Dammon," *The Jubilee Standard*, June 5, 1844, 104; Ellen G. White to Joseph Bates, July 13, 1847, [Letter 3, 1847](#); Burt, *op cit.*, 131.

⁵³Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:39, 40; Arthur L. White, *op cit.*, 77.

Since creeping and crawling were mentioned by several witnesses, let me briefly describe it. As part of sincerely attempting to follow Christ's instructions that His followers should become as little children,⁵⁴ in the wake of the October 22 disappointment, a number of Millerite adventists in Maine rather than walking, began creeping everywhere they went. Accounts have come to us from a bit later in 1845 regarding some in Paris, Maine, who participated in this form of fanaticism. Cyprian Stevens crept in front of a stagecoach full of passengers. The horses became frightened, almost upsetting the coach. The driver became so angered that he "handed the lines to a man that sat beside him, jumped down with his whip, and gave Bro. Stevens the full benefit of it. One eye was badly swollen and his whole face was bruised as well as his body."⁵⁵

On another occasion, a Bro. Lunt was creeping on the bridge in the same village. "One man by the name of Townsend grabbed him by the hair of his head, threw him over the railing of the bridge, intending to throw him on the rocks in the deep water." He was saved by the writer of the letter, a teenager at the time, who "caught Townsend, by the coat tail, saying, Let him alone, he means right, and it is none of your business whether he walks or creeps."

When visiting Paris during the summer of 1845, Ellen was asked if she felt it was their duty to creep. She told them most assuredly that it was not. As soon as she had quit speaking, an elderly brother who was present said,

- [4] If man was made to walk erect, The serpent made to crawl, Why imitate the odious thing That introduced the fall?⁵⁶

Besides creeping, there were also false visionaries. Let me share just one incident from this time regarding a practical way that Ellen dealt with getting a false visionary to come out of vision. Many years after the event, she recalled her advice,

⁵⁴Matthew 18:1-6.

⁵⁵M. C. Stowell Crawford, "Extracts from Letter of M S Crawford to WCW," attached at end of her letter to Ellen G. White, dated October 9, 1908, DF 439.

⁵⁶Fragment of interview with Ellen G. White, ca. 1906, DF 733-c.

“Get a pitcher of cold water, good cold water, and throw it right in her face, that will bring her out of it the quickest of anything you can do.”

Before the water could even be brought, the visionary ⁵⁷ had come out of her vision! ⁵⁸

The question naturally arises why Ellen and James would even be meeting with, and attempting to minister to, people with such strange, fanatical views. The fact is that these were the only ones among the former Millerites who still placed any validity in the October 22, 1844, date. ⁵⁹ Additionally, it would be sometime later in 1845 before God actually sent Ellen to a place to oppose fanaticism. ⁶⁰

From Exeter, the group moved on to Atkinson where the meeting and subsequent arrest of Israel Damman took place late Saturday night, or very early Sunday morning, February 15/16, 1845.

At this point, there are several ways one could proceed in terms of analyzing the events of that evening and the subsequent trial. We could review the descriptions of those events as given by Ellen White’s critics. In all candor, there are enough Web sites out there already doing that, for me to do it also would just be a waste of time!

Likewise, I have found fascinating a study of the comparisons between Ellen Harmon and Dorinda Baker that evening, including their actions and visions. Several witnesses said they accepted the visions of both women as being from God. However, there appear to me to be some very obvious differences between both women that evening; I could be tempted to summarize what I see as being those

⁵⁷Probably either Dorinda Baker or Mary Hamlin, see M. C. Stowell Crawford letter to Ellen G. White, October 9, 1908, 5, DF 439; see also Merlin Burt, *op cit.*, 2002, 148.

⁵⁸Portion of Ellen White interview, ca. 1906, 5, DF 733-c.

⁵⁹Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 1998, 474. See top half of col. 1.

⁶⁰Although Ellen White specifically recalled having to deal with a few fanatics in Exeter, Maine, in early February, 1845 [see *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:39, 40], and again a short time later with a small group of fanatics in Claremont, New Hampshire [*Ibid.*, 46-48], it appears that it was in Springfield, New Hampshire, that she was given the first vision specifically instructing her regarding the reproach that fanaticism was having on the cause of God, and that she should return to Maine to bear her testimony against it [see Ellen G. White, unpublished *Life Sketches Manuscript*, 126, 127].

parallels and differences.⁶¹ However, I don't think that is precisely what is being expected of me in this presentation.

Instead, I want to give an alternate viewpoint about that evening's happenings regarding Israel Damman by taking another look at what the newspaper reporter does, and does not, say in his account of the trial. It is unfortunate that the full court transcript has not been found. Without it, we will never know for sure what all was actually said by the various witnesses. I say that because the longer one reads and rereads what is stated in the *Piscataquis Farmer*, the more intrigued and frustrated you become as you realize how much is really missing. For instance, at least one critical web site quotes an

⁶¹Obvious parallels include: 1. Several witnesses testified that the Saturday night meeting was held so that both Ellen Harmon and Dorinda Baker could relate their visions [Loton Lambert 30, col. 3; James Ayer, Jr., 32, col. 2; Joshua Burnham, 34, col. 2]. 2. Several defense witnesses believed the visions of both women to be genuine [Joel Doore, 33, col. 2; George S. Woodbury, 33, col. 3]. 3. The content of both women's messages was described by several recipients as being accurate [James Ayer, Jr., 32, col. 2; Joel Doore, 32, col. 2; Isley Osborn, 32, col. 3; Jacob Mason, 33, col. 1; George S. Woodbury, 33, col. 3]. 4. Both women fell to the floor when going into vision [Isley Osborn, 32, col. 3]. 5. At least during part of the evening, both women were laying on the floor [James Ayer, Jr., 32, cols. 1 and 2; Joel Doore, 33, col. 2; all witnesses who say anything about it agree that Ellen Harmon lay on the floor that evening]. Obvious differences include: 1. Where the two women spent that evening. All agree Ellen lay on the floor, while Dorinda spent part of the evening in a back room of the house, though earlier she also laid on the floor. 2. Descriptions of the two women while have their visions also differ. Ellen laid on the floor quietly where she could be observed by everyone; Dorinda on the other hand was part of the time in a back room where she had some kind of "exercise." 3. Although several defense witnesses testified to their belief regarding the genuineness of both women's visions, it is only while specifically describing Ellen's visions that they actually attribute her visions to God. Admittedly, this is an argument from silence, but I do find curious the fact that nobody made such an observation when talking specifically about Dorinda's vision(s). 4. Apparently that night Dorinda Baker only had one visionary message. It was for Joel Doore. On the other hand, Ellen Harmon reportedly had several. Also, the purposes for the visionary messages seem to have been somewhat different. One senses an urgency in Ellen's visions that does not seem to have been present in Dorinda's single message for Doore. Likewise, when looking at the content of the messages, all of Ellen's involved some aspects of a person's eternal salvation. Not so with Dorinda. She seemed concern because Doore thought "hard" of her. 5. Although Dorinda was described as being involved in both noise making and kissing between sexes, with the single exception of Ellen's call for rebaptism by some, not one witness describes her as being involved with any of the other fanatical activities going on that night: halooing, creeping, crawling, mixed foot washing, foot kissing, kissing between sexes, etc.

article by William F. Sprague who cites a letter written by James D. Brown recalling James Stuart Holmes, the first lawyer in Piscataquis County, and the attorney who represented Israel Damman during his trial. According to Brown's recollections, at Damman's trial Holmes argued "eloquent[ly]... for religious freedom and toleration, and the right of every person to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience..."⁶² In the newspaper reporter's account of the trial there is not so much as a single hint of such an argument having been made by Holmes.

Another reason for expressing my concern regarding the newspaper reporter's record of the trial as we have it is that if my admittedly very limited experience with reporters is any indicator of what happens in the news reporting world, what all of us read in the papers, or hear on the radio and television, is at best only an approximation of what actually occurred. Having said that, I do not in any way impugn the honesty or integrity of that long ago newspaper reporter. But it is worth remembering what he said in his opening comments to any of the witnesses who read what he had written: "I have abridged your testimony as much as possible, and have omitted much of the most unimportant part... but [I] have endeavored in no case to misrepresent you." He continued by saying to the readers of his report "that much of the testimony was drawn out by questions and I have omitted the questions in all cases where it could be dispensed with and shorten the work. To all, I offer it as an imperfect and impartial report. In consequence of my total inexperience, being but a laboring man ..." he concluded by saying that his only reason for preparing the report was because of the numerous requests to do so that he had received.⁶³

[5]

Recalling the actual purpose for the trial may also help us better understand why certain questions were asked, and others apparently were not. Damman was arrested because he was accused of not working, thus risking becoming the responsibility of the town to support. Given the laws of Maine back then that each town was responsible for its indigent, some of the citizens of Atkinson did not

⁶²John Francis Sprague, *Sprague's Journal of Maine History*, X, January 1922 to January 1923, 4.

⁶³Hoyt, *op cit.*, 29. See cols. 1 and 2.

want to take that risk with Damman.⁶⁴ The fact that both prosecution and defense witnesses agreed that Damman urged people not to work did not help his case at all. Granted, Damman believed the Lord was coming within days or weeks at best,⁶⁵ so in his view they had plenty to live on until the end of the world.⁶⁶ In fact, one *prosecution* witness even testified that Damman had said that “if God did not come then we must all go to work together.”⁶⁷ But that kind of small detail was overlooked by the court.

It also needs to be recalled that it was Israel Damman who was on trial, not Ellen Harmon, James White, nor Dorinda Baker. In fact, there is no evidence that Ellen, James, or Dorinda were even present during the trial.

With that general background, let’s start by looking at several things regarding that evening. At the outset, I acknowledge being an apologist for Ellen White. However, having said that, I think there is sufficient cause based upon a reasonable interpretation of the available evidence, so that credible alternate conclusions can be reached regarding a variety of the charges/accusations raised against Ellen White by her critics.

My first observation has to do with the general impression one receives when initially reading the account in the newspaper that everything that evening was total bedlam. Today’s Adventist reader can’t help but wonder how Ellen and James must have felt surrounded by such noise and commotion. In all candor, what went on that evening probably did not sound all that strange to Ellen. Her family were Methodists, sometimes called “shouting Methodists.” She would later recall an incident from about this time that involved her mother in Portland.

“[One] afternoon an officer was sent to visit us, while some of our neighbors raised their windows to hear the result. Father was away to his work, and mother

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of Benjamin Smith, Esq., Selectman of Atkinson, in col. 1.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 30, 33, 35. See testimony of J. W. E. Harvey in col. 1 of p.30; George S. Woodbury in col. 3 of p. 33; and of Israel Damman in col. 3 of p. 35. Damman testified to his belief that the end of the world would come within a week.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 31, 33, 34. See testimony of Ebenezer Trundy at top of col. 3 on p. 31; and of George S. Woodbury at bottom of col 3 on p. 33 and top of col. 1 on p. 34.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 31. See testimony of Ebenezer Trundy at top of col. 3.

stepped to the door. He told her that complaints had reached him that we disturbed the peace of the neighborhood by noisy praying, and sometimes praying in the night, and he was requested to attend to the matter. Mother answered that we prayed morning and night, and sometimes at noon, and should continue to do so.... He said that he had no objection to prayer, and if there were more of it in the neighborhood, it would make them better. ‘But,’ said he, ‘they complain of your praying in the night.’ He was told that if any of the family were sick, or were in distress of mind in the night, it was our custom to call upon GOD for help, and we found relief. He was referred to our near neighbor who used strong drink. His voice was often heard cursing and blaspheming God. Why did not the neighbors send you to him, to still the disturbance he causes in the neighborhood? He serves his master, we serve the LORD our GOD. His curses and blasphemy seem not to disturb the neighbors while the voice of prayer greatly troubles them. ‘Well,’ said the officer, ‘what shall I tell them that you will do?’ My mother replied, ‘Serve God, let the consequences be what they may.’ The officer left, and we had no further trouble from that quarter.”⁶⁸

Emphasizing reports about that evening’s noise obviously played [6] into the hands of those at the trial who were against Damman. And by all accounts, it apparently was a noisy meeting,⁶⁹ though at least one witness testified that most meetings he attended were louder than was Damman’s that Saturday night!⁷⁰

What is easily overlooked is that apparently it wasn’t noisy all the time. Prosecution witness, William C. Crosby, Esq. testified, They would at times all be talking at once, halloing at the top of their voices.... *After the*

⁶⁸Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:80, 81.

⁶⁹Hoyt, *op cit.*, 31. See testimony of Wm. C. Crosby, toward middle of col. 2; and Joseph Moulton, toward bottom of col. 3.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore about two thirds of the way down col. 2.

cessation of the noise, Dammon got up and was more coherent.⁷¹ (Emphasis supplied.)

Another prosecution witness testified that with everyone sitting around on the floor, leaning on each other, “it did not have the appearance of a religious meeting.” However, under cross examination, that same witness admitted that he saw “nothing like licentiousness—there was exhortation and prayer...”⁷²

And Loton Lambert, by far the most hostile of the prosecution witnesses, testified,

They were singing when I arrived—after singing they sat down on the floor—Dammon said a sister had a vision to relate—a woman on the floor then related her vision.⁷³

Although Ellen is not named here, from the context it seems most likely that she is the one Lambert was describing. Other witnesses expressly stated that the meeting was being held that evening so that she could relate her vision.⁷⁴

Here is one of the times when I could wish for a more complete account of that evening’s meetings. Although one would never guess it from the abbreviated account we have to read, Ellen may well have taken quite some time telling her first vision received the previous December. As noted, when in Poland about the end of January, it took her two hours to relate her vision. Now in Atkinson, if she added anything regarding her recent Bridegroom vision given her just a few days previously in Exeter, she might have talked even longer. Of course I realize this is arguing from silence. But the reason she had undertaken this trip was to share her vision. And at least two of the witnesses testified that giving her the opportunity to

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of Wm. C. Crosby, about one third way down in col. 2.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of Ebenezer Blethen, about one-third to half way down in col. 1.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of Loton Lambert near the top of col. 3.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 32, 34. See testimony of James Ayer, Jr. near bottom of col. 2 on p. 32. Also, although Dorinda Baker is specifically mentioned by Joshua Burnham, and Ellen is not, still in the context of all the descriptions given by witnesses at the trial, it seems likely that Burnham is referring to Ellen and not Dorinda. in his testimony. See Burnham’s comments near the middle of p. 34, col. 2.

share her vision was the purpose for the meeting that Saturday night.
75

If one allows for the possibility that Ellen spent considerable time—or even some time—that evening sharing her first vision—assuring them that the bright light of the Midnight Cry was still valid, and would shine as light on the pathway as the people of God were traveling on the narrow path toward the holy city of God, then some of the other things that also happened that evening become more understandable.

After the passing of the time in 1844, reluctantly those terribly disappointed Millerite Adventists came to give up their faith that anything significant had happened on October 22. Ellen herself would later recall that by the time she received her first vision in December, she, too, had given up her faith in October 22. It was her first vision that reconfirmed for her the validity of their Midnight Cry experience. 76

Given this background, we can now possibly understand two otherwise unclear statements made by witnesses. Prosecution witness, William C. Crosby stated, “After the visionist called them up, she told them they doubted. Her object seemed to be to convince them they must not doubt.” 77 Likewise, Loton Lambert, the most hostile of the prosecution witnesses, testified, “The vision woman called Joel Doore, said he had doubted.” 78

Since no other context is given, one can only wonder what it was that Ellen was concerned about them doubting. That it was not regarding the validity of her vision seems clear from statements made by several witnesses who unequivocally affirmed their belief that Ellen’s visions were from God. 79 In fact, Joel Doore himself [7]

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Ellen G. White, “Suppression and the Shut Door,” *Manuscript 4*, 1883.

⁷⁷Hoyt, *op cit.*, 31. See testimony of Wm. C. Crosby, re-examined, top of col. 2.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of Loton Lambert, bottom of col. 3.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 33, See testimony of Jacob Mason about two-thirds down col. 1; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore about four-fifths down col. 2; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of George S. Woodbury about two thirds down col. 3; *Ibid.*, 34. See testimony of John Gallison, bottom of col. 1; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of Isley Osborn middle of col. 3;

visions were “genuine.”⁸⁰ Given that Doore already believed in the immediate return of Christ, plus the validity of Ellen’s visions, then the possibility of his doubting the continuing significance of October 22 makes perfect sense. That’s what Ellen was traveling around trying to encourage people to maintain their belief in—that something really had happened on October 22.

Belief that God was still in their movement, coupled with their belief that Christ would still come at any time, possibly explains their sense of urgency for baptism. After all, if there was any chance of losing eternal life, that certainly must not happen. Although we do not have any written counsel from Ellen White from this time about her views on rebaptism, later she did provide counsel regarding it.⁸¹ However, we do know that James White mentions in one place that he rebaptized his wife,⁸² though the circumstance of his doing so are unknown. It has been speculated that it was after they both accepted the seventh-day Sabbath in 1846.⁸³ Although it is specifically stated that Ellen did not participate in either of the two baptisms that took place that Saturday night in Atkinson,⁸⁴ it may well be that her own rebaptism happened around this same time as a testimony to her own on-going faith in the validity of the October 22 event. I say that because I am not aware of any rebaptisms being recorded around the time that she and James accepted the Sabbath. But if this trial report is to be believed, she urged several to be baptized that evening in Atkinson. James White does say that when he rebaptized her, only that it was “at an early period of her experience.”⁸⁵ This would be about as early in her experience as one could get!

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore, cross-examined, toward bottom of col. 2. Doore is the one who arranged for the attorney, J. S. Holmes, to represent Damman at the trial.

⁸¹See Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 372-375, 1946; Apparently this evening in Atkinson, one of the two girls baptized had already been baptized, but the other one probably had not. It appears that in neither case were these instances of several multiple rebaptisms as happened elsewhere among some former Millerites.

⁸²James White, *Life Incidents, in Connection with the Great Advent Movement*, as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation XIV, 1868, 273.

⁸³Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years 1827-1862*, 1985, 121, 122.

⁸⁴Hoyt, *op cit.*, 31. See testimony of prosecution witness Loton Lambert about half way down col. 1.

⁸⁵James White, *Life Incidents*, 1868, 273.

As one reads the newspaper reporter's account of the trial, you are struck with the fact that several times witnesses are quoted as testifying that Ellen urged people not to "go to hell," or said that if they were not baptized that night they would "go to hell."⁸⁶ Since nowhere else in Ellen White's writings do we find her using similar language,⁸⁷ it is curious if she actually did so that evening. In fact, it is highly unlikely that she did given that by this time she had given up belief in an eternally burning hell.⁸⁸ That not all Millerites believed as she did is clear from the records. And most certainly many of the witnesses, including probably the newspaper reporter himself, believed in an eternally burning hell. Interestingly, the reporter does quote one witness who testified that she had urged another man not to be lost. Defense witness James Ayer, Jr. recalled Ellen saying to Joel Doore "that she was distressed on his account—was afraid he would loose his soul" (both sic.).⁸⁹ Given this single example of other softer wording being used by Ellen that evening, it is easy to see how similar statements by other witnesses could have been misinterpreted by the reporter as meaning that she thought they would go straight to hell. Probably we will never know for sure what Ellen White said that evening, but her strong statements as reported in the newspaper are certainly inconsistent with everything else we know from her life. Concern over people losing their souls is much more consistent with everything else we know about Ellen White.

Another thing that probably strikes most Adventists when first reading the account of the meeting at Atkinson is that Ellen White was described as having been lying on the floor while in vision. At least one witness recalled that part of the time James White sat

⁸⁶Hoyt, *op cit.*, 30. See testimony of prosecution witness Loton Lambert about half way down col. 3; Hoyt, *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of defense witness Isley Osborn about three-fifths way down col. 3; Hoyt, *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of George S. Woodbury about two-thirds down col. 3.

⁸⁷"Hell," The Complete Published Writings of Ellen G. White on CD-ROM; see also Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, August 24, 1874, [Letter 2, 1874](#), and Robert W. Olson to "The White Estate Board of Trustees, White Estate Staff, Research Center Directors," October 5, 1987, revised, October 21, 1987, 3, 4.

⁸⁸Douglass, *op cit.*, 474. See bottom of col. 1 and top of col. 2; see also Ellen G. White, "The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment," *Life Sketches*, 1915, 29, 30; and White, "The Immortality Question," *Ibid.*, 48-50.

⁸⁹Hoyt, *op cit.*, 32. See testimony of James Ayer, Jr. about one-third down col. 2.

holding her head while she was in vision. I know that when I first read this account, I found the description of Ellen's position while in vision to be totally opposite of what I imagined. Thanks to the artists who have depicted her occasionally while in vision, in my imagination I saw her up and walking around, or possibly standing holding a Bible, etc.,—all things that on occasion she did while in vision. But I certainly did not picture her sitting in a chair,⁹⁰ or lying on the floor in a house,⁹¹ or on the platform in a church.⁹² However, the more I have read, the more I realize that more often than not, she probably was lying down while in vision. In fact, Martha Amadon, daughter of John Byington, our first General Conference president, as well as being our first Adventist church school teacher, and who possibly saw Ellen White in more visions than anyone else besides James White, specifically recalled Mrs. White's "position in vision [as] being a recumbent one".⁹³

[8] Another thing that I assume strikes most Adventists is the fact that some testified that Ellen was said to have been called "Imitation of Christ." I recall when I first read the account years ago, although several of the defense witnesses denied having ever heard her called that, and were certain that she was not, it was only after I took time to read carefully the newspaper account that I came to realize that it was only one witness—Loton Lambert, the most hostile of the prosecution witnesses, who claimed she was called "Imitation of Christ." Because the names of all the witnesses are new to today's reader, it's very easy to get them confused without going through them carefully. It might also be helpful to recall that Lambert was

⁹⁰Vision of January 12, 1861, Parkville, MI, Church. See Arthur L. White, op. cit., 463; Vision of January 3, 1875, at home in Battle Creek, Michigan. W. C.. White, [The Review and Herald, February 10, 1983](#), quoted in Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, the Progressive Years, 1862-1876, 459, 460.

⁹¹Hoyt, op cit., 30, 31. See testimony of Loton Lambert in top of col. 3 on p. 30, and middle of col. 1 on p. 31; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of Job Moody at bottom of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of Isley Osborn in middle of col. 3; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Jacob Mason about middle of col. 1; *Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore toward top of col. 2; *Ibid.*, 34. See testimony of John Gallison about one-third down col. 1; Rochester, NY, June 26, 1854. See also testimony of D. H. Lamson quoted in J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent*, 1905, 207.

⁹²Vision of June 12, 1868, "Camp Meeting Talks," Nellie Sisley Boyd, quoted in Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, the Progressive Years, 1862-1876, 1986, 233, 235.

⁹³Martha D. Amadon, Mrs. E. G. White in Vision, undated pamphlet, 1.

the only witness who was told by James Ayer, Jr., the person in whose house the meeting was held that night, that if he disturbed the meeting, he would have to leave.⁹⁴ It is obvious from both Ayers' testimony, as well as Lambert's that he (Lambert) was viewed as a potential disturber that evening. In fact, Lambert even testified that he had not come to disturb the meeting that evening.⁹⁵ That his testimony as a prosecution witness could be considered as hostile to Damman and the others who were there that evening, I think even Lambert would agree to.⁹⁶

As I have read and reread the newspaper account of the trial, I have wondered if with all the noise reported that evening, possibly Lambert may have heard Damman, or someone else, refer to Ellen's "vision of Christ." Or maybe Lambert thought Damman said that Ellen urged people to "imitate Christ."⁹⁷ What I am suggesting is that Lambert may have quite honestly mistakenly thought that he had heard Ellen called "Imitation of Christ." Obviously, we will never know what caused him to say what he said, but we do know that everyone else who specifically is quoted as speaking to the topic denied that Ellen was ever called "Imitation of Christ" that evening. Rather than claim Lambert was lying, as the critics rush to do regarding Ellen White, I would prefer to think that he misheard what had been said.⁹⁸

⁹⁴Hoyt, *op cit.*, 32. See testimony of James Ayer, Jr. in col. 2 about two-thirds of the way down.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 30. See testimony of Loton Lambert near bottom of col. 3.

⁹⁶There is one possible exception regarding the "Imitation of Christ" allegation that needs to be pointed out. One other prosecution witness, Leonard Downes, a friend of Lambert's who went to the meeting that evening with Lambert, may have agreed with him about Ellen being called "Imitation of Christ." We really can't know for sure since the newspaper reporter did not copy Downes' full comments because "his testimony was so near a repetition of Mr. Lamberts, that it is by me, considered useless to copy it." [Hoyt., *op cit.*, 31. See testimony of Leonard Downes at bottom of col. 1, and top of col. 2.] As mentioned, every other witness who spoke to the point disagreed with Lambert's assertion. And since Lambert said several other things in his testimony, possibly even Downes did not agree with Lambert on this particular point; we really do not know.

⁹⁷Even more unlikely is that Lambert had heard of Thoms a Kempis' (1380-1471) book, *The Imitation of Christ* (ca. 1425), and thought that Ellen was being called by the same name.

⁹⁸Admittedly, Lambert says Damman repeatedly called her "Imitation of Christ," as did others (Hoyt, *Ibid.*, 31: See Lambert's cross examination testimony about two thirds

Before moving to consideration of the most obvious difference between the newspaper account and Ellen White's recollections, that of the arrest of Israel Damman, let me comment briefly on something interesting that shows up in the testimony of four of the defense witnesses. I am specifically referring to the understanding of the witnesses regarding the Shut Door. At this time, many former Millerites, including William Miller himself, held to a total shut door for the conversion of sinners (Miller would change his mind the following month).⁹⁹ As is well known, Ellen White categorically denied that she was ever shown in vision that the door of mercy was totally shut thus preventing the conversion of any more sinners.¹⁰⁰ Critics like to pounce on her denial statements by trying to prove that she was shown a total shut door in vision. What insights, if any, do we find among the testimony of several of the witnesses?

While most of the witnesses agreed that Damman opposed the churches, it is interesting that several specifically differentiated between the churches themselves and individual members within the churches. James Ayer, Jr., in whose house the meeting was held stated that Damman believed that "there were members of the churches he referred to instead of the whole."¹⁰¹ Isley Osborne testified regarding Damman's view: "He believes there is good, bad, and indifferent in all churches...."¹⁰² Joel Doore testified, "Elder Dammon said there was [sic.] bad characters in the churches; I did not understand him to say all."¹⁰³ Jacob Mason acknowledged that "Brother Dammon said the churches were of that description—said they were lyers [sic.], rogues, &c. I did not understand him to include all, but individuals."¹⁰⁴

down col. 1). So it is possible, given the fact that all the defense witnesses who addressed the issue denied Lambert's claim, that he just made up his claim rather than having been mistaken regarding what he thought Damman and others had said that evening. But I would prefer to think that he just misheard.

⁹⁹Miller changed his Shut-Door views on March 8 or 9, 1845. See Burt, op cit., 89.

¹⁰⁰Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, August 26, 1874, [Letter 2, 1874](#), p. 1.

¹⁰¹Hoyt, op cit., 32. See testimony of James Ayer, Jr. at bottom of col. 1.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 32. See testimony of Isley Osborne in about middle of col. 3.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Joel Doore at top of col. 2.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 33. See testimony of Jacob Mason about half way down col. 1. See also testimony of Job Moody, *Ibid.*, 32, at the bottom of col. 2. Moody testified, "Brother Dammon said in relation to other churches they were bad enough; said they were corrupt....—he

Whether their understanding of Damman's position is totally accurate is somewhat unclear. I say that because under reexamination, in a two sentence summary of Joel Doore's testimony, he is reported to have said, "I have heard brother Dammon preach that the day of grace was over for sinners. Respondent said 'that is my belief.'" ¹⁰⁵ Also, the very abbreviated summary of Israel Damman's self-defense states, "He argued that the day of grace had gone by, that the believers were reduced; but that there was too many yet, and that the end of the world would come within a week." ¹⁰⁶

Although it is possible that Damman himself may actually have believed in an extreme Shut Door, several witnesses did not understand that to be his position. And since the two accounts (Joel Doore, Jr., and Elder Damman's self defense) are so abbreviated, it is quite possible that the nuances regarding the door of mercy not being shut for those who had not rejected light, could most likely have been missed, or at least misunderstood, by the newspaper reporter. The significant point is that in the testimony of all the defense witnesses who spoke to the issue, not one of them understood that Damman believed the door of mercy was totally shut. It is only in the two very abbreviated statements that you find something else being suggested, and at least in the case of Joel Doore, his brief statement under reexamination contradicts his earlier more expansive testimony regarding what he understood to be Damman's belief. [9]

So for me, I find it significant that among this group, none of those disappointed Millerites said anything that indicated they believed the door of mercy was totally shut. Given that Ellen Harmon was there to share her vision, apparently nothing she said that evening convinced them that the door of mercy was totally shut either. In fact, when looking at what was actually testified regarding her, you find her urging people not to doubt, to be baptized that evening—in short there was a sense of urgency about her messages that would hardly seem likely if she had been shown in vision that the door of mercy had been totally shut.

did say they were thieves (sic) etc. I am not certain, but think he said that evening there was exceptions."

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 35. See testimony of Joel Doore, Jr. about one third way down col. 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 35. See testimony of Prisoner [Israel Dammon] at top of col. 3.

Or to put it even more clearly, if Ellen White's first vision taught an extreme Shut Door as her critics claim, then she must have misunderstood it also. She would not have been present at that Saturday night meeting in Atkinson with people there who were not believers if her vision had taught an extreme Shut Door. Obviously, her first vision did not teach the Shut Door, which is exactly what she always maintained to be the case. ¹⁰⁷

One other interesting insight emerges from the testimony. A short time after this event, Ellen's critics would start making a big issue over their claim that James White manipulated her visions, and unless he were present, she could not have a vision (despite the fact that he was not present at the time of her first vision in December, 1844.) I find a statement made by Joel Doore under cross examination to be of interest. He testified, "I did not tell any person yesterday that it was necessary to have any one in the room with her to bring out her trances." ¹⁰⁸ Since none of the other witnesses are quoted as having addressed the issue, we do not know their beliefs on the matter. But at least Doore did not think that Ellen Harmon's visions resulted from anyone else's manipulation.

Now let's turn to the most apparent contradiction between Ellen White's recollections and the testimony of the sheriff as briefly summarized in the newspaper account: the arrest of Damman by the sheriff. In her most complete account of the arrest written in 1860 in [Spiritual Gifts 2:40-41](#), she says that while she was speaking two men looked into the window. Seeing Damman, they rushed past her to him. She went on to recall,

"The Spirit of the Lord rested upon him, and his strength was taken from him, and he fell to the floor helpless. The officer cried out, 'In the name of the State of Maine, lay hold of this man.' Two seized his arms, and two his feet, and attempted to drag him from the

¹⁰⁷Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, August 24, 1874, [Letter 2, 1874](#), p. 1; see also Ellen G. White, "Suppression and the Shut Door," [Manuscript 4, 1883](#), p. 4.

¹⁰⁸Hoyt, op. cit., 33. See testimony of Joel Doore toward bottom of col. 2. Admittedly in his cross examination testimony Doore refers to both Dorinda Baker and Ellen Harmon. However, since the quoted sentence follows immediately after a comment about "Miss Hammond" (sic.), presumably he is addressing his remarks regarding her. If he meant both women, presumably he would have used "them" rather than "her" in his statement.

room. They would move him a few inches only, and then rush out of the house. The power of GOD was in that room, and the servants of GOD with their countenances lighted up with his glory, made no resistance. The efforts to take Elder D. were often repeated with the same effect. The men could not endure the power of GOD, and it was a relief to them to rush out of the house. Their number increased to twelve, still Elder D. was held by the power of GOD about forty minutes, and not all the strength of those men could move him from the floor where he lay helpless. At the same moment we all felt that Eld. D. must go; that GOD had manifested his power for his glory...and those men took him up as easily as they would take up a child, and carried him out.” ¹⁰⁹

In contrast, the sheriff’s obviously summarized recollections read very differently: [10]

“When I went to arrest prisoner, they shut the door against me. Finding I could not gain access to him without, I burst open the door. I went to the prisoner and took him by the hand and told him my business. A number of women jumped on him—he clung to them, and they to him. So great was the resistance, that I with three assistants, could not get him out. I remained in the house and sent for help; after they arrived we made a second attempt with the same result—I again sent for more help—after they arrived we overpowered them and got him out door in custody. We were resisted by both men and women. Can’t describe the place—it was one continued shout.” ¹¹⁰

These are two obviously very different descriptions of the same event. I said earlier in my talk that I don’t have total answers pertaining to every single thing that happened with the Israel Damman

¹⁰⁹Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:40, 41.

¹¹⁰Hoyt, *op cit.*, 32. See testimony of Joseph Moulton in the bottom half of col. 2.

incident. This, without question, is my largest unresolved contradiction. But having admitted that, let's look at some of the details that may prove of interest. We'll start by listing some similarities between the two accounts:

1. Both agree that it was only Damman who was arrested that night, and no one else.

2. Both agree that initially it was four men who tried unsuccessfully to remove Damman.

3. Both agree that there were multiple efforts to remove Damman. (Ellen White says he could not be moved due to the power of God; the Sheriff, because so many were holding Damman down.)

4. Both agree that the entire time of the arrest took considerable time (Ellen White says forty minutes; Moulton says twice he sent for reinforcements—which would have taken awhile for them to respond in that pre-cell phone era.)

5. Albeit for different reasons, both agree that people in the arresting party had to leave the room during the time of the arrest (Ellen White stated it was due to the power of God, though one can assume that since she agrees that reinforcements came, given that there were then no cell phones, she presumably would have agreed that those reinforcements were sent for; the sheriff only describes having to send for reinforcements.)

The apparent dissimilarities are, I think, readily apparent, but they could be summarized as follows:

1. EGW: "While I was speaking, two men looked into the window." Sheriff: "They shut the door against me.... I burst open the door." (A dissimilarity though not necessarily a contradiction.)

2. EGW: "Two [arresting men] ...attempted to drag him [Damman] a few inches only, and then rush out of the house": Sheriff: "I went to the prisoner and took him by the hand and told him my business."

3. EGW: "The power of God was in that room, and the servants of God with their countenances lighted up with his glory, made no resistance." Sheriff: "A number of women jumped on him [Damman]—he clung to them, and they to him."

4. EGW: "The men could not endure the power of GOD, and it was a relief to them to rush out of the house. Their number increased to twelve, still Eld. D. was held by the power of God about forty

minutes, and not all the strength of those men could move him from the floor where he lay helpless.”: Sheriff: “So great was the resistance, that I could not get him out.”

5.EGW: “At the same moment we all felt that Eld. D. must go; that GOD had manifested his power for his glory, and that the name of the LORD would be further glorified in suffering him to be taken from our midst. And those men took him up as easily as they would take up a child, and carried him out.”: Sheriff: “I again sent for more help—after they arrived we overpowered them and got him [Damman] out door in custody.”¹¹¹ For Ellen White, God was clearly at work supernaturally during the whole arrest. Obviously, nothing even remotely approaching that is described by the arresting officer. It’s again at a time like this that we could wish for the entire court transcript! Was the sheriff cross-examined by the defense attorney? If so, nothing was included in the newspaper report. How did the other witnesses view Damman’s arrest? Not one other comment regarding the arrest is included in the entire published account of the trial. Even if one denies any supernatural element, the fact that twice the sheriff had to send for reinforcements would, I think even to the casual reader, be of sufficient reason to think that in the actual court transcript someone else must have said something regarding the arrest. What we have from the sheriff is not only unusually brief, but as I just said, what he describes is of sufficient interest to cause one to wonder if at least one or two of the other witnesses might have spoken concerning the arrest. Of course, there is always the possibility that even if some of the witnesses had wanted to speak to the issue, unless directly asked by one of the attorneys to do so, the person might have been ruled out of order. Without the complete court transcript, we’ll never know the sheriff’s full testimony, including whether he was cross-examined, or if any of the other witnesses were asked to address this issue.

One reason I cannot help but wonder if other witnesses may have actually spoken about the arrest is because included in one witness’s testimony is a curious statement. No context is given for it in the newspaper reporter’s summary. But could it possibly refer to circumstances surrounding the arrest of Damman? We’ll never

¹¹¹Ellen G. White, *Ibid.*; Hoyt, *Ibid.*

know conclusively, but it does provide us with a tantalizing question. Here is the statement made by Deacon James Rowe that intrigues me:

“Damman stood up in the floor and said, I am going to stand here—and while I stand here, they can’t hurt you, neither men nor devils can’t (sic.) hurt you.”¹¹²

Does this one brief statement attributed by Rowe to Damman pertain to when Damman and the group realized that the sheriff had come to arrest him? Or even more to the point, could it possibly refer to when the sheriff says he broke down the door to gain entry? Could Damman have made this statement then? And if so, does Damman’s statement reflect that in his view also, something supernatural was going on that night? Was it mere bravado, or was there something more behind the statement, something that Ellen White also reflected in her recollection of the arrest? Again, we will probably never know. But it is intriguing to ponder as the statement certainly does not seem to fit in with anything else in James Rowe’s testimony.

One thing, however, is absolutely certain, Ellen White never wavered in her belief that something supernatural was involved with Damman’s arrest. As late as 1906 in an interview with her secretary, Clarence Crisler, Mrs. White still recalled basically the same circumstances regarding Damman’s arrest as she had described in 1860.¹¹³

“They tried to get this Damman, and they could not get him. There he lay on the floor three quarters of an hour. ‘In the name of the state of Maine, we ask you to take hold of this man.’ Then they would rush up and grab hold of him, and they would all begin to sing, ‘We left old mystic Babylon, to sound the Jubilee.’ And their hands would slip off and they would start up. Now said I, they came up to him and began to take hold of him, they did not want me in the room, they want me to go out of the room, they said it was I that was keeping

¹¹²Hoyt, *Ibid.*, 31. See testimony of Dea. James Rowe in middle of col. 2.

¹¹³Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:40-42.

him. I stepped right out of the room, and I said, Elder Damman, the Lord will have you go with these men to this trialk (sic.) and he did. He went to that trial.”¹¹⁴

In another interview from about the same time, Ellen White [12] recalled,

“When they came into the meeting to take him, he was kneeling down. They took hold of his hands and feet and tried to lift him up to take him out of the roo[m]. But they could [n]ot do this.... They would draw him a few stewps (sic.), but as soon as they took their hands off him, he would slide back into the same place. They tried for two hours to take him out of t[h]e room, but without avail. Then we all felt that it would be for the glory of God for him to be taken out.”

“There were twelve men in all who came to take him...”¹¹⁵

So, is there any way that we can reconcile these two accounts? Probably not totally. How then might we look at the two accounts? A couple of suggestions come to mind

First, we might try to understand things from Ellen White’s possible perspective. Even if we were to grant to the critic that everything happened exactly as summarized by the sheriff, would that necessarily mean, as the critic is wont to claim, that Ellen White was lying, or trying to claim more for things than the situation warranted? I think not. Given Ellen White’s spiritual frame of mind at the time, having just gone through the time leading up to when she expected Jesus to return—the happiest year of her life, as she would recall it,¹¹⁶ and then even more recently having been given a vision by God, doubtless her perspective on events would be very different from that of the sheriff, or of any of the other witnesses.

Why do I say this? Let me give just a couple of examples of incidents Ellen White recalled from her life prior to 1845. Young

¹¹⁴Ellen G. White, “Portion of narrative related by E.G.W.” 7. DF 733-c.

¹¹⁵Ellen G. White, “Notes from a talk with Mrs. E. G. White, Dec. 12, 1906,” 2. DF 733-c.

¹¹⁶Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, 1915, 59.

Ellen was converted at the Methodist camp meeting held at Buxton, Maine,¹¹⁷ probably in 1841. For her, that event changed everything. She would recall,

“During the meeting, clouds and rain prevailed a greater part of the time and my feelings had been in harmony with the weather. Now the sun shone bright and clear and flooded the earth with light and warmth....

“It seemed to me that every one must be at peace/ with God and animated by his Spirit. Everything my eyes rested upon seemed to have undergone a change. The trees were more beautiful, and the birds sang sweeter than ever before; they seemed to be praising the Creator in their songs. I did not care to talk, for fear this happiness might pass away, and I should lose the previous evidence of Jesus’ love for me.

“As we neared our home in Portland, we passed men at work upon the street. They were conversing upon ordinary topics with each other, but my ears were deaf to everything but the praise of God, and their words came to me as grateful thanks and glad hosannas. Turning to my mother, I said: ‘Why, these men are all praising God and *they* haven’t been to the camp-meeting.’ I did not then understand why the tears gathered in my mother’s eyes, and a tender smile lit up her face, as she listened to my simple words, that recalled a similar experience of her own.”¹¹⁸

Likewise, once when she and her older brother Robert were young Millerites, Ellen recalled her brother’s face being lit up when he spoke.¹¹⁹ Did others also see it? There is no way of knowing. Even in her account of Damman’s arrest, she recalled that the “countenances of the servants of GOD lighted up with his glory.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:12.

¹¹⁸James White and Ellen G. White, *Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors, of Elder James White, and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White*, [The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials](#), 143, 144.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 164; see also Ellen G. White, unpublished *Life Sketches Manuscript*, 48.

¹²⁰Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:40.

Again, did others that night see what she saw? Since none testified to the point, at least as recorded in the newspaper summary, we will never know. However, it is interesting that many years later, when J. N. Andrews was called to be our first official missionary, his face was also recalled by J. O. Corliss as having shone with a pronounced brightness: [13]

“A camp meeting was appointed to convene a short distance from Battle Creek, in the summer of 1874, just prior to the departure of our first missionary to a foreign field, and Elder Andrews was present. When the expansion of the message was dwelt upon, and notice was given that he would soon leave for Europe, a change came over the meeting, and Elder Andrews, who had never before appeared so solemn, at once seemed altered in appearance. His face shone with ...pronounced brightness....

“I had never before witnessed a sight so heavenly, nor have I seen anything equaling it since that time....”

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Were either Ellen White or J. O. Corliss lying with what they said? No. Did anyone else see what they saw? We'll never know. But viewing the arrest through Ellen White's eyes is one valid possibility. Everything that happened that night she saw from a spiritual perspective.

Another way to look at the differences in the two accounts is not to try to offer any explanation, but rather just simply recognize that supernatural occurrences will be viewed differently by believers and non-believers. The Bible offers numerous examples of events that believers take as supernatural, while others either deny the historicity of, or at least offer other explanations for. Everything from the biblical account of creation, to Noah's worldwide flood, and the resurrection of Christ, not to mention all the lesser miracles in the Bible, are accepted on faith by the believer, but are downplayed,

¹²¹J. O. Corliss, “The Message and Its Friends—No. 5,” [The Review and Herald](#), September 6, 1923, p. 7; quoted in James R. Nix, *Sacrifice and Commitment*, 2000, 107, 108.

or denied, by others. Joshua and the sun standing still; Jericho's falling walls; Hezekiah and his backward moving sundial, Jonah and his large fish; and on and on—these are all stories that the committed Christian accepts as true because the prophet recorded them as facts, while others view the same events entirely differently, providing for them naturalistic explanations, or denying the accounts completely.

But it is not just biblical events that have differing viewpoints regarding them. In the life and experience of Ellen White an example comes to mind of an historical event that she saw as being supernatural, but neither a congressional committee, nor actual eyewitnesses, could totally explain regarding what had actually caused it. I am referring to the ending of the first major battle in the American Civil War, the Battle of Manassas. A total rout of the Union forces occurred on the afternoon of July 21, 1861. About two weeks later, on August 3, 1861, at Roosevelt, NY, Ellen White was shown the reason for that rout.

“I saw a view of the disastrous battle of Manassas, Virginia.... The Southern army had everything in their favor and were prepared for a dreadful contest. The Northern army was moving on with triumph, not doubting but that they would be victorious. Many were reckless and marched forward boastingly, as though victory were already theirs.... They did not expect so fierce an encounter.... The dead and dying were on every side. Both the North and the South suffered severely.... Just then an angel descended and waved his hand backward. Instantly there was confusion in the ranks. It appeared to the Northern men that their troops were retreating, when it was not so in reality, and a precipitate retreat commenced....

“The sudden falling back of the Northern troops is a mystery to all. They know not that God's hand was in the matter.” ¹²²

Let's look first at the report by a Confederate eyewitness regarding what he saw that afternoon:

¹²²Ellen G. White, [Testimonies for the Church 1:266, 267](#).

“Now the most extraordinary spectacle I have ever witnessed took place. I had been gazing at the numerous well-formed lines as they moved forward to the attack, some fifteen or twenty thousand strong in full view, and for some reason had turned my head in another direction for a moment, when someone exclaimed, pointing to the battle field, ‘Look! Look!’ I looked, and what a change had taken place in an instant. Where those well-dressed, well-defined lines, with clear spaces between, had been steadily pressing forward, the whole field was a confused swarm of men, like bees, running away as fast as their legs could carry them, with all order and organization abandoned.” ¹²³

[14]

As visitors tour the battlefield today, the following description is what you find on the next to last explanatory sign on the walking tour:

“Charge on Griffin’s Guns—Raw Recruits: The 33rd VA Infantry

“The Virginians were waiting, tense here at Wood’s edge—their first time under bombardment. Shells from Rickett’s battery exploded in the boughs overhead and plowed up the ground in front. When the two Union cannon rolled into position on top of the rise only 100 yards (approx. 100 m) away, Col. A. C. Cummings gave the order to charge. Better to get his men moving, the colonel figured, before they panicked and before the Union guns could do more damage.”

Continuing on toward the last sign on the battlefield walking tour, you pass a small sign that says:

“You are about to follow in the footsteps of the charging Confederates. If the two cannon had turned and used canister at this range, they would have shredded the regiment. For some reason the artillery did not fire, as if the Virginians were invisible.”

Finally you come to the last descriptive sign on the battlefield. It state:

¹²³W. W. Blackford, *War Years with Jeb Stuart*, 1946, 32-35.

“Point Blank Volley—An Officer’s Error?”

“In clear view of artillerymen here, Confederates lined up at the fence and trees across the open field. These two cannon and supporting infantry could have stopped the Rebels cold, yet the four hundred charging Virginians were able to fire a musket volley at such close range that they virtually wiped out the Union gun crews. Congressional inquiries failed to clear up the mystery: how did the Confederates manage to get that close?....”

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And the full scale route already described would soon commence. That pretty well summarizes the differences: Ellen White said it was one angel that caused all the confusion; the best explanation our National Park Service can offer is that it seemed “as if the Virginians were invisible.” In summary, there are certain events that believers are going to see one way, despite claims to the contrary by non-believers.

However one views it, the account of that long ago evening in Atkinson remains of interest to Adventists. As I said at the outset, doubtless not all questions regarding what actually happened that evening will ever be resolved. In fact, nearly thirty years afterward, Ellen White recalled the impact that fanaticism had on the fledgling Adventist movement,

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“We acknowledge to our grief that there was fanaticism in the State of Maine, and that this fanaticism sprung up in different places in different states.... A fearful stain was brought upon the cause of God which would cleave to the name of Adventist like the leprosy. Satan triumphed, for this reproach would cause many precious souls to fear to have any connection with Adventists.” [125](#)

¹²⁴Wording of explanatory signs on the walking tour of the Manassas National Historical Park was copied during a visit to the battlefield on September 3, 2001.

¹²⁵Ellen G. White to J. N. Loughborough, August 24, 1874, [Letter 2, 1874](#), pp. 2, 7.

But I think that Dr. Herbert E. Douglass in his book has summarized the Damman event well,

“Did the Seventh-day Adventist Church begin amidst shouting, crawling, hugging, allegorizers of the Second Advent? Definitely not. No one at Atkinson was a Sabbath keeper, not even Ellen Harmon. No one that night understood the role of Jesus as High Priest. No one in Dammon’s circle had the slightest concept of the Great Controversy Theme and its implications for them. The Dammon gathering was made up of disappointed Millerites who had not abandoned the Biblical doctrine of the Advent, even though they were groping their way through theological fog.

“Using the plan He had followed since our first parents left the Garden of Eden . . . , God gently started with the few who had not discarded their 1844 experience. Ever so patiently He led the few who would listen away from their many errors, such as Sunday sacredness, the extreme shut-door, ‘no-work’ conviction, and emotional excesses in worship. Without the teaching, guiding intervention of the Spirit of prophecy working through Ellen White, clearly the Adventist witness of the 1840s would have been far different.” ¹²⁶

¹²⁶Douglass, *op cit.*, 474, 475.