

# Seventh-Day Adventist Eschatology

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Bible prophecy has always been important to Seventh-Day Adventists, more so than you would find among mainline Christian groups, even Evangelicals. The SDA church was founded on Bible prophecy, and its phenomenal growth during the 20th Century was based on an emphasis on Bible prophecy.

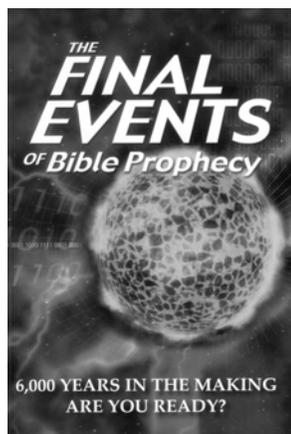
The Millerite Movement of the 1840's gave birth to the Seventh-Day Adventists. The Movement was generated by a false prophecy made by William Miller, a Baptist pastor, that Jesus would return in 1844.

## Compounding the Error

When this prophecy failed to materialize — an event that came to be called “The Great Disappointment” — a small group of Millerite diehards decided to rescue the prophecy by spiritualizing it. They argued that William Miller had set the right date but had prophesied the wrong event! Instead of returning to earth on the prescribed date, Jesus had instead entered the Holy of Holies in Heaven to begin a second aspect of His atoning work called “the investigative judgment.” This process, which continues to this day, involves an evaluation of the sins and works of each believer to determine their eternal destiny.

Thus, one false prophecy led to another which provided the foundation for the establishment of the Seventh-Day Adventists. One analyst has expressed it this way: “The Great Disappointment led to the Great Cover-up.”<sup>1</sup>

## The Source

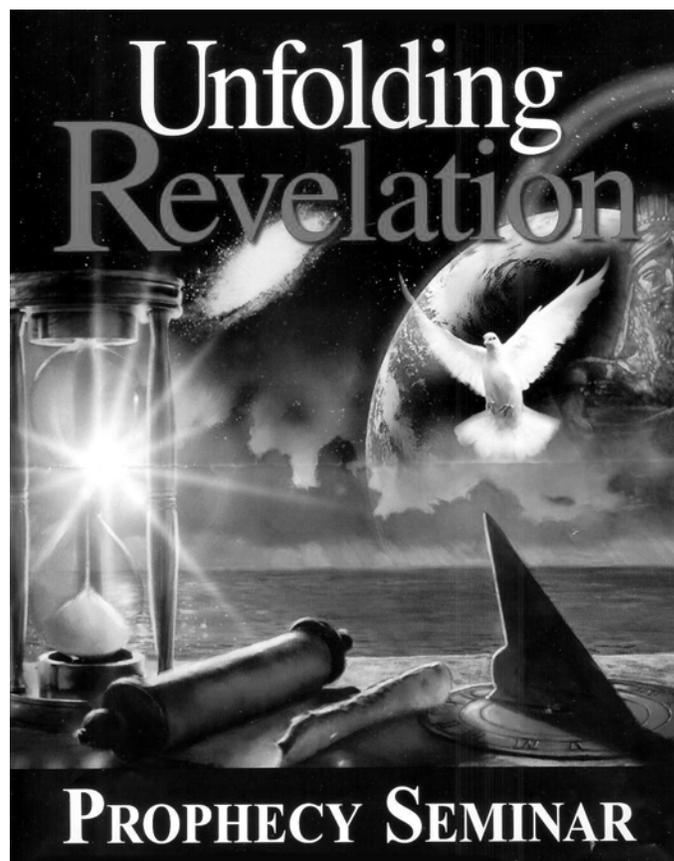


All the fundamental concepts of the SDA scheme of end time events were developed by Ellen G. White and are contained in her book, *The Great Controversy* (1888).<sup>2</sup> Since she is revered by the SDA as a prophet of God, no one has dared to tinker with what she wrote. Accordingly, when you write to the SDA today requesting information about Bible prophecy, you will not receive a summary written by any modern day author. Rather, you will be sent a copy of a brief booklet entitled *The Final Events of Bible*

*Prophecy*.<sup>3</sup> This booklet is nothing but a compilation of relevant chapters from *The Great Controversy*.

Ellen White's writings are not easy going. She was a long-winded writer with a tendency to preach and chase rabbits. Her writings are thus dis-jointed and difficult to consolidate into a time line of events.

Fortunately, the essence of her end time concepts has been boiled down by Doug Batchelor, the SDA spokesman for the



Seventh-Day Adventists use mail-out spectacular brochures containing outstanding full-color graphics to allure people to their seminars. The brochures never reveal that the seminars are sponsored by the SDA or one of its affiliated ministries.

“Amazing Facts” television program. He has summarized the concepts in a video that is also named “The Final Events of Bible Prophecy.”<sup>4</sup> To date, hundreds of thousands of copies of this very high-tech, spectacular video production have been distributed worldwide.

## The Basic Concepts

**The End Times** — The end times leading up to the soon return of Jesus began in 1844 when Jesus entered the Holy of Holies in Heaven and began His investigative judgment of the sins and works of believers. When this work is finished, the Rapture will occur.

**The Tribulation** — In the end times, the United States will align with the Vatican in a conspiracy to impose Sunday worship upon the world. This will lead to a terrible persecution of Sabbath-keepers. The “crowning act” during this time will occur when Satan impersonates Jesus and declares Sunday to be the official Sabbath. The papacy is portrayed as the Antichrist; Protestant Christianity is the False Prophet; the United States is the enforcer; and the period of persecution will constitute the Great Tribulation which will culminate in the Battle of Armageddon between the true believers and the Sunday-keepers who have taken the Mark of the Beast.

**The Rapture** — At this point, Jesus will appear in the heavens. All eyes will see Him. The righteous dead will be resurrected, the living saints will be caught up, and all the redeemed will return to Heaven with Jesus. Before returning to Heaven, Jesus will pour out the wrath of God on the nations, all the wicked will be

killed, and the earth will be totally devastated.

**The Millennium** — The saved will spend the next 1,000 years in Heaven with the Lord. The sins of the redeemed will be placed upon Satan, and he and his angels will be banished to the desolate earth where they will wander for the next thousand years. Meanwhile, during this time in Heaven, the redeemed will judge the lost, reviewing their deeds to determine their degrees of punishment.

**The Second Coming** — At the end of the Millennium, Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives. The redeemed will return with Him, but they will descend inside the New Jerusalem. Jesus will command the wicked to rise from the dead. Satan will then rally these people to revolt against Jesus and His saints. They will march against the New Jerusalem. Fire will engulf the earth while the redeemed are protected inside the New Jerusalem. The wicked will have their judgments pronounced and will then be thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will experience degrees of punishment and then suffer destruction.

**The Eternal State** — Out of the fiery inferno will come a New Earth, purified by fire. God will then recreate the earth in beauty and perfection. The redeemed will live in the presence of God on this New Earth eternally.

**Analysis**

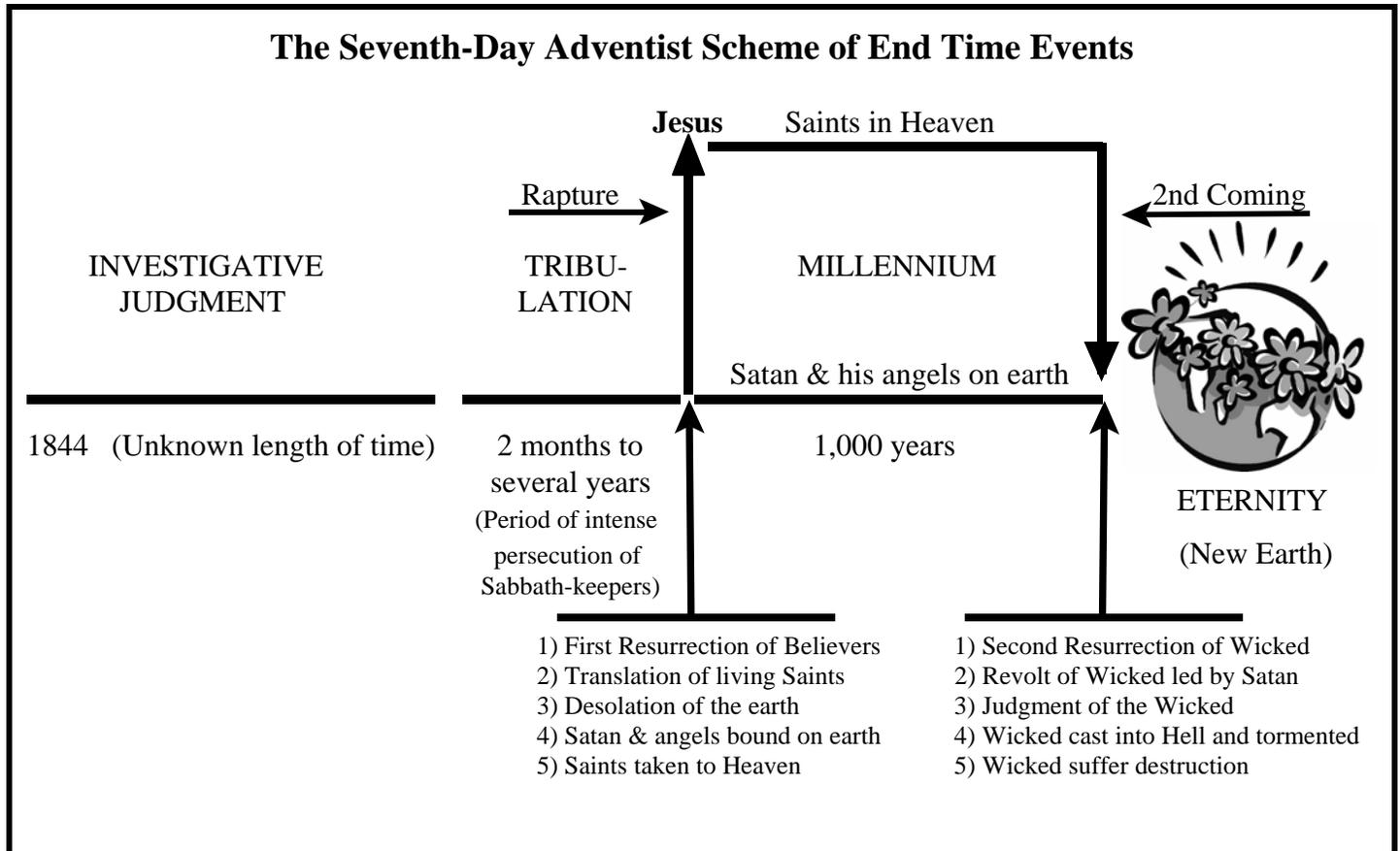
**The Investigative Judgment** — As I demonstrated in the main article in this issue (pp. 5-6), the SDA cornerstone doctrine of investigative judgment is both unbiblical and anti-biblical. The doctrine is unbiblical because there is no true biblical basis for it. It is anti-biblical because it denies the finished work of Jesus on the Cross. It is also downright silly in nature because it assumes

that Jesus, who is omniscient, must take 162 years (and counting) to evaluate and judge the works and sins of all believers.

**The Tribulation** — There are actually two concepts of the Tribulation that can be found in SDA literature. One is the concept that the Tribulation started in 1844 when the “apostate Protestants” began to persecute Adventists. This persecution, of course, intensified (supposedly) when Adventists began to emphasize the essentiality of Sabbath-keeping. The other concept of the Tribulation is that it will be a period of intense persecution that will immediately precede the Lord’s return. Doug Batchelor says he thinks it will last no longer than two months.<sup>5</sup> During this period of time, the United States and the Vatican will be unified in forcing the observance of Sunday worldwide as the proper day of worship.

Both views are unbiblical. The Bible clearly teaches that the Tribulation will be a period of seven years during which time God will pour out His wrath, first on rebellious Gentile nations (Revelation 6-11), and then on the nation of Israel (Revelation 12:13-17). The period will begin when the Antichrist signs a covenant that will guarantee peace in the Middle East (Daniel 9:27). It will end seven years later when a great remnant of the Jews accepts Jesus as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 9:27-28; 11:25-29).

The concept of the U.S. allying itself with the Vatican to force Sunday-worship upon the world is downright ludicrous. This is one of Ellen White’s most flagrant false prophecies. Since the time she wrote this prophecy in the 19th Century, the U.S. has abolished all Sunday observance laws (often referred to as



“Blue Laws”), and the country has become increasingly secular and pagan.

Her scriptural justification for this weird prophecy is a good example of the SDA’s tendency toward nonsensical interpretations. She asserted that chapters 12 and 13 of Revelation teach that the Antichrist (the papacy) would dominate the world for 1,260 days before suffering a fatal wound. She converted the days into years (without any textual authority for doing so) and then decided that the ending point to the 1,260 years was 1798 because that was the year when, during the French Revolution, a French general conquered Rome and took Pope Pius VI captive. She then counted backward 1,260 years and proclaimed that the era of papal dominance over the nations of Europe began in the year 538 AD.

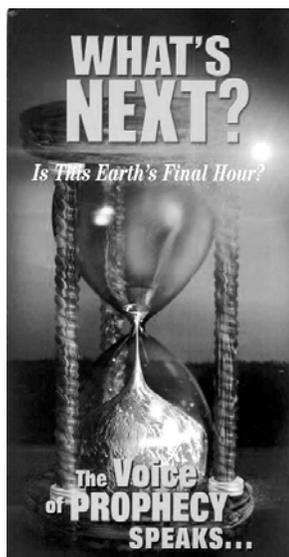


**Last photo  
of Ellen G. White**

Notice that the first thing she did was to violate her own rule that a prophetic year always equals 360 days. This was a rule that had been laid down by William Miller in calculating the date of the Lord’s return, and that rule had been accepted by all Adventists.

The second problem with her calculations is that nothing significant happened in the year 538 AD. The reigning bishop of Rome at that time was Vigilius who never exercised any secular reigning power. Papal power over Western secular governments began during the reign of Gregory the Great who was bishop of Rome from 590 to 604 AD. This is the period of time that is generally recognized by historians as the beginning of the papacy.<sup>6</sup>

A third problem with Ellen White’s calculations is that the papal setback of 1798 was not the first in Vatican history. During the time period she identified, there were at least 20 anti-popes who set themselves up in opposition to the reigning pope, and there was a period of 70 years, from 1309 to 1378, when the papacy was actually moved to Avignon, France.



**SDA prophecy brochure**

The fourth problem with Ellen White’s calculations is that 1798 did not even begin to mark the end of papal influence worldwide. On the contrary, during the 20th Century the papacy was solidified in its power and authority and continues to this day to exercise great authority among the nations of the world. SDA apologists usually respond to the modern day resurgence of the Catholic Church as the healing of the “fatal wound” that is referred to in Revelation 13:3. But this prophecy refers either to a wound experienced by the Antichrist or to the revival of the Roman Empire in the end times.

Finally, the prophecies in

Revelation 12 and 13 have absolutely nothing to do with the papacy. They simply declare that the Antichrist (a person) will focus his demonic efforts on the annihilation of the Jewish people during the last 1,260 days of the Tribulation.

So, why did Ellen White conjure us such a bizarre interpretation? Because she wanted to use it as a basis for asserting that the second beast of Revelation 13 was the United States! Here’s how her reasoning went: Since the power of the first beast waned in 1798, the rise of the second beast (Revelation 13:11ff) must have occurred at that time, and the only candidate on the world scene was the United States which was rising to power at that exact time. Thus, the second beast of Revelation 13 is always portrayed in SDA literature as a bison with either an American flag or a map of the U.S. in the background. This, to say the least, is a reckless interpretation of Scripture, particularly when you consider the fact that Revelation 13:11 specifically states that the second beast “had two horns like a lamb.” Somehow, the lamb became a bison which represented the United States!



**The Mark of the Beast** — Ellen White was equally reckless in determining the meaning of the Mark of the Beast (Revelation 13:16-18). The book of Revelation clearly reveals that this is a mark the Antichrist’s false prophet will require people to put on their right hand or forehead in order to buy or sell anything. It is also stated that the mark will be either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Yet, Ellen White declared that the true mark of the beast would be Sunday-worship! This is an obvious twisting of Scripture to make it mean whatever you want it to mean. It is the problem you always get into when you start spiritualizing the Word of God.

**The Rapture** — The SDA scheme of end time events places the Rapture at the end of the Tribulation and mixes with it some of the events that the Bible says will occur at the time of the Second Coming — such as the pouring out of God’s wrath and the devastation of the earth.

In contrast, the New Testament clearly separates these events. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Jesus is portrayed as appearing in the heavens *for* His Church. Revelation 19:11-16 portrays Him as returning to earth at a later time *with* His Church for the purpose of pouring out God’s wrath and then establishing His worldwide reign.

The New Testament also indicates that the Rapture will occur

at the beginning of the Tribulation, not at the end. When referring to the signs of the end times, Jesus said, “When these things *begin* to take place,” we are to look up for the coming of our redemption (Luke 21:28). Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 that we are to anticipate the return of Jesus who will “deliver us from the wrath to come.” And in Revelation 3:10 Jesus promises that He will keep the redeemed “from the hour of testing” — that hour which will “come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth.” Doug Batchelor refers to the concept of a pre-Tribulation Rapture as “a Satanic delusion.”<sup>7</sup>

**The Millennium** — Placing the Millennium in Heaven is almost as weird as what Amillennialists have done with it by equating it with the Church Age here on earth! The Bible clearly states that when Jesus returns, He will become king over all the earth (Zechariah 14:1-9) and that He will reign over all the nations from Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-7). The Bible also promises that He will redeem the earth, not leave it desolate. It will, in fact, be returned to its original beauty and glory, as it existed before the Fall (Isaiah 11:4-9).

Nor is there any indication that Satan will be bound on earth for 1,000 years. Rather, Revelation 20:3 says he will be bound “in the abyss.” The abyss is pictured in Luke 16:26 as a great chasm located in Hades. Ellen White fancifully interpreted the abyss to be the earth returned to its original state of confusion and darkness.<sup>8</sup> I can’t help but believe that if God had meant the earth, He would have said earth and not abyss!

The concept that the sins of the redeemed will be placed upon Satan when he is exiled to the devastated earth is downright blasphemous! Yet it is clearly taught in the writings of Ellen White.<sup>9</sup> This means that SDAs have two saviors. Christ is the sin-offering who dies for sin. The Devil is the one who plays the role of the scapegoat who bears our sins away! The Bible says Jesus was the one who bore our sins (Isaiah 43:1 and 1 Peter 2:24). The Bible also says there is no savior except the Lord (Isaiah 43:11).

Incredibly, in the SDA scheme, Satan is our final sin-bearer and therefore plays a vital role in our redemption. Jesus becomes simply a mediator between us and Satan. This is plainly “another gospel” that Paul so strongly condemned in Galatians 1:6-9.

During the Millennium, the saints are portrayed as spending their time in Heaven judging the wicked in order to determine their degrees of punishment. The scripture used to justify this concept, 1 Corinthians 6:2, refers to the saints reigning over people on earth during the Millennium. All judgment has been given to Jesus (John 5:22) and will be exercised by Him at the end of the Millennium at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

**The Second Coming** — At this point, the SDA scheme of end time events finally starts getting a few things right. They assert that Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives, and that is correct (Zechariah 14:1-9). The only problem is that the Bible says this glorious event will occur at the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 19:11-16), not at the end of the Millennium. The SDA also correctly asserts that at the end of the Millennium, Jesus will resurrect the unrighteous dead and pronounce their judgments (Revelation 20:11-15).

They are also right when they say that Satan will lead a revolt

## Did the Roman Catholic Church Institute Sunday Worship?

The Seventh-Day Adventists maintain that it was the Catholic church that changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday and enforced the change through a decree issued by Emperor Constantine in 321 AD. This contention is as invalid as the one made by Dan Brown in his book, *The Da Vinci Code*, when he asserts that the Church did not recognize the divinity of Jesus until Emperor Constantine forced them to do so at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. In both cases, the action simply codified what was already the accepted belief or practice.

The New Testament attest to Sunday worship in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2. And the writings of the Church Fathers also confirm that Sunday worship was the accepted practice long before Constantine:

*The Epistle of Barnabas* (100 AD) — “Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.”

*Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians* (110 AD) — “If therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death.”

*Justin Martyr in his First Apology of Justin* (ca 147 to 161 AD) — “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits . . . Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the day . . . Jesus Christ our Savior . . . rose from the dead.”

*Tertullian in An Answer to the Jews* (ca 200 AD) — “The observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary . . .”

against Jesus and His Saints. But they are wrong when they contend that his rebel force will be made up of the unrighteous who have been resurrected. That’s because the resurrection of the unrighteous does not occur until the rebellion is over and done with. The rebellion is described in Revelation 20:7-10; the resurrection of the unrighteous, described in verses 11-15, does not occur until after this rebellion is crushed. Those who rebel with Satan are people born during the Millennium who never receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

One final thing I believe the SDA gets right is the destiny of the unrighteous. They argue that after their judgment, they will be cast into Hell where they will suffer for a period of time in proportion to their sins, and then suffer destruction. Many have condemned the SDA for this teaching, arguing that they are Annihilationists. But that is incorrect. Annihilationists believe that the wicked cease to exist at death. The SDA has adopted the Conditionalist position that claims that immortality is conditional on accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. Those who refuse to do

so never become immortal, but they will be resurrected, judged, tormented, and then suffer ‘the Second Death’ (Revelation 20:14-15).<sup>10</sup>

**The Eternal State** — The SDA is also correct in its concept of the eternal state of the redeemed. The Bible clearly teaches that the saved will live eternally on a New Earth in a New Jerusalem in the presence of the Lord (Revelation 21). The traditional concept of mainline Christianity that Heaven will be an ethereal world of disembodied spirits is not scriptural.<sup>11</sup>

### Two Final Characteristics

There are two characteristics of SDA eschatology that should be mentioned in closing. First, their writings are extremely anti-Catholic in nature. They have been from the beginning and continue to be so to this day. The Catholic Church is blamed for the abolition of Sabbath-keeping, and the papacy is considered to be the Antichrist. Ellen White hated “Romanism” with a passion, and she correctly predicted that the Protestant world would become more accommodating to Catholicism.<sup>12</sup>



**Pope Pius IX was the Bishop of Rome during Ellen G. White’s formative years.**



**Steve Wohlberg**

Another characteristic of SDA end time prophetic interpretations is Replacement Theology. They teach that the Jews got what they deserved in the First Century when God poured out His wrath in 70 AD on Israel and Jerusalem. They believe the Jews have been set aside as God’s Chosen People, and that the Church has replaced them, inheriting all the promises that were made to them in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The amazing thing is that these anti-Semitic views are expressed very strongly by two SDA spokesmen who happen to be Jews — Doug Batchelor and Steve Wohlberg!

In a book entitled *Exploding the Israel Deception*, Steve Wohlberg asserts that the book of Revelation must be read with “Middle East symbolism glasses” and not with “literal Middle East glasses.”<sup>13</sup> When read with symbolism glasses, Wohlberg asserts that we will understand that the prophecies apply to spiritual Israel (the Church) and not to literal Israel. The booklet concludes with a remarkable paragraph:<sup>14</sup>

If you have been led to believe that the prophecies in the book of Revelation apply to an Israel in the flesh, these lies must be unmasked. If you have been taught that Revelation’s statements about Jerusalem, Mount Zion (sic), the temple, God, Magog, Babylon, and the Euphrates River apply to those literal places in the Middle

East, these errors must be shattered. If you have accepted the idea that the Antichrist will one day walk into a rebuilt Jewish temple during a final seven-year period of tribulation, this false theory needs to be blown up. If sincere people have convinced you that Armageddon centers around Russian, China, and the modern State of Israel, then someone must push the button which reads: “Destroy Global Delusions.” It is now time to flee from all frogs and fables!

This paragraph unmasks the fundamental problem with SDA prophetic interpretation. They take a symbolic rather than a literal approach. Instead of accepting the prophecies to mean what they say, they spiritualize them, making them say whatever they desire for them to mean. They ignore the fact that the First Coming prophecies meant exactly what they said. Why then do not the Second Coming prophecies mean what they say? ✚

### Notes:

- 1) John Ecob, booklet entitled *Seventh-Day Adventism Weighed and Found Wanting* (Marayong, Australia: Herald of Hope Magazine, 2004).
- 2) Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, first published in 1888. Now available from Remnant Publications in Coldwater, MI (1997).
- 3) E. G. White, *The Final Events of Bible Prophecy*, (Amazing Facts, 2004).
- 4) Doug Batchelor, “The Final Events of Bible Prophecy,” a video produced by Amazing Facts Ministry, Roseville, CA (2004).
- 5) Doug Batchelor, *Anything but Secret!* a booklet published by Amazing Facts Ministry (2004), page 22.
- 6) Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, volume IV (Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), page 212.
- 7) Doug Batchelor, *Anything but Secret!* page 3.
- 8) E. G. White, *The Final Events of Bible Prophecy*, page 110.
- 9) *Ibid.*, pages 109-110.
- 10) David Reagan, “The Reality of Hell,” *Lamplighter* magazine, (Lamb & Lion Ministries, March-April 2006), pages 3-6.
- 11) David Reagan, “The Meaning of Heaven,” *Lamplighter* magazine, (Lamb & Lion Ministries, January-February 2006), pages 3-7.
- 12) E. G. White, *The Final Events of Bible Prophecy*, page 37-43.
- 13) Steve Wohlberg, *Exploding the Israel Deception*, (Endtime Insights, 1998), page 99.
- 14) *Ibid.*, page 126.

### Outstanding SDA Video

Jeremiah Films has produced an outstanding video about the SDA entitled “Seventh-Day Adventism: The Spirit Behind the Church.” It includes interviews with seven former SDA pastors and four former SDA members. You can order a copy from their website at [www.jeremiahfilms.com](http://www.jeremiahfilms.com).