

DF 350

DF

File  
Shut  
Door

ELLEN WHITE AND THE SHUT DOOR, 1844-45

1. For a brief period after the 1844 disappointment Ellen Harmon believed that the door of mercy had been closed on the 22nd of October and that no more sinners could be saved. She states,

For a time after the disappointment in 1844, I did hold in common with the advent body, that the door of mercy was then forever closed to the world. This position was taken before my first vision was given me.--ISM 63

2. At some point prior to her December, 1844, vision, Ellen Harmon appears to have changed her mind about the close of human probation on the day of the disappointment. She decided that the "seventh-month" movement of August 12 to October 22, 1844, was not the true midnight cry after all. Therefore, the October 22 date must have lost its significance to her. Referring to her first vision (December, 1844), she says,

At the time I had the vision of the midnight cry I had given it up in the past and thought it future, as also most of the band had.--Letter 3, 1847.

James White adds,

When she received her first vision, Dec. 1844, she and all the band in Portland, Maine, . . . had given up the midnight cry, and shut door, as being in the past.--A Word to the Little Flock (published in 1847), p. 22.

Ellen Harmon, along with her friends, had given up one erroneous concept for another. At first she thought that the door of mercy was forever closed for the whole world on October 22, an error which soon gave way to the equally wrong belief that the powerful movement of the autumn of 1844 was all just a big mistake, and that nothing of importance had happened on October 22.

3. In December, 1844, the Lord gave Ellen Harmon the first of two visions which were intended to correct her false notions. She was shown that the door of mercy had indeed closed for many people on October 22. These were

(a) Millerites who denied that their experience under the midnight cry was of God and (b) the "wicked world," i.e., those who had rejected Millerism in the first place. Here is a partial report of her first vision:

While praying at the family altar, the Holy Ghost fell on me, and I seemed to be rising higher and higher, far above the dark world. 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." At this I raised my eyes and saw a straight and narrow path, cast up high above the world this path the Advent people were travelling to the City, which was at the farther end of the path. They had a bright light set up behind them at the first end of the path, which an angel told me was the Midnight Cry. This light shone all along the path, and gave light for their feet so they might not stumble. And if they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the City, they were safe. But soon some grew weary, and they said the City was a great way off, and they expected to have entered it before. Then Jesus would encourage them by raising his glorious right arm, and from his arm came a glorious light which waved over the Advent band, and they shouted Hallelujah! Others rashly denied the light behind them, and said that it was not God that had led them out so far. The light behind them went out leaving their feet in perfect darkness, and they stumbled and got their eyes off the mark and lost sight of Jesus, and fell off the path down in the dark and wicked world below. It was just as impossible for them to get on the path again and go to the City, as all the wicked world which God had rejected. They fell all the way along the path one after another, until we heard the voice of God like many waters, which gave us the day and hour of Jesus' coming. The living saints 144,000 in number, knew and understood the voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake.--A Word to the Little Flock, p. 14.

Some years later, in giving an explanation of this vision, Ellen White stated,

I was shown in vision, and I still believe, that there was a shut door in 1844. All who saw the light of the first and second angels' messages and rejected that light, were left in darkness. And those who accepted it and received the Holy Spirit which attended the proclamation of the message from heaven, and who afterward renounced their faith and pronounced their experience a delusion, thereby rejected the Spirit of God, and it no longer pleaded with them.

Those who did not see the light, had not the guilt of its rejection. It was only the class who had despised the light from heaven that the Spirit of God could not reach. And this class included, as I have stated, both those who refused to accept the message when it was presented to them, and also those who, having received it, afterward renounced their faith. . . . These two classes are brought to view in the vision--those who declared the light which they had followed a delusion, and the wicked of the world who, having rejected the light, had been rejected of God. No reference is made to those who had not seen the light, and therefore were not guilty of its rejection.--ISM 63,64

4. When she related her first vision to the Advent believers in Portland, Maine, it led them to reverse their position. They now acknowledged that the "seventh month" movement truly had been the work of God, and that the date October 22, 1844, really did have some special significance. James White comments, concerning his wife's first vision:

It was then that the Lord shew her in vision, the error into which she and the band in Portland had fallen. She then related her vision to the band, and about sixty confessed their error, and acknowledged their 7th month experience to be the work of God.--A Word to the Little Flock, p. 22.

5. In December of 1844 a small group of former Millerites were teaching, among other things, that Christ had entered the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary on October 22, 1844, and that no more sinners could be saved after that date. This group was headed by Joseph Turner and John Pearson.

L. E. Froom writes,

A small second group, of brief duration--and concentrated largely in Maine and New York--took the extreme position that all probation had ended, with the doom of the world already fixed. They held to the fulfillment of the 2300 days in 1844, and asserted that the door was shut on Christ's mediatorial work, and no more sinners would be saved. Joseph Turner and John Pearson, Jr., of Maine, led out in this. For a time they also held that the sanctuary was in heaven, our High Priest entering the most holy at that time. So Turner calculated that the Bridegroom had come spiritually to the household of faith, and had already shut the door.

Accordingly, only those would be safe who "entered in" with Christ on October 22. All others were lost sinners, and condemned. He held the weird position that the seventh millennium had already been entered, and the antitypical Sabbath had begun. And he strangely held that the saints should do no work or manual labor on the millennial "Sabbath," and that those who entered into this experience were fully sanctified. He was an extremist, and intolerant of others. This he published in the Hope of Israel. In the January 24 issue he stated: "In every place I visited I found a goodly number, I think quite a majority, who were and are now believing that our work is all done for this world."  
--Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, Vol. IV, p. 839.

6. Shortly after Ellen Harmon had her first vision she had a meeting with Joseph Turner. After she had described her vision to him he said that her vision was in complete harmony with his own beliefs. The discussion between the two no doubt centered on the shut door, but not on the heavenly sanctuary, for Ellen White testified later that she knew nothing of Christ's ministry in the holy of holies in heaven until February, 1845. (See Section 8, below).

Actually, Joseph Turner's view of the shut door was not in harmony with Ellen White's first vision. He believed that no more sinners could be saved, but this is not what the Lord had shown her. On the contrary, the Lord had told her that while probation's hour had closed for many people, it obviously had not closed for others, for the living saints at the time of Christ's return would be "144,000 in number." Since only a small fraction of the 50,000 Millerites clung to the advent hope after the disappointment, the figure of 144,000, however interpreted, would certainly mean that many more sinners were still to be converted. (See A Word to the Little Flock, p. 14, quoted in Section 3 above.)

7. It appears, however, that Ellen Harmon may not at first have fully understood the meaning of the December, 1844, vision. This should not seem strange to us, however, when we remember that the Bible prophets themselves at times had the same problem. (See 1 Peter 1:10,11). Some of them

misinterpreted their own prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. So Ellen White apparently briefly believed, on the basis of her first vision, that probation had closed for the whole world on October 22, 1844. At least this is the conclusion which seems inevitable in the light of what Otis Nichols wrote William Miller. In describing the message which Ellen Harmon bore in the weeks following her first vision, Nichols states:

At the time she first went out to deliver her message (Jany 1845) she was scarcely able to walk across the room and could not speak with an audible voice, but she had perfect faith in God and was carried in this state a few miles to deliver her message and when she came to speak her voice was nearly gone but God fulfilled his word: gave her strength of body and a clear loud audible voice to talk nearly two hours with tremendous power and effect on the people and without fatigue of body, and from that time for many weeks she continued to travel day and night talking almost every day untill she had visited most of the advent bands in Maine and the easterly parts of Newhampshire. Her message was always attended with the Holy Ghost, and wherever it was received as from the Lord it broke down and melted their hearts like little children, fed, comforted, strengthened the weak, and encouraged them to hold on to the faith, and the 7th month movement; and that our work was done for the nominal church and the world, and what remained to be done was for the household of faith. (Otis Nichols to William Miller, April 20, 1846). (See additional note on page 9)

8. In February, 1845, the Lord gave Ellen White a vision which illuminated still further the events of October 22, 1844. She was told that Christ had begun His ministry in the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary on that day. The Lord explained to her that, while one door was shut on October 22, another door was opened. She states,

It was on my first journey east (February, 1845) to relate my visions that the precious light in regard to the heavenly sanctuary was opened before me and I was shown the open and shut door.--ISM 74. (See Early Writings 54-56 for an account of this vision).

9. In her letter to Joseph Bates in 1847 Ellen White made crystal clear that she had not received her ideas of the heavenly sanctuary from Joseph Turner, but from the Lord. She declared,

Brother Bates, you write in a letter to James something about the Bridegroom's coming, as stated in the first published visions. By the letter you would like to know whether I had light on the Bridegroom's coming before I saw it in vision. I can readily answer, No. The Lord showed me the travail of the Advent band and midnight cry in December [1844], but He did not show me the Bridegroom's coming until February following.

Perhaps you would like to have me give a statement in relation to both visions. At the time I had the vision of the midnight cry I had given it up in the past and thought it future, as also most of the band had. I know not what time J. Turner got out his paper. I knew he had one out and one was in the house, but I knew not what was in it, for I did not read a word in it. I had been, and still was very sick. I took no interest in reading, for it injured my head and made me nervous.

After I had the vision and God gave me light, he bade me deliver it to the band, but I shrank from it. I was young, and I thought they would not receive it from me. I disobeyed the Lord, and instead of remaining at home, where the meeting was to be that night, I got in a sleigh in the morning and rode three or four miles and there I found Joseph Turner. He merely inquired how I was and if I was in the way of my duty. I said nothing, for I knew I was not.

I passed up [to the] chamber and did not see him again for two hours, when he came up, asked if I was to be at meeting that night. I told him, no. He said he wanted to hear my vision and thought it duty for me to go home. I told him I should not. He said no more, but went away.

I thought, and told those around me, if I went I should have to come out against his views, thinking he believed with the rest. I had not told any of them what God had shown me, and I did not tell them in what I should cut across his track.

All that day I suffered much in body and mind. It seemed that God had forsaken me entirely. I prayed the Lord if He would give me strength to ride home that night, the first opportunity I would deliver the message he had given me. He did give me strength and I rode home that night. Meeting had been done some time, and not a word was said by any of the family about the meeting.

Very early next morning Joseph Turner called, said he was in haste going out of the city in a short time, and wanted I should tell him all that God had shown me in vision. It was with fear and trembling I told him all. After I had got through he said he had told out the same last evening. I rejoiced, for I expected

he was coming out against me, for all the while I had not heard any one say what he believed. He said the Lord had sent him to hear me talk the evening before, but as I would not, he meant his children should have the light in some way, so he took him.

There were but few out when he talked, so the next meeting I told my vision, and the band, believing my visions from God, received what God bade me to deliver to them.

The view about the Bridegroom's coming I had about the middle of February, 1845.

While in Exeter, Maine, in meeting with Israel Dammon, James, and many others, many of them did not believe in a shut door. I suffered much at the commencement of the meeting. Unbelief seemed to be on every hand.

There was one sister there that was called very spiritual. She had traveled and been a powerful preacher the most of the time for twenty years. She had been truly a mother in Israel. But a division had risen in the band on the shut door. She had great sympathy, and could not believe the door was shut. (I had known nothing of their difference.) Sister Durben got up to talk. I felt very, very sad.

At length my soul seemed to be in an agony, and while she was talking I fell from my chair to the floor. It was then I had a view of Jesus rising from His mediatorial throne and going to the holiest as Bridegroom to receive His kingdom. They were all deeply interested in the view. They all said it was entirely new to them. The Lord worked in mighty power setting the truth home to their hearts.

Sister Durben knew what the power of the Lord was, for she had felt it many times; and a short time after I fell she was struck down, and fell to the floor, crying to God to have mercy on her. When I came out of vision, my ears were saluted with Sister Durben's singing and shouting with a loud voice.

Most of them received the vision, and were settled upon the shut door. Previous to this I had no light on the coming of the Bridegroom, but had expected him to this earth to deliver His people on the tenth day of the seventh month. I did not hear a lecture or a word in any way relating to the Bridegroom's going to the holiest.--Letter 3, 1847.

10. Ellen White is very explicit that the Lord never showed her, at any time, that the door of mercy had been closed for the whole human race. She says flatly,

I hereby testify in the fear of God that the charges of Miles Grant, of Mrs. Burdick, and others published in the Crisis are not true. The statements in reference to my course in forty-four are false.

With my brethren and sisters, after the time passed in forty-four I did believe no more sinners would be converted. But I never had a vision that no more sinners would be converted. And am clear and free to state no one has ever heard me say or has read from my pen statements which will justify them in the charges they have made against me upon this point. . . .

I never have stated or written that the world was doomed or damned. I never have under any circumstances used this language to any one, however sinful. I have ever had messages of reproof for those who used these harsh expressions.--ISM 74

11. The February, 1845, vision about the "open and shut door" in the heavenly sanctuary (ISM 74) appears to have led Ellen White to realize that sinners still could be converted. That this was her understanding in the summer of that year is attested by Marian Truesdail who, in a statement signed by five others besides herself, declared,

During Miss Harmon's (now Mrs. White) visit to Paris, Me., in the summer of 1845, I stated to her the particulars of a dear friend of mine whose father had prevented her attending our meetings; consequently she had not rejected light. She smilingly replied, "God never has shown me that there is no salvation for such persons. It is only those who have had the light of truth presented to them and knowingly rejected it." Miss Harmon's reply coincided with my idea of a shut door, and in justice no other could be derived from it.--cited by George I. Butler, RH, April 7, 1885, p. 217.

12. In summary, the "shut door" teaching of Ellen Harmon, as revealed to her in the two visions of December, 1844, and February, 1845, included the following concepts:

- (a) On October 22, 1844, the door of mercy closed for those who rejected the Millerite message as well as those who accepted it and then later denied that their experience was of God.



Like the antediluvians at the time of the flood, there was nothing further the Holy Spirit could do to reach them.

- (b) Jesus began His ministry in the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary on October 22, 1844.
- (c) On that day, while one door of the heavenly sanctuary was shut, another was opened, as Jesus moved from the service of the first apartment to the service of the second.
- (d) The term "shut door" now stood for a fulfillment of prophecy on October 22, 1844.

Additional Note to Section 7:

Ellen White indicates that frequently it took more than one vision to make a certain point clear. She declared,

Often representations are given me which at first I do not understand But after a time they are made plain by a repeated presentation of those things that I did not at first comprehend, in ways that make their meaning clear and unmistakeable.--Letter 329, 1904..