

RESPONSE TO SHEPHERD'S ROD

1. The Davidic Kingdom

The Shepherd's Rod literature teaches that the kingdom of David will be established for God's people here upon earth, particularly in Palestine, before the close of probation and the coming of Christ in glory. Their leader, V.T. Houteff, has said, "The eleventh-hour message has been timed and designed to reveal the Davidian Kingdom rising anew *before the appearing of Christ in the clouds.*"—The Answerer, no. 2 (1944), 77, italics added. He also said, "This prophesied era of absolute righteousness, peace, and knowledge of God (in the kingdom) under the reign of the 'rod' (David) and of the 'Branch' (Christ), must begin *before the close of probation.*"—"Behold, I Make All Things New" (1942), 45, italics added.

God's original plan was to establish Israel at the crossroads of the nations so that through her He might spread the light of His glorious character and plan of salvation to the entire world so that all nations might be ready to receive Christ at His first advent. Based on this original plan, there are scores of OT promises concerning the glorious restoration of literal Israel. She would have: (1) holiness of character (Lev. 19:2; Deut. 4:9; 28:1, 13, 14; 30:9, 10; COL 288, 289); (2) blessings of health (Ex. 15:26; Deut. 7:13, 15; PP 378, 379; COL 288); (3) superior intellect (PP 378; PK 368; DA 827; COL 288); (4) superior land and crops (Deut. 7:13; 28:2-8; Isa. 51:3; Mal. 3:8-11; COL 288); (5) superior craftsmanship (Ex. 31:2-6; 35:33, 35; COL 288); (6) unparalleled prosperity (Deut. 8:17, 18; 28:11-13; COL 288; DA 577); and (7) national greatness (Deut. 4:6-8; 7:6, 14; 28:11-13; Isa. 2:1-4; Jer. 33:9; Micah 4; Mal. 3:12; PP 273, 314; Ed 40; DA 577; COL 288). [material taken from SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, 25-38].

The surrounding nations would be so enthralled by Israel's prosperity, blessing, and "glory" that they would come to inquire about the source of this blessing (Ps. 102:22; Isa. 2:3; 55:5; 56:6, 7; 49: 6, 8, 9, 12, 18, 22; 60:1-3; Zech. 2:11; 8:21-23). Israel would then have the opportunity to point them to the God of heaven—the fount of every blessing! "As the numbers of Israel increased, they were to enlarge their borders, until their kingdom should embrace the world." (COL 290). "It was God's design that the whole world be prepared for the first advent of Christ, even as today the way is preparing for His second coming." (PK 703, 704). Had Israel as a nation preserved her allegiance to Heaven, Jerusalem would have stood forever, the elect of God." (GC 19; PK 46; Jer. 7:7; 17:25). [material taken from SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, 25-38].

But because of Israel's failure to carry out God's plans and purposes, and because of her continued rebelliousness even though given an additional grace period of 70 prophetic weeks (490 literal years) as recorded in Daniel 9:24-27, Israel forfeited the privileges and blessings of God (Matt. 21:33-46; 23:37, 38; Rom. 9-11). Hence, God had to send His own Son, Jesus Christ, to fulfill His plans and purposes. One principle

of Biblical interpretation is that all of God's promises made to literal Israel in the OT were eventually fulfilled in Christ, the perfect Israelite (Gal. 3:16, 26-29; Acts 13:32, 33). In turn, Christ continues to fulfill God's plans and purposes through His body, the church and ultimately through His Remnant people. However there are distinct differences in the way in which God works before the cross and after the cross. Before the cross, God's promises were fulfilled literally and locally to the descendants of Abraham living on a 13,000 square mile patch of soil in the middle east. Everything was centered around Mount Zion and the earthly temple in Jerusalem. But after the cross God's promises take on spiritual and universal proportions and are fulfilled to spiritual Israel who are scattered around the globe. God no longer inhabits a literal temple in Jerusalem, He now inhabits human hearts for we are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19).

When Jesus was on earth, the Jewish people were hung up on the literal fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. They looked for Christ to overthrow the Romans and to usher in a Davidic kingdom where Christ would establish His throne and rule the nations with a rod of iron (Ps. 2, 110). But Christ plainly dispelled this erroneous notion in Luke 17:20, 21 where He said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation [not external]; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you [internal]."

The kingdom of God has two dimensions: (1) the kingdom of grace and (2) the kingdom of glory (GC 347). The kingdom of grace was inaugurated by Christ at His first advent. He came to sit on the throne of our hearts as supreme ruler. He wants complete jurisdiction, authority, and control over our lives. In each heart there is a throne. Christ wants to sit on the throne while at the same time "self" also wants to sit on the throne. So there is this contest/battle for the throne. Every day we must give Christ permission to sit on the throne. It is called "surrender." We must ask Him to sit on the throne of our heart and to rule every area. This happens initially at conversion (Col. 1:13), but must be renewed every day. Are there any rebels or enemies lurking in your life? Anything that opposes His authority. Ask God to declare war on these enemies (habits, cherished sins, un-Christ like characteristics). Claim Heb. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:20-23, 24-28; Ps. 110; 2:9. He will fight until He makes "every enemy His footstool." Our part is to submit and surrender, God's part is to conquer.

The second dimension of God's kingdom is the kingdom of glory. This dimension will not be inaugurated until Christ's second advent (GC 347). Christ knew there would be a lot of misunderstanding regarding His second coming. Satan will try to counterfeit the appearance of Christ. He will undoubtedly appear in Jerusalem as the Davidic Christ-king in regal splendor and glory (2 Cor. 11:14). Many will be deceived because of this false Christ (Matt. 24:4, 5, 11, 24). Jesus gives explicit instructions concerning His second coming so we will not be deceived. Luke 17:23, 24 (cf. Matt. 24:23-26) reiterates there will be no localized land appearance of Christ, rather a lightening appearance in the sky. Rev. 1:7 clearly states, "Every eye will see Him." 1 Thes. 4:16, 17 adds we will "meet the Lord in the air."

Not until after the 1000 year reign in heaven will Christ return with His saints in the New Jerusalem to establish His Davidic kingdom here on earth. The earth is lying desolate at this time. A word of explanation is necessary at this point. At the beginning of the thousand years when Christ returns to rescue His people, His glorious countenance slays the wicked (Rev. 6:15-17; 2 Thes. 1:7-9; 2:8; Rev. 19:15-21). For a thousand years the earth remains desolate; no man is alive on planet earth (Jer. 4:25, 26; 25:33). Only the devil is left to pace back and forth like a caged animal (Rev. 20:1-3).

At the end of the thousand years when Christ and His saints return in the New Jerusalem to inhabit the desolate earth (Rev. 21:2), the wicked are raised from the dead (Rev. 20:5a). Satan incites them to take the city, but as they begin their murderous attack, fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them (Rev. 20:9). At this point the earth is cleansed and purified by fire; sin and sinners are consumed. Then Christ creates a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). He steps on the Mount of Olives which parts and makes a great plain (Zech. 14: 4; *The Day Star*, Jan. 24, 1846 par. 1). The New Jerusalem finds its final resting spot on this plain and becomes the capital city for the new earth and the entire universe for God will establish His throne here. Then the words of Rev. 21:3 are fulfilled, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Not until after the second coming and ultimately after the thousand years when Christ creates a new heaven and a new earth will Christ establish His glorious [Davidic] kingdom on earth. When reading the OT promises concerning the Messianic kingdom (Isa. 2:1-4; 65:17-25; 66:1-24; Jer. 30-33; Ezek. 36-48; Micah 4; Zech. 14; Mal. 4:1-3; etc.) keep in mind that the spiritual/grace components will be fulfilled NOW during God's kingdom of grace, but the literal/physical components will not be fulfilled until AFTER God establishes His kingdom of glory at the second coming (GC 347).

In the mean time, Christ emphatically states, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36). *The Desire of Ages*, 509 clarifies, "Today in the religious world there are multitudes who, as they believe, are working for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ as an earthly and temporal dominion. . . . The establishment of such a kingdom is what the Jews desired in the days of Christ. They would have received Jesus, had He been willing to establish a temporal dominion, to enforce what they regarded as the laws of God, and to make them the expositors of His will and the agents of His authority. But He said, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' John 18:36. He would not accept the earthly throne."

Not until Christ appears as the stone cut out without hands hurtling through space [i.e. second coming] and smiting the kingdoms of this world (Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45) will He establish His eternal kingdom which shall never be destroyed. *The Great Controversy*, 416 declares, "Not until His [Christ's] work as a mediator shall be ended will God 'give unto Him the throne of His father David,' a kingdom of which 'there shall be no end' (Luke 1:32, 33)." Again in *The Great Controversy*, 322, 323 Ellen White clearly states,

*“Not until the personal advent of Christ can His people receive the kingdom. The Saviour said, ‘When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ Matthew 25:31-34. We have seen by the scriptures just given that when the Son of man comes, the dead are raised incorruptible and the living are changed. By this great change they are prepared to receive the kingdom; for Paul says: ‘Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” 1 Corinthians 15:50. Man in his present state is mortal, corruptible; but the kingdom of God will be incorruptible, enduring forever. Therefore *man in his present state cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* But when Jesus comes, He confers immortality upon His people; and then He calls them to inherit the kingdom of which they have hitherto been only heirs.” Italics added. That makes it very plain that Christ will not establish His kingdom and sit upon its throne until His second coming in glory.*

The teaching of a last day Davidic kingdom prior to the close of probation and the second coming defies sound principles of Biblical interpretation and is nowhere supported by Spirit of Prophecy. Such a teaching sets up a false notion of a kingdom of glory on earth (such as that shared by the Jews in Christ’s day) and also predisposes individuals to Satan appearing as a Davidic Christ-king and deceiving many.

2. The Harvest

The term “harvest” is used in Scriptures in more than one sense. First, the word “harvest” is used to represent the gathering of souls into the church of God by the preaching of the gospel throughout the world *before* the close of probation. In this case, the reapers are the faithful men and women who teach the gospel to others. Concerning this harvest, Christ said, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Matt. 9:37, 38. Again Christ urges, “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”

The term “harvest” is also used to represent the gathering of the righteous and the wicked to their respective fates by angels at the second coming of Christ, to judge every man according as his work shall be, *after* the close of probation.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares the householder said, “Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my

barn.” (Matt. 13:30). In explaining the parable, Christ declared: “The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be ailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

John the Revelator says: “And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.’ So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.” (Rev. 14:14-19).

These two important senses in which the term “harvest” is used in the Scriptures need to be kept clearly in mind by those who would not be led into paths of error.

The Shepherd’s Rod theory confuses the whole question of the harvest by taking texts that refer to the harvest in which the good and the bad are gathered unto their respective fates by holy angels *after* the close of probation, and applying them to the harvest in which souls are gathered into the church by gospel laborers *before* the close of probation. To bolster the theory that a theocratic kingdom of David will be set up for God’s people on earth—specifically in Palestine—before the close of probation, the leader of the Shepherd’s Rod group has divided the harvest of the parable of the wheat and the tares into two sections, with two separations, two closing of probation, and two comings of Christ. (V.T. Houteff, *The Judgment and the Harvest* (1942), 52, 68).

In presenting his view of the harvest, Mr. Houteff says: “Note that the separation takes place just at the beginning of harvest; also that the tares are gathered in first. The separation marks the beginning of harvest. The harvest is the loud cry of the third angel’s message.”—*The Shepherd’s Rod*, vol. 1 (1930), 104. He also claims: “Note that in the first section of the separation, the one in the church, the wicked are taken away from the just, whereas in the second, the one in Babylon, the just are called from among the wicked.”—*The Judgment and the Harvest* (1942), 68. Again Houteff claims, “Since these escaped ones (the first fruits, the 144,000 servants of God—Rev. 7:3) ‘shall bring all your brethren’ (the second fruits, the great multitude—Rev. 7:9) ‘for an offering . . . out of all nations’ (Isa. 66:20, first part), this great ingathering necessarily, therefore, is the closing work of the gospel—the second section of the harvest.”—*Ibid.*, 70.

According to the chart presented in *The Shepherd's Rod*, vol 1, edition of 1930, page 224, the harvest referred to in the parable of the wheat and the tares was to begin at the close of the year 1930, or the beginning of 1931, with the effort of V.T. Houteff to call out the 144,000 for the special work that he had outlined for them to do in the harvest of the wheat. But the harvest of the tares would be, in his opinion, the slaughter of the Seventh-day Adventists who reject his message, for thus he supposed that the slaughter predicted in Ezekiel 9 would be fulfilled. (See *The Answerer*, no.1 [1944], 94, 95).

The Shepherd's Rod teaching does not harmonize with that of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White concerning the parable of the wheat and the tares.

In His interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:39-43), Christ emphasizes two things: (1) that the harvest in which the separation of the bad from the good is to take place will occur *at the end of the world*; and (2) that the reapers, the agents by which He will effect that harvest or separation, will be *His angels*.

A parallel passage can be found in Matt. 24:31 where Jesus plainly states, "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." At the great harvest event at the end of the world, the angels will separate [The term judgment (Gk. *krino*) literally means to separate] the wheat into God's kingdom and the tares to be consumed with the brightness of Christ's coming.

Ellen White says, "The great final separation of the righteous and the wicked He [Christ] had pictured in the parables of the wheat and tares and the fishing net." (*The Desire of Ages*, 333). This statement by Mrs. White makes it plain that in the parable of the wheat and the tares, and in that of the fish net, Christ did not refer to the investigative judgment, which takes place *before* the close of probation, and which decides who among God's professed people shall be accepted or rejected as candidates for entrance into the kingdom of glory. But He was speaking of the "great final separation" of the righteous and the wicked, which will take place *after* the close of probation. Hence Mrs. White comments: "When the mission of the gospel is completed, the judgment will accomplish the work of separation. . . . Both the parable of the tares and that of the net plainly teach that there is no time when all the wicked will turn to God. The wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest. The good and the bad fish are together drawn ashore for a final separation. "Again, these parables teach that there is to be no probation after the judgment. When the work of the gospel is completed, there immediately follows the separation between the good and the evil, and the destiny of each class is forever fixed." (*Christ's Object Lessons*, 122, 123).

Since the separation between the good and the evil will take place when the gospel work is completed, that separation must *follow*, and not *precede*, the close of probation.

So Ellen White says, “The tares and the wheat are to grow together until the harvest; and the harvest is the end of probationary time.” (Ibid., 75).

The Shepherd’s Rod teaching that probation will close for one part of the living at one time and for another part at another time in the course of the investigative judgment is a mistaken idea. The Scriptures speak of only one close of probation, indicating that it will apply to humanity in general—both the good and the bad—very shortly before the coming of Christ to reward every man according to his works (Rev. 22:11, 12). Ellen White confirms, “When the work of the investigative judgment closes, the destiny of all will have been decided for life or death. Probation is ended a short time before the appearing of the Lord in the clouds of heaven. Christ in the Revelation, looking forward to that time, declares: ‘He that is unjust let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, Behold I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.’ Rev. 22:11, 12.” (GC 490, 491).

The Shepherd’s Rod places almost exclusive emphasis on reforming the Seventh-day Adventist Church until the time of the establishment of the Davidic kingdom in Palestine. Then once the slaughter of Ezekiel 9 has weeded out the derelict Adventists leaving only the 144,000, then God’s people will turn their attention to the conversion of the gentiles. This general neglect of the harvest of lost souls until the perfection of the saints is a gross misunderstanding of Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy.

Jesus charges His followers in no uncertain terms to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15). As Seventh-day Adventist Christians we have a special mandate to bear the gospel in the context of the three angels’ message to the world (Rev. 14:6-12). To forsake this responsibility is to directly disobey our Savior’s command. The notion of waiting to become perfect before sharing our faith is contrary to inspired counsel. Ellen White contends, “It is in working to spread the good news of salvation that we are brought near to the Saviour.” (*Ministry of Healing*, 102). Active labor for others will prevent our love from waning and our faith from growing dim (*The Desire of Ages*, 825). It will “keep [our] own souls alive” (*Christian Service*, 22), give “strength to resist evil” (*Acts of the Apostles*, 105), “arouse self-sacrificing zeal” (*Ministry of Healing*, 151), and “develop a character like Christ’s.” (*The Desire of Ages*, 142). The only way to develop a Christlike character is to actively share one’s faith.

3. Ezekiel 9

The slaughter referred to in Ezekiel 9 is one of the principal subjects of the Shepherd’s Rod teachings. Victor Houteff asserted that the slaughter referred to in Ezekiel 9 is a slaughter of Seventh-day Adventists who reject the Shepherd’s Rod message, and that it is to take place before the loud cry and the close of probation. “Had the church as a body, or at least the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination accepted the message of reform as presented to them in ‘The Shepherd’s Rod,’ vol. 1, there would

be no necessity for that class to fall by the figure of the five men with the slaughter weapons. It is the reception or rejection of the message that will fix the destiny of the two classes as described in the following testimony: [quotes *Early Writings*, 270].”—*The Shepherd’s Rod*, vol. 2 (1932), 218. In comment on the “half an hour” of Revelation 8:1, Victor Houteff says, “Thus the silence of half an hour points forward to this great event for the church of God. Its fulfillment would bring us to the time of the harvest, or as it is called, the Loud Cry of the Third Angel’s Message of Revelation 18—the last message for the world. Thus, while the five men with the slaughter weapons are taking away those represented by the tares within the church, there will be silence in heaven for about half an hour (seven days), after which the judgment will commence again for those who shall be sealed in the time of the great harvest, which is the end of the world.” *The Shepherd’s Rod*, vol. 2 (1932), 217. Again: “The five agents that destroy the wicked in the church are not forces of nature but men with slaughter weapons in their hands. They are supernatural beings, not natural elements.”—*The Answerer*. No. 2 (1944), 42, 43.

Seventh-day Adventists hold that the slaughter of the unfaithful leaders and people in the church, as foretold in Ezekiel 9, will occur after the close of probation, and in the general destruction of the wicked during the falling of the seven last plagues and at the second coming of Christ in glory. Ellen White wrote against those who excuse wrong in the church, “Unless they repent, and leave the work of Satan in oppressing those who have the burden of the work and in holding up the hands of sinners in Zion, they will never receive the mark of God’s sealing approval. They will fall in the *general destruction of the wicked*, represented by the work of the five men bearing slaughter weapons. Mark this point with care: Those who receive the pure mark of truth, wrought in them by the power of the Holy Ghost, represented by a mark by the man in line, are those ‘that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done’ in the church. . . . But the general slaughter of those who do not thus see the wide contrast between sin and righteousness, and do not feel as those do who stand in the counsel of God and receive the mark, is described in the order to the five men with slaughter weapons: ‘Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary’ [Ezek. 9:5, 6]” (*Testimonies*, vol. 3, 267).

Note that, according to Mrs. White’s statement, the slaughter foretold in Ezekiel 9 will be fulfilled “*in the general slaughter of the wicked*” that is to come. When will that be? In *Testimonies to Ministers*, pages 431, 432, Mrs. White indicates that this slaughter will take place during the pouring out of the seven last plagues *after* the close of probation for all mankind.

4. The Sealing

The sealing work foretold in Ezekiel 9 and Revelation 7 is a subject of much discussion in the literature issued by Victor T. Houteff, the Shepherd's Rod leader. He lays great stress on the concept of the role of the 144,000 as first fruits unto God. The first sentence in the introduction to his first book reads: "This publication contains only one main subject with a double lesson; namely, the 144,000, and a call for reformation."—*The Shepherd's Rod*, vol. 1 (1930), 11. Hence his definition: "The sealing of the 144,000 is the separation of the faithful from the disloyal ones; the purification of the church."—*Ibid.*, 29.

Mr. Houteff says, "The sealing of the 144,000 can not extend to the close of probation, for they must be sealed long before that time, and it must close before the loud cry of the third angel's message."—*Ibid.*, 35. Also he remarks, "If we were to mark out the exact time of the beginning of this sealing, we would say it began sometime during 1929."—*Ibid.*, 32. Why 1929? Because he claims that light on the sealing work was given to him in that year (*Ibid.*, 157). Hence the year 1929 occupies a conspicuous place in one of his prophetic charts (*Ibid.*, 221). Claiming that he began to proclaim the sealing message for the 144,000 in 1929, he adds, "Thus, the sighing and crying since 1929 for the abominations in the church, has been the supreme evidence that we are living in the period of the sealing."—*The Answerer*, no. 2 (1944), 34. His theory is that the investigative judgment for the dead professed people of God extended from 1844 to 1929, and for the living from 1929 to the present time (*Ibid.*, 33; *The Shepherd's Rod*, vol. 2 [1932], 150, 162).

Assuming that the 430 years of Israel's sojourn prior to the deliverance from Egyptian bondage, as recorded in Exodus 12:40, must have an antitypical counterpart in the Christian dispensation, Mr. Houteff solves the problem as follows: He chooses A.D. 1500 as a starting point, alleging that at this date Martin Luther discovered a Bible in the library of the University of Erfurt, and was thus called out of Rome. By reckoning the 430 years from A.D. 1500, Mr. Houteff ends them in 1930, the very year in which he began to publish his call for the 144,000 to come out and do the work he had planned for them. He does a similar thing with the 390 plus 40 years of the prophecy of Ezekiel 4:5, 6, in his effort to show that his work has been a remarkable fulfillment of time prophecies in the Bible. (See V.T. Houteff, *The Shepherd's Rod*, vol. 1 (1930), 108-117, 133 [chart], 219, 221, 227, 228; *The Shepherd's Rod*, vol. 1 [in tract form, 1945 ed.], 84-87).

Many years ago Ellen White gave testimonies of warning that the Lord's people should beware of time setting. She wrote: "Time has not been a test since 1844, and it will never again be a test." (*Early Writings*, 75). In another place she testified, "I saw that God tested His people upon time in 1844, but that no time which has since been set has borne the special marks of His hand. He has not tested His people upon any particular time since 1844. We have been, and still are, in the patient waiting time."

(*Testimonies*, vol. 1, 409). Another statement of warning is given in *Testimonies to Ministers*, 55: “Let all our brethren and sisters beware of anyone who would set a time for the Lord to fulfill His word in regard to His coming, or *in regard to any other promise He has made of special significance*. ‘It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.’ False teachers may appear to be very zealous for the work of God, and may expend means to bring their theories before the world and the church; but as they mingle error with truth, their message is one of deception, and will lead souls into false paths. They are to be met and opposed, not because they are bad men, but because they are teachers of falsehood and are endeavoring to put upon falsehood the stamp of truth.” (Italics added). One more warning statement is worthy of notice: “Again and again have I been warned in regard to time-setting. There will never again be a message for the people of God that will be based on time. We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ.” (“It Is Not for You to Know the Times and the Season,” *The Review and Herald*, March 22, 1892, 177, 178). The Lord showed me that the message must go, and that it must not be hung on time; for time will never be a test again.” (Ibid., 178).

Now a quick look at the Seal of God. God’s name/seal (Rev.7:1-3; 14:1) is imprinted in the forehead of His true followers in the end of time to protect them from the final tribulation, plagues, and destruction that will deluge the earth. This “sealing” is similar to the protective sealing in Ex. 12 and Ezek. 9. In all three accounts those sealed are saved. Those unsealed are destroyed. Illust. of marking trees on a lot with a yellow ribbon that you want to “save.” The bulldozer will then “take out” all the trees that are unmarked. What is this sealing? It’s not a literal “tattoo” on the forehead which is expressly forbidden by God (Lev. 19:28), but something deeper! In Heb. 8:8-10 God indicates - “I will put My laws in their mind [forehead] and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (See also Heb.10:16 cf. Jer.31:31-34). This is the new covenant experience! God wants His commandments to be internalized so it becomes a joy and delight to keep them. The Sabbath is especially designated a “sign” between us and God (Ex. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12,20), like a cattle brand in the old west, or a trademark, or a wedding band, showing that we belong to Him. The real issue of the Seal or the Mark is not just a day, but who is the ultimate authority of my life? Jesus and His Word, or the beast and the traditions of men? I want Jesus Christ to be the ultimate authority of my life, don’t you?

5. The 144,000

One of the hottest topics debated in Christian circles today is WHO are the 144,000 in Revelation? I would like to address this issue. [this last section is a sermon I preached on the 144,000 on February 26, 2005 at Highland SDA Church]. We’re going to look at the 144,000 - their a) Identity, b) Character, and c) Calling. Keep in mind Ellen White cautions us not to be dogmatic as to who the 144,000 are (7BC 978).

A. IDENTITY:

The 144,000 are found only two places in Scripture - Rev. 7 & 14. Let's start with Rev. 7 and begin to piece together their identity. Vs.1-3 (read) - A "Time of Trouble" is about to rock planet earth! (Cf. Dan. 12:1). God dictates to the four angels (four living creatures/cherubim - 6:1, 3, 5, 7) who guard the four corners of the earth - "Hold back the winds of strife UNTIL the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads."

Who are these servants that number 144,000 (vs. 4-8)? What is this mystical seal of God? Hal Lindsey and Dispensationalists believe the Christian church will be secretly raptured away before the Great Tribulation. Then 144,000 Jews will be converted and go out and evangelize the world before the final coming of Jesus. The Great Multitude in Vs.9-17 is the millions of gentiles who will be converted through their efforts. Essentially everyone gets a "second chance." What is the truth about the 144,000? Are they literal Jews? Is this a literal number? Three Problems with a literal interpretation:

a) The 12 tribes no longer exist. You can't definitively trace anyone's ancestry back to any of the tribes except for possibly Benjamin, Levi and Judah. They've all amalgamated with each other and with the surrounding nations. This list does not coincide with the original list of tribes in Gen. 49 - Dan is left out, and Manasseh (son of Joseph) is added. Where do Jews come from today? Most are descendants of European and Russian converts who were won during the middle ages.

b) In the NT, literal Israel is no longer seen as the chosen people of God, rather the church. All who are baptized into Christ become a seed of Abraham, and heirs of the promise (Gen. 3:16, 26-29).

c) The Book of Revelation is a symbolic book. Should generally take it as symbolic unless there's compelling evidence in the context to the contrary.

The number 144,000 is derived by multiplying 12X12X1000. This number reminds us of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the Lamb (21:12, 14). The number thousand comprised a military unit in ancient Israel (Num 31:4-6). Thus, the 144,000 represent the church militant in the end times.

What is the SEAL?

Seal - *sphregis* (noun) *sphregizo* (verb) - lit. a (1) signet ring. Used on legal documents (wills, deeds of sale, etc.) to certify their authenticity. Also a (2) sign of ownership which was placed on possessions, beasts, slaves in order to identify personal property. Used 32 times in NT (22 times in Revelation alone!)

Two types of sealing:

a) General/Gospel sealing - placed on all believers at our conversion. See Eph.1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor.1:22. The Holy Spirit is a tangible evidence that we belong to Christ. We are His fiancé, bride, possession.

b) Special/Apocalyptic sealing - a unique sealing placed on the end-time generation to protect them from final tribulation, plagues, destruction that will deluge the earth. This sealing is needed in addition to the general sealing that was given to us at our conversion. It is a sealing that has not been needed by previous generations, but is critical for earth's last day generation!

We have two examples of this protective sealing in the OT:

a) The Passover - Just before the Israelites were delivered from Egyptian bondage and taken to Canaan, 10 plagues fell upon the land. The final plague was the most severe of all - the death of the first born. At midnight the death angel passed over the land of Egypt slaying all the firstborn. But God instructed His people to mark the doorpost of their home with the blood of the lamb. When the death angel sees the blood, he will pass over you, and you will be safe from judgment!

b) Ezekiel 9 - presents a morbid scene, something out of a horror show. Israel apostatizes. God is forced to withdraw His presence. When God removes His protective hedge, terrible things happen. Five men with battle axes are instructed to go throughout the entire city and to slay every man, woman and child. But before they are released to do their deadly work, a 6th man dressed in linen with a writers ink horn at his side, is instructed to lead the procession, and to "mark" the foreheads of those who are faithful. This mark a sign of distinction between the loyal and disloyal, the faithful and the unfaithful. It protects the righteous from the battle axes! The ones marked are safe, the ones not marked are slaughtered!

Illustration. When we moved to Pensacola, FL, we had a home built in Charter Woods Subdivision in Pace. There were many live oak trees on our lot. Many of these trees had to be torn down with a bulldozer in order to place our home on the lot. We had to mark the trees with yellow ribbon that we wanted to stay so they wouldn't be harmed or destroyed.

The final judgments are about to be poured out on planet earth. God has to mark His people with a "ribbon," seal so they won't be destroyed.

Revelation 7:1-4 - The 144,000 = God's Remnant people who go through the Time of Trouble and are translated without seeing death.

B. CHARACTER of the 144,000:

Let's go back to the seal in the forehead. Cf. 7:3 with 14:1-5 - Seal on foreheads = name on foreheads. Seal or signature is the same as name. Illustration. When close on a house, must put your "seal"/name on the contract.

Now one step further. What does name represent? Character!

Ex. 34:5, 6 - "Then the Lord proclaimed the name of the Lord . . . the Lord, God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth." Name = attributes/character!

1. God's Remnant will possess the Image and Likeness of Christ.

Revelation 14 gives further insights into this special group who are sealed:

Rev. 14:4 - spiritual virgins, instead of playing around with the harlot (Babylon) they have reserved themselves for Christ alone! They follow the Lamb wherever He goes signifying absolute loyalty and allegiance to Jesus. Vs. 5 - without fault (Gk. *amomos* - blemish, stain, moral impurity).

God's last-day people will reach a level of spiritual maturity and commitment and fortitude that no other generation before them has reached. What are some of the areas in the last days where God is specifically asking us to "follow Him":

Phil. 4:8 declares, "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, if there be any virtue or any praise, think on these things." God wants us to be extremely selective and judicious in our viewing of T.V., videos, movies, internet, music. Illustration. Pit Bulldogs - "The dog [nature: spiritual or carnal] you feed is the dog that will win."

1 Cor. 10:31 challenges, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." In military warfare, the first thing the enemy tries to do is to knock out the telecommunications systems. That's what the devil tries to do in spiritual warfare too - knock out the communications system between us and God - the brain. That's why God asks us to keep our bodies and brain healthy through healthy diet and lifestyle. Cut out smoking, alcohol, high-fat, high sugar that clouds the brain. Embrace low-fat vegetarian diet and exercise.

One more area where God wants us to "follow Him." Rev. 12 - depicts the Remnant church as a pure, virgin woman dressed in natural beauty - sun, moon, stars. As opposed to the harlot woman in Rev. 17 - decked out in seductive clothes, gold, jewels, and pearls. This portrait/snapshot is given for a purpose to show HOW God wants His Remnant people to dress - simply and modestly, NOT with gold or jewels or pearls (1 Tim. 2:9,10; 1 Pet. 3:3,4). A golden thread runs through the Bible regarding jewelry, whenever God's people wandered away from Him, they tended to put on ornamental jewelry. Conversely, whenever God's people returned to Him in sincere repentance, renewal, rededication, they took their jewels off (Gen. 33:1-4; Ex. 33:3-6; Isa. 3:16-23).

A king of a mountainous country was looking for a chauffeur to drive his limousine. Three gentlemen applied for the job. The king asked each to test their driving skills on a windy mountain pass to determine which one was the best. The first driver said, "Oh king, I'm so good, I drove down the mountain within a foot of the edge." The king replied, "That's good!" The second driver reported, "Oh king, I careened around those

corners with my tires hugging the edge.” “Whew, I’m impressed!” The third driver reported, “Oh king, I know that if I should be your driver, that your life will be in my hands, therefore, I drove down the mountain as far away from that edge/precipice as possible.” Which driver do you think got the job? Oh friends, when we realize what God has done for us, we’ll no longer live life on the edge, seeing how close we can get without falling over, we’ll stay as far away from compromise as possible, not out of legalism, but out of love. We’ll “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”

2. God’s Remnant will be Obedient to God’s Commandments, especially the Sabbath

Where is the seal placed? In the forehead (Rev. 7:3; 14:1; 22:4). Elsewhere in the Scriptures something is placed in the forehead. Hebrews 8:8-10 - “I will put My laws in their mind [forehead] and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (See also Heb.10:16 cf. Jer. 31:31-34). This is the new covenant experience! God wants His commandments to be internalized so it becomes a joy and delight to keep them/do them.

Deuteronomy 5:6-21 - the Ten Commandments. 6:6-9 - Tells where God wants to place those commandments (read) - in our hearts and minds (forehead)! Do you see the pattern? God wants to place His commandments in our minds (foreheads) - particularly the Sabbath.

Ezekiel 20:12,20 - A SIGN of ownership, that we belong to God.

Illustration. In ancient times a slave was branded with his owner’s name. In the old west, cattle were branded with a seal/mark to show to whom they belonged.

Sometimes we etch our name or SS# on electronic equipment, so if it is ever stolen, it might be returned to us. A craftsman or manufacturer will place their trademark on their products to indicate who the designer/creator is. What special sign or seal expresses God’s ownership - the fact that He created us, and owns us? The Sabbath is a unique sign of God’s ownership, showing we belong to Him.

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“The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. While the observance of the false Sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God’s law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God.”

C. The CALLING of the 144,000, God’s Remnant:
What is our calling, mission, mandate?

Rev. 7:4-8 identifies the 144,000. Then Vs. 9-12 depicts the Great Multitude which no man can number, from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue. Who is this Great Multitude? Our typical Adventist interpretation is the 144,000 are the people who will be translated without seeing death, and the Great Multitude are the redeemed from every age, who will be resurrected when Jesus comes. But wait a minute! Vs.13, 14 gives us the identity of the great multitude. This great multitude dressed in white robes are those who come out of the great tribulation! Both the 144,000 and the great multitude pass through the tribulation!

This is my personal conviction:

Back to Revelation 14:1-5 depicts the 144,000 on Mount Zion - redeemed from among men. Triumphant in heaven! I need to explain something. The Greeks reason from cause to effect. The Hebrews reason from effect to cause. Illustration: The Olympics. The Greeks would first show the figure skaters battling it out on ice (Hughes won the gold), then show the winners on the platform receiving their medals. The Hebrews would first show the winners on the platform receiving their medals, then show how they got there.

Revelation 14:1-5 shows the 144,000 in heaven getting their medals! Then Vs. 6-12 shows HOW they get there!

WHAT is the work the 144,000 are to be doing? God has entrusted them to preach the 3 angels message - to every nation, tribe, tongue and people! These are God's last day heralds - warning the world to come out of Babylon, avoid the mark of the beast.

The great multitude then are the "My people" in Babylon who respond to the preaching of this message! (Rev. 18:4). The 144,000 are the "first fruits", the great multitude are those that join them. Both groups go through the time of trouble, then are "caught up" when Jesus comes in the clouds of glory! The real issue is not WHO are the 144,000, but WHAT are they supposed to be doing!

Are we following this mission, mandate?

The problem is we're wrapped so up in our own little world, tower, fortress, we don't notice the needs of others out there. Jesus shows that our primary emphasis should be on the Harvest! Get out of the farmhouse and into the fields! Leave the comfort zone and go and reach the lost!

Friends, we are about to enter into a time of tribulation such as this world has never seen (Daniel 12:1-3). Are you protected with the seal of God? Are you protected with the general sealing - covered with His blood and filled with His Spirit. Are you protected with His apocalyptic sealing - the character of Christ and obedience to His commandments, especially the Sabbath?

R.A. Anderson tells of a farmer in Australia who returned home one day to find that his house and barn had burned to the ground. The man couldn't help weeping as he looked over the charred ruins and realized he'd lost all his possessions. But something caught his eye as he came to the chicken coop. He spotted a mound of charred feathers. It was the body of a hen. He idly nudged it with his boot. To his amazement four fluffy baby chicks came scampering out. This mother hen had stayed there with her chicks safely beneath her as the fire raged. In the ruins of his farm this man had seen a remarkable picture of sacrificial love. I am thankful that Jesus has the kind of love that will cover us as the final fire rages. "He will cover us with His feathers, and under His wings shall we trust." (Psalm 91). Praise God for His protective seal!

Summary:

The Shepherd's Rod teachings hold many similarities to the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These teachings are especially appealing to conscientious, conservative Seventh-day Adventists who want to be ready for the Lord's return. That is precisely what makes Shepherd's Rod teachings so dangerous is that they contain 90 percent truth, but also a fatal 10 percent error. This error mainly concerns their understanding of end-time events. They believe their founder, Victor T. Houteff, to be a modern-day prophet, and to reject his message means to subject oneself to the slaughter of Ezekiel 9. In reality Victor Houteff is a false prophet whose teachings are riddled with error.

The Shepherd's Rod teaching of the Davidic kingdom sets up a false premise of a kingdom of glory on earth (such as that shared by the Jews in Christ's day) and predisposes individuals to Satan's appearing as a Davidic Christ-king and deceiving many (such as happened with David Koresh and his followers at the Waco compound).

The Shepherd's Rod teaching of the Harvest, Ezekiel 9, the Sealing, and the 144,000 places almost exclusive emphasis on reforming the Seventh-day Adventist Church, rather than reaching out to the lost. The Gospel Commission and the preaching of the three angels' message of Revelation 14:6-12 are expressly delayed or postponed until after the perfection of the saints and the establishment of the 144,000 on Mount Zion, only then are the people of God supposed to get cranked up to evangelize the nations. Satan delights in these diversion tactics to preoccupy the attention from the real harvest field—the world of 6 billion lost people. This does not negate the need for a work of reform among God's people, but this reform will be accomplished by power of the Holy Spirit, and not by the finger pointing of critical saints.

Victor Houteff and his teachings directly contradict the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. In light of these contradictions he must be judged as a false prophet and rejected.

David Hartman [with liberal use of *The History and Teachings of The Shepherds' Rod* reprinted by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of SDA's, 1955].