

The Making of a Prophetess

In 1845, Joshua V. Himes, one of the leaders of a rapidly fragmenting revival movement, wrote William Miller, founder of that movement, "Things are in a Bad way at Portland [Maine]." ¹ Himes was particularly concerned about the influence of Israel Dammon, a fanatic who had entangled a group of Miller's former followers. ²

Millerites had predicted the second advent of Christ on October 22, 1844, based on Miller's interpretation of Daniel 8:14. The movement had achieved great success, particularly in New England. There may have been 150,000 to 200,000 hard-core Millerites at the peak of the revival, with approximately a million additional Americans who were quietly expecting the advent of Christ in 1844. ³

The hopes of these advent believers were, of course, dashed on October 22, 1844. Many had been disfellowshipped from their previous denominations, leaving them isolated at the time of their greatest spiritual and emotional vulnerability. Shamed by scoffers, many adventists never returned to their former churches. Some adventists, following the initial lead of William Miller, taught that the door of probation had closed in 1844. However, Miller abandoned these "shut-door" teachings when it became clear that sinners were still being converted. ⁴ Open-door adventists, with the blessing of Miller and Himes, met at Albany, New York, to discuss the future of the movement, and by 1860, the Advent Christian Association emerged, representing the more mainstream members of the disappointed movement. ⁵

Israel Dammon was a leader of the shut-door Millerites, who were noted for the large number of "prophets" in their midst. Several of these prophets were with Dammon in the Portland area. ⁶ It is important to note that the presence of prophets wasn't all that uncommon in New England at this time. Seventh-day Adventist historians Frederick Hoyt and Ronald Graybill have identified six such visionaries in the State of Maine: William Foy, Emily Clemons, Dorinda Baker, Phoebe Knapp, Ellen Harmon, and Mary Hamlin. ⁷ Ellen White adds that Phebe Knapp was another Maine visionary, albeit, not a true prophetess. ⁸

Elder Dammon taught that he had achieved perfection before October 22, and by his

¹Qtd. in Knight, George R. *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism*. Boise: Pacific Press, 1993. 256.

²Ibid.

³Ibid, 213.

⁴Ibid, 240-241.

⁵Ibid, 287.

⁶Ibid, 254, 303.

⁷Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. "Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial." *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. p. 39.

⁸White, Ellen G. *Manuscript Releases*. Vol. 8. Silver Spring: White Estate, 1990. p. 234. (Letter 2, 1874).

definition, nothing that he did subsequently could be considered sinful. He taught his followers that it was sinful to work, and he also supported greeting others with a "holy" kiss. Some shut-door believers became so fanatical that they crawled around their homes like babies, and even in public, to emphasize their childlike faith.⁹ Dammon was married, but he took another "spiritual wife" because he believed that nothing he did could possibly be sinful. Of Dammon's "spiritual" marriage, Seventh-day Adventist historian George R. Knight comments that "the evidence seems to be quite clear that the union was less than spiritual."¹⁰

One of Dammon's associates was a twenty-three-year-old preacher named James White; another was Miss Ellen Harmon, a frail prophetess of seventeen who was suffering from tuberculosis.¹¹ These young people would eventually marry and co-found the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In addition to alarming Himes and Miller, the activities of Elder Dammon created a scandal among the sensible, mainstream Christians in the region, whose moral foundations had been largely shaped by their formidable Puritan ancestors. Dammon was arrested and brought to trial for being "a vagabond and idle person, going about in the town of Atkinson [Maine] . . . begging." The charges go on to state that Dammon "is a common railer or brawler, neglecting his calling, or employment, mispending his earnings, and does not provide for the support of his family, & against the peace of the State of Maine . . ."¹²

Dammon's trial took place February 17, 1845, in Dover, Maine.¹³ An abridged version of the testimony was printed in the *Piscataquis Farmer*, the local newspaper. Several of the prosecution witnesses had attended meetings of the Dammon group, culminating in a raucous meeting on Saturday, February 15, which became the focal point for much of the testimony. One man bluntly stated, ". . . I never saw such confusion, not even in a drunken frolic." Prosecution witnesses reported scandalous kissing amongst unmarried men and women. They also claimed that men were accompanying a prophetess, Dorinda Baker, into a back bedroom during the meeting.¹⁴ Of one instance, Loton Lambert claimed, "Miss Baker and a man went into the bed

⁹Ibid, 251. See also White, Ellen G. *Manuscript Releases*. Vol. 8. Silver Spring: White Estate, 1990. pp. 229-230. (Letter 2, 1874); Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. "Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial." *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. pp. 40-41.

¹⁰Knight, George R. *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism*. Boise: Pacific Press, 1993. 253. According to an account by Ellen (Harmon) White, Dammon cleverly sidestepped this issue while under oath: "Eld. D. was asked if he had a spiritual wife. He told them he had a lawful wife, and he could thank God that she had been a very spiritual woman ever since his acquaintance with her." White, Ellen G. *Spiritual Gifts*. Vol. 2. Battle Creek: James White, 1860. p. 42.

¹¹Douglass, Herbert E. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White*. Nampa: Pacific Press, 1998. p. 473.

¹²Hoyt, Frederick, ed. "Trial of Elder I. Dammon Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*." *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 29-36. p. 29.

¹³Douglass, Herbert E. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White*. Nampa: Pacific Press, 1998. p. 473.

¹⁴Hoyt, Frederick, ed. "Trial of Elder I. Dammon Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*." *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 29-36. pp. 30-31. The prosecution alleged that Elder James White was one of the men accompanying

room—subsequently heard a voice in the room hallo Oh! the door was opened—I saw into the room—she was on the bed—he was hold of her; they came out of the bed room hugging each other”¹⁵

A humorous moment in the trial came when J. W. E. Harvey reported seeing an Elder Hall remove his boots and apparently encourage women to kiss his feet: “One girl made a smack, but did not hit his foot with her lips. Hall said ‘he that is ashamed of me before men, him will I be ashamed of before my father and the holy angels.’ She then gave his feet a number of kisses.”¹⁶

Members of Dammon’s group, testifying for the defense, corroborated most of the prosecution’s charges. James Ayer, Jr., the owner of the Atkinson house in which the questionable meetings occurred, affirmed, “It is a part of our faith to kiss each other—brothers kiss sisters and sisters kiss brothers, I think we have bible authority for that.”¹⁷

Regarding the accusation of noise unbecoming for the worship of God, Joel Doore stated, “There was not one tenth part of the noise Saturday evening, that there generally is at the meetings I attend.”

Job Moody and Isley Osborn admitted that Dammon had encouraged them not to work. In addition, George S. Woodbury and Abel S. Boobar appeared to acknowledge the presence of men in the bedroom with the erstwhile prophetess Miss Baker, but the abridged transcript doesn’t give conclusive proof of their meaning.

Another prophetess was present during the meetings. Witnesses for both the defense and the prosecution depict Ellen Harmon lying on the floor in a trance, with James White hovering beside her, holding her head. Miss Harmon would rise from time to time and relate a vision, usually testifying that some member of the group must renounce a certain sin, and occasionally ordering someone to go outside immediately and get baptized in the creek. Elder Dammon’s testimony provides a clue as to the urgency for rebaptism. He taught “that the day of grace had gone by, . . . but that there was too many [believers] yet.”¹⁸ In other words, Christ had not come on October 22, 1844, because there were more than 144,000 believers. Some must be weeded out. However, in His mercy, He sent messages of warning to certain fortunate persons through

Miss Baker to the bedroom, but numerous defense witnesses denied White’s involvement. It was probably a case of mistaken identity (see page 34).

¹⁵Ibid. Ellen White, commenting on fanaticism in the early years of her ministry, stated, “Young, unmarried women, would have a message for married men, and in no delicate words would tell them to their face of the abuse of the marriage privileges. Purity was the burden of the messages given, and for a while everything appeared to be reaching a high state of purity and holiness. But the inwardness of these matters was opened to me. I was shown what would be the outcome of this teaching. Those who were engaged in this work were not a superficial, immoral class, but persons who had been the most devoted workers. Satan saw an opportunity to take advantage of the state of things, and to disgrace the cause of God. Those who thought themselves able to bear any test without exciting their carnal propensities, were overcome, and several unmarried men and women were compelled to be married.” White, Ellen G. *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce*. Silver Spring: White Estate, 1980. pp. 109, 110. (Letter 103, 1894). Also in 4 MR 119.

¹⁶Ibid, 35.

¹⁷Ibid, 32.

¹⁸Ibid, 35.

Ellen Harmon and Dorinda Baker, and some of these falling saints required urgent baptism in order to keep their names in the Book of Life.

Loton Lambert recalled a message for Mrs. Woodbury, who was commanded by God via Ellen Harmon to “forsake all [her] friends or go to hell.”¹⁹

Mr. Woodbury, who must have resented his wife’s friends, concurred: “I believe in Miss Harmon’s visions, because she told my wife’s feelings correctly.” He later added, “Sister Harmon said to my wife and the girls if they did not do as she said, they would go to hell.”²⁰

The girls referenced by Mr. Woodbury appear to be two seventeen-year-olds who were sent out to the creek that Saturday night in the middle of February to be baptized. Otherwise, they would be lost. The authority for this action was the testimony of Ellen Harmon, based upon her visions that night. Loton Lambert testified, “Imitation of Christ, as they called her, would lay on the floor a while, then rise up and call upon someone and say she had a vision to relate to them . . . ; there was one girl that they said must be baptised that night or she must go to hell; she wept bitterly and wanted to see her mother first; they told her she must leave her mother or go to hell . . . She finally concluded to be baptised.”²¹

Joel Doore, witness for the defense, corroborated Lambert’s account: “The vision woman would lay looking up when she came out of her trance—she would point to some one, and tell them their cases, which she said was from the Lord. She told a number of visions that evening. Brother Gallison’s daughter wanted to see her mother before she was baptised, but finally concluded to be baptised without seeing her The girls that was baptised were 17 years old, one of them had been baptised before.”²²

When called to the stand, Joseph Gallison revealed that he had fully consented to his daughter’s chilly immersion. “I have no doubt sister Harmon’s visions were from God—she told my daughter so I was in favor of my daughter being baptised”²³

Israel Dammon was sentenced to occupy “the House of Correction for the space of Ten Days.”²⁴ Dammon appealed, but before the appeals court could rule, the case was “quashed,” according to SDA historian Frederick Hoyt.²⁵

¹⁹Ibid, 30.

²⁰Ibid, 33. Herbert Douglass points out, “At this time Ellen did not believe in hell as a place of ‘eternal fire.’ If she said that unbelievers would be ‘lost,’ most Christians in that group would have interpreted that to mean that they were ‘going to hell—to eternally burning hell.’” Douglass, Herbert E. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White*. Nampa: Pacific Press, 1998. p. 474.

²¹Ibid, 30. According to numerous defense witnesses, Lambert is incorrect in referring to Ellen Harmon as Imitation of Christ, but the remainder of his testimony appears to be correct.

²²Ibid, 33.

²³Ibid, 34.

²⁴Ibid, 35.

²⁵Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. “Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. p. 39. Unfortunately, Hoyt doesn’t provide any details as to why the case was dismissed, other than to suggest that the case against him was an infringement on religious liberty.

After marrying James White, Ellen Harmon wrote an account of Dammon's arrest and trial, including it in *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 2, published in 1860.²⁶ *Spiritual Gifts* is part of the canon of Ellen G. White's writings, a manifestation of the Spirit of Prophecy, and thus, orthodox Seventh-day Adventists consider it inspired. Ellen White recorded the events of Dammon's arrest and trial in this manner:

"One night I was shown something that I did not understand. It was to this effect, that we were to have a trial of our faith. The next day, which was the first day of the week, while I was speaking, two men looked into the window They entered and rushed past me to Eld. Damman [sic]. The Spirit of the Lord rested upon him, and his strength was taken away, and he fell to the floor helpless. The officer cried out, "In the name of the State of Maine, lay hold of this man." Two seized his arms, and two his feet, and attempted to drag him from the room. They would move him a few inches only, and then rush out of the house. The power of God was in that room, and the servants of God with their countenances lighted up with his glory, made no resistance. The efforts to take Eld. D. were often repeated with the same effect. The men could not endure the power of God, and it was a relief to them to rush out of the house. Their number increased to twelve, still Eld. D. was held by the power of God about forty minutes, and not all the strength of those men could move him from the floor where he lay helpless. At the same moment we all felt that Eld. D. must go; that God had manifested his power for his glory, and that the name of the Lord would be further glorified in suffering him to be taken from our midst. And those men took him up as easily as they would take up a child and carried him out."²⁷

Ellen White's eyewitness account differs dramatically from the sworn testimony of Joseph Moulton, the deputy sheriff who arrested Dammon:

"When I went to arrest prisoner, they shut the door against me. Finding I could not gain access to him without, I burst open the door. I went to the prisoner and took him by the hand and told him my business. A number of women jumped on to him—he clung to them, and they to him. So great was the resistance, that I with three assistants, could not get him out. I remained in the house and sent for more help; after they arrived we made a second attempt with the same result—I again sent for more help—after they arrived we overpowered them and got him out door in custody. We were resisted by both men and women. Can't describe the place—it was one continued shout."²⁸

According to the transcript that we possess (and it is admittedly a partial transcript printed according to the space-constraints of the newspaper), there is no attempt by defense witnesses to contradict Moulton's testimony. Witnesses correct other misstatements by the prosecution—such

²⁶According to Ronald Graybill, the Dammon incident in Atkinson, Maine, was mentioned in *Spiritual Gifts*, but it was dropped from "any subsequent rendition of her life story, which would include the 1880, 1888, and 1915 editions of *Life Sketches*." Ibid, 44.

²⁷White, Ellen G. *Spiritual Gifts*. Vol. 2. Battle Creek: James White, 1860. pp. 40-41.

²⁸Hoyt, Frederick, ed. "Trial of Elder I. Dammon Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*." *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 29-36. p. 31.

as the assertion that Ellen Harmon was called “Imitation of Christ” and the charge that James White went to the bedroom with Dorinda Baker—but they never challenge the accusation of resisting arrest. If Ellen White is correct regarding the number of men who eventually came to assist Moulton, there could have been eleven additional witnesses to corroborate his testimony if needed. Since most of Dammon’s followers were striving for perfection in order to remain part of the 144,000 (excepting those who, like Dammon, had already declared themselves perfect), they would have every incentive to be honest. In this context, the lack of a response to the charge of resisting arrest is quite telling.

Ellen White’s account of Dammon’s trial is also interesting. (It must be noted that Ellen Harmon and James White weren’t present at the trial, but we know that she must have heard or read a fairly detailed account because she correctly identifies a song that the Dammon group sang during the trial.²⁹ She wrote, “The charge brought against Eld. D. was, that he was a disturber of the peace. Many witnesses were brought to sustain the charge, but they were at once broken down by the testimony of Eld. D.’s acquaintances present, who were called to the stand.”³⁰

Adventist historians, after studying the transcript of the Dammon trial, have been unable to sustain Ellen White’s claim that prosecution witnesses “were at once broken down by the testimony of Eld. D.’s acquaintances” Jonathan Butler, participating in a roundtable discussion of the trial, commented, “The transcript had credibility for me There were conflicting stories, but the fact that there were differences of opinion about detail and they kind of got worked out lends credibility to it. I thought there was sort of a consensus as to what was going on there.”³¹

Ronald Graybill added, “It seems to me that the defense witnesses corroborate virtually all that the prosecution witnesses charge, with the exception of the charge that Ellen Harmon was referred to as the ‘Imitation of Christ.’”³²

Ellen White’s comment about Dammon’s testimony is also interesting. She doesn’t reveal the details, but some of his comments are preserved in the *Piscataquis Farmer*. White wrote the following: “There was much curiosity to learn what Eld. D. and his friends believed, and he was asked to give them a synopsis of his faith. He told them in a clear manner his belief from the Scriptures.”³³

According to the trial transcript, Dammon “argued that the day of grace had gone by, that the believers were reduced; but that there was too many yet, and that the end of the world would come within a week.”³⁴ The “synopsis” of Dammon’s faith is interesting because it must have

²⁹White, Ellen G. *Spiritual Gifts*. Vol. 2. Battle Creek: James White, 1860. pp. 42; Hoyt, Frederick, ed. “Trial of Elder I. Dammon Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 29-36. p. 35.

³⁰White, Ellen G. *Spiritual Gifts*. Vol. 2. Battle Creek: James White, 1860. pp. 41.

³¹Qtd. in Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. “Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. p. 40.

³²Ibid.

³³White, Ellen G. *Spiritual Gifts*. Vol. 2. Battle Creek: James White, 1860. pp. 42.

³⁴Hoyt, Frederick, ed. “Trial of Elder I. Dammon Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 29-36. p. 35.

closely paralleled the young prophetess's own faith. As she recalls (based on whatever source informed her of the trial's proceedings), Dammon "told them in a clear manner his belief from the Scriptures." What were his clear beliefs? That after the Great Disappointment in 1844, the door of probation was shut ("the day of grace had gone by"); that there were actually "too many" saints currently ready for the Lord's coming; that the number of believers must be reduced to avoid overcrowding heaven; and that continual date-setting for the second advent of Christ was par for the course among his followers. It is most interesting to note that Ellen Harmon's second vision, which appears to confirm Dammon's view that "the day of grace had gone by," actually took place in Dammon's home in Exeter, Maine.³⁵ Her first account of this vision was written to Enoch Jacobs on the very day (Saturday, February 15, 1845) of the unruly gathering in Atkinson, at which Dammon was the leader.³⁶

It is easy to see why Ellen White, having moved on from her brush with fanaticism, glossed over the specifics of early adventist belief when she wrote *Spiritual Gifts*.³⁷ The account rendered in *Spiritual Gifts* reflects a certain selectivity on the part of the author. Ellen White presents herself as a strong opponent of fanaticism: "We trembled for the church, for they were in danger through these fanatical spirits. They trusted every impression, and laid aside reason and judgment. My heart ached for God's people. Oh must they be thus deceived, and led away by a false spirit! Warnings had but little effect, only to make those warned jealous of me."³⁸ She undoubtedly began opposing fanaticism at some time in her early ministry, but in the incident at Atkinson, Maine, she was up to her eyeballs in it, lying on the floor, sending girls out to be baptized in the middle of a New England winter night, and later claiming that the power of God rested upon a man who had taken a spiritual wife. Frederick Hoyt observes that he "can't find any reference where she cites Atkinson and claims that she denounced fanaticism there. Now maybe that's accidental, but I doubt it very much."³⁹

The more mature Ellen White asserted that God had protected her from being overly involved with fanatics, but again, this seems like wishful thinking in light of her Dammon experience: "The false burdens and impressions of others might have led me away from duty, but the Lord had previously shown me my duty where to go, and, although young and inexperienced, preserved me from falling, by giving me special directions who to fear, and who to trust. Were it

³⁵Douglass, Herbert E. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White*. Nampa: Pacific Press, 1998. p. 473.

³⁶White, Arthur S. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. p. 78. Regarding the shut-door overtones of the vision at the Dammon residence, Ellen White's account dated July 13, 1847, and addressed to Joseph Bates is most insightful. It will be discussed in depth in a future chapter.

³⁷Adventist historian Rennie Schoepflin observes that "she revised the past in order to solidify her later status as a more mature and responsible prophetess." Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. "Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial." *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. p. 44.

³⁸White, Ellen G. *Spiritual Gifts*. Vol. 2. Battle Creek: James White, 1860. p. 45.

³⁹Qtd. in Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. "Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial." *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. p. 44.

not for this, I can now see many times where I might have been led from the path of duty.”⁴⁰ Coming just three pages after her account of the Dammon trial, this statement seems inconsistent with what we now know about the background of the Dammon affair. Current historical research, uncovering information lost for decades, begs the reader to ask why God didn’t warn her to “fear” Elder Dammon’s influence.⁴¹

Soon after leaving Dammon’s group, Ellen journeyed to New Hampshire, where she had a vision that warned her against the sins of some whom she “had previously had great confidence in as ministers of righteousness.”⁴² She returned to Maine, but because she came to rebuke the fanatics, she was often unwelcome among her former friends. Ellen later recalled, “At one house in Orrington, the door was closed upon me as they saw me coming, but in the name of the Lord I opened it. They said Phebe Knapp was in vision. She was crying out in a most pitiful manner, warning against me. I knelt by her side and asked my heavenly Father to rebuke the spirit which was upon her. She immediately arose, her agony and burden ended.”⁴³

Continuing her new-found crusade against fanaticism, Ellen met with Israel Dammon and his followers in Garland, Maine. At this time, Dammon was teaching that the dead in Christ had already been raised. Ellen strictly rebuked their errors, but while she was quoting I Thessalonians 4:16 and 17, “Elder Dammon arose and began to leap up and down, crying out, ‘The dead are raised and gone up; glory to God! Glory, glory, hallelujah!’ Others followed his example. Elder Dammon said, ‘Don’t be tried, Brother White. I cannot sit still.’”⁴⁴ Dammon refused her warnings. In *Spiritual Gifts*, her first account of her dealings with Dammon, and in which she had erroneously emphasized the power of God in Dammon’s life, she simply stated, “Distracting influences have separated Eld. D. from his friends who believe the third message”⁴⁵

One of the most important questions arising from Ellen White’s *Spiritual Gifts* account of the Atkinson affair involves her overall honesty. Did she tell the truth to the best of her ability regarding her involvement with adventist fanatics in Atkinson and other places? Was she correct in stating that the power of God held off twelve strong men attempting to arrest Dammon, or was the trial testimony—stating that Dammon’s followers had physically confronted the lawmen—correct? It must be remembered that the deputy sheriff’s testimony wasn’t challenged in the record we have of the proceedings. It should also be considered that this trial would have been a big deal in the rural area served by the *Piscataquis Farmer*, in that it involved so many witnesses. The courtroom was packed with friends and family members of the witnesses and the

⁴⁰White, Ellen G. *Spiritual Gifts*. Vol. 2. Battle Creek: James White, 1860. pp. 45.

⁴¹Shortly after leaving Dammon, Ellen Harmon was shown, among other things, the error of refraining from labor. Ibid, 58.

⁴²White, Ellen G. *Manuscript Releases*. Vol. 8. Silver Spring: White Estate, 1990. p. 231. (Letter 2, 1874).

⁴³White, Ellen G. *Manuscript Releases*. Vol. 8. Silver Spring: White Estate, 1990. p. 234. (Letter 2, 1874).

⁴⁴Ibid, 237.

⁴⁵White, Ellen G. *Spiritual Gifts*. Vol. 2. Battle Creek: James White, 1860. pp. 42.

accused, in addition to those who were simply curious.⁴⁶ This explains why the newspaper reporter begins his abridged transcript with a disclaimer urging that witnesses who believe they find a misrepresentation will “impute it to my head, instead of my heart.” He continues, “In consequence of my total inexperience, being but a laboring man, I should shrink from publishing it, but from the urgent solicitation of others.”⁴⁷ Given the large number of witnesses, it is inconceivable that this published report could be far off base or ignore important testimony. Too many people would know, and that explains the caution of the reporter.

Seventh-day Adventist historian Rennie Schoepflin attempts to answer the question of Ellen White’s honesty, since her account differs so widely from that told under oath at the trial:

“Ellen White may have been in trance and, therefore, not conscious or in complete control of her senses when the arrest took place She may not have known what was going on, but I don’t believe she lied. With all that noise going on, was it possible for a young invalid, who was lapsing in and out of visionary trances, to distinguish the hullabaloo that surrounded the ecstatic experiences from ‘the continued shout’ that surrounded the effort to arrest Dammon?”⁴⁸

Schoepflin’s explanation leaves one asking why neither James White nor God bothered to correct Ellen White’s mistaken impression prior to publication of *Spiritual Gifts*.

Jonathan Butler’s appraisal is more blunt than Schoepflin’s. He states, “Her recollection of fanaticism and how she related to it was completely distorted. If you only had Ellen White and not this transcript, you would never imagine Ellen White in a scene like this.”⁴⁹ It seems that Ellen White’s recollections in *Spiritual Gifts* are fanciful and selective—not up to par with reasonable expectations of prophetic accuracy or possibly integrity. Does this mean that her recollections reflect outright lies? Only God knows. It was a pattern with Ellen White to dismiss experiences that seemed to contradict her deep belief in her prophetic gift, so she may have subconsciously modified her memory of this event to protect her belief in her calling.

Another important question about the Dammon affair revolves around God’s possible involvement. Is it reasonable that God would inspire His prophetess to send two girls out to be baptized on a cold February night in Maine, on the mistaken impression that their names would be dropped from the Book of Life if they weren’t immediately immersed? If Ellen Harmon’s messages that night were from God, why didn’t God send the lecherous Israel Dammon out to be rebaptized, along with his spiritual wife and all the women who kissed him? Why didn’t God require Elder Hall to cleanse his feet in an ice-cold New England creek, rather than with the kisses of young women? Instead, the naive prophetess’s rebukes were directed against the “small fish”

⁴⁶Hoyt, Frederick, ed. “Trial of Elder I. Dammon Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 29-36. p. 29.

⁴⁷Hoyt, Frederick, ed. “Trial of Elder I. Dammon Reported for the *Piscataquis Farmer*.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 29-36. p. 29. Some SDAs might seize on the reporter’s admitted inexperience as a reason to ignore his work, but he was drawing on the official court minutes.

⁴⁸Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. “Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. p. 46.

⁴⁹Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. “Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. p. 47.

of the group. As one evaluates God's Old Testament prophetic messages, rebukes are more commonly directed toward kings, priests, and other leaders than against specific common persons.

It is also important to consider Ellen White's claims of divine intervention on behalf of Dammon—delaying his arrest for some forty minutes and leaving twelve strong men powerless to move him. Would the power of God actually intervene on behalf of a dangerous fanatic like Elder Dammon? In 1874, the mature Ellen White wrote the following regarding persons like Dammon: “A fearful stain was brought upon the cause of God which would cleave to the name of Adventist like the leprosy.”⁵⁰ Causing miracles to attend Dammon's ill-fated ministry, the “stain” of which “would cleave” to Adventists “like leprosy,” would be most unadvisable on God's part. As Ronald Graybill comments, “It strains one's credulity to accept that God had anything to do with what was going on in that kind of chaos.”⁵¹

Adventist apologists would like to minimize the damage from James White and Ellen Harmon's involvement with Israel Dammon in Atkinson, Maine. Ellen White's defenders argue that her involvement with Dammon was brief, that James and Ellen were inexperienced, that they were not present at the trial, and that they began denouncing fanaticism soon after their time in Atkinson.⁵² However, the real questions involve the accuracy of Ellen White's account in *Spiritual Gifts*, and the extent to which God was behind those visions she was having on the floor. If we conclude that her account of this experience cannot bear scrutiny, what basis do we have to trust her word on other matters? In addition, if it appears that God would not have inspired her testimonies directing young women to get baptized immediately in a freezing creek, then we have to question the validity of other, less sensational testimonies. All in all, the Dammon affair raises serious questions that cut to the heart of Ellen White's prophetic claims.

On the other hand, one should also have a great deal of sympathy for James and Ellen. They had been gravely disappointed when Christ had not come on October 22, 1844. During the fall of 1844 and the winter of 1845, these young people had seen many of their friends descend into fanaticism; some even lost their minds from the spiritual strain.⁵³ As the Harmon family, along with many other Millerites, had been disfellowshipped from established Christian communities, they had nowhere to turn for sober Christian counsel. In their eagerness to serve the Lord, young James and Ellen became attracted to fanatics who continued setting dates for the Lord's return. This gave them hope, but it would inevitably be dashed. Unfortunately, James and Ellen were less than candid about their involvement in fanaticism, and the truth has now found them out.

⁵⁰White, Ellen G. *Manuscript Releases*. Vol. 8. Silver Spring: White Estate, 1990. p. 238. (Letter 2, 1874). See page 237 for the background specifically linking Dammon to this quote.

⁵¹Qtd. in Schoepflin, Rennie, ed. “Scandal or Rite of Passage? Historians on the Dammon Trial.” *Spectrum* 17.5 (1987): 37-50. p. 49.

⁵²See Douglass, Herbert E. *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White*. Nampa: Pacific Press, 1998. pp. 473-476. It is most disappointing that Douglass doesn't compare Ellen White's account of the Dammon affair in *Spiritual Gifts* with the testimony from the trial, and that he ignores the serious questions regarding God's involvement in the testimonies she was bearing to these people.

⁵³See White, Ellen G. *Selected Messages*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1958. pp. 34, 35.