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HAS THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH BECOME BABYLON?

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Has the Seventh-day Adventist Church Become Babylon?

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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“The Captain of our salvation leads His people on step by step, purifying and fitting them for translation, and leaving in the rear those who are disposed to draw off from the body, who are not willing to be led, and are satisfied with their own righteousness. ‘If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.’ No greater delusion can deceive the human mind than that which leads men to indulge a self-confident spirit, to believe that they are right and in the light, when they are drawing away from God’s people, and their cherished light is darkness.”—[Testimonies for the Church 1:333](#).

Previous to and since the time when these words were written in 1861, many and varied movements have arisen that have resulted in detaching from the Seventh-day Adventist Church groups of people who, for some reason, have become dissatisfied either with the doctrines or the practices of the church.

Without exception these movements have been feeble, and in most cases shortlived. The organized body, however, has continued to increase in strength. This disparity in numbers and power is said by those drawing away from the body to be in harmony with the divine program, each dissenting company believing itself to be that “little flock” that is to enter the kingdom. The teaching of the leaders of these offshoots—“reform movements,” as they sometimes call themselves—is thus set forth by Mrs. E. G. White in an article written in 1863 entitled, “The Cause in the East,” published in [Testimonies for the Church 1:417, 418](#):

“There are little companies continually arising who believe that God is only with the very few, the very scattered, and their influence is to tear down and scatter that which God’s servants build up. Restless minds who want to be seeing and believing something new continually are constantly rising, some in one place and some in another, all doing a special work for the enemy, yet claiming to have the truth. They stand separate from the people whom God is leading out and prospering, and through whom He is to do His great work. They are continually expressing their fears that the body of Sabbath keepers are becoming like the world, but there are scarcely two of these whose views are in harmony. They are scattered and confused, and yet deceive themselves so much as to think that God is especially with them.”—[Testimonies for the Church 1:417](#).

In contrast to the vagaries of these deceived souls, God’s purpose for a strong, united people, through whom He will finish His work in the earth, is set forth in the same connection:

“God is bringing out a people, and preparing them to stand as one, united, to speak the same things, and thus carry out the prayer of Christ for His disciples: ‘Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me’”—*Ibid.*

The leaders of some of these earlier movements of separation from Seventh-day Adventists rejected and denounced the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy. This was logical, for they were not in harmony with their teaching.

Most of these movements, however, in more recent times have claimed to be in harmony with the *Testimonies*. Their speakers and writers have freely quoted such portions as they could use in condemning their former brethren, and in upholding themselves in any differences they may have with the church.

“The Loud Cry” Pamphlet

One of these movements arose in 1893. A pamphlet entitled “The Loud Cry” was circulated widely among Seventh-day Adventists, in which the position was taken that the church had so completely apostatized that she had become Babylon, and that all of God’s true people should heed the call to come out of her. It was asserted that from those who thus came out of Babylon, God’s “remnant church” would be made up. As evidence of the alleged corruption of the church, the strongest reproofs found in the *Testimonies* for individuals and for the church in general, were compiled, isolated from any words of hope or courage, and interspersed with the comments of the writer of the tract.

Of this movement, Mrs. White wrote from Wellington, New Zealand, under date of June 12, 1893:

“Those who have published the ‘Loud Cry’ tract have not consulted me upon the subject. They have quoted largely from my writings, and put their own construction upon them. They claim to have a special message from God, to pronounce the Seventh-day Adventist Church Babylon, proclaim her fall, and call the people of God to come out of her, and try to make the testimonies substantiate their theory....

“How could they...proclaim that the loud cry was that the commandment-keeping people were Babylon? Satan was saying that same thing to Christ when Joshua stood before the angel. Satan was declaring his sins to be so great that he should not be restrained from destroying him. The words of Christ are applicable to these brethren, and to all who advance similar sentiments.

““And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the

fire?"—[The Review and Herald, November 8, 1953.](#)
(Ms 21, 1893.)

In a series of articles entitled, "The Remnant Church Not Babylon," Mrs. White emphatically protested against this use of her writings. These articles were published in the *Review and Herald* in August and September, 1893. They are reprinted in *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, and may be found on pages 32-62.

A few statements from them are worthy of note in this connection.

In the very first paragraph are pointed out the entirely opposite aims of the author of the *Testimonies* and the advocate of the theory that the church had become Babylon:

"Those who have proclaimed the Seventh-day Adventist Church as Babylon, have made use of the *Testimonies* in giving their position a seeming support; but why is it that they did not present that which for years has been the burden of my message—the unity of the church? Why did they not quote the words of the angel, 'Press together, press together, press together'? Why did they not repeat the admonition and state the principle that 'in union there is strength, in division there is weakness'?"

"It is such messages as these men have borne that divide the church, and put us to shame before the enemies of truth, and in such messages is plainly revealed the specious working of the great deceiver, who would hinder the church from attaining unto perfection in unity."—[Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 56.](#)

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The following paragraph clearly intimates that the Seventh-day Adventist Church alone is giving the final message as set forth in the prophecy, and expresses astonishment that any among them should unite with the "accuser of the brethren":

"There is but one church in the world who are at the present time standing in the breach, and making up

the hedge, building up the old waste places; and for any man to call the attention of the world and other churches to this church, denouncing her as Babylon, is to do a work in harmony with him who is the accuser of the brethren. Is it possible that men will arise from among us, who speak perverse things, and give voice to the very sentiments that Satan would have disseminated in the world in regard to those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus?”—[Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 50, 51.](#)

Mrs. White plainly and emphatically protested against the use of her *Testimonies* in any attempt to identify the Seventh-day Adventist church with Babylon. She declared that only by setting her *Testimonies* in a framework of error, could anyone place such a construction upon them.

“To claim that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Babylon is to make the same claim as does Satan, who is an accuser of the brethren, who accuses them before God night and day. By this misusing of the *Testimonies* souls are placed in perplexity because they cannot understand the relation of the *Testimonies* to such a position as is taken by those in error; for God intended that the *Testimonies* should always have a setting in the framework of truth.”—[Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 42, 43.](#)

False Teaching to Be Revived

With such clear, definite statements from the pen of Mrs. White to the effect that she had not taught that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was Babylon, it would seem that the question should be forever settled. It would seem that no one in sincerity could ever again put forth the claim that her writings teach what she expressly denied that they taught. Yet with remarkable foresight she pointed out that similar movements in opposition to the church would arise in the future, and she gave clear instruction as to how they should be received. She declared:

“Such messages will come, and it will be claimed for them that they are sent of God, but *the claim will be false*; for they are not filled with light, but with darkness. There will be messages of accusation against the people of God, similar to the work done by Satan in accusing God’s people, and these messages will be sounding at the very time when God is saying to His people, ‘Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.’”—[Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers](#), 41, 42.

“Believe it not,” said Jesus, foretelling specifically what men in the last days would teach regarding His coming. “The claim will be false,” declares the Spirit of Jesus through His servant, in foretelling “messages of accusation” against God’s people, in an attempt to revive the teaching that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Babylon.

In harmony with this prediction, “Such messages will come,” we do find today people claiming that the Seventh-day Adventist

[4] Church is Babylon. Moreover, these people attempt to prove their position by quoting freely from messages of reproof and counsel, the misuse of which in the early nineties called forth the articles from which the foregoing quotations are made. The doctrine that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has now become Babylon, is being taught and published at the present time, and is being urged upon our church members.

By a leader in one of these “reform” movements the charge is seriously made that “the Seventh-day Adventist Church of the present time is beyond hope of purification, either through the means of the shaking or otherwise.”

The very year when God is said to have finally rejected the church is specified and repeatedly referred to in the writings and teachings of these self-styled reformers. Writing in August, 1929, the author of the foregoing statement continues:

“Twenty-six years ago, after having been persistently disobeyed, shamefully misrepresented, and most sorely grieved—and that for more than half a century—God was compelled to withdraw His divine presence and glory from His once-favored ‘House.’ The Seventh-day Adventist Church was *then cast off of God*—divinely condemned. And as the Lord’s servant has declared, ‘He does not cast worthless stones into His furnace. It is valuable ore that He refines’ ([The Ministry of Healing, 471](#)).

“To late, now, far too late! ‘The divine presence and glory have departed.’ Laodicea followed on year after year, determinedly and persistently, in the ‘same path as did ancient Israel;’ and today there rings out against her—and, too, against the possibility of there having been in the past or of there being in the future a return of ‘the divine presence and glory’ to her midst—these self-same words which the longsuffering though despised and rejected Christ pronounced upon Jerusalem of old, ‘Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye

shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.””

Unwarranted Conclusion

“Such messages will come,” we were forewarned. Here they are. “It will be claimed for them that they are sent of God.” That is what this “accuser of the brethren” claims. “But the claim will be false.” That is clear to every believer in the Spirit of Prophecy. “There will be messages of accusation against the people of God.” Accusation against whom? *The people of God*. And here they come in direct fulfillment of the Spirit of Prophecy.

The terrible conclusion that “twenty-six years ago” the divine Spirit of God left the Seventh-day Adventist organization, never to return, is based entirely upon a misinterpretation of a passage wrested from its context. The passage is found in [Testimonies for the Church 8:250](#), and reads as follows:

“Who can truthfully say, ‘Our gold is tried in the fire; our garments are unspotted by the world’? I saw our Instructor pointing to the garments of so-called righteousness. Stripping them off, He laid bare the defilement beneath. Then He said to me: ‘Can you not see how they have pretentiously covered up their defilement and rottenness of character? “How is the faithful city become a harlot?” My Father’s house is made a house of merchandise, a place whence the divine presence and glory have departed. For this cause there is weakness, and strength is lacking’”

Like an inverted pyramid, the accusing message proclaiming the church to be Babylon rests upon this single passage. If examination shows that the interpretation of this passage by the exponents of this doctrine of denunciation is false, and contrary to the thought of the writer, the entire structure must fall. The importance of this passage, and the date of its writing, are constantly stressed in the publications of this “reform” propaganda. Only so can this accusing

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movement claim to escape the condemnation uttered against the false teachers, who in 1893 were teaching that the “remnant church” had become Babylon.

One month later than the appearance of the statement that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had been cast off, the same accuser tells us why he believes that the instruction given by Mrs. White that the “remnant church” is “not Babylon” no longer applies. He admits that up to the early nineties it was “a very serious mistake for anyone to denounce that church as ‘Babylon,’” but puts forth the claim that by the next ten years the church had backslidden so far that it is the duty of the “reformers” now to denounce her as Babylon. But we will let him make the explanation in his own words, lest some might think he is misrepresented. He writes:

“At this juncture let us call to mind certain dates; first the date under which the Testimony entitled *The Remnant Church Not Babylon*, was first presented—March 23, 1893; and another date—one of incomparable importance in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—that is April 21, 1903.... A most vital truth is herein involved.

“The fact of the church’s Spirit pronounced condemnation and final renouncement was made known to her in a Testimony given April 21, 1903....that was a decade, approximately, after the servant of God stated that the church was not Babylon.

“Let us consider calmly and unprejudicedly, this most remarkable message in which is contained the startling exposure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s spiritually corrupt condition, also her just condemnation as declared by Christ Himself (‘our Instructor’) on that fateful day, April 21, 1903.”

The passage in the Testimony is then quoted, but the editor finds it necessary to make two interpolations in order to put into the mind of the reader the false interpretation he wishes him to accept. In order to make clear this addition of this private interpretation, we quote the sentences again as the critic set them forth:

“Who can truthfully say, ‘Our [meaning the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s] gold is tried in the fire; our garments are unspotted by the world’? ... ‘How is the faithful city become a HARLOT’ [or Babylon]?”

Both these interpolations are misleading. True, Babylon is called a “harlot” in the Scriptures. But in the passage as quoted from [Isaiah 1:21](#) there is no reference to Babylon. On the contrary, the words were spoken to God’s backslidden people, and in close connection with that wonderful assurance that “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” Let us note the earmarks of the enemy of our souls in any effort today to disconnect these words from the promise and assurance of a possible forgiveness.

Wrested From Its Context

A brief examination of the setting of the paragraph in question, perverted by the writer as evidence of our final sentence, is sufficient to show clearly to the candid mind that it was far from the intention of the author of the *Testimonies*, speaking by the Spirit of Prophecy, to pronounce a final, irrevocable doom upon the church as an organization. That is left for this young man to do, under the influence of “the accuser of the brethren.” Note that the preceding paragraph is inseparably linked with the first sentence, and gives the clue to the antecedent of the pronoun “who.” Two classes are brought to view in the church, and there is also assurance of a purification. [6]

“God has not changed toward His faithful servants who are keeping their garments spotless. But many are crying, ‘Peace and safety,’ while sudden destruction is coming upon them. Unless there is thorough repentance, unless men humble their hearts by confession and receive the truth as it is in Jesus, they will never enter heaven. *When purification shall take place in our ranks, we shall no longer rest at ease, boasting of being rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing.*”—[Testimonies for the Church 8:250.](#)

Purification where? “In our ranks,” not outside. Is the church always to remain in the condition set forth by the first part of the Laodicean message? No; we “shall no longer rest at ease, boasting of being rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing.” Thank God, there is hope for such an experience “in our ranks.”

Surely this is far from being a statement of hopeless doom for the church. Furthermore, hardly are the solemn words penned regarding the departure of “the divine presence and glory,” than the servant of God hastens to bring hope, not despair. Under the heading, “A Call for Reformation,” is the assurance regarding “the church” at this time without doubt:

“When she resists the evil and chooses the good, when she seeks God with all humility and reaches her high calling in Christ, standing on the platform of eternal truth, and by faith laying hold upon the attainments prepared for her, *she will be healed*. She will appear in her God-given simplicity and purity, separate from earthly entanglements, showing that the truth has made her free indeed. Then her members will indeed be the chosen of God, His representatives.”—[Testimonies for the Church 8:250, 251](#).

In this glorious consummation may we all share by acting our part in the reformation to which the church is called.

Paul speaks of certain ones who “wrest the scriptures to their own destruction.” What shall we say regarding an interpretation of a single paragraph in such a manner as to make it directly contradict plain statements in immediate connection, before and after, and especially when, in order to do so, it is necessary to make interpolations which would not occur to the careful reader?

The True Antecedent

The preceding paragraph, as we have seen, brings to view two classes in the church. How fitting, then, to ask a question to be answered individually: “Who can truthfully say, ‘Our gold is tried in the fire; our garments are unspotted by the world’?”

Is it correct to assume that in this quotation from the *Testimonies* the pronoun “our” refers to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a body? Evidently not. It is plain that the insertion of “The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s” as the antecedent of this interrogatory pronoun is inconsistent with the call to purification and reformation set forth as the precious privilege of the backslidden, yet divinely beloved church. The Lord condemns, that He may pardon and save. It is Satan who uses the Lord’s rebukes to discourage and destroy.

Turning to the Light

[7] God forbid that we should belittle or despise the solemn warnings and reproofs that God has through the years sent to His remnant church. And if, after we have searched our own hearts, we look about us and feel that many seem to be sleeping in carnal security, and our soul is led to cry out because of the abominations that we see in Jerusalem, may our reaction be not to condemn and accuse, but like that of God's servant who thus pens her experience:

“There are times when a distinct view is presented to me of the condition of the remnant church—a condition of appalling indifference to the needs of a world perishing for lack of knowledge of the truth for this time. Then I have hours, and sometimes days, of intense anguish.

“Many to whom have been committed the saving truths of the third angel's message fail of realizing that the salvation of souls is dependent upon the consecration and activity of God's church. Many are using their blessings in the service of self. Oh, how my heart aches because Christ is put to shame by their unChristlike behavior! But after the agony is past, I feel like working harder than ever to arouse them to put forth unselfish effort for the saving of their fellow men.”—[Testimonies for the Church 8:24](#).

If we were to take the position that the message of April 21, 1903, refers to the church as a body; if we were to believe that this is a final decree from Heaven announcing the final departure of the divine Presence, never to return; if we should assume that this is the pronouncement that the church has become Babylon, and that salvation can be assured only by coming “out of her,” then surely we should expect that later Testimonies—if, indeed, any should be sent—would make all this clear.

And just here is where these accusers, who speak in her name after her death, are really bringing accusation against her. For surely, if these monstrous suppositions were truth, Mrs. White herself would, to be in harmony with her message, have left the organization, and all her writings would have confirmed the sentence of doom against her former associates. The fact that nothing of this nature occurred should be sufficient evidence to the candid mind that this modern movement based upon this manifestly false interpretation of a single paragraph is as untimely as was the similar message that sought entrance into the church years ago.

To one who will study the *Testimonies*, volumes 8 and 9, nearly all of which was written later than 1903, nothing can be clearer than that the Lord still remembered His church in mercy with messages of counsel, warning, and reproof, and also of encouragement and promise. It was in November 1903, seven months later than the paragraph in question was written, that there was given to the church that wonderful message, “A View of the Conflict,” in which “floods of spiritual power” are promised to be poured out upon those prepared to receive it. And the church in its entirety is recognized in the closing appeal. (See [Testimonies for the Church 8:41-47](#).)

“God calls upon every church member to enter His service.... Every addition to the church should be one more agency for the carrying out of the great plan of redemption. The entire church, acting as one, blending in perfect union, is to be a living, active missionary agency, moved and controlled by the Holy Spirit.”—[Testimonies for the Church 8:47](#).

Thus, even to the end of her life, Mrs. White’s burden for the church was not “separation,” but unity. The closing years of her life were rich in counsel and encouragement in connection with the building up of the work and its wider extension.

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Perish the thought that God has mocked us by sending such messages to a church years after His divine Presence had been finally withdrawn, and before this modern “reform” movement had arisen!

Instead of dwelling in thought upon the evil course of our brethren, let us rather find light and blessing through faith in God's power to fulfill His purpose for His people.

As the very climax of evidence that the Lord's servant, till the very end of her life, regarded the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of which she consistently remained a member, as God's chosen agency for the giving of light and blessing to the world, we need but refer to her message of greeting addressed to the General Conference in 1913, the last session held during her life. "Courage in the Lord," is the heading, and "courage" the keyword of the document.

"I have words of encouragement for you, my brethren. We are to move forward in faith and hope, expecting large things from God. The enemy will seek in every way to hinder the efforts that are being made to advance the truth, but in the strength of the Lord you may gain success. Let no discouraging words be spoken, but only such words as will tend to strengthen and sustain your fellow workers....

"I pray earnestly that the work we do at this time shall impress itself deeply on heart and mind and soul. Perplexities will increase; but let us, as believers in God, encourage one another. Let us not lower the standard, but keep it lifted high, looking to Him who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. When in the night season I am unable to sleep, I lift my heart in prayer to God, and He strengthens me, and gives me the assurance that He is with His ministering servants in the home fields and in distant lands. I am encouraged and blessed as I realize that the God of Israel is still guiding His people, and that He will continue to be with them, even to the end....

"We are to hold as very sacred the faith that has been substantiated by the instruction and approval of the Spirit of God from our earliest experience until the present time. We are to cherish as very precious the work that the Lord has been carrying forward through His commandment-keeping people, and which, through the power of His grace, will grow stronger and more

efficient as time advances. The enemy is seeking to becloud the discernment of God's people, and to weaken their efficiency; but if they will labor as the Spirit of God shall direct, He will open doors of opportunity before them for the work of building up the old waste places. Their experience will be one of constant growth, until the Lord shall descend from heaven with power and great glory to set His seal of final triumph upon His faithful ones."—[The General Conference Bulletin, May 28, 1913](#). (Partially quoted in [Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, 437-439](#).)

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