



## No Cunningly Devised Fables

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It is now over a 160 years after the Millerite Movement reached its climax on October 22, 1844 - an epochal day when they expected the Lord to come. The calculations had been done. The arithmetic was correct. The only thing left now was to write Q E D. And the problem was solved. The anticipation of the soon return of Christ was sweet in their mouths. With glorious anticipation they expected to leave this world and be forever with the Lord. As the clouds split wide open they would have the opportunity to see the magnificent display of heavenly fireworks, as the Son of God, wrapped in the glory of ten hundred thousand mid-day suns, come riding down the flaming skies to call His people to their Heavenly Home. The air was electric with anticipation. Every sin had been confessed. Wrongs had been made right. The earthly chores were forgotten. Their Dear Blessed Lord would soon be here! In a few hours, in a few minutes it would be reality. But midnight passed. October 23, 1844 is the real Day of Disappointment. The thought of it was sweet in their mouth, the fact of it was bitter in their belly, as the book of Revelation states in **Revelation 10: 2, 8-10**. Their hopes were crushed, their wonderful anticipation of being with their Lord was smashed. Their hearts were broken. Tears flowed freely as strong men wept like babies, along with mothers and children. Jesus had not come! All that has been written about this event can hardly describe adequately the depth of their disappointment. The cold, dismal, disappointing feeling that gripped their hearts! The derision they would face at the hands of their enemies and despisers would be almost too great to bear. We are familiar with the story, or we ought to be; but somehow, out of the ashes of their terrible disappointment arose a new Biblical hermeneutic. The earth was not the sanctuary

to be cleansed. Daniel 8:14 had another meaning. The sanctuary is in heaven. The work of the pre-Advent, Investigative Judgement must begin. Christ entered into the Most Holy Place, where the books were opened, and the judgement in heaven had begun. The work of preaching the gospel was not over. The Three Angels' messages had to be carried to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. Yes, they must prophesy again.

And so it was out of the ashes of the Millerite hopes, smoldering in the dust of October 23, 1844, that the Advent movement, the Seventh-day Adventist Church arose. And it should be pointed out clearly and forcefully that the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself has never, ever set a date for the Second Coming of Christ. And anyone who does is doomed to disappointment and failure, for he or she is outside the Word of God. **"For of that day and hour knoweth no man (Matthew 24:36),"** says the Bible. No, not the angels in heaven. But we Seventh-day Adventists have got to ask ourselves the question: Is our hope in the coming of the Lord doomed also to failure like the Millerites? Who is to say that this belief in the coming of the Lord that has now become the warp and woof of the Advent Movement and a part of our name, Adventists, will not blow up in our face? Who is to say that it is not just a figment of the imagination or just a fugitive optimism? And that we, too, are destined to die in despair, never realizing our hope? Who is to say that this Christian belief in the Second Advent of Christ should not itself be relegated to the realm of prophetic fantasy? Or the scrap heap of religious history? After all, going back to the time of the apostles, for almost 2000 years now, the church has talked about it, preached about it, prayed about it, sung about it, waited for it. Generation after endless generation of believers have died without seeing its fulfillment.

Will it ever come? Or is it simply the figment of ancient superstitious religious speculations? We need every so often to ponder the enormous implications of such a question. Shall we join the skeptics and the agnostics and say, "Nothing has changed and nothing will change. Everything will continue as it has done for centuries and millennia"? For the Christian, is there any reason for hope in a future? Was Shakespeare right when he says in Macbeth that "Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"? Well, in II Peter, Chapter 1, Peter seemed to have sensed the disturbing questions that would arise, both in the immediate and in the distant future. He, too, had experienced the apprehensions of sophisticated Greek audiences, questioning whether the Christians' story of the incarnation and the Second Advent was not some figment of the imagination. Some cunningly devised fable. Or some cleverly devised myth.

As we read in II Peter, Chapter 1, verses 12-21, let's go to the context of our text, putting it in its setting. For Peter is saying, **"16. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty."** What does he mean? Well, Peter's mind goes back to that extraordinary event of many years before. It had been a long and exhausting day. And Jesus had taken him, along with James and John, across the fields and up a lonely mountainside. Somehow Jesus seemed to enjoy the company of these three whenever He wanted to pray and meditate, or when some great event or teaching in His ministry would be about to occur. The sun was setting in the western sky, its golden beams still caressing the mountaintop. Higher and still higher they followed Him, wondering but not daring to break the silence. What could this all mean? And then at last they come to the place, perhaps familiar to Jesus Himself, where He had spent other nights in prayer alone. Going a little beyond them, Jesus Himself, the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, pours out His soul to God, with heartbreaking intensity. For hour after slow-moving, agonizing hour, He prays for strength to endure the test before Him on behalf of humanity.

He prays for power to take fresh hold on Omnipotence so that His own faith would not fail in the dreadful crisis hour ahead. He prays for His disciples, especially the three sleeping ones on the mountainside that evening who would be selected to witness His crushing anguish in Gethsemane. He prays that they might be fortified for the excruciating test just ahead. Jesus prays that these three might be given a manifestation of His great celestial power and majesty, that they might be strengthened to behold with human eyes a revelation of His glorious kingdom, a revelation so vivid, so spectacular, so realistic as to sustain them through the dreadful events of Gethsemane and the cross just ahead. The Father in Heaven hears His Son's prayer. And as Ellen G White puts it in *Desire of Ages*, page 421: "While He is bowed in lowliness upon the stony ground, suddenly the heavens open, the golden gates of the city of God are thrown wide open, and holy radiance descends upon the mount, enshrouding the Saviour's form. Divinity from within flashes through humanity and meets the glory coming from above. Arising from his prostrate position, Christ stands in Godlike majesty."

The agony of His soul disappears completely and the quaking mountain is ablaze in the light all around Him. This was indeed a miniature dress rehearsal of that great and stupendous hour when powerful voices in heaven will announce, "It is done. The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And He shall reign forever and ever." Revelation 11:15. Suddenly, Peter, James, and John awake and there before their astonished eyes stood their Master in blazing splendor, enshrouded in the glory of his pre-Earth state. The disciples are completely enraptured by this sublime revelation and the thrilling grandeur of that moment. And that moment makes an indelible impression upon the mind of Peter, never to be erased. And it was the hard-nosed factuality of that stupendous event that led him to make this categorical declaration: **"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." II Peter 1:16.**

We have actually felt the thrilling rapture of that grand and stupendous hour when Christ with clouds shall come. This was the message of the transfiguration. This is what Peter is talking about. No cunningly devised fables here. And how do we know that this is true? We believe it BY FAITH. The theologians call this epistemology - dealing with the question of how we come to know. And it boils itself down to a matter of faith and belief. And that is why what we believe becomes extremely important. We may not be able always to prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt, but we believe it because God's Word says so.

Involved in this is the weighing and assessing of available evidence. There is an innate ability of the human mind, a sort of native shrewdness, an innate capacity to discern sense from nonsense, truth from fiction, fact from fancy, history from fantasy, reality from myth. We can't fully explain it, but the logic of the situation says it is so. This probably is the reason why many non-Christian lands maintain their policy against Christian witness and the Christian gospel, for fear that their own people will be confronted by a new system of ideas and that the native ability of the human mind for recognizing truth, discerning sense from nonsense, and truth from fiction, and history from fantasy will suddenly come into play, and the whole fabric of their ironclad non-Christian belief system will come crashing down.

On the other hand, teachings and claims of the Christian faith have been open and under scrutiny for over 2000 years. And the Jewish faith from which it sprang, an additional 4000 years. Historians, archaeologists, sociologists and scientists of every description, not to mention Biblical scholars themselves, have gone over the Judeo-Christian Scriptures inch by inch, millimeter by millimeter, yet its credibility still stands undamaged and unshaken. And that is why we can today affirm that we are not

following cunningly devised prophetic fantasies when we make known to the nations the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. True, you and I have not been eyewitnesses ourselves of His majesty, but the native intuition of the human mind that God has given us has led us to believe the testimony of those who experienced it. Their unequivocal affirmation has come down to us in this document whose reliability has remained unshaken by the massive onslaught of hostile critics over the years and whose credibility has withstood the concentrated battering rams of the centuries. So that we can sing the words of that wonderful hymn, "We have this hope - hope in the coming of the Lord." True, we say today we have not followed cunningly devised fables. We Seventh-day Adventists still believe the basic fundamental truths that make us a peculiar people, the remnant people of God. We still believe in creation by Divine fiat, that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and rested on the seventh, which we celebrate today. We still believe the Seventh-day Sabbath is a sacred memorial of God Himself, which He set aside and asked us to remember. This reminds us that Jesus is our Creator, Saviour and Coming King. And God's Law is still sacred and provides His standard for humankind and happiness today. We still believe in the two-phase ministry of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. We still believe in the pre-Advent Investigative Judgement, which is going on now. No cunningly devised fables here. We still believe that forgiveness for sin and salvation are available through Jesus Christ alone. And salvation is provided as an unmerited favor to all who will accept and follow in His way. No cunningly devised fable here. Yes, we still believe that the prophetic basis for Adventism is anchored in God's Word. The books of Daniel and the Revelation sustained our belief that the Seventh-day Adventist movement was established by God Himself, whereby truth is to be taken to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. And when the Great Commission is completed, Jesus Christ will come. We still believe that the Christian life is an outgrowth of making Jesus Christ the central reference point of life. When this is done we no longer measure life, its failures or successes, by the instruments of society around us. Our citizenship is in heaven. We still believe that the Christian call is an invitation from God for us to take our place, to declare our allegiance in a universal drama that is being played out in every life and community. The headlines of the newspapers are but the footnotes of Scripture. Our mission is to draw attention to God, and not to ourselves. We become a link in the chain of divine history. The list of faith heroes in Hebrews 11 is continued even in our day by individuals who demonstrate their faith in God by the choices they make in everyday life. When we place our trust in God, He uses every experience of our lives, even our problems and defeats, for the proclamation of His kingdom. Yes, we believe, still believe in the entire 28 fundamental points of belief in our church. And we believe that the Christian destiny begins on this earth but does not end here. God has prepared for us something much more enduring, and He prepares us for it. And we are but strangers and pilgrims here.

So this message is one of expectation and encouragement and hope. It is desperately needed today, especially in sophisticated circles where thinking people understand something of the frightful alternatives facing mankind in these, the opening years of the 21st Century. There was a time when conservative Christians, especially Seventh-day Adventists, used to be branded as calamity howlers, but today it is the politicians, the thinkers, the secular intellectuals who are the calamity howlers. A mood of pessimism is setting in. We hear it in the words of the late British philosopher Bertram Russel who, some of you may recall, used to lead demonstrations in the 1960s against the Vietnam war. Expressing his philosophy in terms of the barren theory of evolution, he also contends that man is the product of causes which have no pre-vision of the end they are achieving - that is, that man's origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are simply the outcome of accidental collocations or combinations of atoms; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon-day brightness of human genius are destined to extinction in the vast depth of the solar system, and that the whole temple

of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. He says all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. (Quoted in *The Christian Approach to Philosophy*, page 165.)

Interestingly enough, the apostle Peter does in part share in this pessimism, for he speaks in Chapter 3 of this Second Epistle, of The coming of the day of the Lord in which the heavens will pass away with a tremendous roar. The elements would be destroyed with intense heat, and the whole earth, and the works of human civilization will be burned up. Ah, but this is the difference, the great Christian difference. Peter is an ultimate optimist. Nevertheless, (What a Word!) Nevertheless, according to His promise, we look to a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. What a privilege is ours today to join Peter in this glorious hope! What a joy it will be to join in the rapture of that thrilling moment when the heavens split wide open and Jesus rides down the azure skies in blazing splendor to wake the sleeping saints and translate the living righteous, and claim His faithful people from all nations.

In summary, we can confidently affirm today that we have not followed cunningly devised fables, that this glorious message that we believe and share will not peter out on the rocks of oblivion and end in some obscure corner with just a little whimper. But, no, under the outpouring of the power of the Latter Rain it is destined to end in a fantastic display of apocalyptic glory. We must never lose this hope, for if we do we lose everything. We must hold on to it; we must cherish it; we must believe it against all odds. The thrilling rapture of that hour must capture our every waking imagination, pursue us even in our dreams. That is why, brothers and sisters, we must remain United in Christ. We are God's "rainbow" family, made up of every nation, kindred, tongue and people. We are not the people of God of Africa, of India, of the Caribbean, of South America, or of the United States; of the Philippines, of the Americas, of China or of Asia. No, we are the people of God in all of these countries - one people United in Christ, under God, looking forward to His blessed return in power and great glory. For "We have this hope, hope in the coming of the Lord." And so I ask you, friend of mine: Are you ready for Jesus to come? Have you given Him your heart and your life? Are you living for Him day by day? Are your sins forgiven? Do you know the joy of God's forgiveness and the sweetness of His companionship with you through the Holy Spirit day by day? Do you love His people - His Church? Are you just all in all in love with Jesus Christ? Is He YOUR Saviour? Would you like to tell Him once more today, "My Jesus, I love You, I know You are mine"? Would you do that, and join me in standing to your feet, and let the world see once again that we are a united people waiting for the coming of the Lord, for "We have this hope that burns within our hearts, hope in the coming of the Lord." For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!