

Adventist Heritage

The Conversion of William Miller



160
YEARS of
SABBATH SCHOOL

Program Help Outline

Song Service
Theme Song
Worship in Prayer
Welcome
Mission Emphasis
Personal Growth Time
Class Time

Call to Commitment:

The superintendent may invite attendees to review the four goals of Sabbath School orally. The teacher may invite class members to apply the topic of the lesson study to their lives, and invite guests to study for baptism. Ask your pastor for guidance.

Graduate School:

Words to ponder: "You are in a perpetual graduate school. The goal of your education is in the words Paul wrote to the Ephesians [4:12, 13]. God invented His Son's life in your future to prepare you for works of service by the power of the Holy Spirit. . . . Paul uses the phrase 'we all' [NIV] to reveal the extent of God's kingdom. You have the company of many Christians with many callings as you reach together for unity of faith and spiritual maturity" (Edward Grube, *Teaching 101*, pp. 34, 35).

Lesson Focus:

Time Frames reminds the audience of how we must remember to trust in God's timing of things, and not our own timing. Find a presenter. Find a big clock with a second hand to display. Find volunteer readers for the Bible texts.

The Conversion of William Miller:

Encourages members to consider the conversion of a leader as an example of working with unbelievers and to take courage in their personal witnessing efforts.

Song Service

SDA Hymnal: "We Know Not the Hour"; "Does Jesus Care?"

Church Hymnal: "He Leadeth Me"; "Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed?"

He Is Our Song: "Jacob's Ladder"; "For God So Loved the World"

Theme Song: "Bring Me Back, Lord"

Scripture

Mark 1:15; John 1:12, 13

Welcome

Lesson focus: Time is an important commodity, isn't it? Time records where our heart truly is. And time is often used when talking about firsts, often in the sense of timeliness, as in John 7:8. Time is our subject this morning. Happy Sabbath!

"The Conversion of William Miller": Sometimes we think that our leaders never struggled with doubt. Sometimes we don't grasp that they too had fears. "The Conversion of William Miller" will bring a smile to your lips. Perhaps his story will renew your hope for the possible conversion of loved ones and neighbors. Happy Sabbath!

Lesson Focus: Time Frames

President John F. Kennedy used to tell the story of Marshal Hubert Lyautey, a French soldier who once asked his gardeners to plant a row of rare trees within the next few days. One of the gardeners responded that that species of tree often took a century or more to grow. "In that case," answered the marshal, "start planting them today."

This little story illustrates the fact that Christians must never forget: humanity's notion of time is very limited, very skewed, and very subjective. Let's focus on this clock and count off 60 seconds together. **(Count out loud.)** Time seemed to pass slowly, didn't it?

Age groups perceive time differently. Didn't the passing of a year seem quite different when you were 7 years old, 27, 57, or 67 than it does now? And yet, as far we know, a year has always been 365 twenty-four-hour days, not one bit longer or shorter. **(Raise the clock.)**

Have you heard the saying "The faster I go, the behinder I get"? We laugh, but there is some truth to that concept. The faster objects move, the slower time moves. This was part of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. If you send one twin to the moon in a rocket ship moving near the speed of light that returns to earth in 20 years' earth time, he will have aged about three years, while the twin who remained on earth will have aged the full 20. Yes, time is mysterious, and we understand it only a little.

(Volunteer 1 reads 2 Peter 3:8.)

Thank you. How does this passage affect your daily life?

(Accept responses from the audience.)

Physics professionals tell us that the precision of time within the subatomic world is mind-boggling. Time moves in millionths and billionths of a second. So we can understand that the God who can orchestrate and move with that kind of precision can, indeed, manage our time. So He allowed the children of Israel to spend 400 years in slavery in Egypt and the little horn hegemony to last 1260 years. These years were "small potatoes," "peanuts of time" to a God who deals in the time frame of eternity.

(Volunteer 2 reads 1 Peter 5:6, 7.)

Thank you. What's the point about time made here? **(Accept responses.)** As Christians, one of the hardest things for us to learn is to trust God in all things, including His timing. But He can handle time. And He cares for us. Let's trust Him.

The Conversion of William Miller

Although still holding the deist views he had embraced soon after his marriage, William Miller did sometimes go to church with his mother. When the preacher was

away, the deacons would choose a sermon to be read from a book. At the preacher's suggestion Miller was asked to read the sermons on those Sundays.

One Sunday the deacons chose a sermon entitled "The Importance of Parental Duties." Soon after he began to read, Miller became so overcome with emotion that he couldn't continue. He had to sit down. There was something about that sermon that brought him to a spiritual crisis. He later commented on the incident:

"Suddenly the character of a Saviour was vividly impressed upon my mind. It seemed that there might be a Being so good and compassionate as to himself atone for our transgressions, and thereby save us from suffering the penalty of sin. I immediately felt how lovely such a Being must be; and imagined that I could cast myself into the arms of . . . such An One" (Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, p. 66). Miller was forced to conclude that the Bible brought to view just such a Savior as he needed, and that the "scriptures must be a revelation from God." He said that the Scriptures "became my delight; and in Jesus I found a friend" (*ibid.*, p. 67). The Bible now became his chief study, and he searched it with great pleasure.

For the next two years Miller made a thorough study of the Scriptures. For the next 13 years the conviction grew that he must tell others of the soon coming of his best friend, Jesus. But he was unwilling to go public with his findings. He believed that no one would listen to an uneducated farmer. But the Lord had other plans.

Day by day he continually heard the words ringing in his ears, to go and tell the world of its danger. Finally he gave up in despair and told the Lord he would go and preach if anyone asked him. He felt perfectly safe in saying this, because he was quite sure that no one would ask a 50-year-old farmer to preach on the second coming of the Lord. But the Lord's clock was ticking, and the time had come (*ibid.*, p. 97).

Within an half hour of this promise to the Lord, a young man was at Miller's door bearing an invitation from his father for Miller to come home with the young man and tell their neighbors about his studies.

Miller was extremely upset at this turn of events. Without answering the young man, he stormed out of the house and fled to the grove of maple trees that had become his refuge. There he wrestled and argued with the Lord. Yes, he had promised he would go if invited, but he hadn't expected to be invited. And now he tried to find a way out of his promise to the Lord. But Miller had always been a man of his word. Whatever he said, he would do. He finally promised the Lord that if He would sustain him, he would go. And so the man who went into the maple grove a farmer came out a preacher in the making.

The following day at Dresden, New York, 16 miles from his home, William Miller preached his first sermon on the Second Advent. The people asked him to stay the following week and give lectures every day. A revival began, and of the 13 families who attended, all but two persons were reported to have been converted. Arriving home again, he found a letter from a pastor in a neighboring town inviting him to speak in his church. From that time on invitations began to pour in, and with hardly a pause he continued in the proclamation of Christ's soon coming (*ibid.*, pp. 98, 99).

He spent the rest of his life "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, KJV).

Discussion: The lessons learned from this story can be applied when working with non-Christians, e.g., how did believers connect with Miller, the deist? What lifelong

habits was the Holy Spirit able to use in Miller's conversion? What human characteristics of believers would have attracted or repelled Miller, the deist?

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