

TURNING POINTS

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN LIFE



BY MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL
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Turning Points: Seventh-day Adventist History and Christian Life

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INTRODUCTION: TURNING POINTS ALONG THE WAY

One day in 34 or 35 A. D. a Pharisee left Jerusalem for Damascus intent on persecuting followers of “The Way,” a Jewish sect which accepted Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. In those days it was the custom of Saul of Tarsus, in a “raging fury” (Acts 26:11 RSV), to drag men and women from their houses and into prison. He consented to the death of some, including Stephen, when he held the coats of those who stoned him.

It was on that road to Damascus that Saul had an experience considered by some to be one of the ten most important *turning points* in the history of the world. Saul was blinded by a bright light and had an encounter with the risen Christ. His sight was restored; then he received the Holy Spirit and was baptized and commissioned to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The *Free Dictionary* defines a turning point as “an event marking a unique or important historical change of course.” A turning point means that things will never be the same again. The birth of Jesus, Luther’s posting 95 *Theses* to the door, the invention of the printing press, and Edward Jenner’s small pox vaccine are some of the great turning points in history.

The Old Testament speaks of two roads or “ways:” one that leads to death and the other that leads to eternal life (Proverbs 14:12; 15:24; 21:16). Isaiah speaks of turning to the right or to the left on the road selected by the Lord, “This is the way, walk in it” (Isaiah 30:21). He also states why turning points are necessary: it is because people like sheep “have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). When drivers make a wrong turn, it is necessary to do a U-turn to get back on the right road. “Let the wicked forsake his way,” Isaiah urges; “let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him” (see Isaiah 55:7-9).

The New Testament introduces Jesus Christ as the new way to salvation, the new road to eternal life. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” which may be understood to mean that he is the way to truth and life. Secondly, the Book of Acts reveals that the followers of Jesus were called “the Way,” even before they were called “Christians” (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

Every Christian begins a journey on the highway to the New Jerusalem, but every Christian from time to time gets off on “goat trails,” that go their own way. So there is the need to turn off those roads and back on the road to life. A turning point in the experience of the whole church, the whole body of

Christ, is a turning point in the experience of each part of that whole. When a person literally turns at a point in space, their whole body turns, not just their feet. So, each turning point in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a turning point in the life experience of each member of the body. The life experiences may or may not follow in the same order as the historical turning points, but they match up in every case.

While the authors have chosen 14 turning points in the Christian experience of every member, keep in mind that these turning points are subjective. Readers may discover other turning points not emphasized in this book that are also important. The main thing to keep in mind as you study each lesson is the life turning point that is suggested and the Bible passages and historical events that support it. The readers may want to ask themselves if there is a need to experience that turning point. Each lesson includes a section devoted to the importance of the world mission of God because it is understood that God's purpose for his church is to reach out in service and proclamation to the lost people of the world.

We focus first on examples from the Bible. The illustrations from Seventh-day Adventist history are designed to help us see how the pioneers experienced the turning points that are emphasized in Scripture. On the importance of learning from history, Paul wrote, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Ellen White has also emphasized the importance of being familiar with church history: "In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what the Lord has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. *We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history*" (*Life Sketches*, p. 196).

How to Use This Book

This book is intended to emphasize interaction between the authors and the reader. Readers are sometimes invited to contemplate and answer questions that are not explicitly answered in the text. The book is meant to serve as a “study guide” to help individuals and groups to focus on turning points in Scripture and history, and apply them to their own lives. We would suggest the following specific situations where this book may prove to be helpful. Readers may think of more.

- Personal daily devotions
- Family worship
- Small groups
- Sabbath School classes
- Classes for recently baptized church members
- Worker’s retreats
- Worker’s continuing education
- Teacher’s resources—elementary, academy, and college
- Sermon preparation

About the Authors

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Cover Photos

Front cover photos from left to right/top to bottom: James White family, Joseph Bates, Washington, NH church, A.G. Daniells, HMS Richards

Back cover photos from left to right/top to bottom: William Miller, Stahls at school, W.W. Prescott, Jones and Waggoner, first Present Truth magazine, Ellen White speaking at General Conference

CONVERSION: WILLIAM MILLER MAKES FRIENDS WITH JESUS

BIBLE READINGS: Acts 16:1-3; 11-15, 40; 24-36; John 14:1-6; Revelation 10:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Matthew 25:1-13; Luke 24:13-35.

KEY TEXT: “But I have prayed for thee [Simon], that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32 KJV).

KEY THOUGHT

The conversion of William Miller demonstrates the divine power that enabled him to prepare *his world* for the return of his friend Jesus.



The first turning point in Adventist history is also the first turning point in the Christian experience of many people—conversion.

Miller’s friendship with Jesus motivated him to study his Bible, focus on the return of Christ, and introduce him to hundreds of thousands so they might be prepared to meet him “about the year 1843.” When Jesus did not appear, Miller was disappointed but he did not give up his faith *because he knew Jesus*. If Jesus is *our* friend, we can endure disappointments and look forward to his return with “sweet” anticipation instead of fear.

Our key text says that even though Peter might betray Jesus short term (v. 34), Jesus was praying that Peter’s faith would not fail long term. The Greek word for “convert” here means “to turn again.” Peter’s later conversion marked a huge turning point in his life. Like Peter and William Miller, we may strengthen *our world* through our conversion and continuing friendship with Jesus.

LOOKING FORWARD: Compare the conversion experiences of William Miller, Paul’s converts in Acts 16, and your own conversion. What is the relationship between conversion, Bible study, and readiness? What was the meaning of “the midnight cry” for the Millerites? What about for today? Compare the disappointments of the Millerites with Christ’s disciples after his death. How did the advent message reach the world?

A Farmer Finds a Friend

During the War of 1812, fought between Great Britain and the United States, Captain William Miller proved to himself that he was not a coward by leading his men into battle. Although Miller escaped death and injury, he lost five close relatives. When he watched these men dying around him, he realized that his deism (the belief that God was not involved in the affairs of this world) left nothing for him during his hour of greatest need. Before the war Miller had made fun of his own family members by mimicking the way they led out at church.

At the pivotal Battle of Plattsburgh at Lake Champlain, New York, on September 11, 1814, a shell landed by Miller (stationed in a fort in front of the naval encounter), but did not explode. It led him to think that maybe there was a God who watched over his life. The American victory further amazed him, as he expected sure defeat and likely death. “So surprising a result against such odds, did seem to me like the work of a mightier power than man,” he later wrote (*Apology and Defense* [1845], p. 4).

Over the next two years Miller wrestled with God until he was asked to read a homily at church. The date was September 15, 1816, the Sunday after the second anniversary celebration of the Plattsburgh victory. The topic was the importance of parental duties, and he read the sermon with his own mother, Paulina, in the congregation. At one point Miller was so overwhelmed with emotion that he quit reading. He admitted afterward that the Scriptures must be a revelation from God. “The Scriptures became my delight,” he wrote, and Jesus became “a friend and my only help.”

Read the conversion stories of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3; 2 Tim 3:14-15), Lydia (Acts 16:11-15, 40), and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:22-36). Compare these accounts with William Miller’s conversion. The jailer, like Miller, experienced a stressful event before his conversion. Have you had an event in your life that convinced you to surrender your cares to God?

When Miller experienced conversion, he immediately began a systematic study of his Bible. How is conversion and Bible study linked in the story of the Ethiopian treasury official (Acts 8:26-39)?

Think about how dependent you are on God for your life here and now. How does this dependence lead to daily conversion and feeding upon his Word?

Getting People Ready to Meet Jesus

Two years of intensive Bible study led William Miller to the startling conclusion, based upon the 2300-day-prophecy of Daniel 8:14 combined with the “year for a day” principle (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6; see William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader’s Guide*, pp. 137-141), that “on or before 1843” Jesus would come to this earth. Although Miller was initially hesitant to go and “tell his discovery to the world,” he surrendered his fears to God and accepted an invitation to speak in the nearby town of Dresden, New York. By 1831 he had introduced audiences small and large to his friend Jesus and invited them to get ready for his soon return.

How did Jesus try to prepare his disciples for the shock of his upcoming departure? **Read** John 14:1-6. **Read** 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. How did Paul describe the Second Coming? Why is the promise of Christ's return sometimes called "The Blessed Hope"?

Miller secured so many conversions that churches opened their doors to him even though their leaders were sometimes skeptical about his views about the end of the world. His first visit to Dresden resulted in nearly every person among the thirteen families in the church experiencing conversion. As he traveled backsliders were reclaimed and people won to Christ. A report from New Hampshire noted 150 conversions and 67 baptisms after six weeks of meetings by Miller. By January, 1840, Miller had begun to preach in large cities—at times to more than a thousand people. Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Toronto, and Washington, D.C. were just some of the many places he shared his views.

Why was Miller so successful? The Holy Spirit convicted people's hearts through the preaching of God's Word (John 16:8). Miller demonstrated that he was truly converted; furthermore, he believed what he preached; and finally, he showed his hearers by his constant diligence in teaching that he *really* wanted them to believe it too. He based his messages on the fulfillment of Bible prophecy in history. Then he led his listeners "by slow and sure steps to Jesus Christ" in preparation for his soon and certain return to earth. He ended one letter on a note that characterized his sentiment: "At this dread moment, look! Look!—O, look and see! What means that ray of light? The clouds have burst asunder; the heavens appear; the great white throne is in sight! Amazement fills the universe with awe! He comes!—he comes! Behold the Savior comes! Lift up your heads, ye saints—he comes! He comes! He comes!"

Think about how conversion and an ongoing friendship with Jesus enable us to look forward to his return with rejoicing rather than fear.

The Great Anticipation

In August, 1844, the Millerite movement gained momentum when Samuel S. Snow arrived at the Exeter, New Hampshire, camp meeting. He shared the startling insight that the 2300-day prophecy would conclude on October 22, 1844. The news spread like wildfire. Jesus would return in just a few short weeks! The "midnight cry" of Matthew 25:6, "Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him," was now the great hope of the Millerites.

James White, a minor Millerite preacher at the time, recollected, "Language cannot describe the solemnity of that hour.... The time for shouting and display of talent... seemed to be past. The brethren and sisters calmly consecrated themselves and their all to the Lord and His cause, and with humble prayers and tears sought His pardon and His favor" (*Life Incidents* [1868], p. 166).

Joseph Bates, who was also at this same meeting, said, "When that meeting closed the granite hills of New Hampshire were ringing with the mighty cry, 'Behold the bridegroom [Jesus] cometh; go ye out to meet Him.' As the loaded

wagons, stages and railroad cars rolled away through the different states, cities, and villages of New England, the cry was still resounding, ‘Behold, the bridegroom cometh! Get ready! Get ready!’” (*Autobiography* of Joseph Bates [1868], p. 298).

Read the parable in Matthew 25:1-13; the “midnight cry” reference is in verse 6. When Jesus returns, some will be ready, but others will be unprepared. Adventists believe the bridegroom refers to Christ and the wise and foolish virgins to represent two classes of church members. If the lamps represent God’s Word (Psalm 119:105) and the oil signifies the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18; Zech. 4:1-14), **how** do we explain the fact that the foolish virgins were not ready even though they had lamps? **Why** are the foolish virgins told to “buy oil for themselves instead of obtaining it from the wise virgins? Could we say that the foolish virgins are not truly converted?

The Millerites applied the midnight cry message to their new understanding of when Jesus would come. They urged their friends and acquaintances to make sure they were ready before the solemn judgment day when Christ would return on October 22. Why is the cry said to come at *midnight*? When might we hear the cry, “Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him?”

How can we make sure that we have enough oil so that we will be ready to meet Jesus when he comes?

The Great Disappointment

On the morning of October 22, 1844, thousands of Millerites anticipated the joy of meeting their friend Jesus. One of the most prominent preachers, Charles Fitch, died just twelve days before the anticipated day when he caught pneumonia after baptizing people in an icy lake. On his deathbed Fitch asked friends to share with his wife and children to expect to see him come forth from the grave in a little over a week. The Fitch family was keenly disappointed when Jesus did not return!

Hiram Edson, another Millerite, put it this way: “Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept and wept till the day dawn” (Hiram Edson, *Untitled Ms.*, Andrews University).

Read Revelation 10:8-11. Sabbatarian Adventists soon applied this passage to the Millerites who had preached that “time would be no more” (Revelation 10:6). They came to identify the “little scroll” of Revelation 10 not only with the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation preached by Miller—but with their own preaching of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 to the whole world. They too were in for some “bittersweet” experiences.

How was the Millerite experience sweet in the mouth but sour in the stomach? Miller himself could have easily given up. “It seemed as though all the demons from the bottomless pit were let loose upon us. The same ones and many more who were crying for mercy two days before, were now mixed

with the rabble and mocking, scoffing and threatening in a most blasphemous manner (*Memoirs of William Miller*, 270-271). Yet William Miller also trusted Jesus Christ even though he did not understand his disappointment! The Jesus he had known as a friend since his conversion twenty-eight years earlier was not about to let him down now. Jesus kept his hope alive! One month after the great disappointment he wrote that his hope in the coming of Christ was as strong as ever. Like John in Revelation 10:11, he continued to preach the message of the soon return of Christ.

Compare and contrast the “great disappointment” of the Millerites with the experience of Christ’s disciples after his death. Read the story of Cleopas and his friend on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Verse 17 describes the depth of their disappointment; their faces, it says, “were downcast” (NIV). In what ways were the two disappointments similar and different? How did the two disciples come out of their despair (v. 31-32)?

Think of some of your most difficult disappointments. How has your friendship with Jesus gotten you through?

The Conversion of the World

Read Revelation 14:6-7. **To what extent** was the everlasting gospel, inviting conversion to Christ and preparation for the judgment, to be preached? At the same time that William Miller called the attention of people in the United States and Canada to the soon return of Jesus, there were already numerous people around the world, who, based on their study of the Bible, became convicted that Jesus was coming soon.

One of the most colorful personalities was Joseph Wolff, a Jew who converted to Christianity and became convinced that Jesus was going to return during the 1840s. He was raised in Europe and traveled on a series of epic missionary tours through the Middle East teaching people about the Bible and the Lord’s soon return. After several narrow escapes from death he spent his later years pastoring a small church in England.

Manuel Lacunza in South America wrote a book about the Messiah returning in majesty and glory before the millennium. At the same time Daniel Wilson in India and Thomas Playford in Australia both shared the news about Christ’s soon return. In Sweden interest in the Second Advent intensified after adults were forbidden to share and young children known as “criers” proclaimed the news. Physicians were mystified as they tried to discover the source of this “preaching sickness.” One of the pivotal moments was the Albury Park Conference of 1812 where a group of Advent believers gathered in England to unite their efforts to raise funds and send missionaries. God was simultaneously raising up a global movement to share the message about the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

Read Matthew 28:18-20. Consider the four prominent verbs in this passage: *go, make disciples, baptize, and teach*. In the Greek only the term “make disciples” is in the form of a command. It is evidently not enough to just go to a particular

country. The primary goal is to make disciples or followers of Jesus by calling for conversion and baptism—and by teaching. Perhaps we could paraphrase the Gospel Commission: “When going to the nations, *make disciples*—by baptizing and teaching.”

Count how many ways you and your group members have been personally involved in the taking of the gospel outside of your home country.

Further Study

Ellen White described her own experience in waiting for Jesus to return in 1844: “With diligent searching of heart and humble confessions we came prayerfully up to the time of expectation. Every morning we felt that it was our first work to secure the evidence that our lives were right before God. Our interest for one another increased; we prayed much with and for one another. We assembled in the orchards and groves to commune with God and to offer up our petitions to Him, feeling more fully in His presence when surrounded by His natural works. The joys of salvation were more necessary to us than our food and drink. If clouds obscured our minds, we dared not rest or sleep till they were swept away by the consciousness of our acceptance with the Lord” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 55).

She also describes the beauty of conversion in *Steps to Christ*: “When as erring, sinful beings, we come to Christ and become partakers of His pardoning grace, love springs up in the heart. Every burden is light, for the yoke that Christ imposes is easy. Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure. The path that before seemed shrouded in darkness, becomes bright with beams from the Sun of Righteousness” (p. 59).

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss what role the intellect and emotions each play in the conversion experience in light of 2 Corinthians 5:17.
2. As a group, discuss what it would be like to be transported back in time to October 22, 1844. How would you live your life if you knew Jesus was coming back within a few days or weeks?
3. How is the conversion of William Miller significant for the founding of Adventism?
4. How can we explain the “delay” of the bridegroom (Matthew 25:5)? Can anything be done to “hasten” Christ’s coming?
5. How was the rise of Adventism more than a regional movement? Why do you think other people at the same time as Miller arrived at a similar conclusion that Jesus was coming soon?

Summary

The conversion of William Miller shows how God touched one life and stimulated a movement with the distinct purpose of preparing a people for the Second Advent of Christ. Since the conversion of William Miller in 1816 God has touched the hearts of millions more—who have also discovered Jesus as their friend, found delight through reading the Bible, and look forward to the Second Coming as their hope. They have a part in preparing their world for the return of Christ.

JOSEPH BATES AND THE DISCOVERY OF “PRESENT TRUTH”

BIBLE READINGS: Mark 2:23-3:6;
Matthew 13:44-46; 2 Chronicles
20:13-22; Revelation 11:19, 12:17, 14:12;
Revelation 3:7-13.

KEY TEXT: “Wherefore I will not
be negligent to put you always in
remembrance of these things, though
ye know them, and be established in
the present truth” (2 Peter 1:12 KJV).

KEY THOUGHT

The doctrinal discoveries of Joseph Bates and other pioneers demonstrate how God reveals “Present Truth” to His people.



In the wake of the 1844 Great Disappointment, a retired sea captain took the lead in integrating fresh biblical insights into a timely package of “Present Truth,” a term Sabbatarian Adventists adapted from the Millerites to describe their progressive understanding of truth for their time. When Bates returned home one day, he met an old friend, James Hall, on the bridge between Fairhaven and New Bedford, Massachusetts. “What’s the news?” James asked. “The news is the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord our God,” Bates replied. This second turning point showcases how Christians, after conversion, eagerly search their Bibles for truth. They “replay” the excitement of these pioneers who discovered truth!

The key text suggests that the apostles also believed in “present truth.” Peter preached it at Pentecost. This week we consider both Joseph Bates’ 19th century discoveries and recall how the Holy Spirit still provides “present truth” to continually satisfy the needs of Jesus’ people until He returns. Jesus said, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:12-13 NIV).

LOOKING FORWARD: What link is there between the new truths of the seventh-day Sabbath and the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary? What role did the gift of prophecy play in their development of beliefs? What new dimension did Joseph Bates bring to an understanding of the Sabbath? What kind of mission outreach did the Sabbatarian Adventists have during the “Shut Door” period?

Discovering the Sabbath

How did Jesus try to help the Pharisees “discover” the true Sabbath? **What** two kinds of Sabbath reform are mentioned in Mark 2:23-27 and 3:1-6? Is it possible that ridding the Sabbath of unreasonable regulations contributed to the healing that Jesus wanted to provide every Sabbath—even without a withered hand?

The Sabbath reform issue for mid-19th-century Adventists was quite radical: it replaced Sunday with Saturday. At its core, the problem was the same. A human-made regulation had replaced the true Sabbath. Although “present truth” speaks to new contexts, at its heart is the same corrective truth that Jesus taught.

The first Millerite Adventists to keep the seventh-day Sabbath learned about it during the spring of 1844 when Rachel Oakes, a Seventh Day Baptist from Washington, New Hampshire, shared her conviction. After a communion service, she invited the pastor, Frederick Wheeler, to visit her. She urged him to begin keeping all of God’s commandments, including the fourth one, before he stood up front in church again. As a result, Pastor Wheeler began to observe the seventh-day Sabbath.

That same spring, Thomas Preble, a Free Will Baptist minister turned Millerite, presumably received the Sabbath from Wheeler, who lived in the area. Preble first published his views in the Advent periodical, *Hope of Israel* (Feb. 28, 1845), which convinced Joseph Bates of the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Frederick Wheeler’s son George was already in bed when he heard his father let a man into the house at 10:00 p. m. Their voices kept George awake for much of the night. In the morning, he met Joseph Bates, who had come to study about the Sabbath (George Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism*, p. 80).

Two people with whom Bates shared the Sabbath were James White and Ellen Harmon—shortly before their marriage on August 30, 1846. Ellen wrote that at first, she “thought that [Brother Bates] erred in dwelling upon the fourth commandment more than the other nine” (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 2, p. 82). But as they continued to study the topic they accepted its validity, too.

Does “present truth” always come when individuals like William Miller are studying their Bibles alone? Read Acts 17:11. Bates proved that his decision to keep the Sabbath was based on Scripture when he wrote four important booklets on the subject between 1846 and 1849.

What Sabbath treasures are out there still waiting to be discovered?

Digging for Hidden (Sanctuary) Treasure

Compare and contrast Jesus’ parable of the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44) with His parable of the pearl of great price (vv. 45-46). **How** do we respond to present truth when we discover it? **What** did the Samaritan woman at the well do with her revelation of truth (John 4:28-30, 39)? In the parables, Jesus is

the Pearl of Great Price and His teachings are the hidden treasure that requires searching of the Scriptures.

Many Millerites arose at dawn on the morning of October 23, 1844, devastated, wondering why Jesus had not returned. Hiram Edson, a farmer in Port Gibson, New York, became convicted while praying “that light should be given” and “our disappointment would be explained.” He afterward went with friends across a field to encourage them. As they crossed, he later reported, “I was stopped about midway” and “heaven seemed open to my view.... I saw distinctly and clearly, that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month, at the end of the 2300 days, that he for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary; and that he had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this earth.” Edson’s mind was also “directed” to Revelation 10 with the account of the little book that was at first sweet, but quickly became sour in the stomach. He saw comfort in this story as he identified their disappointment with the additional admonition to “prophesy again.” (Untitled Hiram Edson Ms., Andrews University).

Edson shared his experience while studying the Bible with his friends, O. R. L. Crosier and Dr. F. B. Hahn. Together they concluded that the sanctuary that was to be cleansed in Daniel 8:14 was not this earth but the sanctuary in heaven—a cleansing that was prefigured with the Israelite Day of Atonement. Crosier published their findings first in a small Millerite paper, *The Day Dawn* (March, 1845); then they were more widely circulated in *The Day Star Extra* (February 7, 1846). This group of friends in western New York, led by Hiram Edson, then invited Joseph Bates and others to join them for a conference. Edson became convinced about the truth of the Sabbath, and Bates connected the importance of the Sabbath with the heavenly sanctuary.

The idea that Jesus is our High Priest in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary gave new meaning to what happened at the end of the 2300 evenings and mornings of Daniel 8:14. A reform movement began—in 1844—that focused on the restoration of “truth” that became “present truth” for Seventh-day Adventists. First, they discovered, Jesus’ followers have direct access to Him as their High Priest, without having to go through an earthly priest for the forgiveness of sins. And second: Christ’s work in the Most Holy Place would be akin to that of the Israelite high priest on the Day of Atonement. The record of forgiven sins in the heavenly sanctuary would be blotted out, and God’s people who maintain their faith are sealed for eternity.

The Adventist pioneers discovered Jesus, the Pearl of Great Price, in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Are we willing to risk everything to find him there? What does it mean in practical terms to go out and sell everything we own in order to purchase this pearl?

Finding Encouragement in the Gift of Prophecy

Read the story of King Jehoshaphat's miraculous victory in 2 Chronicles 20:13-22. **Outline** Jehoshaphat's prayer in verses 5-12. **Can** we say that it is a model prayer? Try following the outline in your next prayer and see how it works. In verses 13-17 the prophet, Jahaziel, gave an encouraging message from the Lord, "Fear not, and be not dismayed;" he repeated, "Tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you" (v. 17). Jehoshaphat sent the choir out ahead of the army with these words ringing in their ears, "Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed" (v. 20). And succeed they did—without having to raise a weapon—by simply singing songs of praise! **What** part did Jahaziel have in the victory?

Ellen Harmon was just a young girl, seventeen years old, when she received her first vision in December 1844. "About this time," she writes, "I visited Sister Haines, one of our Advent sisters, whose heart was knit with mine. In the morning we bowed at the family altar. It was not an exciting occasion. There were but five of us present, all females. While praying, the power of God came upon me as I never had felt it before. I was surrounded with light, and was rising higher and higher from the earth. I turned to look for the Advent people in the world, but could not find them—when a voice said to me, 'Look again, and look a little higher.'" (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 2, p. 30-31)

Ellen went on to describe a straight and narrow path that went from the world up to Heaven. As long as people kept their eyes on Jesus, at the end of the path, they were fine, but when they took their eyes off him, they fell off into the dark world below. She later went on to publish her first vision as a broadside (larger sheet of paper) titled "To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad." God interrupted the young women's morning worship to share with this small group the hope that "present truth" was real. As they wrestled with making sense of their recent disappointment, God showed His people—when things seemed bleakest—a ray of hope by calling a prophetic messenger.

When Joseph Bates first heard about Ellen Harmon's visions, he was not convinced that they were genuine! But in November 1846, the recently wedded Mrs. Ellen White had a vision that led Bates to accept them as manifestations from God. He knew that Ellen understood nothing about astronomy, so the sea captain was amazed when she described Jupiter as a red planet with four moons, Saturn with its rings and eight moons, and the opening in Orion—all while she was in vision. "From that evening Elder Bates became fully satisfied that the visions of Mrs. White were outside of her knowledge and control" (John Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* (1892), p. 126). **Why** did Ellen tell of Jupiter having only four moons and Saturn eight—when current data confirms that Jupiter has sixty-three and Saturn fifty-one moons? God in His providence, no doubt, revealed to her the number that was held by contemporary astronomers, including Bates, in order to confirm the prophetic

gift. If God had revealed the actual number of moons we currently observe, Bates would not have believed her vision was authentic.

What kind of “success” or “prospering” does God promise to those who “believe his prophets?” Can you relate any examples from your life journey?

Facing Opposition

We are up against an opposition that is angry and strong and determined to destroy us. **Review** 2 Chronicles 20:13-18. Note that the battle was against the *families* of Israel (men of Israel, little ones, wives, and children, v. 13). The Adventist home is under attack! **How** does the prophet Jahaziel encourage the people (v. 15, 17)? **Read** verses 18 and 19 and note how the people responded. First, the king and all the people “bowed” and “fell down” in worship of the Lord. Second, the Levites stood up and praised the Lord with “a very loud voice,” no doubt, in song. Later they sang their way to victory on the battlefield (vv. 21-22).

Revelation 12 tells of a war, a “great controversy,” between a great red dragon (Satan) and a particular child (Jesus Christ), who was born of a shining woman (God’s people). This struggle would continue for many years of Christian history before it ultimately reaches its climax in the final crisis before Jesus’ return. **Read** Revelation 12:17. The Devil, knowing his time is short, becomes enraged with Christ’s end-time church, and declares an all-out war against it. **What** are the two characteristics of Christ’s followers living in the last period of Earth’s history? Yes, they obey God, keeping even the Sabbath commandment. And, yes, they are open to the testimony of Jesus in the Bible and through the spiritual gift of prophecy (see Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). Joseph Bates was the first to look around at his fellow Sabbatarian Adventists, and recognize that this was speaking about them.

Who are our opponents, according to Ephesians 6:12? **How** do we fight these demonic powers? **Is** it by actually fighting, or by simply wearing the armor of God and praying (vv. 11-18)? **What** does it mean to “fasten the belt of truth around our waist” (v. 14 NRSV)?

Joseph Bates published four Sabbath pamphlets between 1846 and 1849 that linked the Sabbath to end-time events. He believed that the Sabbath was the seal of God, and Sunday observance would become “the mark of the beast” of the third angel’s message during the final crisis. Bates focused intently on Revelation 14:12 as the way to identify those end-time people who would be preaching the three angels’ messages: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” Bates also emphasized Revelation 12:17 and formulated the beginning of what was later known as “great controversy” theology. In April of 1847 Ellen White had a vision confirming that theology and its importance as “present truth.”

In August 1846, Bates published a pamphlet entitled *The Seventh-day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign*. In the second edition (published in January 1847) he expanded the tract to emphasize the connection between the heavenly

sanctuary and the Sabbath (Revelation 11:19). In this text, the Ark of the Covenant was seen in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Because the Ark historically contained the Ten Commandments that were written on tables of stone, and the new sanctuary message focused on Jesus going into the Most Holy Place on October 22, 1844, Bates now saw biblical support for linking the Sabbath and the sanctuary in his package of present truth.

What part do we play in the ongoing drama of the great controversy between Christ and Satan? What is our greatest source of courage to face the future?

Sharing Present Truth

Read Revelation 3:7-13, Christ's message to the church in Philadelphia.

Verse 8 refers to an open door, which has often been understood to refer to "the church of the open door," the open door of opportunity to evangelize the world. Jesus promises to come soon and urges church members to "Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown" (v. 11).

By contrast, the "Shut Door" was a term used by early Adventists drawn from Matthew 25:10 and Revelation 3:7 that applied to the close of human probation just before the Second Coming. After the Great Disappointment, Millerite Adventists divided into two groups: Those who spiritualized the significance of the 1844 date, and those who continued to believe in its prophetic importance. For the latter group, the Shut Door represented their continued literal hope that Jesus was still going to return.

At first Sabbatarian Adventists held to the "Shut Door" and unlike the spiritualizers they understood the second coming to be a literal event. Because they believed the door of probation was shut for others, their outreach focused only on Millerite Adventists—those who had not rejected the good news that Jesus was about to return. They invited Advent believers with varying views to attend a series of "Sabbath and Sanctuary Conferences." The purpose of these conferences was evangelism—as they sought to forge a unity with these Advent believers under the banner of the "present truth" that was being advocated by Joseph Bates, James and Ellen White, Hiram Edson, and others.

From 1848 to 1850, at least 23 conferences were held. Approximately 50 people gathered for the first meeting (April 20-24) to listen to Joseph Bates speak about the Ten Commandments, and to hear Ellen White relate what she had seen in vision about the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

During the third conference (held at Volney, New York, August 18-19, 1848), Ellen White recalled that a slightly smaller group gathered together (about 35 individuals), but hardly anyone agreed. All "were anxious for an opportunity to advance their sentiments, or to preach to us. They were told that we had not come so great a distance to hear them, but had come to teach them the truth" (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 2, pp. 97-98). Overwhelmed, Ellen fainted. As she revived, she was taken off in vision and began to open the Bible, pointing out relevant texts

to their discussions. After the vision, she told the group her “accompanying angel” had explained “some of the errors of those present, and also the truth in contrast with their errors” (Ibid., p. 98). It is significant that Ellen White resolved doctrinal conflict by calling attention to Scripture, which laid a foundation that truth had to be first and foremost grounded in the Bible.

At the conclusion, Ellen White reported, “Many yielded their errors and united upon the third angel’s message. Our meeting ended victoriously. Truth gained the victory” (Ibid., p. 93). And James White reported that by the spring of 1849, the number of Sabbath-keepers in Western New York was “twice the number now than six months ago” (Letter cited in George Knight, *Joseph Bates: the Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism*, p. 126). So, even during the “Shut Door” period, the mission outreach of the pioneers had its successes.

Can we meet together today to resolve differences after the manner of the pioneers during the Sabbath and Sanctuary Conferences? If so, how might that be done?

Further Study

Ellen White underlines the importance of studying the historical development of truth: “There is a work of sacred importance for ministers and [lay] people to do. They are to study the history of the cause and people of God. They are not to forget the past dealing of God with His people. They are to revive and recount the truths that have come to seem of little value to those who do not know by personal experience of the power and brightness that accompanied them when they were first seen and understood. In all their original freshness and power these truths are to be given to the world” (*Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, pp. 57-58).

Study the concept of “present truth,” in Jesus’ farewell message to His disciples (John 16:12-13). Jesus said, “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” Ellen White comments, “The grace of Christ is illustrated by the gradual unfolding of the day, from the early morning light to the full blaze of noon. Jesus revealed to his disciples all the truth that their minds were prepared to comprehend; but the meaning of his words cannot be fully appreciated, except as the Spirit of truth illuminates the mind, and leads on to an understanding of the truth appropriate for the time” (*Review and Herald*, October 14, 1890).

“Present truth” was a concept Ellen White understood early in her ministry. Note the following statement from *Early Writings*: “There are many precious truths contained in the word of God, but it is ‘present truth’ that the flock needs now. I have seen the danger of the messengers running off from the important points of present truth, to dwell upon subjects that are not calculated to unite the flock and sanctify the soul” (p. 63, emphasis in original).

Discussion Questions

1. How important is it that Christians believe sound doctrine, rather than false doctrine?
2. Why does God reserve certain truths for specific times in the history of His people?
3. Is the present truth of 1844-1850 still present truth today? What “present truth” might God want to teach us today—that the Millerite Adventists and early Sabbatarian Adventists “were not able to bear?” Note that John 14:26 teaches that the Holy Spirit will teach us all things (including truth for our time), while at the same time bringing to our remembrance all that Jesus taught.
4. What utilitarian advantages did the mistaken “Shut Door” approach to mission offer the Sabbatarian Adventists?

Summary

The doctrinal discoveries of Joseph Bates and the other pioneers came from their personal study of Scripture under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Together they welded new insights on the end-time significance of the Sabbath, coupled with a new understanding of the sanctuary. This small fledgling band of Sabbatarian Adventists slowly solidified their understanding of doctrinal basics by 1850. Today, millions of Christians are discovering these truths, and going even deeper as they apply them to personal and corporate Christian experience.