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Subject Age of the Earth
Early Writings, Mistake in
p. 185

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE—QUESTION AND ANSWER FILE

May 23, 1968

Mrs. Bertha E. Parmentier
458 Palo Alto Avenue
Mountain View, California 94040

Dear Sister Parmentier:
Your letter of May 15, addressed to Elder Delafield and sent to Miss Bessie Mount, has come to my desk, and as Brother Delafield is away from the office for some two weeks I shall endeavor to call your attention to some points which may be of service to you as you deal with the question you are wrestling with.

First of all, let us dispose of the matter of error in Early Writings. If you will, turn in your copy to page 185. You will find here that in the very brief sweep of the presentation of the highpoints of the Great Controversy story, as it was written out by Ellen White in 1858, when she dealt with the resurrection of Christ, she spoke of the effect of the reports upon Pilate; and then she speaks of Herod, of how his heart had grown harder, and in an incidental statement indicates that he later took the life of James and intended to take the life of Peter. It is very clear that in Ellen White's mind at that time the two different Herods did not stand out distinctly. A note was placed in Early Writings in 1882, as the Spiritual Gifts, Volume 1, material was reprinted, and you will find this note in the book today.

When we take into account the manner in which the light was given to Ellen White, that she did not write from dictation, but rather she witnessed the events as they took place and then, while not in vision, attempted to set before the people what had been revealed to her, it is clear that she did not distinguish between the two Herods. Later as she wrote in a more detailed way about the New Testament history, she draws a clear distinction between the two Herods.

To my mind this hardly lays the foundation for the premise that Ellen White may have been influenced in her youth by the term "6000 years" in connection with the age of the earth, by Ussher or anyone else. I recognize that the geologist finds evidence which to him indicates that the world is much older than 6000 years. It was my privilege to spend five weeks, some three years ago, in making a geology tour in which we saw many of the exhibits which gave evidence of the earth having a very great age and, of course, this conclusion is reached because all of these matters are considered in the light of the uniformitarian principle that is, we know how long it takes today for certain things to happen and using

I was very much interested in Dr. Harold Coffin's article, which appeared in a recent issue of The Ministry, telling of the island which came into being near Iceland, as there was a volcanic eruption five or six years ago that raised up from the bottom of the ocean a body of land, which already now gives the appearance of having considerable age and already has some plant life upon it. This, men have seen take place before their eyes. It gives evidence that some of the measures which they use for the figuring of time may not be altogether accurate.

In this matter of the six thousand years we are not dealing with Ellen White's use of the time period as an incidental reference, thrown out by her, but it is something which she has set forth in her writings consistently over a period of almost fifty years. I am sending to you a group of statements, touching on the subject of geology, and on page 11 you will find Ellen White's statements on the age of the earth. These are tied in with the Spiritual Gifts statement, which appears as the first item in this document. Now, let us take a look at this statement.

Darwin's book had been published in 1859. This was not the first suggestion of evolution, but his book gave it a popular acceptance throughout the world. In 1864, just five years later, Ellen White published Spiritual Gifts, Volumes 3 and 4. In these volumes she retraced the early Bible history. She gives a whole chapter to the question of the age of the earth, under the title of "Disguised Infidelity." This is the one you find as the opening statement in the document I am enclosing. Please read it carefully. To my mind this is a basic statement. She is dealing with the issue of the age of the earth, whether it was a long or a short period, and in so doing she deals with the Creation days. Then, coming to the age of the earth itself, she places the whole matter in a very interesting and valuable setting, one which indicates that she certainly was led by God.

In this statement she recognizes the evidences with which we are confronted today, the very things you are writing about, and the very things that are perplexing our geologists. She states, "Infidel geologists claim that the world is very much older than the Bible record makes it. They reject the Bible record, because of those things which are to them evidences from the earth itself, that the world has existed tens of thousands of years." (Spiritual Gifts, Vol. 3, pp. 91, 92). In other words, as an individual, without taking into account the Bible record, observes what he finds in the world today in the way of fossils, evidences of glaciers, shells, and coral in mountainous regions, petrified tree stumps in their natural position, et cetera, there is very strong evidence, as we look at this from our knowledge of how long it takes for certain things to take place, that the world is very old. Ellen White speaks of it as "tens of thousands of years." But is this the basis upon which Seventh-day Adventist Christians fasten their opinions? God in this statement has given us a forewarning. He has told us that we cannot depend upon such evidence. Now, let us go on with the statement on page 92. "And many who profess to believe the Bible record are at a loss to account for the wonderful things which are found in the earth, with the view that Creation Week was only seven literal days and that the world is now only about six thousand years old."

Mrs. Bertha E. Parmentier, Mountain View, California
May 23, 1968

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Many of the "wonderful things" referred to here were not known to exist when Ellen White wrote these words, but the Spirit of God brought to her mind these issues which we would face and she was led to write as she did, recognizing that there are evidences in the world itself, wonderful things, which indicate a very great age. But in spite of all this she states that the world is only about six thousand years old. In this same chapter, on page 93, she declares, "I have been shown that without Bible history geology can prove nothing."

These statements should alert us. This chapter in Spiritual Gifts, Volume 3, is the only chapter in the book in which Ellen White three times indicates that she had been shown these things. Of course, her general statement in the foreword covers the whole book, but the point is reinforced in this chapter, which deals with this very critical point in such a basic manner. Then, subsequently she republished this statement, first in Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 1, in 1870, and then in the Signs of the Times of March 28, 1879. In addition to this, in seventeen other statements, published between 1878 and 1911, she makes reference to the six thousand years. In another fourteen statements, covering about the same period, she speaks about the four thousand years between Creation and Christ.

It would be very difficult for me to comprehend that the Lord would in the first place misinform Ellen White, and in the second place, allow her, if there was any danger of being influenced by the concepts of those about her, to repeatedly present to the church that which is error, especially touching such a basic subject as does this. I am sure that the great adversary will do all in his power to impair the confidence of Seventh-day Adventists in the statements which have come to us through the Spirit of Prophecy. We may not have exhibits to present as confirming every one of these statements, but the Lord has never let His people down. We are witnessing today in the medical world the confirmation of E. G. White statements made concerning nutrition and physiology, which were quite out of line with what was accepted at the time Ellen White wrote them. I am enclosing a pamphlet, which covers some of these points. We may well ask, "Would the Lord bother to give instruction with regard to the use of salt and leave His people of this earth's last days in the dark on the question of the age of the earth?"

As to whether or not Ellen White was influenced by her contemporaries, we have a good many exhibits which are of interest. Some of these I have drawn together in a statement under the general title of "Who Told Sister White?" I am enclosing a copy. You may find it of interest in this connection. We are coming to a time when the faith of men will be tested. Each must stand for himself. Just keep in mind that Satan's last attack against the church will be to make of none effect the Spirit of Prophecy, and if in this age when science is held in such high esteem he can work from this angle, you may be assured he will do it and capitalize on this point.

Where would we be as a people without these statements from Ellen White? We would be in the same place that the other churches are who have discredited the Bible accounts and who are entirely at sea in matters of this kind.

I am glad you have written about this matter. If we can help you further, please write again. With the best of wishes I am

Sincerely your brother,

Arthur L. White, Secretary
ELLEN G. WHITE PUBLICATIONS

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