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*Report of a Meeting
Between a Group of*

**"Shepherd's Rod" Leaders
and a Group of
General Conference Ministers**

July 27 - August 7, 1959

Takoma Park, Washington 12, D.C.

The Research Committee of the
GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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Introduction

Before the middle of 1959 it was widely known that the Shepherd's Rod group was facing a critical and embarrassing situation as a result of their prophetic interpretations that had resulted in time-setting. Increasing internal divisions resulting in offshoots from the Rod movement were apparent from the literature issued by these factions.

A considerable number of followers of Shepherd's Rod teachings had gathered at their Mt. Carmel headquarters near Waco, Texas, in anticipation of certain predicted events (detailed later in this report), such as the ejection of the Jews from Palestine, and the beginning of the establishment of an intermediate kingdom of God in the Holy Land. When these predicted events did not take place, deep disappointment and disillusionment came to many sincere hearts among that mistaken people. Some of them returned to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Others, who did not leave the Rod movement then, were naturally perplexed, and many were disposed to discuss their problems with Seventh-day Adventist leaders under the circumstances related below. In order to show how this discussion came about let us first note some details of the time-setting by the Shepherd's Rod leaders.

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I. The Background of Time-setting

In their official organ, *The Symbolic Code*, vol. 11, no. 1 (November, 1955), the leaders of the Shepherd's Rod party at Waco, Texas, announced that "during the last months of his life" V. T. Houteff, whom they regard as having had the gift of prophecy, "expressed the definite conviction that the time prophecy of Revelation 11:2-12 and Daniel 12:6, 7 could have met their fulfillment only *in type* from 538 A.D. to 1798 A.D. and that they have a latter-day fulfillment."—Page 3.

On the basis of that theory, the Shepherd's Rod leaders then announced "that we have already entered the period of forty-two months."—*Ibid.*, p. 13. They affirmed also "that the fulfillment of the slaughter of Ezekiel 9 is immediately preceded by the forty-two months (Rev. 11:2) or 1260 days (Rev. 11:3) or 'time, times and an half' (Dan. 12:7)."—*Ibid.*, p. 12. They stated likewise "that this period terminates with the slaughter of Ezekiel 9 (an act of God), war brought by Christendom against the two witnesses (an act of man), and a 3½-day period when the two witnesses are dead after which they rise in great exaltation by divine interposition."—*Ibid.*, p. 13.

After cherishing that theory for three years, the Shepherd's Rod leaders issued under date of February 17, 1959, and over the signatures of the nine members of the executive council of the Davidian (or Shepherd's Rod) association, an open letter addressed to the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, in which the following sensational announcement was made:

"In November of 1955 this association in its official organ, *The Symbolic Code*, issued its stand on the prophecy of Revelation 11:1-13, which concerns the 42 months that the Gentiles tread the Holy City, and the 1260 days the two witnesses prophesy with power (authority) in sackcloth. . . . In the November, 1955, *Symbolic Code* we published our stand that we were then living in this

time period. Today we believe we are approaching the end of it. In fact, we believe it will end sometime this spring."—*The Symbolic Code*, vol. 14, no. 6 (special edition issued early in 1959), pp. 5, 6.

The official announcement added:

"By this letter we make it known to you that we are now leaving this entire matter with the Lord to demonstrate whether He is leading in the work at Mt. Carmel, or whether He is leading you to stop your ears to the message which Mt. Carmel has put forth in her official publications. . . . If the message and the work of the Shepherd's Rod is God's truth as we believe it to be, the 1260 days of Revelation 11 as *The Symbolic Codes* have explained, will end sometime this spring. Then will follow the war that will kill the two witnesses. Those whom the witnesses had tormented will gloat over this. But after 3½ days the two witnesses will be exalted. At the same time will come the earthquake (shaking) in which will be slain all the hypocrites in God's part of Christendom—the Adventist church."—*Ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.

That same publication carried also an "Important Announcement," the first paragraph of which reads:

"Mt. Carmel hereby serves notice that she now leaves the prophecy of Revelation 11 as the *Code* has explained it, as the test by which the Lord will demonstrate whom He is leading."—*Ibid.*, p. 29.

Thus the Shepherd's Rod leaders, in their official publications, staked the validity of their system of prophetic interpretation and the integrity of their cause on the outcome of their time-setting for the spring of 1959.

Soon afterward, *The Symbolic Code*, vol. 14, no. 8 (second special edition issued early in 1959), made this statement:

"In the first special edition of *The Symbolic Code* (vol. 14, no. 6), the General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventists issued its stand on the 1260-day time prophecy of Revelation 11. Notice was also given that the fulfillment of the events of verses 7 to 13 which follow the 1260 days, as explained in the *Code*, would be the means by which the Lord will demonstrate that He is leading this association in its teachings and work. The purpose of this article is to define just what the Lord's demonstration will consist of."

—Page 3.

They then predicted that:

"At the conclusion sometime this spring of the 1260 days' prophesying by the two witnesses, war is to be brought against them. The two witnesses are understood to be God's church and the Old and New Testament Scriptures."—*Ibid.*, p. 4.

And in comment on verse 13 of Revelation 11, they said: "The foregoing slaying in the tenth part of the city is the fulfillment of the slaughter of Ezekiel 9 in the Lord's part of the city."—*Ibid.*

In reference to the power represented by the leopardlike beast of Revelation 13:1-10, the Shepherd's Rod leaders announced:

"It is this evil system that the two-horned beast (the United States) will cause those who dwell in his territory to worship. Thus will the same Satanic order that is to originate in western Europe be extended to this country. It is the extension of this dragon-inspired despotic system to the United States that will create controversy between the followers of Christ and the followers of the evil one in this land, and that will bring the war against the two witnesses at the end of the 1260 days of Revelation 11. This we confidently expect to happen sometime this spring. Thus immediately following these 1260 days of Revelation 11 the leopard-like beast of Revelation 13 will commence his last 42 months' existence. At the end of the 42 months the beast will no more continue."—*Ibid.*, p. 7.

Again:

"Thus at the end of the 1260 days of Revelation 11 when the 42 months of Revelation 13 begin, western Europe is to organize herself under a system sponsored by the great adversary, that is to astound the world. For this Satanic system will come suddenly, unexpectedly.

"With the end of the 1260 days of Revelation 11 coming this spring and the 42 months of Revelation 13 then beginning, students of prophecy should expect this event to develop in western Europe and be adopted by the United States this spring."—*Ibid.*, p. 9.

A little later the Shepherd's Rod leadership summoned their followers everywhere to assemble at their new headquarters in Waco, Texas, by April 16, 1959, in expectancy of seeing "the things come to pass as prophesied."—*The Symbolic Code*, vol. 14, no. 9 (third special edition issued early in 1959), pp. 2, 3.

Time Set for April 22, 1959

In the meantime April 22, 1959, was definitely set as the exact date for the 1260 days of Revelation 11:3 to end, and a press release prepared at their Mt. Carmel headquarters, was issued under the title "What Davidians Are Expecting After April 22." In it they said among other things:

"We believe also that sometime this spring God will in a direct and terrible judgment as shown in Isaiah 66:15-20 and Ezekiel the ninth chapter, remove all the hypocrites from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and also from among the Davidians."

They further stated:

"We expect that sometime this spring God will commence to set up His peaceful kingdom in the Holy Land."

Also:

"We believe that the Holy Land will be prepared for the setting up of God's kingdom by the war of Zechariah 14."

And finally:

"The April 22 date was calculated from the symbolic prophecy of the 1260 literal days of Revelation 11:3-6. Those days commenced November 9, 1955, and will end April 22, 1959. The events of verses 7 to 13 are to be fulfilled after April 22."

(Copies of this complete document are available on request.)

The Shepherd's Rod leaders personally informed us later, in reply to our inquiry, that they arbitrarily chose November 9, 1955, as the commencement of the 1260 days of Revelation 11, because it was on that date that the "light" on the subject was first proclaimed among them.

Both eye-witness and published reports indicate that between 800 and 1,000 persons were present at the Shepherd's Rod tabernacle near Waco, Texas, during the period from April 16 to 22, 1959. This figure includes children of their own followers, followers and leaders of offshoots from the Shepherd's Rod party, and some other people who went there out of curiosity or for other personal reasons.

April 22 came and went without the Lord's doing the things which the Shepherd's Rod leaders had predicted He would do as a demonstration that He was leading in their teachings and work. It was a stunning disappointment for many of their adherents. Special services were held daily at the Shepherd's Rod headquarters

thereafter in hope that God would yet demonstrate in some signal way that He was guiding them. As the weeks passed and the people encamped there reflected upon this sad experience, it became quite obvious that they must do something soon. Some of them told us that they were penniless. Many had sold their homes, their businesses, and their property before coming to Waco, for they expected that their next move would be to the Promised Land where the Davidic kingdom was supposed to be set up soon. One after another they began to leave Waco, embarrassed with disappointment, to find work and to start life over again.

II. The Meetings in Waco, Texas

On June 20, 1959, Elder A. V. Olson preached at the Seventh-day Adventist church in Waco, Texas. On the following day two Shepherd's Rod leaders visited him and requested that he meet with their executive council. As a result of this meeting the council invited him to speak to their people in their new tabernacle. Arrangements were made for him, assisted by Elder R. L. Winders, the local Seventh-day Adventist minister, to speak each evening and on Sabbath afternoon at the Mr. Carmel tabernacle. The meetings began on June 24 and continued to July 7, and were devoted primarily to answering questions submitted in writing by anybody present who cared to do so. They were well attended by the 600 or more people still encamped there. The interest grew from the start, and so did the number of queries. Hence the Texas Conference arranged for Elder R. P. Montgomery, of Cleburne, Texas, to help Elders Olson and Winders. The General Conference sent R. L. Odom from Washington, D.C., for the same purpose. The Shepherd's Rod leaders were attentive, kind, and congenial, and our ministers were given full freedom in presenting their answers to the questions submitted. Some adherents of the Shepherd's Rod decided to return to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Others indicated they were seriously thinking of taking the same step.

At the close of the last meeting, on July 7, Mrs. Florence Houteff—principal leader of the Shepherd's Rod party—read in public a resolution voted by her followers, in which they expressed appreciation to our ministers for having held those meetings for their

benefit. In that resolution they respectfully petitioned the General Conference to appoint a special committee of ministers to meet with an equal number of Shepherd's Rod representatives to "freely discuss our differences," saying, "It is out of our desire to comply with the Spirit of Prophecy instruction regarding these matters that we request this hearing be granted." The full text of this resolution was included in an official letter sent out by Mrs. V. T. Houteff to her followers on July 14, 1959.

III. The Meetings in Takoma Park, Maryland

The request of the Shepherd's Rod leaders was presented by Elder Olson to the General Conference officers for consideration. Inasmuch as the request had come from the Shepherd's Rod leaders themselves, and they had expressed a desire for help, the appointment of a special committee was made for the purpose. It consisted of Elders W. E. Murray, A. V. Olson, H. W. Lowe, L. C. Evans, A. C. Fearing, D. E. Neufeld, and R. L. Odom. The Shepherd's Rod delegation was made up of Mrs. V. T. Houteff, T. O. Hermanson, H. G. Warden, N. W. Wolffe, J. D. Springer, Dudley Goff, and Harmon Springer. The two groups met around the table in one of the offices at 1711 Cedar Street, in Takoma Park, Maryland, where their discussions were conducted privately and in quiet. Neither tape recordings nor verbatim shorthand records were taken. However, Mrs. Houteff and H. W. Lowe made copious shorthand notes. W. E. Murray presided as chairman, and H. W. Lowe served as secretary. The meetings began on Monday afternoon of July 27, consisted of nineteen sessions of approximately two hours each, and ended on Friday afternoon of August 7. The first session of each day was opened with a short devotional study by either Elder Murray or Elder Olson, and followed with prayer by persons designated from each group.

In the first part of the first session the 22 articles of Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists as stated in the *Year Book* were read. The Shepherd's Rod delegates expressed approval of all of them. Hence it was unanimously agreed that the Shepherd's Rod representatives should proceed at once to present their views on the principal matters wherein there is disagreement between them

and Seventh-day Adventists. During the first ten sessions they presented their teachings concerning the Davidic kingdom, which they expect to be set up in Palestine before Christ comes; the way in which that kingdom would be set up; the harvest of the wheat and the tares; the sealing work and the role of the 144,000 in the closing work of the church; the slaughter of Ezekiel 9 and the purification of the church; the claim that the spirit of prophecy was revived in 1929 in the work of V. T. Houteff; the prophecy of Revelation 11 and the time-setting based thereon for April 22, 1959; the prophecy of Ezekiel 4:1-6 and the time-setting based thereon; and the 430 years from the call of Abraham to the Exodus and the time-setting based thereon.

During the next six sessions the Seventh-day Adventist group presented a review of each of the doctrines set forth by the Shepherd's Rod spokesman pointing out any error found in them, and setting forth the correct view when this was necessary.

The meetings were conducted in a reverent and respectful manner as is becoming to Christians, and without heated argument or unkind remarks from either side. The writings of Ellen G. White were used by either side as desired in support of Scripture interpretations presented, for at the outset the representatives of the Shepherd's Rod party expressed themselves as wholeheartedly accepting the writings of Mrs. White as the gift of prophecy for God's people in the last days.

As the seventeenth session opened, the Shepherd's Rod representatives, instead of attempting a rebuttal of the reasoning presented by our brethren in their reviews of the Rod's doctrines, resorted to steps which would have avoided the vital points at issue in the previous discussions. They presented a motion that we turn our attention to a new issue, namely, that their system of Bible interpretation be discussed *without any reference to or use of the writings of Mrs. White*. The meeting then adjourned for the Seventh-day Adventist ministers to consider the matter. Strange as it may seem, we had already gone through sixteen sessions of discussion without anyone's raising any objections to the use of the Spirit of Prophecy writings by either side. Furthermore, the Rod representatives had freely used those writings whenever they deemed it worth while in support of their presentation of their views.

At the next session the Shepherd's Rod group were informed

that the motion to eliminate the use of Mrs. White's writings in interpretation of the prophecies certainly was not consistent with the Shepherd's Rod policy and practice of the past thirty years. V. T. Houteff, himself the chief exponent of Shepherd's Rod teachings, and whose expositions of the Bible prophecies the Shepherd's Rod party had followed constantly as divinely inspired light, started his literary endeavors by saying, in the "Introduction" to his very first book, *The Shepherd's Rod*, vol. 1 (published 1930):

"This publication contains only one main subject with a double lesson; namely, the 144,000, and a call for reformation. . . . The wonderful light between its pages shines upon a larger number of scriptures which we have had no understanding of heretofore. *The interpretation of these scriptures is supported entirely by the writings of Sr. E. G. White, that is termed the Spirit of prophecy.*"—Page 11. (Italics supplied.)

Not only did Mr. Houteff freely use Mrs. E. G. White's writings to support his teachings as is evident in his books and pamphlets, but the other Rod leaders through the past thirty years have spared no pains in trying to bolster their teachings by the use of her writings. Mr. Houteff, whom they regard as the inspired spokesman and founder of the Shepherd's Rod party, boasted:

"Our being, as you know, unswerving adherents of the Bible and of Sister White's writings, full-fledged S.D.A.'s, we are sure that both the Bible and Sister White's writings support the 'Rod' one hundred per cent."—*The Symbolic Code*, vol. 7, nos. 7-12, p. 5 (July-December, 1941).

IV. Shepherd's Rod Leaders Question Mrs. White's Writings

It appeared now that the representatives of the Shepherd's Rod, after our scrutinizing examination of their teachings, had become convinced that Mr. Houteff's views were not "one hundred per cent" supported by "both the Bible and Sister White's writings." Their statement of motion at the seventeenth session of discussion with them, to eliminate the use of Mrs. White's writings from interpretation of the prophecies of the Bible, seemed to be a repudiation

of the claims which the supposedly inspired founder of their party had made.

We call attention to the fact that the Shepherd's Rod spokesman, in presenting their interpretation of Revelation 11 in our ninth session, declared that "there is good reason to doubt that Mrs. White herself originated the teaching of Revelation 11 as it is given in 'Great Controversy.'"—*The Shepherd's Rod, Report and Analysis of the General Conference Committee's Closed Hearing of the Shepherd's Rod* (Waco, Texas, 1959), p. 25.

Mrs. White's chapter in *The Great Controversy* (pages 265-288) substantially represents her views on Revelation 11 as originally appeared in her book *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 4, pages 188-193, first published in 1884. Mrs. White died July 16, 1915. Thus her views on Revelation 11 remained unchanged for thirty-one years after their first publication. Whether others had previously held similar views or not, we dare not question the fact that she was shown by the Lord that the views she should set forth in *The Great Controversy* were truth for this time, and that it was her duty to make it known to others.

V. The Question of Prophetic Interpretation

It was pointed out to the representatives of the Shepherd's Rod that the validity of their method of interpretation of the prophecies of the Bible had been put to a decisive test by them in the spring of 1959, and that the results of that demonstration speak for themselves. God and time had proved that their interpretation of the prophecies was not correct. The meeting adjourned for the Shepherd's Rod representatives to reflect on our reply.

In the nineteenth session the Shepherd's Rod representatives reiterated their desire to eliminate the writings of Mrs. White from further discussion with them. This decision on their part brought the discussions to an end.

Earnest appeals were made to the Shepherd's Rod representatives to give up their mistaken opinions and return to the church that God is using to carry His last message of mercy to a perishing world. After thirty years of persistent effort to hinder the church, the Shepherd's Rod party had ignored the repeated warnings in

Mrs. White's writings against time-setting and brought embarrassment to themselves and to their followers by their time-setting of April 22, 1959. We urged them to repudiate their blunder of time-setting, or else it would be a reproach to them during the rest of their existence as an offshoot group. An earnest invitation was extended to them to turn from their course and come back to the church to unite with us in finishing her task for Christ and humanity.

Thus our meeting ended, but not without a prayer for them, and for the cause that we love and which is advancing to ultimate triumph.

The Shepherd's Rod party has split into several factions, each laboring to lure to itself the followers of the others, while all of them work to obstruct and disparage the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to draw away any of its members who are not rooted and grounded in the faith. Leaders of some offshoots from the Shepherd's Rod claim to have the gift of the spirit of prophecy and to be divinely led of God. More time-setting has been in vogue among some of them.

VI. Conclusion

In summary, the Shepherd's Rod leaders have committed a major blunder by their time-setting for April 22, 1959. They have shown a marked reluctance to discuss it, because of the embarrassment brought to them by the worldwide publicity given to it. Hence, the General Conference representatives could not allow this subject to be ignored, because the church needs to be warned against time-setting.

When the subject of their time-setting was reviewed, the Shepherd's Rod leaders made the rejoinder that William Miller and his followers had made a mistake in their time-setting in 1844 and were sorely disappointed as a result of it. The answer to this was that the Millerites had a sound Biblical and historical basis for reckoning that the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 would end in 1844. "The preaching of a definite time for the judgment, in the giving of the first message, was ordered of God. The computation of the prophetic periods on which that message was based, placing the close of the 2300 days in the autumn of 1844, stands without im-

peachment."—ELLEN G. WHITE, *The Great Controversy*, p. 457.

The mistake of the Millerites was in predicting that Christ would come back to earth in glory in 1844. That is, their error was in regard to the event and not to the time. At any rate, time-setting as "ordered of God" was to end with 1844, for the angel of prophecy declared in that connection, "that there should be time no longer" (Rev. 10:6).

"This time, which the angel declares with a solemn oath, is not the end of this world's history, neither of probationary time, but of prophetic time, which should precede the advent of our Lord. That is, the people will not have another message upon definite time. After this period of time, reaching from 1842 to 1844, there can be no definite tracing of the prophetic time. The longest reckoning reaches to the autumn of 1844."—Ellen G. White, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 971, col. 2.

As early as 1851, Sabbathkeeping Adventists were told:

"Time has not been a test since 1844, and it will never again be a test. The Lord has shown me that the message of the third angel must go, and be proclaimed to the scattered children of the Lord, but it must not be hung on time. I saw that some were getting a false excitement, arising from preaching time; but the third angel's message is stronger than time can be. I saw that this message can stand on its own foundation and needs not time to strengthen it; and that it will go in mighty power, and do its work, and will be cut short in righteousness."—ELLEN G. WHITE, *Early Writings*, p. 75.

Therefore, the General Conference representatives emphasized the need of heeding this timely warning:

"Let all our brethren and sisters beware of anyone who would set a time for the Lord to fulfill His word in regard to His coming, or in regard to any other promise He has made of special significance."—ELLEN G. WHITE, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 55.

Another revealing tendency made by the Shepherd's Rod leaders was committed in their questioning the integrity of Mrs. White and her book *The Great Controversy*, and in their formal motion to eliminate the use of her writings in interpreting the prophecies of the Bible. In response, the Seventh-day Adventist representatives sounded the warning:

"Let none seek to tear away the foundations of our faith—the

foundations that were laid at the beginning of our work by prayerful study of the word and by revelation."—ELLEN G. WHITE, *Gospel Workers*, p. 307; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 297.

"The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' (Prov. 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony. . . .

"There will be a hatred kindled against the testimonies which is satanic. The workings of Satan will be to unsettle the faith of the churches in them, for this reason: Satan cannot have so clear a track to bring in his deceptions and bind up souls in his delusions if the warnings and reproofs and counsels of the Spirit of God are heeded."—ELLEN G. WHITE, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 48.

It is sad to see men misuse the Scriptures and Mrs. White's writings in order to give a semblance of support to some fanciful prophetic interpretation accompanied by time-setting, and use them to produce division and strife where there should be unity and whole-hearted devotion to the proclamation of the three angels' messages: "The unity of the church is the convincing evidence that God has sent Jesus into the world as its Redeemer."—ELLEN G. WHITE, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 620.

We have done our best to help the Shepherd's Rod leaders and their followers. We rejoice that some have returned to the church, and we shall continue to pray that many more may acknowledge their mistakes and return to the fold before it is too late. We are as willing as ever to help them, and we trust that our brethren in the field will seek by earnest and wise efforts to reclaim as many of them as possible.

NOTE: For further information on the Shepherd's Rod see *History and Teachings of the Shepherd's Rod*, obtainable from your Book and Bible House, price 25c.