

Misinterpreted End-Time Issues: Five Myths in Adventism

Jiří Moskala
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University

When I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior in my early teens, I genuinely rejoiced in the gift of salvation. However, almost simultaneously, I was deeply disturbed and perplexed by a message preached by some pastors regarding last-day events. They claimed that no one could be sure of salvation because we do not know when our names will be called during the pre-advent judgment. Thus, as it was explained to me, only at the very end of time, after the shaking period, would believers know if they had passed the investigation and could be sure of their redemption. I was profoundly frustrated because I wanted to be saved, have assurance of forgiveness of my sins, experience the joy of salvation, and receive the seal of God, but this complete uncertainty led me to an unhealthy self-examination.

This teaching seemed to be in direct contradiction to the explicit instruction of the Holy Scripture (see texts such as John 1:12; 3:16–17, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 1 John 1:7–9; 2:1, 28; 4:17; 5:12-13), and I did not know what to do with all these claims and the insecurity I felt, as this tension tortured my conscience. Salvation is a future reality, they insisted, and I was deeply confused and discouraged, because on one side I believed that I was saved in Jesus Christ (in spite of all my fragility He is my Savior!), but on the other side I had to wait for a seal of God to be approved at the end of the probation period. I was not able to make sense of all these contradictory thoughts.

My spiritual life was unbalanced, and I lived in fear of the future. Even though I believed in God, I was torn within myself because, if I had to wait

MOSKALA: MISINTERPRETED END-TIME ISSUES

until the end time to know for sure what would happen to me, at the very end everything might be different. And, of course, the time of probation was painted with dreadful colors, thus it was a nightmare to think about the time of judgment and Christ's Second Coming. Feelings that I was lost brought a keen sense of desperation that I would never belong in the kingdom of heaven and thus not make it. My faith was shaken, and thoughts about my weak faith led to the conclusion that probably everything I did was in vain, and maybe I had deceived myself with the notion of being saved in Christ.¹ The thought that even stronger attacks against our faith would come at the end of the world's history only added to my anxiety. How could I survive during that time when mercy would no longer be granted?

Worse than that, I was told that at the very end of human history, when the time of probation and God's door of mercy would close and Satan's attacks intensified, I would have to live without any help from God and that I would have to make it through the last-day events on my own because the Holy Spirit would be taken from the earth and Jesus would cease to be our Intercessor. Thus, believers would be left alone and on their own. If I struggled now, how could I make it through when Satan's anger and activities would culminate without any restrictions?

By this mistaken and distorted thinking, as I understand it today, I was robbed of the assurance and joy of salvation. I was scared of God, afraid of His judgment, feared the time of the end, was concentrating on myself, my performance, and achievements, and lived in spiritual schizophrenia. It was a very unfortunate situation as my attitude toward God was not built on gratitude and motivated by love for what He had done and is graciously doing for me. Needless to stress, it was a very sober struggle of faith during my youthful years that were full of fear and anxiety.

When I analyze my incertitude today, I realize that my unpleasant Christian experience was built on five misunderstandings which assumed that the Bible and/or the Spirit of Prophecy: (1) teach that believers will only receive the seal of God at the end of time; (2) stand against the assurance of salvation; (3) affirm that living believers can be called and examined in the pre-advent judgment at any time; (4) proclaim that after the close of probation the Holy Spirit will be removed from the earth meaning that even believers will be without any supernatural help; and (5) declare that believers in Jesus Christ will be on their own when the door of mercy

¹ An excellent book on self-deception was published by Gregg A. Ten Elshof, *I Told Me So: Self-Deception and the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

is closed because Christ will cease to be their Intercessor, thus their characters must be strong in order to be victorious against the forces of evil in this final short period of time. I now understand that I cannot make it to heaven on my own because salvation is an undeserved gift from God, from beginning to end, to repentant sinners who surrender to Him and accept Him as their personal Savior through faith. It is only this amazing grace of God that makes us fit for God's kingdom.

Even though it is impossible in one article to deal in depth with all five of these important issues, nevertheless, with what follows I summarize the crucial points to each claim. Let me stress that all five opinions are Adventist myths, misleading propositions built on false presuppositions, and need to be corrected because only truth can set us free (John 8:31–32). All of them are erroneous in their core teaching. Their way of reasoning is a human construct which mixes truth with error because the Bible and Ellen G. White's writings present a different picture. Let me explain why this kind of theology is fatally wrong and how these mistakes distort biblical teaching, as well as how the true biblical teaching supported by the Spirit of Prophecy makes us free, trusting, and trustworthy, joyful and full of abundant life.

1. God's Two Seals: The Seal of the Gospel and the Apocalyptic Seal

The Bible teaches about two seals of God and not one. This was an astounding and unexpected biblical discovery for me because no one had ever told me anything about there being two seals. It was a deep relief when I read Paul's epistle to the Ephesians where in two places I discovered this very encouraging and comforting message concerning the first seal of God that helped me to change my mind, abandon my spiritual schizophrenia, and deepen my Adventist identity. My Christian walk with the Lord changed, joy appeared, and I victoriously overcame my crisis of faith.

These two seals are different, given at different times, but complementary. Only those who receive the first seal will receive the second one (just like the gift of the Holy Spirit: only those who receive the early rain will be recipients of the latter rain). The first seal is received at the beginning of our spiritual journey with our gracious and awesome Lord and the second one at the very end of time just prior to the close of probation. Where do we find the biblical data for these biblical facts?

The First Seal

The relevant biblical passage is the following: “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:13–14).² Paul plainly states that at the moment one gives his/her life to Jesus and believes in Him the Holy Spirit seals (Greek verb: *sphragizō*) that believer in Christ for the day of redemption. Wonderful liberating and reassuring truth! The Spirit of God marks Christ’s followers with the seal of salvation right when they first believe. I propose to call this seal “the seal of the Gospel.”

This clear statement brought great relief to my troubled heart. For the first time in my life, I clearly understood that I did not need to wait until the time of the end to be sealed by God because at the moment I begin to trust in Him and gave my life to Jesus I was sealed, marked by the Holy Spirit. This was incredible news to me. Ellen White links sealing with conversion: “Oh, that the youth and children would give their hearts to Christ! What an army might then be raised up to win others to righteousness! . . . Do not many of them [parents] think that the minister should take the burden and see to it that their children are converted and that the seal of God is placed upon them?”³

The Greek expression (*esphragisthēte*)⁴ occurs only twice in the New Testament, namely in Eph 1:13 and 4:30, and always in relation to believing in Christ. Pay attention to Paul’s affirmation that the sealing by the Holy Spirit is a past event in both texts: “You were sealed.” Believers in Christ are sealed by the Holy Spirit for the future event of total redemption. No one can put a seal on himself or herself. It is God’s action for us in which there is no “but” or “perhaps.” By staying in Christ, we have this assurance of salvation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the final judgment (1 John 2:28; 4:17). This is why Paul encourages believers: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed [Greek:

² Biblical quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

³ Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home* (Washington, DC; Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 1952, 1980), 188.

⁴ It is a verb indicative aorist passive second person plural, which means “you were sealed” or “marked” (from *sphragizō* = to seal, secure with a seal, mark with a seal, set apart by a seal, affix to be true, acknowledged, proved) and is speaking about a community of faith, believers in Christ Jesus.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

esphragisthēte] for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).⁵ He then exhorts them to maintain proper ethical behavior and an obedience that flows from a living faith (see Christian ethics in a nutshell in Eph 4:31–5:2). Sealing is God’s gift, His response to our openness and surrender to Him. Note that the believers already have the Holy Spirit, and for that reason they should not disappoint and sadden Him by wrong actions and the behavior described in this passage. The purpose of this phrase is an exhortation to not grieve the Holy Spirit because we have Him and need to stay in a right relationship with Him, fulfilling the will of God. Why live contrary to Him whose ownership seal we wear and in violation of our eternal destiny? We not only need to marry Jesus but we need to stay married to Him.

The sequence of thoughts in the Ephesians’ passage is clear: (1) we heard the word of truth, the Gospel of salvation; (2) we believed in God, Jesus Christ; (3) we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit; (4) the Holy Spirit is given to us as a deposit (Greek: *arrabon*, Eph 1:14; 2 Cor 1:22) or as a firstfruit (Greek: *aparchē*, Rom 8:23–24), which means He is a pledge and guarantor of our salvation/redemption. Thus, the Holy Spirit is guaranteeing our inheritance, i.e., salvation. He is guaranteeing our redemption for when we will be God’s possession in our entirety at the end of time, then we will have a perfect relationship with God face to face.⁶

The gift of the Spirit is like a down payment of the inheritance we have in God. This first recompense guarantees complete future payment. The Spirit is the initial installment in our salvation and the promise and assurance that the full future inheritance and salvation will be delivered. Salvation does not depend on our achievements, performance, or actions, it is thoroughly and uniquely God’s work. The Greek word *arrabōn* (noun nominative masculine singular common) means pledge, guarantee (of what is to come); this term is used also in 2 Cor 1:22 where sealing and

⁵ Ephesians 4:30 is mentioned among the list of exhortations and is derived from Isa 63:10. The reference to “the day of redemption” is Paul’s unique emphasis in the epistle to Ephesians (4:30) and in its context points to the Second Coming of Christ (see 1:14).

⁶ The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers is not only evidence of his/her present salvation in Christ, but also a pledge and guarantor of his/her future inheritance and down payment of that inheritance. Paul speaks also about having the firstfruits of the Spirit: “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?” (Rom 8:23–24).

MOSKALA: MISINTERPRETED END-TIME ISSUES

guaranteeing is put together, and in 2 Cor 5:5 where living by faith is underlined and the Holy Spirit is given to us as a deposit or guarantor.

Sealing in the Old Testament time had several functions. The principle functions were three: it was (1) a sign or proof of authenticity; (2) a sign of ownership; (3) a sign of approval, like a signature for us today. By sealing, God proclaims that we belong to Him, that we are His own, that He approves and accepts our little faith in order that we may grow in Him, and that He will help us to live an authentic life of love, faith and hope (1 Cor 13:14). All these nuances are relevant for God's sealing of those who believe in Him. In Paul's time, sealing was also a sign of ownership, belonging to, as well as an approval of a product. It was like an autograph and gave a sense of authenticity. "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor 1:21). "Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor 5:5). The possession is seen as God's possession of His people, not their possession of salvation (v. 14; see also Mal 3:17).

The "you" in Eph 1:13 and 2:11 refers to the Gentile believers in Christ. Through their union with Christ, they belonged to Him, and the Holy Spirit put His stamp on them in order to seal that relationship. Thus here, there is no uncertainty of salvation as the Holy Spirit is the Guarantor of that redemption. Having believed, they are sealed by the Spirit for the day of redemption. It is significant that sealing by the Spirit is mentioned in both parts of this epistle of Paul's: (1) in the first part, which is more theological or doctrinal, Paul presents the indicative of the Gospel or root of our salvation and reminds Christians of their calling and the riches of God's grace (chaps. 1–3). Then (2), in the second part, which demonstrates the consequences of salvation, namely the imperative of the Gospel and ethical behavior, he exhorts Christ's followers to live in a manner appropriate to their calling, to show by obedience the fruits of their faith, and explains how to praise the Lord in walking faithfully with Christ (chaps. 4–6).

The Second Seal

The other seal of God is described in the book of Revelation. This seal is not in contradiction to the first one but a complementary, matching one. This seal is like a final stamp on the finished document. Its purpose is not focused on salvation or redemption but has to do with protection. Ezekiel

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

9 clearly demonstrates that only those who are sealed are protected from impending destruction. What happened before the fall of Jerusalem in 587/6 BC is a type for the marking of God's faithful followers with the seal of God at the time of the end (see 9:3–6). In the book of Revelation, those who have the seal of God are protected from the last seven plagues before the outpouring of the wrath of God. The commands were similar: "Do not touch anyone who has the mark" (Ezek 9:6) and John records the order for four angels: "Do not harm" (Rev 7:3). The seal of God shields God's people in the time of the outpouring of the divine judgment of condemnation.

This seal affirms God's faithful children at the time of the end. It is not by chance that in the climax of the three angel's messages, the Spirit of God says: "They will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them" (Rev 14:13b). These faithful are God's inheritance, resting in the Lord until the day of redemption. Salvation is never an anthropocentric but theocentric endeavor. We cannot take it into our hands. We do not possess salvation, it comes to us as God's prepared gift that we can only accept or reject. God possesses us, we belong to Him. One needs to stay "in Christ," and this is "a central motif in Paul."⁷ Christ is the Guarantor of our sealing, because He received a seal of approval on His work of salvation on our behalf when He lived on earth: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval" (John 6:27).

This eschatological or apocalyptic seal (Greek: *sphragis*) is plainly described in Revelation where God's faithful followers receive it at the end of time in order to be able to go through the final events and be protected from the seven plagues (7:2–3; 9:4; 14:9). This seal of God is in contrast to the seal/mark of the beast, and people are solemnly warned not to receive the seal/mark of the beast (Rev 13:16–17; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4), because the recipients of this mark are not ready for the Second Coming of Christ and will perish. Ranko Stefanovic fittingly comments:

All classes of human society are commanded to receive the mark of the beast. To receive the mark of the beast means to belong to the beast and worship it. The mark of the beast is, thus, an antithesis of God's seal (14:1). Just as the seal identifies those who belong to God, so the mark of the beast identifies those who belong to and worship the beast.

⁷ "In Christ' with its 164 occurrences, 36 of which are in Ephesians, is much more likely the central motif, or at least a central motif in Paul." (Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* [Zondervan, 1996], 57; author's emphasis).

MOSKALA: MISINTERPRETED END-TIME ISSUES

While the sealing signifies the Holy Spirit's working presence in human hearts (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30), the mark of the beast counterfeits the work of the Holy Spirit.⁸

Moreover, the seal of God "at the end time functions as a sign of protection. Those who have the seal of God upon their foreheads are protected from the destructive forces of the seven last plagues. These are the ones who are able to stand on the great day of wrath (Rev. 7:3)."⁹

The first seal may be called the "seal of the Gospel" and the second one, "the apocalyptic seal." The first is a seal of salvation and the second is the seal of protection. They each are irreplaceable and cannot be exchanged. The sealing is done by the Holy Spirit. One seal is a seal of acceptance, and the other is a seal of final ratification. The first seal is declarative, and the second one is affirmative. This second seal confirms their faithfulness in following the Lamb and God's leadership in their life, doing His will, keeping His commandments, and living according to His revealed Word (Rev 12:17; 13:10; 14:4-5, 12; 17:14; 19:10). They were sealed by the Spirit at the time of their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Savior, but, according to the book of Revelation, they will have continued walking with God in order to receive the final eschatological seal of God at the close of the time and to be able to go through the final showdown and stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36). Although the seal of the Gospel can be broken by rebellion and unrepentance, the apocalyptic seal is permanent.

2. The Assurance and Joy of Salvation

The assurance of salvation is plainly taught in Scripture. God declares that we can have full confidence and a bold assurance when we are in Christ in regard to the divine judgment and His Second Coming.¹⁰ Study carefully the following texts: (1) "Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you'" (Isa 35:4); (2) "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24); (3) "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may

⁸ Ranko Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation: A Reader's Introduction to the Apocalypse* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2013), 163.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰ For details, see my article "The Gospel According to God's Judgment: Judgment as Salvation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, no. 1 (2011): 28-49.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

be confident and unashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28); (4) “This is how love is made complete among us so we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus” (1 John 4:17). In both of the texts from 1 John, it is underlined that faithful dedicated Christians should have bold confidence (Greek: *parrēsia*) and assurance for the Day of Judgment and His coming. The apostle Paul underlines that when we are in Christ we are His and no one can stand against us or separate the believers from the love of God: (1) “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1); (2) “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4–7). In a crystal clear way, the apostle John proclaims: “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:12–13; see also John 1:12; 3:16–17, 36; 6:47; 10:28–29; Rom 5:1–5; Eph 2:1–14; 1 John 1:7–9; 2:1; 3:1). Note how often the biblical material speaks about eternal life in the present tense! We have it here and now. Of course, by faith, and at the Second Coming of Jesus it will be a physical reality.

There are two extreme views of salvation. One group of believers has **too little or no assurance** of salvation and experiences internal struggles with doubts, frustrations, fears, self-centeredness and unwholesome tensions. The other group has **too much assurance** and sleep on the pillow of self-assurance, self-justification, self-deception, and rejoice in cheap grace. Where does the balance lie? Only the word of God can provide it—living in harmony with the revealed will of God. The Apostle Paul speaks about healthy self-examination under the guidance of His Spirit: “Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup” (1 Cor 11:28). “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Cor 13:5).

Ellen G. White very colorfully paints the assurance of salvation for Christ’s followers: “If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your personal Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you

MOSKALA: MISINTERPRETED END-TIME ISSUES

are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned."¹¹ Her statement that "there is danger in taking the position that many do take in saying, 'I am saved,'"¹² is often taken out of context, and her intention is distorted. She wants to stress that one should not live in a false assurance by claiming to be saved and then disobeying the explicit commandments of God:

God's holy law is the only thing by which we can determine whether we are keeping His way or not. If we are disobedient, our characters are out of harmony with God's moral rule of government, and it is stating a falsehood to say, "I am saved." No one is saved who is a transgressor of the law of God, which is the foundation of His government in heaven and in earth.¹³

Ellen White also states that Christ's followers must have an assurance of salvation: "It is essential to have faith in Jesus, and to believe you are saved through Him,"¹⁴ however, at the same time she warns against cheap grace and self-deception:

But there is danger in taking the position that many do take in saying, "I am saved." Many have said: "You must do good works, and you will live"; but apart from Christ no one can do good works. Many at the present day say, "Believe, only believe, and live." Faith and works go together, believing and doing are blended. The Lord requires no less of the soul now, than He required of Adam in Paradise before he fell—perfect obedience, unblemished righteousness. The requirement of God under the covenant of grace is just as broad as the requirement He made in Paradise—harmony with His law, which is holy, and just, and good. The gospel does not weaken the claims of the law; it exalts the law and makes it honorable. Under the New Testament, no less is required than was required under the Old Testament. Let no one take up with the delusion so pleasant to the natural heart, that God will accept of sincerity, no matter what may be the faith, no matter how imperfect may be the life, God requires of His child perfect obedience.¹⁵

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1956), 62.

¹² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1958), 1:373.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1:315.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:373.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:373–374.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

In this sense, Ellen White clearly warns against the idea of “once saved, always saved” and explains the issue in the following way (pay close attention to the context in which she speaks about salvation):

We are never to rest in a satisfied condition, and cease to make advancement, saying, “I am saved.” When this idea is entertained, the motives for watchfulness, for prayer, for earnest endeavor to press onward to higher attainments, cease to exist. No sanctified tongue will be found uttering these words till Christ shall come, and we enter in through the gates into the city of God. Then, with the utmost propriety, we may give glory to God and to the Lamb for eternal deliverance. As long as man is full of weakness,—for of himself he cannot save his soul,—he should never dare to say, “I am saved.” It is not he that putteth on the armor that can boast of the victory; for he has the battle to fight and the victory to win. It is he that endureth unto the end that shall be saved. The Lord says, “If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” If we do not go forward from victory to victory, the soul will draw back to perdition. We should raise no human standard whereby to measure character. We have seen enough of what men call perfection here below. God’s holy law is the only thing by which we can determine whether we are keeping his way or not. If we are disobedient, our characters are out of harmony with God’s moral rule of government, and it is stating a falsehood to say, “I am saved.” No one is saved who is a transgressor of the law of God, which is the foundation of his government in heaven and in earth.¹⁶

She further explains that in the matter of salvation we cannot rely on our feelings:

There are many who conclude that they are saved, simply because they have good impressions; but this is not enough. The entire affection must be renovated. Every individual must learn by experimental knowledge where lies his true strength. No one can leave his first love without a forfeiture of the Christian character. The Church must come up out of the wilderness, leaning upon the arm of her Beloved. When each member of the church can say, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me,” then Christ, the hope of glory, will be revealed in his people.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 17, 1890.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 18, 1890.

MOSKALA: MISINTERPRETED END-TIME ISSUES

She powerfully states when warning against cheap grace and self-deception:

All those who say, "I am saved! I am saved!" but do not obey God's commandments, are resting their salvation on a false hope, a false foundation. No one who has an intelligent knowledge of the requirements of God, can be saved in disobedience. Just so far as men have a knowledge of the words of Christ, so plainly laid down in the Bible, they will be held responsible.¹⁸

Ellen White describes the Gentiles' joy of salvation who responded to the preaching of the Gospel in the early Church:

The Spirit of God accompanied the words that were spoken, and hearts were touched. The apostle's appeal to Old Testament prophecies, and his declaration that these had been fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, carried conviction to many a soul longing for the advent of the promised Messiah. And the speaker's words of assurance that the 'glad tidings' of salvation were for Jew and Gentile alike, brought hope and joy to those who had not been numbered among the children of Abraham according to the flesh.¹⁹

Study carefully Ellen White's warning against emptying God's grace of its power by false self-confidence as well as her words on the assurance of salvation we have *only* in Christ:

Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading. Every one should be taught to cherish hope and faith; but even when we give ourselves to Christ and **know that He accepts us**, we are not beyond the reach of temptation. God's word declares, "Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried." Daniel 12:10. Only he who endures the trial will receive the crown of life. (James 1:12.)

Those who accept Christ, and in their first confidence say, I am saved, are in danger of trusting to themselves. They lose sight of their own weakness and their constant need of divine strength. They are unprepared for Satan's devices, and under temptation many, like Peter, fall into the very depths of sin. We are admonished, "Let him that thinketh he standeth,

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 28, 1891.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1911), 172–173.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

take heed lest he fall,” 1 Corinthians 10:12. **Our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ.**²⁰

Not only our safety, but the whole universe’s, lies in beholding and understanding the meaning of Jesus’s sacrifice. It is the effectiveness of what He accomplished on the cross and not in our or angels’ achievements or sinlessness: “The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan.”²¹

Ellen White rightly explains the healthy tension every believer has to live with—full confidence in Christ and complete mistrust in himself/herself. It is not easy to learn how to live this paradox of our faith and avoid extreme positions which lie on both ends. We need to be constantly focused on Him: “We are to be found day by day abiding in the Vine, and bringing forth fruit, with patience, at our home, in our business; and in every relation in life manifesting the Spirit of Christ.”²² In this process we need to look persistently to Jesus (John 15:5; Phil 4:13; Heb 12:2) and not concentrate on our bearing the fruit which is the natural result of cultivating a close fellowship with Him: “Connected with Jesus Christ, they will be wise unto salvation. They will be fruit-bearing trees.”²³

Unfortunately, many people are not sure if they will be saved and constantly live in need of security and freedom in Christ. They are baffled as the last-day events bring them fear, they do not know what to expect at the end, and are plagued with questions: Will they be able to go through the last-day events victoriously or not? Will they be sealed with the seal of God or with the mark of the beast? Instead, today we must live in a balanced tension of “already” but “not yet.” We have eternal life but not yet; we are saved but not yet; we are perfect in Christ but not yet; we are sanctified but

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1941), 155. Emphasis is mine. Notice that Ellen White clearly states that believers can “know that He [Christ] accepts” them. For the context of her statement, read especially pages 155–163.

²¹ Ellen G. White, “What Was Secured by the Death of Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, Dec. 30, 1889. See Eph 1:3, 10; Phil 2:9–11; Col 1:19–20.

²² Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, April 18, 1892.

²³ Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 1998, 2005), 16. See also Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1940), 674–680.

not yet; we sit with Christ by the right side of the Heavenly Father but not yet. We need to wait for the Second Coming of Christ when we will see Him face to face because at that time our present hope and what we accept by faith will become physical reality.

3. God’s Apocalyptic Sealing—At Any Time?

Does the Bible teach that the cases of the living can be brought before God in the pre-Advent judgment any time before the close of probation? If this were the case, it would be unfair and unjust as Douglas Bennett writes: “God appears hard, unjust, and arbitrary. Why should He finalize on a person’s destiny prior to the close of probation, since life has not ended and that person still possesses the power of choice?”²⁴ God judges according to an individual’s decision, and at the time of the end, there will be such pressing circumstances that people will have to decide on which side they stand—with God or the forces of evil presented in the book of Revelation (the dragon, the beast out of the sea, the beast out of the earth, the image of the beast, and the false prophet; see Rev 13–18).

The apocalyptic seal is only given to God’s faithful followers after the final global crisis. It is closely related to forming the image of the beast and the false demands that power requests. Ellen G. White explicitly teaches:

The image of the beast will be formed before probation closes; for it is to be the great test for the people of God, by which their eternal destiny will be decided. . . . This is the test that the people of God must have before they are sealed. All who prove their loyalty to God by observing His law, and refusing to accept a spurious Sabbath, will rank under the banner of the Lord God Jehovah, and will receive the seal of the living God. Those who yield the truth of heavenly origin and accept the Sunday Sabbath, will receive the mark of the beast.²⁵

Ellen G. White also explains more specifically when the mark of the beast will be received:

No one has yet received the mark of the beast. The testing time has not yet come. There are true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman

²⁴ Douglas Bennett, “The Good News About the Judgment of the Living,” *Adventist Review* (June 16, 1983): 14.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1957), 7:976 (Letter 11, 1890).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Catholic communion. None are condemned until they have had the light and have seen obligation of the fourth commandment. But when the decree shall go forth enforcing the counterfeit sabbath, and the loud cry of the third angel shall warn men against the worship of the beast and his image, the line will be clearly drawn between the false and the true.

Then those who still continue in transgression will receive the mark of the beast. With rapid steps we are approaching this period. When Protestant churches shall unite with the secular power to sustain a false religion, for opposing which their ancestors endured the fiercest persecution, then will the papal sabbath be enforced by the combined authority of church and state. There will be a national apostasy, which will end only in national ruin.²⁶

Additionally, the statement/belief that “the name of a believer before the close of probation can be taken into judgment any time and sealed for eternity” is a myth: (1) the eschatological sealing only comes after apostate Protestantism unites with Catholicism and enforces the keeping of Sunday. This Sunday law will cause people to choose, and their final decision for or against God, His law, and His people will be made. Only then will the seal of God or the seal of the beast be given. Bennett explains this crucial point very well when he states: “It seems appropriate to suggest that the close of probation will occur for all the living simultaneously and that this can only be after all the living have met a supreme test that exposes the true condition of each heart before the universe.”²⁷ Ellen White also clearly states: “Sunday keeping is not yet the mark of the beast, and will not be until the decree goes forth causing men to worship this idol sabbath. The time will come when this day will be the test, but that time has not come yet.”²⁸

Today there is still time to prepare people for the final crisis by preaching the Gospel, educating, and teaching them so they will be ready to stand before the Son of Man at His Second Coming. God’s apocalyptic sealing of the living will not occur at just any time but only after the final test. Those who have chosen God’s side will be approved, affirmed at the heavenly pre-Advent court (Dan 7:9–10, 13–14).

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1946), 234–235 (Manuscript 51, 1899).

²⁷ Bennett, 15.

²⁸ White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7: 977 (Manuscript 118, 1899).

4. Living Without the Holy Spirit after the Close of Probation

Another myth in Adventism is built on a serious misinterpretation of biblical teaching as well as of the Spirit of Prophecy, namely, that the Holy Spirit is gradually withdrawing from our world, and He will be finally be taken away; and at the close of probation, the world will be left without Him. Thus it is believed that everyone, including the believers, will be left on their own. This erroneous belief is taken from a misunderstanding of Ellen White's statement that "the Spirit of God is gradually leaving the world."²⁹ However, if we study this statement in its proper context, we discover that Ellen White was talking about the Holy Spirit gradually leaving the *wicked* world: "All fornicators will be outside the City of God. Already God's angels are at work in judgment, and **the Spirit of God is gradually leaving the world**. The triumph of the church is very near, the reward to be bestowed is almost within our reach, and yet iniquity is found among those who claim to have the full blaze of heaven's light."³⁰ On the other hand, the Holy Spirit will be more abundantly given to God's followers to enable them to be transformed into His image and to accomplish God's given mission.

Ellen White situates the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit only with the wicked people.

The days in which we live are solemn and important. **The Spirit of God is gradually but surely being withdrawn from the earth**. Plagues and judgments are already falling upon the **despisers** of the grace of God. The calamities by land and sea, the unsettled state of society, the alarms of war, are portentous. They forecast approaching events of the greatest magnitude.

The agencies of evil are combining their forces, and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great crisis. Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones.³¹

²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1962), 431.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

³¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:11; emphasis added; *idem*, *Evangelism*, 31-32.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The restraining Spirit of God is even now being withdrawn from the world. Hurricanes, storms, tempests, fire and flood, disasters by sea and land, follow each other in quick succession.³²

The time is at hand when there will be sorrow in the world that no human balm can heal. The Spirit of God is being withdrawn.³³

The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one. Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose.³⁴

So when the irrevocable decision of the sanctuary has been pronounced and **the destiny of the world** has been forever fixed, the inhabitants of the earth will know it not. **The forms of religion will be continued by a people from whom the Spirit of God has been finally withdrawn;** and the satanic zeal with which the prince of evil will inspire them for the accomplishment of his malignant designs, will bear the semblance of zeal for God.³⁵

Thus, it is very evident that Ellen White underlines that the Holy Spirit is withdrawn from the wicked world but will stay with God's faithful followers. Already in *Early Writings*, Ellen White explains that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the very end will have two functions: (1) to finish the preaching of the Gospel before the Second Coming of Christ; and (2) for helping the saints to go through the perilous period of time after the close of probation.³⁶ Believers will never live without the Holy Spirit. God will always be with His people (Matt 28:18-20; John 15:5). The latter rain of the Holy Spirit will be given in abundance to the believers (Joel 2:23, 28-29), and it will be the Holy Spirit who will carry them victoriously through the short final crisis (Matt 25:1-10; cf. Gen 32:24-30).

³² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 6:408.

³³ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1943), 277.

³⁴ White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1950), 614; emphasis added.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 615; emphasis added.

³⁶ "At that time the 'latter rain,' or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, will come, to give power to the loud voice of the third angel, and prepare the saints to stand in the period when the seven last plagues shall be poured out" (Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945], 86).

MOSKALA: MISINTERPRETED END-TIME ISSUES

Jesus Christ explains this deep truth persuasively in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 15:1–13). Only five wise virgins had the oil in abundance, and because of this oil they were ready to welcome the Bridegroom and enter into the joy of His wedding. The oil represents the Spirit of God; and more precisely, the transforming power of the Divine Spirit who changes them and enables them to obey God (Ezek 36:25–27). These believers, who expect the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, allow God to change their characters and behavior, and they are sealed by the Spirit for the final victory. Paul powerfully states: “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God” (Rom 8:14).

5. Living Without the Intercessor

How often I have heard in different congregations of our Church the thought that believers will live without an Intercessor after probation ends, meaning that they will be on their own. This half-truth is another myth in Adventism and is related to the erroneous thinking that the apocalyptic sealing and the presentation of our cases in the heavenly judgment before the Second Coming of Christ are two different events. On the contrary, they are closely related. When our name is called during the pre-Advent judgment and Jesus as the True Witness of our life presents before all the Universe’s representatives (Dan 7:9–10, 13–14) our life choices and orientation and we are found hidden “in Christ,” then our destiny is sealed and protected before the seven last plagues. After probation, when the door of mercy has closed, Jesus Christ will no longer be our Intercessor because He has “saved us completely” (Heb 7:25). This fact is often interpreted in such a way that believers will live without His help and that they will be on their own. Consequently, they must develop a strong character and a firm will to go victoriously through the final crisis without divine help while the evil forces will no longer be restricted by divine mercy and intervention (Rev 7:1–3; 14:9–11; 15:6–8). Is such an understanding biblical? Not at all.

It is true that Jesus Christ will no longer be our Intercessor when probation closes, but it does not mean that we will live independently of Him and that He will leave us on our own. Jesus will never abandon His own (see John 10:27–28; 15:5, etc.). After probation closes, believers will live without His intercessory ministry (they are saved by His grace), but never for one moment will they live without Christ, His presence and power since every sincere believer has decided to live in total dependence upon God and chosen to live in a trusting and loving relationship with Him. As

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Jacob's struggle with the pre-incarnated Christ demonstrates (his victorious night struggle is a type of the intense faith experience of Christ's followers at the time of the end), Jesus Christ's presence was even closer than before. The real struggles of faith bring His faithful closer to Him more than ever. This love, faith, and hope fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ will never be broken or interrupted.³⁷

In other words, believers will never be on their own because we are not able to make it to heaven by ourselves (salvation is a pure 100% gift of God; Eph 2:4–10). Thanks to Jesus Christ's accomplishments on the cross and His grace, our salvation is secured by His righteousness (Rom 1:16–17; 5:1; 8:1–5; 1 Cor 1:18, 22–24, 30; 2:2). All our security is in Him. He promised that He will be with His people until the very end of the world (Matt 28:20), and the Holy Spirit will carry us through the final period of world's history when Jesus, who has saved us completely, will no longer be our Intercessor (Rom 8:14).³⁸ Amazingly, not only will Jesus be with us and the Holy Spirit, but the Father as well (Isa 57:15; 66:2). The Presence of the Father will be marked by the help of His angels (Ps 34:7; Heb 1:14). Paul

³⁷ Even in the time of trouble, our faith will continue to grow, and we will not be able to claim "sinless perfection" but will still be dependent upon the blood of Jesus Christ to cover our sinful nature until we are glorified at the Second Coming of Christ. The good news is that Jesus Christ regenerates and changes our hearts (John 3:3–5), forgives all our sins (Isa 1:16–19; 1 John 1:8–9), liberates us from the bondage of sin (John 12:31–32), and transforms our lives (Rom 12:1–2; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 3:1–3). If the Son gives freedom, we are indeed free. Sin began with pride but is defeated by humility. There is hope for us because sin was overcome by the humble person Jesus Christ who is the Guarantor of freedom, peace, and joy. Our sinful nature does not change nor disappear through conversion or repentance, however, our sinful nature, tendencies, or inclinations (inherited or cultivated) can be controlled by the power of the Holy Spirit, His word, and God's grace (Rom 7:25; 8:1–11). Until the second coming, we will have our sinful nature and only then will believers be completely transformed and receive an incorruptible body (1 Cor 15:50–57; Phil 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2–5). We are not able on our own to do good deeds. Good deeds are a result of the transforming power of God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit (John 1:12; 15:1–5; Rom 1:16–17; 8:1–4; 1 Cor 1:18–25, 30–31; 2:12–15; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 1:10; Phil 4:13; 1 Pet 2:9–10).

³⁸ "The time of trouble, trouble such as was not since there was a nation [Dan 12:1], is right upon us, and we are like the sleeping virgins. We are to awake and ask the Lord Jesus to place underneath us His everlasting arms, and carry us through the time of trial before us" (*Manuscript Releases: From the Files of the Letters and Manuscripts Written by Ellen G. White*, vol. 3 [Silver Spring, MD: E. G. White Estate, 1990], 305; Letter 54, 1906).

MOSKALA: MISINTERPRETED END-TIME ISSUES

aptly declares: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6).³⁹

Summary

All five interpretations of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy mentioned above are completely wrong in their teaching:

1. Because there are two seals of God, the seal of God is not only given at the end of time: the seal of the Gospel/salvation is given at the beginning of our spiritual journey with Christ, and the eschatological/affirmative/protective seal is given only to those who will live through planet earth’s final crisis after the close of probation. This seal demonstrates that those of who receive it love God, His law, and His values and have sought to save people for eternity. Each seal has a special, different but complementary role. Only those who received the first seal can experience getting the second one. Only those who were sealed by the Gospel seal can at the end of time be marked by the eschatological seal which will protect them in the time of trouble and when probation is closed. It is a seal of life in the midst of destruction and ruin; it is a seal of final redemption (see Ezekiel 9).

2. The Bible presents the assurance of salvation. God is for us and never against us. He saves us completely. We may know that we have eternal life and passed from death to life. We can already now rejoice in the gift of salvation. We can have a bold assurance, because this assurance comes from God, from what He accomplished for us, and not on the basis of our achievements. We need only to stay in Christ, to dwell every day in Him (see John 5:24; 1 John 2:28; 3:1–5). Assurance of salvation is always in view of Jesus’ work and His merits, and in maintaining a living trustful relationship with God. Salvation is never dependent upon us, our performance and works, as they are the fruits of our redemption in

³⁹ For additional insight how God is working with His people from the beginning till the end, sanctifies and helps them, see Phil 3:12–15; 4:13; Jude 24–25; 1 Thess 5:23–24; 2 Thess 3:3; 2 Cor 3:5; Rev 3:10; Hebrews 12:1–2. See also White, *Testimony to Ministers*, 431; idem, *Great Controversy*, 615, 623.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Christ Jesus. Good deeds are important for the salvation of others but not for our salvation.

3. The sealing will not occur at just any time for those who will be alive when the final events of the human history will take place but only after the Sunday law is issued, and people make their decision for or against God. The Sabbath-Sunday controversy will be an outward expression of either loyalty and love for God or obedience to the ungodly powers aimed against Him, His law, and His people.

4. The Holy Spirit will not be taken away from believers at the end. On the contrary, it will be given to them even in greater portion, and it will be the Holy Spirit who will carry us through the final time of crisis. We will be safe in His hands! The Holy Spirit will leave only the wicked, stubborn world.

5. We will never live without Christ, but only without His special intercessory ministry: He saved us and secured our salvation on the cross and proclaimed it on our behalf in front of the Universe and Heavenly tribunal, so we do not need to worry about being alone, without His presence. During Jacob's fight (Gen 32:24–30) when the patriarch was wrestling with God, the Lord was closer to Him than ever. This will be the experience of God's people after the time of probation is closed. They will be sustained by Jesus' constant Presence as Jacob was sustained and blessed by Him.

Conclusion

Five myths in Adventism in regard to end-time events are not biblically substantiated. We can face tomorrow with full confidence because we are in God's hands and He is in ultimate control of our lives and world events. We can trust Him, and on this relationship between our gracious and Holy Lord and us depends our destiny. We can rely on the firm prophetic Word of God and look forward with hope. The hope of the Second Coming of Jesus is called the "blessed" hope (Titus 2:13), so we can rejoice in this life, having full confidence in Him (1 John 2:28; 4:17) while having our "eyes fixed on Jesus" (Heb 12:2). This is why we do not need to listen to different conspiracy theories on last-day scenarios, but instead cultivate God's Presence in our lives and serve others with joy (Rev 14:6–7). We cannot be

MOSKALA: MISINTERPRETED END-TIME ISSUES

“fear-centered” Seventh-day Adventist Christians but need to be known as “hope-centered” people. The return of Jesus is the ultimate hope for humanity, and He is the only way to the bright future.

God does not want to keep people from heaven. He is not a goalie trying to protect His kingdom, allowing only a few to enter. He wants all to be saved (1 Tim 2:3–4), because He has no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23, 32). Punishment is a strange act for Him (Isa 28:21b) because He is the God of life (Deut 30:20). Isaiah expressed the Lord’s desire exceptionally well: “Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” (Isa 30:18). Thus, correct theology always culminates in doxology. Paul relevantly declares: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph 1:3), and again: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Eph 3:20).

Jiří Moskala is Dean and Professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary on the campus of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Moskala received his Th.D. in 1990 from the Comenius Faculty of Protestant Theology, which is now renamed the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, Czech Republic. His dissertation was entitled: “The Book of Daniel and the Maccabean Thesis: The Problem of Authorship, Unity, Structure, and Seventy Weeks in the Book of Daniel (A Contribution to the Discussion on Canonical Apocalypics)” and was published in the Czech language. In 1998 he completed his Ph.D. from Andrews University. His dissertation was entitled: “The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals of Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale (An Intertextual Study)” and has been published under the same title. Moskala has authored several books and articles in the Czech and English languages. moskala@andrews.edu