

Old Paths

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:16

The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant. Psalm 25:14

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For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10, 11)



The Non-Immortality of the Wicked (Part 1)

By Allen Stump

Life Only in Christ

No corporate personality has captured the public’s eye the last few years like Steve Jobs. A genius of innovation, he co-founded Apple and made everyday household words out of products such as the iPod, iPad, and iPhone. Shortly before Steve Jobs died this year, he told his biographer, Walter Isaacson, “Sometimes I believe in God, sometimes I don’t. I think it’s 50–50 maybe.” Jobs then said, “But ever since I’ve had cancer, I’ve been thinking about it more. And I find myself believing a bit more. I kind of—maybe it’s cause I want to believe in an afterlife. That when you die, it doesn’t just all disappear. The wisdom you’ve accumulated. Somehow it lives on.”

Jobs last words, as he died, are said to have been, “Oh, wow; oh, wow; oh, wow.” What did he mean? Is there life after death, and is it for everyone? Is there an immortal aspect to the spirit or soul of man that continues after death? If so, what would make that soul immortal or from what would it find energy or life? Thankfully the Bible has the answers. The last two *Clearly Comprehend* articles have studied the state of man in death, but those studies did not discuss the mortality or immortality of man. In this study we will open the Bible to understand this important concept, for if man is immortal and is conscious after death, then perhaps there is communication between the dead and the living. If this were so, could we trust those communications to be in our best interests? Thankfully the Bible also has the answer to these issues.

First of all the Bible condemns any attempts to communication with the dead. God instructed the children of Israel to allow no necromancers to be among them (Deuteronomy 18:11). Necromancers claimed to be able to communicate with the dead and were grouped with charmers, consultants with familiar spirits (similar to a necromancer), and wizards. God declared that these people were to be stoned to death for their evil (Leviticus 20:27).

Secondly, let us understand the nature of man. The Bible absolutely states that man, in contrast to God, is mortal. “Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker” (Job 4:17)? Man is called mortal. The Bible tells us, though, that God is immortal:

That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his [Christ’s] times he [Christ] shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. (1 Timothy 6:14–16)

Here we see that only God the Father hath immortality. Immortal means not subject to death. The Bible says that when Jesus returns he will bestow immortality upon the saints: “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54). Since the righteous will, one day, have immortality, the immortality that Paul speaks of in First Timothy must be understood in an absolute sense. This kind of non-conditional immortality belongs only to God and is not something that the saints or the wicked have before the coming of Jesus. A person does not have within himself immortality. God has this life, though, and the Bible says that he shared this life with his Son. Jesus declared:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall

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hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. (John 5:25, 26)

Man can have immortality only from Christ, and Christ received it from his Father.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:11–13)

The Scripture says that if we have Christ, we have life and if we do not have Christ, we do not have life. It then calls this life “eternal life.” The Bible says “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Here death is contrasted with eternal life. They are opposites. Eternal life is life without end, but death is the absence of life. James 1:15 also affirms that sin brings “death.” Ezekiel 18:20 says that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

In the beginning God created humanity. Humanity has not always existed, nor is humanity a self-existing entity. If man is to have life, he must have it from God. In the greatest of all Bible texts, Jesus said:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Jesus said that those who believe, or have faith, shall have everlasting life. This is set in contrast to those who do not believe. They shall perish. The Greek word translated *perish* is *apoletai* (αποληται) is taken from the Greek word *apollumi* and means to perish or to cause destruction. Some other places it is found are:

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to **destroy** him. (Matthew 2:13)

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to **destroy** both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise **perish**. (Luke 13:3; also verse 5)

They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and **destroyed** them all. (Luke 17:27)

But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and **destroyed** them all. (Luke 17:29)

And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never **perish**, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. (John 10:28)

Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation **perish** not. (John 11:50)

For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it **perisheth**: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. (James 1:11)

Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, **perished**. (2 Peter 3:6)

In all of these verses, we see nothing to indicate that the word *perish* means to live forever. Most professed Christians believe in the doctrine of an eternally-burning hell, where all sinners who do not accept Christ live forever in a place called hell, with flames, torment, and eternal pain and suffering. The Bible surely does mention a place called hell, and we shall examine it shortly, but it is clear that the wicked do not have eternal life. Only the righteous have this life from God. The Bible consistently contrasts eternal life for the righteous with death, destruction, and a perishing for the wicked.

“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

First John 3:15 states that “no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” As we shall see the Bible is clear that there is a lake of fire called hell and that the wicked will, at last, be cast into it: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). But this lake of fire does not burn eternally. The wicked will finally perish. The Bible does not teach that the wicked have eternal life in a fiery hell. Such a life might be a miserable life, but it would be an eternal life.

Did the people in Sodom or those in the world during the time of the flood continue to live after judgment came? No, not at all. In fact, Jesus uses these examples to show that the wicked will finally perish. (See Luke 17:26–37.)

The good news is that we need not perish, if we believe in Jesus. Jesus has “brought life and immortality to light *through the gospel*” (2 Timothy 1:10). There is no immortality outside the gospel!

Paul, in writing to the Romans, notes that God “will render to every man according to his deeds: “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life” (Romans 2:6, 7). If humanity were naturally immortal, why would man be told to seek after immortality? No, immortality can come only through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Implications against the Character of God

The implications of an eternally-burning hell against the character of God are terrible. We have been told:

After the Fall, Satan bade his angels make a special effort to inculcate the belief in man's natural immortality; and having induced the people to receive this error, they were to lead them on to conclude that the sinner would live in eternal misery. Now the prince of darkness, working through his agents, represents God as a revengeful tyrant, declaring that He plunges into hell all those who do not please Him, and causes them ever to feel His wrath; and that while they suffer unutterable anguish and writhe in the eternal flames, their Creator looks down upon them with satisfaction. (*The Great Controversy*, p. 534)

What would be gained to God should we admit that He delights in witnessing unceasing tortures; that He is regaled with the groans and shrieks and imprecations of the suffering creatures whom He holds in the flames of hell? Can these horrid sounds be music in the ear of Infinite Love? It is urged that the infliction of endless misery upon the wicked would show God's hatred of sin as an evil which is ruinous to the peace and order of the universe. Oh, dreadful blasphemy! As if God's hatred of sin is the reason why it is perpetuated. For, according to the teachings of these theologians, continued torture without hope of mercy maddens its wretched victims, and as they pour out their rage in curses and blasphemy, they are forever augmenting their load of guilt. God's glory is not enhanced by thus perpetuating continually increasing sin through ceaseless ages.

It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels.

The theory of eternal torment is one of the false doctrines that constitute the wine of the abomination of Babylon, of which she makes all nations drink. Revelation 14:8; 17:2. That ministers of Christ should have accepted this heresy and proclaimed it from the sacred desk is indeed a mystery. They received it from Rome, as they received the false sabbath. (*Ibid.*, p. 536)

An eternally-burning hell demands that God sustains the wicked for all eternity, giving them life so they can suffer. This is not quarantining a group of naturally immortal beings in a place away from joy and happiness. Satan is the

originator of such a devilish teaching, and his personal representative on earth is his great helper in teaching this abominable doctrine.

On December 19, 1513, Pope Leo X issued the bull *Apostolici regiminis*, declaring: "We do condemn and reprobate all who assert that the intelligent soul is mortal." This was the same pope who authorized the mass sale of indulgences and later issued the bull demanding Martin Luther to retract or be excommunicated. In the very year that Luther burned the pope's bull excommunicating him, he called this declaration of Pope Leo X on the immortal soul as among "those monstrous opinions to be found in the Roman dunghill of decretals" (*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 570), also saying "that the soul is immortal: and all these endless monstrosities in the Roman dunghill of decretals" (*Ibid.*).



Martin Luther



Leo X

Martin Luther was not the only reformer who spoke out against the papal doctrine of the immortal soul. William Tyndale, one of the greatest Christians since the time of the apostles, agreed with Luther that the soul was not naturally immortal. In 1530 William Tyndale replied to Sir Thomas More of England, who had referred to Tyndale and Luther as a part of a "pestilential sect" because they taught that "all souls lie and sleep till doomsday" and said:

And ye, in putting them in heaven, hell and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection. ... And again, if the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good case as the angels be? And then what cause is there of the resurrection. (*An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, Parkers' 1850 reprint, bk. 4, pp. 180, 181; obtained from Google digital books)



William Tyndale

Jonathan Edwards is perhaps best remembered for being a preacher from the Great Awakening period of America (1730–1755). He was also the president of Princeton

University. Edwards was a manuscript preacher, so we know the exact content of his sermons. His best remembered sermon was preached July 8, 1741, at Enfield, Connecticut. It was entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” In that sermon Edwards said:



Jonathan Edwards

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.

As the proverb states, *with friends like these, who needs enemies?* Thankfully God is infinitely more good than Edwards ever imagined.

(To be continued)



Pastor Allen’s Sweet Potato Patties

In many cultures sweet potatoes appear in the diets of those who enjoy longevity and are one of the most nutritious foods in the world. Since they are in season this time of year, we thought you might enjoy this delicious recipe which quickly becomes a favorite for most people who try it.

- ✦ 4 medium well-baked or cooked sweet potatoes
- ✦ 1 medium to large sweet onion, finely chopped
- ✦ ½ cup whole wheat flour
- ✦ 1 tablespoon egg replacer
- ✦ ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ✦ ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ✦ 1 tablespoon non-MSG, chicken-style seasoning or other seasoning of your choice

Peel and mash the sweet potatoes in a mixing bowl, adding the other ingredients until mixed well. On a baking sheet sprayed with non-stick spray, spoon out ¼ cup of patty mixture and spread out to about 3 inches in diameter. (You can vary the size, according to your need.) Bake at 350° F for about 20 minutes or until brown on the bottom, then flip and bake for another 15 minutes, again until brown. Serve with a sprig of parsley. You and your family will be glad you tried these. No need for the traditional brown sugar and butter to make sweet potatoes a hit with the family! ✍

Youth’s Corner

Keep the Sabbath Holy

Those who wish to be blest and approved of the Lord in this world, and who expect to finally be saved, and have right to the tree of life, must keep the Sabbath holy. They should pray daily for grace and wisdom to keep from polluting it in any way. Isaiah says: “Every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain” [Isaiah] Chapter 56: 6, 7.

Dear children, are you as careful as you should be in keeping the Sabbath? You have something to do besides laying aside your work and amusements on that day. If you, on that day, lay plans of what you will do when the Sabbath is past, or talk of your work, amusements and clothes, you pollute the Sabbath. The Prophet has in another chapter told us how to keep the Sabbath from polluting it, and nothing short of doing as he has pointed out will be keeping the Sabbath holy. He says:

“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, [that is, from treading it down or breaking it] from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words . . .” (Isaiah 58:13)

When you are speaking of your hope in God, of Jesus and of his soon coming, and of the beauties of the New Earth, you are not speaking your own words. Of these things you may freely speak on the Sabbath. On six days you may talk of business matters, and lay plans that are necessary; but the Sabbath is holy time, and all worldly thoughts must, on that day, be dismissed from the mind. The blessing of God will then rest upon you, and you will have the sweet consolations of his Spirit, and you will also have confidence when you approach the throne of grace. (Ellen G. White, *The Youth’s Instructor*, February 1, 1853) ✍

Prayer Requests

We thank you for your prayers for God’s work around the world. Brother Aland Ashton in Peru still suffers with medical issues, and we ask that you uplift him and his family in prayer. Brother Kevin Dubbs, Sister Anne Ford’s son, continues to experience health issues, and we ask for your prayers that these will soon resolve. Pastor Stump will be traveling to the Dominican Republic and to Europe in the next few months, and we also ask for your prayers as these meetings are planned.

The Church, Part 2

Dietitian and nutritionist, Jeff Novick, tells a story of grocery shopping with his young daughter. Jeff has been eating a plant-based diet for many years, and as he and his daughter were checking out their fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, the lady at the register asked them, “Are you having a salad-bar party?” To this Jeff’s daughter replied with great delight, “No, we’re vegetarians.” To that the store worker replied, “Great, so am I; I only eat chicken.” With laughter Jeff tells of his daughter’s quick reply, “Chicken is not a vegetable!”

Today, many people think that buildings are churches or that denominations are churches, but just as chicken is not a vegetable, buildings and denominations are not churches. In the first part of this series on the church, we learned that the term *church* means the called-out ones (Greek: *ekklesia*), specifically those whom are called out from the world to serve God and Christ. The question is not *what* is the church but *who* is the church. It is a *who* question, not a *what* question!

In the first part of this series, we learned that the church belongs to God and Christ and that it is built upon the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. We also saw that the church is the pillar and ground of truth, especially what we call the pillars of our faith. God gave to our people truth and gave it to them early, so that Ellen White could confidently declare:

It is as certain that we have the truth as that God lives; and Satan, with all his arts and hellish power, cannot change the truth of God into a lie. While the great adversary will try his utmost to make of none effect the word of God, truth must go forth as a lamp that burneth. (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 595; 1881; all emphasis supplied unless otherwise noted)

The pillar of the truth has as its focus the three angels’ messages, and it certainly cannot be composed of those who break the commandments of God because they lack the faith of Jesus. You see, the faith of Jesus says that you may overcome as he overcame! “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:21). The promise is to the overcomer!

We also saw last month that Babylon is composed of all the false and apostate religions of the world.

One important point that cannot be overemphasized is that physical birthright does not equal spiritual birthright. In the case of the Jews, they defied earth, and even heaven, to take their favored status away from them. But we saw that even the Jews, with their many great promises, could not remain God’s chosen people without obedience.

We then examined the shifting nature of doctrine within the Adventist Church since the death of Ellen White and that key fundamental positions of our message have been

changed, compromised, and even abandoned since the time of the prophetess.

Finally we learned an important lesson from the Reformation. It was when Martin Luther clearly understood that the pope was antichrist that he truly had a right to separate from Rome and finally be free in conscience, for you do not compromise with antichrist. One does not negotiate with antichrist because you cannot reform antichrist.

Principles of Interpretation:

As we begin this second segment of our study, we want to examine pertinent statements of Ellen White on the church as they relate to the topics of the General Conference and Babylon. First of all, what can we understand about Ellen White’s teaching concerning the General Conference being the voice of God, and secondly, what did she mean when she wrote about the church and Babylon?

We need honest answers that are acquired by an examination of all the evidence. To achieve a correct understanding, we also need to have the proper system of interpretation that God has been pleased to give us in the testimonies. You see like the Bible, the testimonies demand that we use proper study methods (hermeneutics) to arrive at the proper conclusions. For example, there are four major schools of hermeneutic thought on how to interpret the book of Revelation (idealist or allegorical, preterist, futurist, and historicist). All students use the same text of Revelation but come up with vastly different results, and this is because they begin with different mindsets and use different hermeneutics. So in our study of Ellen White’s writings, we need good methodology, and God has been pleased to help us in this matter. We have been told:

Soon every possible effort will be made to discount and pervert the truth of the testimonies of God’s Spirit. We must have in readiness the clear, straight messages that since 1846 have been coming to God’s people.

There will be those once united with us in the faith who will search for new, strange doctrines, for something odd and sensational to present to the people. They will bring in all conceivable fallacies, and will present them as coming from Mrs. White, that they may beguile souls. ...

Those who have treated the light that the Lord has given as a common thing will not be benefited by the instruction presented.

There are those who will *misinterpret the messages that God has given*, in accordance with their spiritual blindness.

Some will yield their faith, and will deny the truth of the messages, pointing to them as falsehoods.

Some will hold them up to ridicule, working against the light that God has been giving for years, and some who are weak in the faith will thus be led astray.

But others will be greatly helped by the messages. Though not personally addressed, they will be corrected,

and will be led to shun the evils specified.... The Spirit of the Lord will be in the instruction, and doubts existing in many minds will be swept away. *The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture.* Many will read with eagerness the messages reproving wrong, that they may learn what they may do to be saved. . . . Light will dawn upon the understanding, and the Spirit will make an impression on minds, as Bible truth is clearly and simply presented in the messages that since 1846 God has been sending His people. These messages are to find their place in hearts, and transformations will take place. (Letter 73, 1903, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 41, 42)

There are some important points to consider in this statement, and we dare not pass lightly over them. In this statement Ellen White notes that God had given his people “clear straight messages” since 1846. She further speaks of some that had been with them “in the faith [past tense] who will search [present tense] for new, strange doctrines, for something odd and sensational to present [present tense] to the people. They will bring in all conceivable fallacies . . .” This indicates that these people once believed the faith and have not left a position of physical proximity to the people of God, for they are able to present false theories to them.

Furthermore, they will claim that these theories come from Ellen White. Interestingly at the time she was writing, Dr. John H. Kellogg was teaching pantheism and claimed that his doctrine was derived from and supported by the testimonies!

Ellen White then states an important principle of interpretation. “*The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture.*” Just as we compare line upon line of scripture, we compare the various different testimonies together to arrive at the whole picture. Another important principle is also given in book one of *Selected Messages*. The lack of understanding this principle has caused multiple, mass misunderstandings. This principle states:

Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered. Nothing must be done untimely. Some matters must be withheld because some persons would make an improper use of the light given. Every jot and tittle is essential and must appear at an opportune time. (Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 57; written in 1911)

In addition to all the different testimonies, their context, or their time and place, are also to be considered. In other words the context of the situation and the history of the state of affairs *when* the testimony was given must be considered. However, one cannot do that without knowing the history around which the testimonies were given. No wonder we were told that “we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history” (*Life Sketches*, p. 196).

Ellen G. White and the General Conference as the Voice of God:

With an understanding of these principles, let us now look at a representative set of statements about the General Conference being the voice of God. We will supply a historical background to these statements in order to see the picture that is being presented. These statements will be in chronological order, beginning with the earliest statements.

I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. *But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered. . . . You did not seem to have a true sense of the power that God has given to His church in the voice of the General Conference. You thought that in responding to the call made to you by the General Conference you were submitting to the judgment and mind of one man. You accordingly manifested an independence, a set, willful spirit, which was all wrong. (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 3, p. 492; written in 1875)*

In 1875 Ellen White was writing to a Brother A. We do not know who he was except that he was a brother who had been in a position of leadership whom the General Conference called to a different post. He considered this as a call from man and not from God. However, in 1875, Ellen White informed him differently.

Ellen White emphatically stated that the General Conference was the highest authority that God had upon the earth and that no person’s independent or private judgment should be maintained when at variance with the General Conference. Ellen White told Brother A he was “all wrong” in his spirit of rebellion.

In March 1891, the General Conference asked Ellen White to visit Australia and labor there to help establish a school and better support the work in that part of the world. Ellen White had no burden to leave the United States at the age of 64. There was much writing to be done and “in anticipation of a concerted program of writing, she had purchased a lot in Petoskey, in a resort area on Lake Michigan, and was having a home built where she and her staff could work without the interruptions they would have to contend with in Battle Creek” (Arthur White, *The Australian Years*, p. 14). However, Ellen White obeyed the call of the General Conference stating:

At times before leaving America I thought that the Lord did not require me to go to a country so far away, at my age and when I was prostrated by overwork. But I followed the voice of the [General] Conference, as I have ever tried to do at times when I had no clear light myself. (Selected Messages, bk. 2, p. 239; written July 10, 1892)

Thus we see from 1875 to at least 1892, Ellen White considered the voice of the General Conference to be the voice

of God. This timing is critical to know not only to understand the current topic of the authority of the General Conference, but also to understand the issue of the church and its relationship to Babylon.

However, events transpired between 1893 and 1895 so that within three years of 1892, she could state:

Now, it has been Satan's determined purpose to eclipse the view of Jesus, and lead man to look to man, and trust to man, and be educated to expect help from man. *For years the church has been looking to man and expecting much from man, but not looking to Jesus, in whom our hopes of eternal life are centered.* Therefore God gave to His servants a testimony that presented the truth as it is in Jesus, which is the third angel's message in clear, distinct lines. (*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1338; May 1, 1895)

What had been transpiring between 1893 and 1895? With a further rejection of the organizational principles that had been shared in 1888 by Jones and Waggoner, the General Conference was becoming more centralized and taking upon itself authority with which it had not invested. Ellen White called it a "high-handed power" and stated that the brethren had been following in the track of Romanism:

The high-handed power that has been developed, as though position has made men gods, makes me afraid, and ought to cause fear. It is a curse wherever and by whomsoever it is exercised. This lording it over God's heritage will create such a disgust of man's jurisdiction that a state of insubordination will result. The people are learning that men in high positions of responsibility cannot be trusted to mold and fashion other men's mind and characters. The result will be a loss of confidence even in the management of faithful men. But the Lord will raise up laborers who realize their own nothingness without special help from God.

The spirit of domination is extending to the presidents of our conferences. If a man is sanguine of his own powers and seeks to exercise dominion over his brethren, feeling that he is invested with authority to make his will the ruling power, the best and only safe course is to remove him, lest great harm be done and he lose his own soul and imperil the souls of others. "All ye are brethren." This disposition to lord it over God's heritage will cause a reaction unless these men change their course. Those in authority should manifest the spirit of Christ. They should deal as He would deal with every case that requires attention. They should go weighted with the Holy Spirit. A man's position does not make him one jot or tittle greater in the sight of God; it is character alone that God values.

The goodness, mercy, and love of God were proclaimed by Christ to Moses. This was God's character. When men who profess to serve God ignore His parental character and depart from honor and righteousness in dealing with their fellowmen, *Satan exults, for he has inspired them*

with his attributes. They are following in the track of Romanism. (*Testimony to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 361, 362; September 1895)

I could not entrust the light God has given me to the publishing house at Battle Creek. I would not dare to do this. . . . *As for the voice of the General Conference, there is no voice from God through that body that is reliable.* (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 178, October 12, 1895)

No wonder Ellen White could not consider the voice of the General Conference as the voice of God at that time. The leaders of the denomination were using "high-handed power," were exhibiting a "spirit of domination," were inspired with the "attributes" of Satan, and were "following in the track of Romanism"!

The next year, 1896, she wrote:

Who can now feel sure that they are safe in respecting the voice of the General Conference Association? If the people in our churches understood the management of the men who walk in the light of the sparks of their own kindling, would they respect their decisions? I answer, No, not for a moment. I have been shown that the people at large do not know that *the heart of the work is being diseased and corrupted at Battle Creek.* (*1888 Materials*, pp. 1567, 1568; May 31, 1896)

The voice from Battle Creek, which has been [past tense] regarded as authority in counseling how the work should be done, *is no longer the voice of God.* (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, p. 185; July 1, 1896)

Why would she write this? What inspired history can we find of the condition of the movement in 1896 and even before?

Finite men should beware of seeking to control their fellowmen, taking the place assigned to the Holy Spirit. Let no men feel that it is their prerogative to give to the world what they suppose to be truth, and refuse that anything should be given contrary to their ideas. This is not their work. Many things will appear distinctly as truth which will not be acceptable to those who think their own interpretations of the Scripture always right. Most decided changes will have to be made in regard to ideas which some have accepted as without a flaw. *These men give evidence of fallibility in very many ways; they work upon principles which the word of God condemns. That which makes me feel to the very depths of my being, and makes me know that their works are not the works of God, is that they suppose they have authority to rule their fellowmen.* The Lord has given them no more right to rule others than He has given others to rule them. Those who assume the control of their fellowmen take into their finite hands a work that devolves upon God alone.

That men should keep alive the spirit which ran riot at Minneapolis is an offense to God. All heaven is indignant

continued on page 17

From Patmos, Messages for Seven Churches



Sardis—The City That Dwelt Carelessly

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Revelation 3:1–6)

Grand Geography

The Greek word which we translate *Sardis* is actually a plural word in the Greek language, and many believe it is so because there were two parts to the city of Sardis—the city on the acropolis and the city which spread out, as it grew, below the acropolis. Only a small city could have been built on the top of the acropolis, but when Sardis was first established a few centuries before Christ, cities tended to be small.

The acropolis of Sardis rises grandly 1,500 feet above the valley, with rock walls that were almost perpendicular, creating a natural citadel. The acropolis was

. . . inaccessible except at one point, namely the neck of land on the south, which still offers the only approach. On all other sides the rock walls were smooth, nearly perpendicular, and absolutely unscalable even without a defender . . . This small city on its lofty plateau was an ideal stronghold for a prince of primitive times. It was large enough for his needs; it could be easily fortified and defended at the only point where fortification or defense was needed. It was like a *watchtower* overlooking the whole of the great plain. (W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the*

Seven Churches, pp. 260, 261; all emphasis supplied unless otherwise noted)

And it was *watchfulness* that was lacking, not only spiritually which Jesus addressed in his letter to Sardis, but also physically, for this seemingly impregnable citadel was captured due to a confidence in its position and a failure to watch because of its perceived security.

The rock of the acropolis is a coarse and friable conglomerate, which melts away gradually under the influences of the atmosphere. It always preserves an almost perpendicular face, but at times an oblique crack develops in the rock wall, and permits a bold climber to work his way up. Such a weak point betrayed Sardis. . . . In the course of time a weakness had developed at one point. Through want of proper care in surveying and repairing the fortifications, this weakness had remained unobserved and unknown to the defenders. But the assailants, scrutinizing every inch of the walls of the great fortress in search of an opportunity, noticed it and availed themselves of it to climb up, one at a time. On such a lofty hill rising fully 1,400 feet above the plain, whose sides are, and must from their nature always have been, steep and straight and practically perpendicular, a child could guard against an army. Even a small stone dropped on the head of the most skillful mountain climber would inevitably hurl him down. An attack made by this path could succeed only if the assailants climbed up entirely unobserved, and they could not escape observation unless they made the attempt by night. Hence, even though this be unrecorded, a night attack must have been the way by which Cyrus [the same Cyrus of the Bible] entered Sardis. He came upon the great city “like a thief in the night.” (*Ibid.*, p. 264)

And this capture of Sardis due to its careless defense occurred not just once, but twice! The same thing happened when Antiochus the Great captured Sardis a few hundred years later. The great heavenly historian, our heavenly Father, knew all this and chose Sardis as an example of lazy watchfulness!

The acropolis today is diminished due to the weathering of the centuries, so much so that little remains of the upper plateau on which the city once stood. “In one place the top has been worn to an extremely narrow neck with steep descents of the usual kind on both sides, so that the visitor needs a fairly cool head and steady nerve to walk across it” (*Ibid.*, p. 280). Undoubtedly it was much more splendid thousands of years ago—a city with walls, towers, temples, houses and palaces. It was a royal stronghold that provided refuge during times of war for its citizens below. The rock walls were so straight that it seemed one could drop a stone from an outer building and have it land in the plain below, but the rock itself was deceptive. The closer one investigated, the more one could see its crumbling, poor quality—rock that was easily worn away with the advance of time and the attack of the elements.

Archeological Finds

Some lovely ancient structures have been excavated in the lower city of Sardis—a Roman theater and stadium, as well as an exceptionally large temple dedicated to Artemis which contained seventy-eight columns, each fifty-eight feet in height and two of which have remained standing, unbroken through the ages. The lower city also had a large bath-gymnasium complex built in the second century after Christ. This complex, covering five and a half acres in the center of the city, also housed the largest Jewish synagogue outside of Palestine. It should be remembered, however, that this synagogue was not in existence at the time John wrote to Sardis.

The Message Compared

Probably no one would say the sanctuary of the wandering Israelites was more beautiful than Solomon’s temple. What had been made with skins and cloth was later solidly constructed in marble and stone, though both were beautifully designed to meet the needs of the people—one transient, the other settled. Solomon’s temple, however, was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

Hundreds of years later King Herod envisioned a beautiful, new temple in Jerusalem. Ten thousand workmen, including one thousand priests, and one thousand wagons for transporting materials were utilized. It took eight years for the courtyard and porticoes to be completed and one and a half years for the temple proper. The finished size of the temple area was greatly enlarged from that of Zerubbabel’s temple and eventually covered nearly forty acres, large enough for thirty-two football fields! Within the temple and surrounding it on all sides were beautiful colonnaded porticoes—covered walkways—with double rows of Corinthian columns over thirty-seven feet high, each column cut from one block of stone, and inside the porticoes were chests for charitable contributions, likely the place where the widow cast in her two mites. The southern portico, known as Herod’s Basilica, was grander than the other porticos and contained a public hall which was rectangular in shape with

colonnaded aisles containing 162 Corinthian columns. The complex had magnificent gates, curved steps, and courtyards—it was *the pride* of the Jewish people—but no matter how grand and awe-inspiring the temple was in appearance, it was a hollow and dead structure, for it was not blessed with the visible tokens of the divine presence which had hallowed Solomon’s temple. It had “no manifestation of supernatural power to mark its dedication. No cloud of glory was seen to fill the newly erected sanctuary. No fire from heaven descended to consume the sacrifice upon its altar. The Shekinah no longer abode between the cherubim in the most holy place; the ark, the mercy seat, and the tables of the testimony were not to be found therein. No voice sounded from heaven to make known to the inquiring priest the will of Jehovah” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 24). For a short time, however, the glory of this temple did far exceed that of Solomon’s temple, for Jesus walked within its gates and “taught and healed in the sacred courts. In the presence of Christ, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory. But Israel had put from her the proffered Gift of heaven” (*Ibid.*).

In Matthew 23, we read that the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day were also dead within—whited sepulchres, full of dead men’s bones and of *all* uncleanness—but outwardly they appeared beautiful and righteous. They were guilty, however, of binding heavy burdens on men and of then offering no relief to undo them, of doing their works to be seen of men, of loving the best and chief seats at gatherings and of loving to be called Rabbi, of shutting up the kingdom of heaven to men, of making long prayers that were only pretenses, of devouring the possessions of widows, of being blind guides by their twisted doctrines, of faithfully tithing their spices but of omitting the weightier matters of the law, and of being full of extortion and excess. In spite of this these leaders seemed desirable by the people and worthy of honor.

Just as Jesus knew the works and the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees, he knew the works and heart of the leader of the Christian church in Sardis, and he proclaimed this leader to be dead, even though he appeared to be alive. What was missing in this leader? The same thing that was absent in Herod’s temple (except for a few brief years) and that was absent in the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees—the presence of God.

The Greek root of the word translated *name* in Revelation 3:1 is *onoma* (ὄνομα) and means, simply, the name by which a person or thing is called so as to distinguish him or it from any other object or concept. This is important to remember when we consider the remnant that remains in Sardis, for Adventism also has a *name* that distinguishes it from all other churches, but for now, let us accept that the leader in Sardis must have been productive of many apparently good works, so much so that he created an admirable name for himself, but a name that only covered an inner decay and stumor. This hypocrisy is so repugnant to Jesus that he had no



The eroded acropolis of Sardis

commendation to offer this leader. He did not leave him without hope, however, as he did the scribes and Pharisees and as he did Jerusalem when he said Jerusalem's house was left unto her desolate (Matthew 23:38), but he offered the leader of Sardis words of counsel. He advised him to do five things, the first of which was to be watchful.

The Greek root of the word translated *watchful* in Revelation 3:2 is *gregoreo* (γρηγορέω) and means to be awake or to give strict attention. Twice in Revelation is the admonishment given to be watchful and each time it is accompanied with the dire consequence of Jesus coming as thief if watchfulness is lacking—the first time in the message to the leader of Sardis and the second time in connection with the sixth of the seven last plagues. “Behold, I come as a thief. *Blessed is he that watcheth*, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15).

The next thing the leader is advised to do is to “strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die” (Revelation 3:2). What are those things that are about to die? The Bible does not tell us. In fact, the word *things* is a supplied word (though the King James version does not identify it as such), but it is not incorrectly supplied, for it fits the Greek language structure. The Greek root for the expression translated *which remain* is *loipos* (λοιπός) and is used several times throughout the New Testament, but only here in Revelation 3:2 is it translated *which remain*. In Revelation 11:13; 12:17; and 19:21, *loipos* is translated *remnant*, and the rest of its usage in Revelation and all of its usage in the rest of the New Testament (save one) is translated *rest*, *other(s)*, or *other things*. There is a remnant (something that remains) in Sardis that is about to die but whether the remnant is a few graces left in the leader which are not quite extinct or whether it is a few souls who are about to wither away within the hollow church of Sardis itself, we do not know. Biblical commentators have developed both viewpoints, but there are a few things we can know. One is that the counsel is addressed to the leader of the church. The reproofs are for him, as is also

the severe warning, should he fail to heed the advice offered. Even the description of the faithful few in Sardis (v. 4) is written to him; whereas, in the message to Thyatira, for example, we find the leader *and* “the rest in Thyatira” (Revelation 2:24) addressed. The whole message is for the angel of Sardis, with the exception of the last verses (5 and 6), where the language changes from first person to third person.

Next the leader is advised to remember what he has received and heard. The Bible does not tell us just what it was that he had received and heard, but it could only have been truth. Jesus would not have advised him to remember and to hold fast to error. This leader must have let truth (we do not know how much truth but, remember, Jesus had nothing for which to commend him) slip from his grasp, and then he must have covered up his loss with an exterior manifestation that convinced others he was spiritually alive and thriving. Jesus, however, counseled him to hold fast to what he had received and to repent for not being watchful.



These two unbroken pillars of the temple of Artemis at Sardis were more than halfway buried by dirt before excavation began.

In this message Jesus has given five important actions for any spiritual leader—maintaining a watchful attitude, giving spiritual strength to the weak, remembering truth and holding fast to it, and repenting when failing to do these things—but there is no assurance in the message that the leader followed Jesus' counsel. It is only the *few* in Sardis who have not defiled their garments who walk with Jesus in white, not him, I am sorry to say.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church

We should note, in addition, that the message to the leader of Ephesus also carries the counsel to remember and to repent and the promise that Jesus would remove the church (the candlestick) from the leader's care if he did not do so. God, through Ellen White, more than once applies the messages sent to these two churches (Ephesus and Sardis) directly to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For example, writing on



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Psalm 19:1, 4





Second century Jewish synagogue with mosaic floors and a Torah table in the distance

January 5, 1903, after learning of the fire in Battle Creek that destroyed the publishing offices of the Review, Sister White states:

To the Brethren in Battle Creek—

Today I received a letter from Elder Daniells regarding the destruction of the Review office by fire. I feel very sad as I consider the great loss to the cause. ... But I was not surprised by the sad news, for in the visions of the night I have seen an angel standing with a sword as of fire stretched over Battle Creek. Once, in the daytime, while my pen was in my hand, I lost consciousness, and it seemed as if this sword of flame were turning first in one direction and then in another. *Disaster seemed to follow disaster because God was dishonored by the devising of men to exalt and glorify themselves.*

This morning I was drawn out in earnest prayer that the Lord would lead all who are connected with the Review and Herald office to make diligent search, that they may see wherein *they have disregarded the many messages God has given.*

Sometime ago the brethren at the Review office asked my counsel about the erection of another building. I then said that if those who were in favor of adding another building to the Review and Herald office had the future mapped out before them, if they could see what would be in Battle Creek, they would have no question about putting up another building there. *God said: "My word has been despised; and I will turn and overturn."*

At the General Conference, held in Battle Creek in 1901, the Lord gave His people evidence that He was calling for reformation. Minds were convicted, and hearts were touched; but thorough work was not done. If stubborn hearts had then broken in penitence before God, there would have been seen one of the greatest manifestations of

the power of God that has ever been seen. But *God was not honored. The testimonies of His Spirit were not heeded.* Men did not separate from the practices that were in decided opposition to the principles of truth and righteousness, which should ever be maintained in the Lord's work.

The messages to the church of Ephesus and to the church in Sardis have been often repeated to me by the One who gives me instruction for His people. "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and the labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Revelation 2:1-5.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. (Revelation 3:1-3)

We are seeing the fulfillment of these warnings. Never have scriptures been more strictly fulfilled than these have been. (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 97-99)



The table from which the Torah was read to the male congregation seated on the marble-covered tiers behind it

This letter, written in 1903, focused on the churches of Ephesus and Sardis and applied their messages to God’s people in the last days, so when we read about these churches and the counsel given them, we *must* understand that the characteristics of the churches belong to us and the needed counsel given them is for us to heed. Ellen White makes further reference to Sardis in this letter, by saying:

Let every soul be on the alert. The adversary is on your track. Be vigilant, watching diligently lest some carefully concealed and masterly snare shall take you unawares. Let the careless and indifferent beware lest the day of the Lord come upon them as a thief in the night. Many will wander from the path of humility, and, casting aside the yoke of Christ, will walk in strange paths. Blinded and bewildered, they will leave the narrow path that leads to the city of God.

A man cannot be a happy Christian unless he is a *watchful* Christian. He who overcomes must watch; for, with worldly entanglements, error, and superstition, Satan strives to win Christ’s followers from Him. It is not enough that we avoid glaring dangers and perilous, inconsistent moves. We are to keep close to the side of Christ, walking in the path of self-denial and sacrifice. We are in an enemy’s country. He who was cast out of heaven has come down with great power. With every conceivable artifice and device he is seeking to take souls captive. Unless we are constantly on guard we shall fall an easy prey to his unnumbered deceptions. (*Ibid.*, pp. 99, 100)

Ellen White also has this to say about Sardis, in a document written February 9, 1905, and published, in part, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*:

A warning is given of a time when errors would come in as a thief to steal away the faith of God’s people, when they must watch diligently and be constantly guarded against the delusions of the enemy.

In Sardis many had been converted through the preaching of the apostles. The truth had been received as a bright and shining light. But some had forgotten the wonderful manner in which they had received the truth, and Jesus found it necessary to send reproof.

One after another of the old standardbearers had fallen, and some had become wearied of the oft-repeated truths. They desired a new phase of doctrine, more pleasing to many minds. They thought they needed a wonderful change, and in their spiritual blindness did not discern that their sophistries would uproot all the experiences of the past. (Manuscript 34, 1905; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 958)

This is why Jesus spoke so sternly to the leader of the church in Sardis—after the old standardbearers were gone, *some* of the people desired a new phase of doctrine that would be more pleasing to *many* minds, but Jesus knew this would uproot *all* the experiences of the past! He could only

condemn what was happening in Sardis. Some in the church had become weary of the old truths, but Jesus advised them to remember what they had received and had heard and to hold fast to it. Even though Ellen White says *some* of the people desired this change, she says it was desired because *many* minds would find it pleasing. This is in harmony with Jesus, when he said that only a *few* in Sardis had not defiled their garments. The *many* must have accepted the new theology.

“We are seeing the fulfillment of these warnings. Never have scriptures been more strictly fulfilled than these have been.”

(Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, pp. 97–99)

Has a new theology come into the Seventh-day Adventist Church that is more pleasing to many minds than the old waymarks, foundations, and pillars? Are our past experiences as a church being uprooted because of them? They need not be because we have been told “we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history” (*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196). Sadly the evidence is we have forgotten both the way God has led us *and* his teaching, and many are being faced today with new doctrines and new interpretations of Scripture. Perhaps *you* are being faced with new doctrine and a new understanding of Scripture that confuses you. If so, please consider the following statement, written August 11, 1898:

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” [Revelation 3:4, 5].

These words are given for the people while they are in connection with the world, *subject to temptations and influences which are deceiving and deluding. While they stay their mind upon Him who is their sun and their shield, the blackness and darkness that surround them will not leave one spot or stain upon their garments. They will walk with Christ.* (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13, p. 8)

White Raiment

White raiment is mentioned a few times in Revelation: In connection with the churches of Sardis and Laodicea, with

the twenty-four elders, with the great multitude that no man can number, with the martyrs, with the seven angels who have the seven last plagues, and with the Lamb's wife (Revelation 3:5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9; 16:5; 19:8). The angel at the tomb of Jesus was also clothed in white, and the garment of the Ancient of days is described as white as snow (Mark 16:5 and Daniel 7:9, respectively). These are the only times white clothing is mentioned in the Bible, and every time it is in connection with heavenly beings or with the righteous saints.

Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God's presence. This covering, the robe of His own righteousness, Christ will put upon every repenting, believing soul. "I counsel thee," He says, "to buy of Me . . . white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." Revelation 3:18.

This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us. "All our righteousness are as filthy rags." Isaiah 64:6. Everything that we of ourselves can do is defiled by sin. But the Son of God "was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin." Sin is defined to be "the transgression of the law." 1 John 3:5, 4. But Christ was obedient to every requirement of the law. He said of Himself, "I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart." Psalm 40:8. When on earth, He said to His disciples, "I have kept My Father's commandments." John 15:10. By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah. (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 311)

They Are Worthy

Jesus also declares the small remnant in Sardis who have not defiled their garments to be worthy: "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: *for they are worthy*" (Revelation 3:4). Only four times in the book of Revelation is something declared to be worthy: The Father is worthy (4:11), the Son is worthy (5:9), the remnant in Sardis is worthy (3:4), and the wicked are worthy of the outpouring of the third of the seven last plagues (16:6). The root of the Greek word used in Revelation 3:4 for *worthy* is *axios* (ἄξιος), and scholars are divided on its meaning—some saying it is an inherent worth, others saying it is a meritorious worth. Before we discuss this issue further, let us first consider

another Greek word, *kataxioo* (καταξιόω), that John did not use in Revelation 3:4, but which Paul and Jesus both used: "Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be *counted worthy* of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer" (2 Thessalonians 1:5) and "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be *accounted worthy* to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). *Kataxioo* means to be accounted worthy or to regard as worthy, but *axios* (which John used) means, according to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* on *axios* in Revelation 3:4, a "bringing up the other beam of the scales" or being "equivalent," as both sides of a balance beam would be when balanced, and it "shows that two distinct magnitudes are equal or equivalent." John uses *axios* instead of *kataxioo* in describing the remnant in Sardis; this remnant is worthy (has become equivalent, so to speak) and is granted the future privilege of walking with Jesus because they have not defiled their garments. These garments are not external garments which cover an impoverished character, a condition implied for the leader of Sardis, but are the genuine robes mentioned earlier in *Christ's Object Lessons*:

This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us. . . . By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 311).

With this kind of character-robe, we can easily see why the remnant in Sardis is considered worthy to walk with Jesus. May we, who stand at the end of this earth's history and on the threshold of the appearing of our Lord and Saviour, join the ranks of those worthy few in Sardis. They are our brothers and sisters whom, one day, we will meet. To this end may we be faithful to the true Shepherd, who has promised: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them" (Isaiah 42:16).

Ornycha Holt

at the spirit that for years has been revealed in our publishing institution at Battle Creek. Unrighteousness is practiced that God will not tolerate. He will visit for these things. (*1888 Materials*, p. 1553; Letter to S. N. Haskell, May 30, 1896)

I have been shown that the people at large do not know that *the heart of the work is being diseased and corrupted at Battle Creek*. Many of the people are in a lethargic, listless, apathetic condition, and assent to plans which they do not understand. (*Ibid.*, p. 1568; Letter to O. A. Olsen, May 31, 1896)

Two years later we find the following appraisal of the situation at the General Conference:

As I was made to understand something of the management of the work in this great center, it was all that I could bear. My spirit was pained within me, for *I had lost confidence in that which I had ever presented before the people as the voice of God to His children. It has not been the voice of God*. There has been a lording power exercised over God’s heritage in decisions which were not dictated by the Spirit of God. Unconsecrated men who were brought in connection with the work have exercised their own wisdom, and have woven into the work their own unconverted peculiarities. Their own principles have been counterworking the principles of truth and righteousness. *We cannot therefore present before the people that the voice of the General Conference in its decisions must move and control them; for its propositions and decisions cannot be accepted. They are not in the right line of progress. God is dropped out of their counsels.* (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, pp. 221, 222; 1898)

It has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God. (*Ibid.*, p. 216; Letter to Brother and Sister Waggoner, August 26, 1898)

Then three year later, speaking at the 1901 General Conference, Ellen White said:

I feel a special interest in the movements and decisions that shall be made at this Conference regarding the things that should have been done years ago, and especially ten years ago, when we were assembled in Conference, and the Spirit and power of God came into our meeting, testifying that God was ready to work for this people if they would come into working order. The brethren assented to the light God had given, *but there were those connected with our institutions, especially with the Review and Herald Office and the Conference, who brought in elements of unbelief*, so that the light that was given was not acted upon. It was assented to, but no special change was made to bring about such a condition of things that the power of God could be revealed among his people.

O, my very soul is drawn out in these things! Men who have not learned to submit themselves to the control and discipline of God, are not competent to train the youth, to deal with human minds. It is just as much an impossibility for them to do this work as it would be for them to make a world. *That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be,—that is past*. What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle. (*General Conference Bulletin*, April 3, 1901)

Thus, from at least 1875 until 1892, Ellen White declared that the General Conference was the highest authority of God upon the earth. However, due to events between 1893 and 1901, her testimony had to reflect the time and place of events! From 1901 to Ellen White’s last General Conference appearance in 1909, we could not find any statements concerning the voice of the General Conference being or not being, the voice of God. However, in 1909 Ellen White again addressed the issue very pointedly:

I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. *But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered*. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body.

At times, when a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God’s work, *I have said that I could no longer regard the voice of the General Conference, represented by these few men, as the voice of God. But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field should not be respected. God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority.* (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 260, 261; Manuscript read before the delegates at the General Conference in Washington, D. C., May 30, 1909)

So what are we to make of all these testimonies? The early and later testimonies speak of approval of the General Conference as the voice of God, and the middle statements speak of disapproval. Here is where we must take into consideration “time and place.” Ellen White spoke according to the conditions that were current when her specific statements were issued. I have seen people take the 1909 statement and

read into it perpetual approval, with disregard to other statements. I have also seen people read the statements from 1896–1901 without giving consideration to the 1909 statement. But the real truth for *today* is not found simply by noting what Ellen White wrote in 1898, in 1901, or in 1909. The real truth for today can only be understood by basing it upon the principles Ellen White wrote about and by applying these principles *today*. If she were alive today, what counsel would Ellen White have, based upon these principles? We will consider this at the end of the next section in connection with the issue of the church and Babylon.

Is the Church Babylon?

From August 22 through September 12, 1893, Ellen White published a series of four articles in *The Review and Herald* under the title “The Remnant Church Not Babylon.” In the third part of this series, we find the following often-quoted statement:

There is but one church in the world who are at the present time standing in the breach, and making up the hedge, building up the old waste places; and for any man to call the attention of the world and other churches to this church, denouncing her as Babylon, is to do a work in harmony with him who is the accuser of the brethren. Is it possible that men will arise from among us, who speak perverse things, and give voice to the very sentiments that Satan would have disseminated in the world in regard to those who keep the commandments of God, and have the faith of Jesus? (The Review and Herald, September 5, 1893)

In 1893 Ellen White was as emphatic as one could be. She said at that time there was “one church in the world who was then standing in the breach, and making up the hedge, building up the old waste places ... keep[ing] the commandments of God,” and “the faith of Jesus.” She declared that to call this church Babylon would be to cooperate with Satan!

If we consider the time and place of these articles, we learn that earlier in that year a Brother Stanton was leading a movement known as “The Loud Cry of the Third Angel” and had been proclaiming that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was Babylon and had appealed for all to leave the church. He even used some of Ellen White’s writings to attempt to sustain his position. Ellen White also wrote personally to Stanton and noted:

“Dear Brother Stanton: I address to you a few lines. I am not in harmony with the position that you have taken; for I have been shown by the Lord that just such positions will be taken by those who are in error. Paul has given us warning to this effect: ‘Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter time some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.’

“My brother, I learn that you are taking the position that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Babylon, and that all that would be saved must come out of her. You are

not the only man whom the enemy has deceived in this matter. For the last forty years, one man after another has arisen, claiming that the Lord has sent him with the same message; but let me tell you, as I have told them, that this message you are proclaiming, is one of the Satanic delusions designed to create confusion among the churches. My brother, you are certainly off the track.

“My brother, if you are teaching that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is Babylon, you are wrong. God has not given you any such message to bear.” (The Review and Herald, September 12, 1893; from a letter originally dated March 23, 1893)

As we noted in the first part of this study concerning the Jews believing that they, as a corporate body, had a clear path into the kingdom, their title was based upon the condition of having God’s law written in their hearts. Here we find qualifications. The remnant that can never be called Babylon are building up the old waste places, are keeping the commandments of God (all ten), and have the faith of Jesus.

There were further circumstances that are essential to know concerning the time of these testimonies. Just as 1892 was closing, Ellen White wrote the following in *The Review and Herald*:

Let every one who claims to believe that the Lord is soon coming, search the Scriptures as never before; for Satan is determined to try every device possible to keep souls in darkness, and blind the mind to the perils of the times in which we are living. Let every believer take up his Bible with earnest prayer, that he may be enlightened by the holy Spirit as to what is truth, that he may know more of God and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Search for the truth as for hidden treasures, and disappoint the enemy. The time of test is just upon us, for the loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer. This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth. (The Review and Herald, November 22, 1892)

Just a few months before Ellen White wrote to Brother Stanton, she had penned that the latter rain was beginning to fall upon the people of God! Beloved, no message declaring the church to be Babylon could be true when God was pouring his Spirit in the latter rain. Yet we know that the latter rain will not need over 119 years to complete the work. Yet 119 years after the latter rain began to be poured upon God’s people we are still here and Jesus has not come back. It is clear that something cut the precious Spirit away from God’s people.

Remember the date 1892? It was the last time we found a testimony declaring that the General Conference to be the voice of God before a series of strong testimonies declaring the opposite. By 1895 the strong endorsements had stopped, and there were several testimonies that declared the true condition of the people of God.

By the mid 1890's the spirit of Romanism—of rule, rule; of men ruling over men—had been entering the denomination. Ellen White declared that God was calling for new principles of reorganization. Specifically did she oppose the idea of having one man to be head of the General Conference. In 1896, she wrote:

As a people we should study God's plans for conducting his work. Wherever he has given directions in regard to any point, we should carefully consider how to regard his expressed will. This work should have special attention. *It is not wise to choose one man as president of the General Conference.* The work of the General Conference has extended, and some things have been made unnecessarily complicated. A want of discernment has been shown. There should be a division of the field, or some other plan should be devised to change the present order of things. . . . (*Special Testimonies*, series A, no. 8, pp. 28, 29; August 1896)

Ellen White came back from Australia in 1901 especially to attend the General Conference at Battle Creek, Michigan. During this conference she gave a talk at the college library, where she made God's will for the leadership of the denomination plain:

Now the Lord wants his Spirit to come in. He wants the Holy Ghost king. (*Spalding and Magan Collection*, p. 166; April 1, 1901)

We noted earlier that in 1901 Ellen White called for a reorganization of the General Conference:

That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be as the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be,—that is past. *What we want now is a reorganization. We want to begin at the foundation, and to build upon a different principle.* (*General Conference Bulletin*, April 3, 1901)

When she said that they “want to begin at the foundation,” the delegates understood what she meant, and the office of the General Conference president was abolished! A new constitution was brought to the delegates which called for a committee of twenty-five members and no provision for a General Conference President. The constitution stated:

ARTICLE 4. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

SECTION 1. The Executive Committee of this Conference shall be twenty-five in number, and shall have power to organize itself by choosing a chairman, secretary, treasurer, and auditor, whose duties shall be such as usually pertain to their respective offices. It shall also have the power to appoint all necessary agents and committees for the conduct of its work. (*General Conference Bulletin*, April 22, 1901, p. 379)

After the Constitution was discussed and studied, W. W. Prescott moved “that the Constitution as printed here [in the *Bulletin*] be adopted as a whole” (*Ibid.*, p. 444). O. A. Olsen seconded the motion, and according to the Chair, G. A. Irwin,

the motion was “carried unanimously” (*Ibid.*). At first the discussion carried the idea that the different officers, such as chairman, could be changed from time to time (*Ibid.*, p. 205); however, A. G. Daniells was elected as the “Permanent Chairman” (*Ibid.*, p. 377). While the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* lists A. G. Daniells as president of the General Conference from 1901–1922, he was not elected president until two years later, when a new constitution was implemented.

Thus it seemed that *the church* was beginning to get back on track and move away from Romanism. Ellen White was joyous at the events that had taken place, and so was the God of heaven. She noted:

Who do you suppose has been among us since this Conference began? Who has kept away the objectionable features that generally appear in such a meeting? Who has walked up and down the aisles of this Tabernacle?—The God of heaven and his angels. And they did not come here to tear you in pieces, but to give you right and peaceable minds. They have been among us to work the works of God, to keep back the powers of darkness, that the work God designed should be done should not be hindered. The angels of God have been working among us. (*Ibid.*, p. 463; April 25, 1901)

Sadly, the work did not develop as it had been envisioned. Ellen White had to later write:

At the General Conference, held in Battle Creek in 1901 the Lord gave His people evidence that He was calling for reformation. Minds were convicted, and hearts were touched; *but thorough work was not done.* If stubborn hearts had then broken in penitence before God, there would have been seen one of the greatest manifestations of the power of God that has ever been seen. *But God was not honored. The testimonies of His Spirit were not heeded. Men did not separate from the practices that were in decided opposition to the principles of truth and righteousness, which should ever be maintained in the Lord's work.* (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 97; January 5, 1903)

The context of this testimony concerned fire that destroyed the Review and Herald building in 1901. It should be noted that the printing plates were prepared to print Dr. Kellogg's book *The Living Temple*. Before God would allow his publishing house to print this book, he would burn the publishing house down. What was wrong with *The Living Temple* that would cause such a reaction? It had subtle teachings about the personality and nature of God. It presented pantheism, and God was not honored by this, so he destroyed his publishing house before he would allow such lies about himself to be published. Yet, few of the brethren at the time could discern the character of *The Living Temple*. Perhaps some said, as we hear echoed today, “What difference does it make? Why is it so important to understand who God is? We have the Sabbath; we know the state of the dead. Let's not get

caught up in minor matters.” But, beloved, God did not see it as a minor matter!

By the time of the next General Conference in 1903, a new constitution was proposed which called for the reinstatement of office of the president of the General Conference. Part of the new constitution reads as follows:

ARTICLE V—OFFICERS AND THEIR DUTIES

SECTION 1. The officers of this Conference shall be a president, two vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, and an auditor, who shall be elected by the Conference. (*General Conference Bulletin*, p. 218; April 14, 1903)

For the first and only time at a General Conference, a minority report was presented to the delegates from the Committee on Plans and Constitution. That report read:

Report of the Minority of the Committee on Plans and Constitution

The minority of your Committee on Plans and Constitution beg leave to submit that the Constitution proposed by the majority of the Committee appears to us to be so subversive of the principles of organization given to us at the General Conferences of 1897 and 1901 that we can not possibly subscribe to it.

The proposed new Constitution reverses the reformatory steps that were taken, and the principles which were given and adopted as the principles of reorganization, in the General Conferences of 1897 and 1901, and embodied in the present Constitution; and this before that Constitution or the organization according to it, has ever had adequate trial.

We therefore recommend that the Constitution of 1901 be given a fair trial before it be annihilated.

Signed,

E. J. Waggoner,

David Paulson,

Percy T. Magan. (*Ibid.*, p. 147)

After the minority report was presented, a motion was made and seconded to accept the majority’s report; however, before a vote was taken, discussion began. Elder E. J. Waggoner spoke to the issue by noting that he was against the new Constitution because it was against the teaching of the Bible to have one person above another. He also noted:

The Bible organization is opposed to the exaltation of any person over others. ...

Two years ago a constitution was formed in harmony with instruction given, as nearly as might be. (*Ibid.*, p. 148)

This instruction was that there was to be no one man as the head of the General Conference. Waggoner continued:

The Bible organization recognizes leaders; most certainly it does. Whomsoever God appoints as leaders ought to be recognized, and will be recognized, by the body, if they are leaders indeed; for authority rests in the individual

and his relation to God, and not in the position to which he is elected. And truth is truth, though it be spoken by one who has no standing or official position. And error can not be made to be truth, or mistakes can not be made to be right, because promulgated by some one in official position, or even by the whole body; and we should recognize, and we must educate ourselves and the people to recognize, the truth of the Bible, and to be recognized by the Bible and the Spirit of God, so that whenever any case comes up for decision we have that one thing to guide us. (*Ibid.*)

After Waggoner finished speaking the conference adjourned until the afternoon session. When the afternoon session began, there was energetic discussion concerning the principles upon which the new constitution was based. At first there was a motion to limit the discussion to only five minutes per person, but after an eloquent appeal by A. T. Jones, supported by A. G. Daniells, the motion was rejected. The Chair then allowed P. T. Magan, who was a member of the minority committee, to speak. Dr. Magan began by stating:

I fully appreciate the gravity of this situation, and I have absolutely no intention of in any way filibustering or trying to use a little time in which to say nothing.

As a member of the minority of the Committee on Plans, and as a man, if I had not been on the Committee on Plans at all, I am conscientiously opposed to the proposed new constitution. I have always felt that the hardest place that any man could be put in in this life is to have to stand conscientiously opposed to what the majority of his brethren believe to be right. To me it has always appeared to be a much easier thing to stand in a position of opposition to the world, and even to have to face a court of justice in the world, for your faith, than to have to face your brethren for your faith. And therefore I shall say to-day, as briefly and modestly as I know how, what I have to say.

The minority report expresses in a word the feelings which actuated the minority in making the report, because we believe that the constitution proposed by the majority of the committee appears to us to be so subversive of the principles of organization given to us at the General Conferences of 1897 and 1901. Those principles were given to us by the Spirit of God. In my judgment, and in the judgment of the minority of the committee, this constitution is absolutely subversive of those principles.

Further: The proposed new constitution reverses the reformatory steps that were taken, and the principles which were given, and which were adopted as the principles of reorganization, at the General Conferences of 1897 and 1901, and which were incorporated in the constitution of 1901.

Now, I am not here for a moment to state that the constitution of 1901 is a perfect one. To my mind, in many respects, it is very imperfect. To my mind, in many respects it is very clumsily drawn. But I have learned this,

that all reforms come gradually; and in that constitution, clumsy though you may call it, defective though you may mark it, *there are principles of reformation and reorganization for the head of this work which are right; and those principles are absolutely subverted and swept aside in the proposed new constitution.*

It may be stated there is nothing in this new constitution which is not abundantly safeguarded by the provisions of it; but I want to say to you that *any man who has ever read "Neander's History of the Christian Church," Mosheim's, or any of the other of the great church historians,—any man who has ever read those histories can come to no other conclusion but that the principles which are to be brought in through this proposed constitution, and in the way in which they are brought in, are the same principles, and introduced in precisely the same way, as they were hundreds of years ago when the Papacy was made.*

Further: This whole house must recognize this, before we are through with this discussion, that the proposed new constitution, whatever improvements may be claimed for it, whatever advantages it may be stated that it contains, that, in principle, as far as *the head of the work is concerned*, it goes back precisely where we were before the reformatory steps of two years ago. I do not deny for a moment but what improvements have been made in the distribution of administrative power. I am heartily in favor of all that has been done in regard to Union Conferences, but I say that, as far as the head of the thing is concerned, as far as the general administration of things is concerned, though not coached in the same words, though not hedged about with the same identical language, they are precisely the same principles which governed us up to two years ago; and that the moment you vote this constitution, which I do not believe you are ready to do, yet, *when you understand this, the moment you vote it you vote yourselves right back where we were two years ago and before it.* (*Ibid.*, p. 150)

A. T. Jones soon thereafter spoke, making the real issues clear:

Now, please bear in mind, I am not in any sense calling attention to any fault, or trying to, or raising any reproach whatever against the brethren who have been at headquarters, and who have acted as a few, no more than the testimony that I read found fault with those who were there before, and went into wrong courses, because it is simply the principle that is wrong. I do not think we have any worse men, or have had the last two years, than we had the six or eight years before. I do not think we had any better men in the last two years than the men we had in the six or eight years before. I do not believe we have had any better man as president than we had as president of the General Conference from 1897 to 1901, or than we had from 1888 to 1897; but the president who was there from 1888 to 1897 landed where this says because the principle

was wrong. And he who was president and those who were the committee from 1897 to 1901 came to the same point precisely as this points out, not because they were wrong, not because they were bad men, because they were good men, but following a wrong principle; and a good man can go to perdition on a wrong principle. A man can pray himself into perdition on a wrong principle. And that is what is pointed out,—not that anybody intended to be wrong, or that any one, in that sense of the word, was wrong; but the principle was wrong, and this principle carried that man wrong; it carried the committee wrong; and it carried the whole General Conference wrong; and it came to that place where the testimony of the Lord said. "The management of the work is becoming confused in itself," and that, if continued, would come to naught. (*Ibid.*, p. 153)

In the end, the delegates voted in the new constitution and the church now had a signal man elected to be its head, despite the fact that the Bible says that "Christ is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:23).

The 1903 General Conference was held in Oakland, California, about sixty miles from Sister White's home at Elmshaven. After the meeting she had no glowing words of praise about the conference, no declaration that the God of heaven or his angels were there. Instead, Sister White traveled back St. Helena and on April 21, 1903, just a week after the conference had ended, wrote out a testimony entitled "Shall We Be Found Wanting?" In this testimony we find the following words:

Our position in the world is not what it should be. We are far from where we should have been had our Christian experience been in harmony with the light and the opportunities given us, had we from the beginning constantly pressed onward and upward. Had we walked in the light that has been given us, had we followed on to know the Lord, our path would have grown brighter and brighter. But many of those who have had special light are so conformed to the world that they can scarcely be distinguished from worldlings. They do not stand forth as God's peculiar people, chosen and precious. It is difficult to discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.

In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence: "Found wanting." By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged. (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, p. 247, April 21, 1903)

Here is a clear statement that "the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed ... [or] judged." Some believe that she has no accountability to God, but this statement confirms

that God is no respecter of persons. There will be a decision in the judgment on the denomination and it will be based upon what she has done with the truth that has been bestowed upon her. Later in the same testimony, she wrote:

The heavenly Teacher [capital “T”—Christ] inquired: “What stronger delusion can beguile the mind than the pretense that you are building on the right foundation and that God accepts your works, when in reality you are working out many things according to worldly policy and are sinning against Jehovah? Oh, it is a great deception, a fascinating delusion, that takes possession of minds when men who have once known the truth, mistake the form of godliness for the spirit and power thereof; when they suppose that they are rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing, while in reality they are in need of everything.”

God has not changed toward His faithful servants who are keeping their garments spotless. But many are crying, “Peace and safety,” while sudden destruction is coming upon them. Unless there is thorough repentance, unless men humble their hearts by confession and receive the truth as it is in Jesus, they will never enter heaven. When purification shall take place in our ranks, we shall no longer rest at ease, boasting of being rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing.

Who can truthfully say: “Our gold is tried in the fire; our garments are unspotted by the world”? I saw our Instructor [capital “I”—Christ] pointing to the garments of so-called righteousness. Stripping them off, He laid bare the defilement beneath. Then He said to me: “Can you not see how they have pretentiously covered up their defilement and rottenness of character? ‘How is the faithful city become an harlot!’ My Father’s house is made a house of merchandise, a place whence *the divine presence and glory have departed!* For this cause there is weakness, and strength is lacking.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 249, 250)

Thus we see that heaven’s view of God’s people just after the 1903 General Conference session was not a positive assessment. Now we can quote from 1893 that the *church is not Babylon*, or we can quote from 1903 and declare *the church to be a harlot*. Which should we quote today? The truth is that we must take the time and place of these testimonies into consideration when we read them, and we need to consider the time and place *today*, as we attempt to understand what Christ is saying to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

So that there is no misunderstanding, let us clarify that God is the author of *Seventh-day Adventism* and that there is no question that *Adventism, the Advent movement*, will be the last vehicle of God in giving the gospel to the world. He has called *Adventism* to give his truth, and there will be a faithful group of people who will proclaim this truth. The real questions are: Does the Seventh-day Adventist denomination represent Adventism? Is this denomination the church of the

living God? Do the people of this denomination comprise the church at this time?

What Would God Say Today?

Without understanding the context—the time and place—of the writings of Jeremiah and Daniel, it would have been difficult for early Christians to have understood that the nation of Israel, as a corporate body, was weighed in the balances of the sanctuary in AD 34. But with that understanding a group of people rose up and followed the truth, unshackled from the restraints of men and men’s traditions. The early Christians did not judge Judaism, but they did recognize that God had judged Judaism and had found it to be wanting.

It is just as important to take time and place into consideration today to properly understand our current position as it is to take time and place into consideration to properly understand our history. While no person is able to determine judgment upon a church denomination today, God is able to weigh any group in the balances of the heavenly sanctuary and then make his decision known to his people.

Just as when we confronted the question concerning the issue of the voice of the General Conference, the real question again is not what did God say in 1893 or in 1903, but what has God say *today* about this denomination that calls itself God’s remnant?

What does God say today when he sees the worship of the pagan trinity in Seventh-day Adventist churches? I think he must say, “Ye worship ye know not what” (John 4:22). “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3).

What does God say *today* when he sees the final atonement denied and the theology from *Question on Doctrine* taught in the seminary and preached from the pulpits? I think he must remind us:

The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the law, was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement; so in the type the blood of the sin offering removed the sin from the penitent, but it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement. (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 357)

God must be saying, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). “How is the faithful city become an harlot” (Isaiah 1:21)! Inspiration tells us:

Nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the new movement. The leaders would teach that virtue is better than vice, but God being removed, they would place their dependence on human power, which, without God, is worthless. Their foundation would be built on the sand, and storm and tempest would sweep away the structure. (*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 204)

What does God say today about the selling out of the Russia Valdimir A. Shelkov, leader of “The True and Free” brethren? He reminds us of the words of our Lord, “The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men” (Matthew 17:22).

“Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

What does God say *today* about having brethren arrested at the 1985 General Conference for protesting Catholic teachings and influences within the denomination, as well as attempting to arrest brethren at the 2005 General Conference for the same reasons? God tells us, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

What does God say *today* about B. B. Beach presenting Pope Paul VI with a gold medallion from the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Or what does God say *today* about Beach introducing Catholic Priest T. J. Murphy to speak to the world church and pray for it at the 1990 General Conference Session in Indianapolis? I think he would say, “It is a backsliding church that lessens the distance between itself and the Papacy” (*The Signs of the Times*, February 19, 1894) and “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4).

What would God say today about the abominations connected with the Parade of Nations *on Sabbath* at the General Conference? I think he would say, “Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths. . . . Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them” (Ezekiel 22:8, 26).

What would God say today about the Celebration Church? We know what he would say, for his prophet has told us:

The things you have described as taking place in Indiana, the Lord has shown me would take place just before the close of probation. Every uncouth thing will be demonstrated. There will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. . . . (*Last Day Events*, p. 159)

What would God say about the medical work, the educational work, and on and on? Understanding the principle of time and place is essential to knowing our current standing with God.

There is a lesson we can learn from the past. In a verse that is famous to Adventists, we read:

After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. (Numbers 14:34)

We know the context is the time of the apostasy at the borders of the promised land. God had offered the land of promise to Israel, and because of unbelief, they could not

enter. God told them that they would be in the wilderness forty years, one year for each day the spies were searching out the land. But it is the last part of Numbers 14:34 that we wish to notice: “Ye shall know my breach of promise.” The marginal reading says: “Ye shall know the altering of my purpose.” God’s purpose was to quickly take Israel into the promised land, but due to their unbelief, he could not do this, and so he altered his purpose for Israel.

God desired to use the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in connection with the Advent movement, but he has had to alter his purpose.

Do you remember the story in Part 1 of this study about Sylvester Prierias, a faithful Catholic who warred against Martin Luther? Prierias said: “If the pope were so scandalously bad that he led multitudes of souls to the devil, still he could not be removed from office” (*Luther, Gospel, Law, and Reformation*, part 1, p. 138). Do we feel the same about the General Conference president as Sylvester Prierias felt about the pope?

Many do not know that Ellen White acknowledged that the denomination might not go through and there would be the need “for another coming out.” Shortly after the Minneapolis Conference, she wrote:

I was confirmed in all I had stated in Minneapolis, that a reformation must go through the churches. Reforms must be made, for spiritual weakness and blindness were upon the people who had been blessed with great light and precious opportunities and privileges. As reformers they had come out of the denominational churches, but they now act a part similar to that which the churches acted. *We hoped that there would not be the necessity for another coming out.* While we will endeavor to keep the “unity of the Spirit” in the bonds of peace, we will not with pen or voice cease to protest against bigotry. (*1888 Materials*, pp. 356, 357; 1889)

During her lifetime, despite backsliding and apostasy, Ellen White never called for a coming out of the the denomination. But the real question is not about what she said in 1915, the year she died, but about what she would say today. The answer is vital for you and for me, for if we continue to stay in anything that is a part of Babylon, we will finally be a partaker of her sins and of her plagues and be lost!

Next month we will discuss the Philadelphian church, the synagogue of Satan, and the shaking and consider what is shaken out of what.

Allen Stump

(*To be continued*)

Whiter than Snow

I begin to awaken in the dark-before-dawn stillness and burrow deeper into my pillow, reveling in the warmth of my bed, dreading another cold, bleak winter day. The cat, perhaps alerted by a change in my breathing, assumes I am awake and jumps onto the bed with a softly-gurgled purr. I slip a hand from under the covers and gently stroke her a bit, then we settle in for a few more minutes before we decide to abandon our moment and the cozy bed.

With my mind in neutral, I plod to the kitchen and open a can of food for Cat. She nibbles a little, then takes her place beside me, where I sit in the dark, snuggled in my winter robe. The dawn gradually brightens the window with the beginning of a new day, and my thoughts are stirred to life.

Remembering that it was snowing when I went to bed last night, I stand and move to the window and peer out. The landscape has been transformed! Yes, the world outside is elegantly draped in white. Not only the ground, but also the trunks and limbs and twigs of the trees and bushes are clothed in frothy white perfection.

Vividly contrasting with yesterday's bleak gray and brown covering, the earth is now hibernating under a coverlet of white eiderdown; tree trunks and limbs have been transformed from gnarled, knobbed and twisted caricatures to ermine-wrapped chic.

I don my socks and shoes, my coat and gloves, and go out to sweep snow and scatter bird seed. The maple tree in the circle driveway stands tall and wide, silhouetted in snowy splendor against the sky. A half moon shines brightly overhead, and a single star still glows far to the east. A scene so breathtakingly beautiful must be captured before it fades away! I dash inside for my camera.

Not only my yard, but also my own negative winter attitude has suddenly been transformed! Resentful of the cold weather, depressed by the bleakness, intimidated by snow, I have been churlish and discontented for weeks. When snow has covered the landscape, I have, till now, felt claustrophobic, panicky, almost frantic. But this morning is different! Why? There's a reason!

Yesterday, I repented of my winter attitude; I asked God to take it away and replace it with acceptance of what I cannot change, for contentment regardless of the weather. I asked Him to open my eyes to the unique beauty of the season, for a spirit of thankfulness regardless of circumstances. He has heard my prayer; He has forgiven me for my downcast outlook and has replaced it with that "garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3).

And now, looking at the snow through new eyes, I am reminded of the words of a song: "Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole . . . Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." The True Witness counsels us to buy of Him that snowy "white raiment" (Revelation 3:18) of a character that has been washed pure and clean in the blood of Christ.

I am also reminded of the story of the ermine which broke my heart when I read it. (My heart is so easily broken, anyway, by the sadness in the natural world.) It breaks my heart anew to repeat it here, but it is a wonderful object lesson for us.



The ermine in his white fur

The ermine's fur is brown in summer, but in winter it is changed to snowy white. The fabulous white fur has long been used to line the robes of European dignitaries. Ermines are very careful to keep their fur perfectly clean. They will not let themselves be contaminated in any way. Men, bent on killing them for their precious white fur, will smear dung on the inside of the ermine's den. Rather than have any spot of dung defile their fur, they will run out of their dens into the jaws of dogs and certain death. They sacrifice their very lives rather than become defiled.

James 1:27 tells us that "pure religion and undefiled before God . . . is . . . to keep [ourselves] unspotted from the world" which raises the question in my heart and mind: Would I give up my life rather than allow my character to become defiled with the wickedness of the world? If not, I am not worthy of the name of Christ, who willingly stepped down from heaven's throne and partook of my degraded humanity (though never yielding to sin) in order to give His all for me.

The snow-wrapped world this morning is a reminder to me of Christ's perfect white robe of righteousness with which He promises to clothe me, changing my character from the gnarled and twisted caricature shaped by sin to the pure perfection of "Christ in me, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

Grace Cox

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