

About the Author

Dale Ratzlaff was a conservative, fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist (SDA). He received all his formal education in SDA schools, graduated from the Seventh-day Adventist seminary, pastored two Seventh-day Adventist churches, and taught Bible in a Seventh-day Adventist school for seven years. In the 1980s, while nearing the end of his doctoral program at Andrews University, he became convinced that the SDA doctrine of the investigative judgment and cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary could not be supported by Scripture, was contrary to clear biblical teaching and undermined the new covenant gospel of grace. His conference president told him he either had to promise to teach all of the Fundamental Beliefs of the SDA church or resign. Because he could not do this in clear conscience, Pastor Ratzlaff, with his wife Carolyn, who was a denominationally employed Bible worker, left the SDA church. Since that time, Pastor Ratzlaff has written four books dealing with Adventist issues.

In 2000 Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff, working with Richard and Colleen Tinker, started Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., a non-profit corporation that publishes the bi-monthly journal, *Proclamation!*, which at this writing is sent free of charge to approximately 30,000 homes. This has been a faith ministry since its inception.

Dale Ratzlaff also manages LAM Publications, LLC, which publishes and sells a number of books written by former Adventists. These combined ministries have helped thousands make the difficult transition from Adventism to healthy evangelical churches.

Ratzlaff believes the true, simple gospel of faith in Christ is central and sufficient. He also believes that the simple gospel must be defended in a spirit of love against legalistic compromises, just as Paul defended it in the book of Galatians. It is his prayer that this book will be used by God to clarify the simple gospel—He who believes has eternal life.

Truth Led Me Out

Dale Ratzlaff

LAM Publications, LLC
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Camp Verde, Arizona 86322

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LAM Publications, LLC
1042 North Powderhorn Road
Camp Verde, Arizona 86322
928-554-1001
dale@ratzlaf.com
<http://www.SabbathInChrist.com>

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DEDICATION



To my wife, Carolyn,

who is my best friend and has been a supportive life partner on our theological journey. I owe her a huge debt of gratitude for her numerous helpful suggestions, for the countless hours she spent in reading the many versions of this and other manuscripts—and for our 57+ wonderful years of marriage.

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Preface

Many people have asked me why a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist pastor would leave the Adventist denomination. For Adventists who see themselves as the “true remnant church of Bible prophecy,” the only answer that fits their theological paradigm is apostasy. This is why I am continually being accused of leaving because I wanted to live in open sin. When I respond that I left because of thorough Bible study and a desire to be true to my conscience, I am often met with a blank, questioning stare. For many, this is simply incomprehensible. How can one leave “the truth” and not go into error? I have written this book for three main reasons.

First, *Truth Led Me Out* is my life story—well, at least a good part of it. I know that after I am no longer here, the Adventist church will—if it follows its historical pattern—try to rewrite my history. For this reason, I have included the events, discoveries, conversations, names, and places that played a factor in my decision. By listing the actual names of people with whom I interacted in this journey, it is not my intent to assign blame or imply an evil motive. Many acted out of their own understanding of truth or assigned administrative responsibility. Rather, I list these facts for the sake of history.

Second, because I have authored several other books and have written dozens of articles on Adventist issues, many people have asked me about the details of my exodus. Rather

than answer the hundreds of emails and letters in a very cursory way, I felt writing out my experience would give these inquiries a more complete picture, and also save me a lot of time.

Third, there may be some who read this book in order to discover the truth or discern error. Perhaps it will motivate them to do their own diligent study and to draw their own conclusions about Adventism and the simple, new covenant gospel of God's grace in Christ. It is my settled conviction that truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed. It is my prayer that the reader will be led to a closer relationship with the living Christ and be guided by the Holy Spirit in his/her own diligent Bible study in search for truth.

In His joy,

Dale Ratzlaff

January, 2008

Chapter 1



Adventist

Sitting at my computer, I hear the familiar “ding” telling me that another email hit my corner of cyberspace. Curious, wondering who it might be, I leave my sermon preparation for a few seconds to check. Little did I know that it would be hours before I would return to that sermon. Nor did I realize that answering that email would impel me to write this book.

The email was from a Seventh-day Adventist pastor who was walking where I once walked, hurting where I once hurt, questioning what I once questioned, crying out as I once cried out, desperately seeking the will of God. I will share that email with you.

Thank you for your interest. Yes, you are correct about some internal struggles that I’m facing at this time. I appreciate you keeping my concerns about the SDA church confidential. It seems that I’m having difficulty accepting the views of the SDA church on 1844. I also feel that I’m losing confidence in E.G.W. [Ellen G. White]. I can’t seem to get the SDA timeline on the 2300 day prophecy lined up with Scripture. The connection between Daniel 8 and Daniel 9 is weak.

Since youth, I also have been impressed by the church that if someone does not agree with E.G.W. or leaves the Adventist church, they will be accepting the mark of the beast. These memories keep me from making bold moves upon my internal

struggles. Although no one has come out and said, “those who leave the church are condemned,” the impression is felt! Adventist friends and Adventist family members usually shun or talk about people who have left the church. “Poor so-and-so, did you hear he left the church...we need to pray for him,” etc...

I have countless Adventist friends and family members whom I have brought into this church, not to mention many more whom I have baptized into this church. Any decision I make can make a profound impact on several lives. Thus, I feel that I must give much effort toward my studies and be absolutely sure in the steps that I take in the future.

I understand that you were an SDA pastor. Thus, you understand that asking these types of questions may place me in an uncomfortable position with my employer...I find myself encouraging my members to search out the Scriptures for themselves, to study the doctrines, and draw their own conclusions. Ironic, isn't it? As a pastor, if I explore beyond the scopes of our beliefs, or probe for answers, I'm looked upon as someone who is confused and need counseling or help.

I would very much like an opportunity to meet and talk with you about the church. My concerns are for my family. I have shared some things with my spouse. She is supportive in my quest to find truth. But, I have not shared anything with my children. I must be sure—convinced. To struggle so long to keep your children in the church, to obtain a Christian education, and then tell them you have some questions about the church—that's hard!

I think talking to a former SDA pastor could be helpful. There are many questions about making the transition from being a SDA pastor to being a non-SDA member. In addition, to career changes, etc., I would be very interested in hearing how you crossed that line and the results of crossing that line.

I'm not saying I'm ready to step out of the closet. I have lots of answers to seek first. I must be convinced via the Scriptures. As a youth, I was taught that it would cost my soul to cross that line—thus, the internal struggles. Keep me in your prayers. And, please keep in touch!

As I finished reading the above cry for help and understanding, I started writing out my experience. The words flew so fast that I made many typing mistakes—not

unusual for me. The little squiggly lines from MS Word told me that I had a lot of editing to do. After some time, Carolyn called me for lunch. I told her what I was doing and realized that my little email answer had been done time and again for many other SDA pastors and members who had asked about my experience. Never, it seemed, had I taken the time to answer all that was in my heart and history. Suddenly, *I knew* God was calling me to write another book. I had the same sense of destiny as when I was impelled to write *Cultic Doctrine*. Within an hour, a rough outline was typed, and I began to think back to how it all started. Yes, it started when I *was* an Adventist—through and through.

My earliest memories are sweetly entwined with the Adventist church. My mother, Bessie Smith Ratzlaff Ellyson, who passed away at the age of 99 in 2006, was a missionary's child. Her father was an Adventist pastor, and her mother was a Bible worker.¹ Never was there a family more committed to the Adventist message than my family. My parents served as self-supporting Adventist missionaries in Panama just before the Second World War. They raised up a little Adventist church in the Panamanian jungle before they were advised by the General Conference to return to the mainland because of the uncertainties of the war.

Both my mother and my father taught school in the Adventist system. Except for the fourth grade, my mother was my only teacher until I was in academy. I vividly remember my second and third grade in Tucson, Arizona, in 1944–1945. One day there was an unusually loud roar we had never heard before. We all ran out of the school building to see the first jet we had ever encountered fly over the

¹ A term used in Adventism to apply to people (usually women) who were employed by the local conference of SDAs to give Bible studies.

school. My mother took my sister, Opal, and me to the SDA Junior Camp in Prescott. We went to all the Adventist functions and loved them all.

I can still see in my mind's eye the large chart that was hung across the front of the Tucson church with October 22, 1844, on one end and October 22, 1944, on the other. Its purpose was, as I remember, to help us realize the nearness of the second coming of Christ. The investigative judgment had now been in progress exactly 100 years. That was my first encounter with the 1844 doctrine, but not the last. As a third-grader, it all seemed so wonderful.

My mother was asked to teach the seventh and eighth grade at the Arizona Academy grade school, so the next year, we moved to Phoenix. There, in the fourth grade, I had eyes for a rather attractive and sweet third-grade girl by the name of Carolyn Mundall. I gave her my picture, and she gave me hers. We sometimes traded sticks of gum at recess. One time my parents went to visit her parents and talked about going on an expedition to find Noah's Ark. Of course, Carolyn's sisters made sure I played church (I think it was a play wedding) with Carolyn, even though I remember how embarrassed I was to play something akin to dolls!

Before the year was over, my parents decided it was time to get my sister, just finishing the eighth grade, and me out of the big, bad city into country living. This was, according to Ellen White, the best way to keep kids away from evil influences. We moved to a little Adventist settlement called Winter Haven Academy in the "sticks" of North Carolina, some 30 miles from Wilmington. I will never forget the feeling of exhilaration and youthful energy the spring we arrived. The wildflowers were blooming, the yellow jasmine was growing along the ditch bank, and Meadowlarks and Bob Whites were calling. Life seemed so

full of promise. I had not a care in the world. The place actually was very primitive, with no electricity or running water. I remember the long trip to the outhouse, especially in the winter when it was dark. My mother was to teach all eight grades in the old schoolhouse/church building. My father was to do carpentry and farming. Not long after we arrived there, however, my father became ill, suffering terrible pain. I remember the day and night we drove him in our '42 Ford to an Adventist Hospital in Fletcher. The doctors recognized his kidneys weren't functioning, as he was starting to puff up with fluid. X-rays showed trouble, and they advised we take him to Duke University Hospital. There they operated and found a rare, rapidly growing cancer that spread throughout his body.

My father was born in Kansas, into a large Mennonite family. They were quite poor from all accounts I have heard. His father was the "head of the home" and dictated his wishes to every member of the family to such an extent that when my father was 19 years old he ran away from home to get out from under his father's heavy hand.

I don't know the circumstances that caused my father to become an Adventist. However, he was one heart and soul. He worked as a carpenter during the time I can remember him. The Adventists were opening a mission station for the Navaho Indians near Holbrook, Arizona. Hearing of the need for carpenters, he answered the call and gave a full summer's work to the project.

Sabbath after church—often to my embarrassment—saw any homeless person who came to church at our dinner table. My father, remembering the hardships of his early life, did what he could to help those who were down and out.

When it became known that my father was soon to die, my mother, sister, and I stood by my father's hospital bed. I

didn't know how to act. I was frightened. Trying to remove my fear, my father told me that upon his death, I would get his carpenter tools, and I was to look out for the family as best as I could.

Six weeks after his going into the hospital, we buried my father in Durham, North Carolina. It was a beautiful spring day: lush, green grass, flowers blooming, new living-green leaves on the densely wooded hillsides, birds signing and preparing their nests, and the air was sweet with honeysuckle. Yet inside my soul, there were dark and somber emotions that made the beauty of spring seem like mockery.

My father's death was a terrible shock to our family. We had no medical insurance in those days and did not believe in life insurance. My mother was left with a hospital bill that was humanly impossible for her to pay.

We prayed and worked. In the summer, I worked on a gladiola farm earning 25 cents an hour. My mother and sister worked there too, earning 35 cents an hour.

We always kept the Sabbath. Friday evening, we would often sit out on our front porch and sing Christian hymns to welcome the Sabbath. We would do the same on Sabbath evening as we said goodbye to the Sabbath. Often we would sing, "Day is dying in the west, heaven is touching earth with rest." We always, without question, went to Sabbath School and church on Sabbath. Often on Sabbath afternoon, my mother would organize a "Young People's Meeting" where the youth would participate in a program designed for their age group. I remember the many times we would drive about eight miles to Bolton and pass out literature, hoping people would find "the truth" and become Adventists.

That year was a difficult one for our family. We barely had enough money to keep food on the table. In fact, if it had

not been for my grandmother who sent us beans and a few dollars from time to time, we might have gone hungry.

However, life was not all bad for me. I made good friends with Danny Badzik, a boy who lived about a mile from our house. We spent many happy days exploring the dense North Carolina forest, digging tunnels in the ditch bank, target practicing with our 22s and fishing.

Late one afternoon, I was coming back from Danny's house. It was nearly dark; I was alone without any flashlight, and the sun was already below the horizon. The North Carolina pines were becoming silhouettes in the gold of the western sky. I had a little over a mile to go, so I started running down the dirt road. When I got home, I was thrilled that I was able to run the distance without stopping. Running, I would find out later, would introduce me to someone whose influence would profoundly affect my life.

One evening a cold north wind set in, and then it started to sleet. The next morning we awoke to see a miracle of nature. Every little twig was coated with about one-half inch of brilliant ice that sparkled like multi-faceted diamonds in the sunlight. The little pine trees were bent over as if a wind were still blowing—they were frozen solid. Everything was glittering and coated with ice.

I had a new jacket my parents had purchased for me shortly before my father's death. It was the first jacket I had ever had with a fur-lined hood.² Walking home from school one day, I faced a cold, biting wind with blowing sleet. It was a challenge. I pulled the hood down to my eyes, faced the storm with courage, and felt that I could face any adversity that came my way. I would need that same courage and determination later, on more than one occasion.

² I am sure it was imitation fur.

The picture Carolyn had given me, I placed in a crack behind the door jam. I figured I would never see her again, and I put it there for safekeeping.

My mother realized that she could not survive under the conditions, and decided to move to California, close to friends of the family.

Ours was the only house on a lonely dirt road about a quarter of a mile from the school and church. Moving day came. As we were driving down that dirt road for the last time in our '42 Ford, pulling a little green, six foot, two-wheel trailer loaded precariously high with everything we owned, questions rushed through my mind. We had come to North Carolina a happy, healthy family, financially sound, full of enthusiasm, energy, and hope. Now my father was dead, we had little money, huge hospital bills, and I was leaving my best friend. Why, Lord, why?

We moved to Fortuna, California, where my mother taught grades six through eight in the Adventist church school. Summers I worked for Paul Thornburg,³ who owned two dairies and bailed hay for himself and others. The summers after my sixth, seventh and eighth grades, I worked six days a week, nine hours a day. It was a good experience. I worked hard. I often felt like quitting, but I knew my mother needed the money. Mr. Thornburg taught me the valuable lesson of hard work, even in difficult situations, that has helped me time and again.

Sabbaths always found us in the Fortuna church. There was never a question about whether we would go to Sabbath school and church. We always, with rare exceptions, went to both and were on time.

After being graduated from the eighth grade, my mother moved to Escalon, California, where she taught the

³ Now deceased.

Adventist grade school. Modesto Union Academy, only a few miles away, afforded opportunity for me to attend an Adventist high school. One day shortly after school started in my sophomore year, I looked toward the back of the school bus, and suddenly, I saw a familiar face. Could it be? Could that girl be Carolyn Mundall, whom I had known in Phoenix years before? I was too bashful to ask, so I asked one of my bold buddies, Burton Maxwell, to find out. Yes, that bright-eyed, sweet-smiling girl was Carolyn. Soon we were best friends again.

That winter Elder Folkenburg gave a series of evangelistic tent meetings in Riverbank, a little town which was between Escalon where I lived, and Oakdale where Carolyn lived. These meetings provided an opportunity for me to be with Carolyn. We went to most of the meetings where we watched with keen interest as Elder Folkenburg brought out the black-lighted beasts of Daniel and Revelation and worked out all the time prophecies of Adventism. I can still smell the sawdust shavings in the center aisle leading to the pulpit. I had no question that Adventism was “the truth” and rejoiced as people made decisions to join God’s true remnant people.

The summer after my sophomore year, my mother’s health was such that she was not able to teach. We moved to St Helena, California, so my sister could take nursing at Pacific Union College (PUC) just a few miles away. I stayed out of school that year and worked to support the family. For a teenager, I had a very good job working at a large chicken ranch, which had about 18,000 laying hens. The owner was happy to give me Saturdays off as he had other workers who wanted Sunday off. All went well until one Friday evening he called and wanted me to go to work on Saturday. I told him that I could not collect the eggs on the Sabbath, and I

would not be able to help him. When I went to work on Sunday, everything went as usual until quitting time when my boss handed me my check and said he had to have someone who could work on Saturday, if needed. I distinctly remember how good I felt, not that I had been fired, but that I had been faithful to my convictions.

By taking a year off from school, Carolyn caught up with me, so we were both juniors now. She talked me into attending Monterey Bay Academy, an Adventist boarding school near Watsonville, California. We loved it. We immediately became involved with all the religious activities we could. We both joined the “Seminar,” a program where four students would learn a sermon—usually an old HMS Richards’ sermon—and then the group would go out into surrounding Adventist churches and provide special music and preach.

I was one of the Missionary Volunteer leaders.⁴ We both were regular attendees at the Friday night “hill-top” prayer meetings.

One summer, Carolyn and I attended an Adventist Youth Congress held in San Francisco. An appeal was made for people to give their lives to foreign missions. We both wanted to serve God any way we could, and we both went forward, responding to the call.

Near the end of our junior year at Monterey Bay Academy, we were told by one of the teachers that we were getting “too serious” and should not be going steady. We took their counsel and did not date for the rest of that school year.

⁴ A Sabbath afternoon program where students had the opportunity to develop leadership skills and encourage others to share their faith.

My cousin, Harry Ratzlaff,⁵ had an apple ranch west of Sebastopol, California, and he also hauled hay for the many dairies in the area. Because I had stayed out of school one year, I was eighteen years old after my junior year of academy, and Harry invited me to drive his biggest hay truck and trailer—an old Autocar. We usually loaded by hand, and I again learned a lot more about hard work. I would often think about Carolyn, and we wrote a few times that summer.

The next year at MBA was one of the highlights of my life. I loved physics and advanced math, and Carolyn and I were in the same section of Bible doctrines. I remember the textbook for the class was entitled *Principles of Life*.⁶ This book covered all the traditional doctrines of the Adventist church. We both memorized the key texts. We could draw the time charts and explain the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and saw no problems with Adventist teaching. We both got “A” grades.

I was pastor of our senior class of 1956. As graduation neared, I thought long and hard as to what present I should give Carolyn. Because we were both into the Adventist message and believed in reading *all* of Ellen G. White’s (EGW) books, I decided to get her a set of *Testimonies for the Church*. The set came in two bindings, the familiar red and the luxury binding in black embossed with gold. I chose the latter. She seemed to be happy with the gift.

After graduation, I worked as a colporteur selling Adventist books in Santa Maria, California. I recall going out to eat with my adult supervisor; I believe his name was Elder Savage, who was in charge of the student program. When ordering, he leaned over and whispered, “Dale, I am going to order meat. Please don’t tell anyone.” He went on

⁵ Now deceased.

⁶ It is a classic in its presentation of traditional Adventism.

to tell me that he would lose weight if he did not eat meat. At the time, his statement seemed very strange to me for two reasons. First, we were selling books by Ellen G. White, who said ministers should *never* eat meat.⁷ Secondly, he appeared to me to be overweight and could afford to lose a few pounds. However, I did not let this bother me. We both were in God's true church, working toward taking the truths of the Adventist message to the world. I, however, would not eat the foul stuff!

Yes, I was an Adventist, through and through.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 36. "Let not any of our ministers set an evil example in the eating of flesh meat. Let them and their families live up to the light of health reform."

Chapter 2



Who Am I?

After the summer of selling Adventist books, I went to Pacific Union College, Napa, California, to start pre-medical courses. Carolyn moved to St. Helena and lived with an Adventist family and worked at St Helena Adventist Sanitarium, about seven miles from the College. I studied hard and got good grades. However, it seemed I could not put my heart toward becoming a doctor. I was not sure what I wanted to be.

After my first year of college, Carolyn and I were married. Our first house was upstairs over a horse barn with the address, “666-Z”, but for us, it was a “heavenly mansion”! As we look back after 50 years of marriage, it still has many, many happy memories.

I again worked for my cousin, Harry Ratzlaff, hauling hay. I enjoyed every minute of it except for the trouble—like four flat tires in one day.

The next year I started college again. I liked school except for one class called “Western Arts.” In this class, we were required to listen to classical music,⁸ memorize pages

⁸ And it did create in me a love of good classical music, which I had never had before that time.

of pictures of old statues, some with their arms or heads missing, and read classical literature. One of the assignments was to read sections from Shakespeare. I had remembered Ellen White commenting on the evil of reading fiction, so I looked up “fiction” in the *Index* to the writings of EGW and re-read her statements. I became convinced that a “good Adventist” would not read this junk.⁹ I did read a few pages, and on my book report, I wrote something like the following: “These sections are nothing but fiction and not worth reading.” Miss Babcock read my report and lit into me. She demanded to know why I would not read this literature. In answer to her probing, I relied on Ellen White’s statements. Her answer to me was, “Dale, you are reading too much of Ellen White.” Because of this statement, I thought she was a heretic and should not be teaching in an Adventist college.

Later that year, Bill Ruzicka, an Adventist friend who lived in Napa, found himself out of work. He knew I knew how to haul hay and said, “Dale, why don’t we go into partnership, buy a truck and haul hay. You have the contacts, and we could do it.” I was somewhat discouraged with the Western Arts class, as my refusal to do the work resulted in receiving a “D” in that class. This new idea seemed intriguing. Neither one of us had a dime to spend, but we were excited. We managed to get an Adventist farmer and an Adventist doctor to loan us enough money for the down payment, and off we went. All did not go well, however. We purchased what was said to be a “reconditioned” Freightliner. The diesel engine went out on the first load. After it was repaired, we had to replace the transmission. Soon after that, on a hot, dry, windy day, our load caught fire, and the truck burned to the ground. By now, summer was nearly over, and

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Teachers*, p. 383.

I decided perhaps God wanted me to go back to school. I was a little slow at times in discerning God's will.

I still was not sure I wanted to be a doctor but jumped back into the grind. I loved my Bible and math classes. However, money was tight, and I was not motivated. The old trucking passion soon came back; it seemed diesel smoke was in my blood. Bill and I bought an old truck this time; we fixed it up, and things were going well until he, traveling about 60 mph, had a head-on collision with a Cadillac that was driving on the wrong side of the road, doing an estimated 80 mph. Bill was not hurt; the man in the Cadillac was killed. It took over a month to rebuild the truck. Soon we purchased a second truck and were in the hay business for a number of years.

Both of our wonderful boys, Bruce and Mike, were adopted during my hay hauling days. Bruce became ours when we lived in Napa, California. We moved to Woodland to be closer to where I could purchase hay when Mike was born.

Winters, when the hay hauling was slow, we sometimes hauled grain to Los Angeles. I recall how I used to race my trucking friends to and from Los Angeles. My truck was not faster, but while they stopped for coffee, I kept going. Following the advice of EGW, I *never* drank coffee. On several occasions, however, I nearly fell asleep at the wheel. One day I ordered a tomato sandwich at a restaurant. It came with a thin slice of ham. I took the meat out and gave it to another trucker. Yes, I was a "good Adventist."

One winter, when things were slow, Carolyn's father invited us to move to Cornville, Arizona, to help him grow watermelons. Why not? We were not making much money trucking, so I took him up on the offer. We hauled our own things out in an old Chevy truck that Carolyn's father had. In

the process, I had to put a new engine in it. I drove all night a time or two, which apparently lowered my resistance. Not long after we moved to Arizona, I helped Carolyn's cousin move and again worked hard loading furniture, driving all night, and unloading the next day.

I got a bad cold and soon had a terrible sore throat with a fever. I went to see Dr. Stump, an Adventist doctor in Sedona. I don't recall the medications he gave me, but he would say, "If the fever does not go down, come back tomorrow." It did not, I did. Each day he would give me a different diagnosis. Each day I was getting worse. Finally, he said he thought I had diphtheria and recommended Carolyn rush me to a hospital in Phoenix. She drove about 90 mph the whole way. I was having a hard time breathing and was very sick. The hospital would not admit me as it did not have a contagious disease ward. Instead, they quarantined me in a motel room where two doctors came by to see me. I had a high fever and was exhausted. Every time I would drop off to sleep, I would choke and wake up gasping for air. After about two days of this, I realized I was at death's door.

Suddenly, I had to face the probability of death as never before. Instinctively, I *knew* I was not ready to die. I had paid my tithe, studied my Sabbath school lesson—usually seven times each week. I had always attended church. I had never had sex outside of marriage. I did not smoke (with the exception of a hand-made cigarette with pencil sharpener shavings, once or twice in North Carolina). I did not drink—not even coffee, and only very seldom had a cola drink. I had never attended a movie theater, danced, gone to a professional sporting event, been to a pool hall, circus or rodeo. I did not eat meat (except for a very few times in North Carolina—and that was clean meat). I had lied a time or two but had confessed this. I had never stolen anything. I

had “lost my temper” a number of times when younger, but that was many years ago. I had never played real cards or chess—I had played a few games of checkers. However, despite my outward obedience to the laws of Adventism, I *knew* that I was not ready to die. Even though I had a high fever, I could still think. I was in a desperate situation. Seeking some kind of escape from the terror of looking the Grim Reaper in the face, I began to repeat some of the key texts and memory verses I had learned.¹⁰ 1 John 1:9 came to mind.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As I repeated this text, suddenly, for *the first time in my life, I realized that if I were to be righteous and clean from sin, it would have to be God’s work, not mine.* My part was simply to admit that I was a sinner. *He* would do the forgiving and cleansing. Wow! At that moment, I experienced a peace that I had never known before. Now I was no longer afraid to die. I had peace with God, and the peace of God filled my heart to overflowing. That moment, for the first time, I totally trusted God for my salvation. This was my Jabbok experience. As Jacob left the brook limping and helpless, depending upon God alone, I, too, was brought to the point of complete helplessness. Like Jacob, my encounter with God was to change the direction of my life.

Before that encounter, even though I loved the Lord, my security was based on how good I was doing, not on His righteousness. I was alone (with God) when this took place. I told God I was now ready to die, but I felt an obligation to

¹⁰ The importance of memorizing Scripture cannot be overemphasized. One never knows how the Holy Spirit will use what is stored in our memory.

provide for my beloved Carolyn and our two wonderful boys, Bruce and Mike. So I made a covenant with the Lord that day¹¹. I told Him that I wanted to take care of my family, and if He let me live, I would live each new day as a gift from Him. I covenanted with the Lord that if He clearly told me what He wanted me to do, I would do it—little did I know the far-reaching results of that commitment. I told God that I knew I was not good at discerning His will, so He would have to show it to me in ways I could understand. Also, I told Him I was not good at doing some things, but I would do my best, which might not be good enough. Then I made the big one, I said, “Lord, even if you want me to go back to school¹² and study to become a pastor, I will do it.” At the time, going back to school to study theology was the furthestmost thing from what *I* wanted to do. I knew I would have to face that “D” in Western Arts, and I did not want to retake that class—never! Now, however, my future was in *His* hands. *I* did not have to worry. Now I was a child of God under *His* care.

¹¹ Perhaps, more theologically correct, God, working through the Holy Spirit, made a covenant with me.

¹² I envisioned going back to Pacific Union College.

Chapter 3



Follow Me!

IN about three days after my sickness and experience with God, I was completely well. The farming partnership with Carolyn's father was not working out, so we moved to Phoenix. We leased what we considered a nice home in the growing northern part of Phoenix just north of Bell Road and east of what is now I-17. I was selling Frantz oil filters. Carolyn was a stay-at-home mom with our two boys: Bruce, then about three, and Mike, about one. I had not learned well the lesson of not going into debt—a lesson God has repeatedly tried to teach me, and I have often failed. At the time, we had a nearly new Oldsmobile and a Ford Falcon Ranchero, which I had purchased new before leaving the trucking business. My Falcon was a red four-speed—hot for those days. I was making payments on both cars. Even though I was the fifth in the nation for sales of Frantz oil filters, I was not making enough money to make ends meet. I started looking around for something else to do. I answered an ad for insurance sales, took extensive tests, and Prudential Insurance Company gave me what I considered a very good offer. I was just about to accept that offer when I remembered the covenant I had made with God—to do His will. I went home and looked up insurance in the *Index* to

the writings of Ellen White and read the passages. It was clear she was not in favor of life insurance. Knowing this, how could I go into that business? Suddenly, I *knew* I was at the crossroads of my life again. I recalled the promise I made to God that I would be willing to go back to school and study to become a pastor. I *knew* God was calling me to do this. How did I know? I just *knew*. How, then, could I go back to college? I had saved no money. I was barely making the payments on our two cars. With two small children, how could I afford to go back to a private college? Despite all the apparent problems, I *knew* I should, so I began to muse with the Lord. If I sold my '62 Oldsmobile and '64 Ranchero and could get an old '55 Chevy, then I would have no payments. In those days, a '55 Chevy was not considered a classic; rather, it was inexpensive transportation one notch above a pile of junk. I prayed and recommitted myself to God.

The next day, without placing a "For Sale" sign in the car, without running an ad in the paper, a person whom I did not know drove up to our house in a blue '55 Chevy, knocked on our front door and said he wanted to buy my '64 Ranchero. He would take over my payments and give me his car for my equity. Then I knew *for sure* that God was calling me to the ministry!

We had a female German Shepherd that had just given birth to eight pure-breed puppies. In the Phoenix newspaper there were many AKC registered German Shepherd puppies for sale for \$25.00. We needed the money, and feeling God was guiding and providing, we placed an advertisement in the paper which read, "AKC German Shepherd puppies, \$100.00." The first day it ran, we sold our first puppy for \$100.00. "PUC, here we come!" There was never a question as to where I would go back to school. Even though I did not want to face that "D" on my transcript, I knew I should go

there. I have never been good at English, and now I would have to face Greek. It seemed overwhelming to my natural self. However, now I believed *God* would help me because *He* was calling me to *His* work.

Whenever God calls, Satan is there to try to talk us out of doing God's work. He did it then and has done it many times since. He can find more ways than we can imagine. When we told our landlord that we were not going to renew the lease on our house, he came over and said that he wanted to sell us the house. He would accept the lease money *already paid* as the down payment. All we had to do was make the payments that were even less than the monthly lease we had been paying. Prudential called, and when I told them what I was planning on doing, they wanted me to come in and talk to them first. I did, and they made me an even better offer. From the human perspective—looking at finances alone—I would be a lot better off today if I had stayed in Phoenix and worked for Prudential. But the Christian life cannot be lived from the human perspective. Either God is in control and is truly working all things together for good, or He is not. Therefore, there is no other choice for a committed Christian than to do God's will. It is the *only* path of peace.

I made an application to PUC and was soon accepted. We were not able to sell four of the puppies or the Oldsmobile in Phoenix. So I drove the old blue '55 Chevy with Bruce, Cindy, the mother dog, and her four puppies. Carolyn drove the Olds with Mike. When registering for classes, they asked me if I wanted to retake Western Arts to raise my grade.¹³ I said, "No." It probably was not the right answer, but it seemed right at the time.

¹³ I had good grades in all my other class.

Reasoning that if I had not done too well in high school English, I would have a hard time with Greek, I determined that I would study hard and get an “A.” It was hard, but I did my best, and I took three years of Greek and received mostly “As.”

Because I had dropped out of college for a number of years in the trucking detour of my life, I was older than many of the other college students. I also had more responsibilities. I had a wife and two boys to support. I found employment at a building supply owned by an Adventist in Napa and worked there on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. I took classes at PUC on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

One house we lived in was on the hill behind the boy’s dorm. It was so small that all we could get in the bedroom was a bunk bed for the boys. Carolyn and I slept in the tiny living room on an old \$15.00 hide-a-bed that Carolyn reupholstered. I had a large desk that I had kept from my trucking days, and the only place I could find for it was in the unfinished and unheated attic. I had to take it all apart and carry it piece by piece up the ladder and then put it back together again. I rigged up an extension cord with a naked light bulb and hung it from the rafters. This served as my often cold and sometimes windy, study.

As I continued my theological studies, I began to wrestle with questions. What was wrong?

Chapter 4



Questions

One day in Greek class, Dr. Fred Veltman¹⁴ gave us a translation assignment which included Ephesians 2:8, 9. I could see that the correct translation was “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.” I went to him and said, “This cannot be right because it does not fit Adventist theology.” I had often read where Ellen White said we should never say we are saved.¹⁵ Further, we can never know we are saved until the second coming of Christ because we do not know if we will be overcomers and remain faithful. How could one say he is saved if his name had not yet come up in judgment? I asked Dr. Veltman if there might not be some manuscript that might have a variance in reading to support Adventist teaching. I am so thankful for his answer. He said, “Dale, we are not to try to make the Bible say what we think

¹⁴ Now deceased.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Kress Collection*, p. 120; *Review and Herald*, 1890-06-17; *Medical Ministry*, p. 123. See also, Ratzlaff, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists: An Evangelical Resource, An Appeal to SDA Leadership*, (LAM Publications, LLC, Glendale, Arizona) p. 318–341, for a complete discussion of this problem.

it should say, rather we are to go to the Bible and align our theology with it.”¹⁶ I had thought that perhaps one purpose of Greek class was to find Greek manuscripts that would most nearly harmonize with Adventist teaching.¹⁷ He assured me that was *not* the way to study. Instead, the Greek text should be made from a comparison of the manuscripts, using sound principles of textual criticism, *without personal bias*. Later I took a class from Dr. Veltman called “Seminar in Biblical Languages,” where we learned how linguistic scholars prepared the Greek text for the Bible from the ancient manuscripts. This strengthened my faith in the Bible and gave me a profound respect for those who worked on the meticulous preparation of the Greek and Hebrew texts from which our English Bibles are translated. Translating portions of Ephesians from the Greek, with the security of salvation so evident in this letter of Paul, was the first time I had any evidence that Ellen G. White might be a little bit off in her interpretation of the gospel. However, I was so steeped in Adventism that I hardly gave it a second thought.

I enjoyed my theological studies at PUC and was excited about potential ministry in the Adventist church. I very much liked my pastoral training class taught by Carl Coffman, and I looked up to him as a friend and mentor. The Coffmans had been our neighbors when he was pastor of the Napa church, and I was in the trucking business. In his class, we prepared a series of Bible studies on the Adventist message. In doing so, we were to prepare one on 1844 and the judgment, leading to the Sabbath doctrine. While I had studied this at Monterey Bay Academy, I had not really done independent

¹⁶ I put this in quotes, however, it may not be the exact words he used, but they are certainly close.

¹⁷ Looking back from my current perspective, I now realize what a cultic mentality I had.

study, but rather had just taken Alban Millard's, our Bible doctrines teacher, word for it and memorized the key texts, putting them together in the right order without much thought. However, now I was a theology student preparing for ministry, and I knew the fallacy of haphazardly linking texts of Scripture together to prove my ideas. I needed a good reason to link "proof texts."

I studied Daniel 8 in context and had a hard time trying to make Daniel 8:14 say what Adventists have tried to make it say.¹⁸ It was difficult for me to understand how Rome could be represented as part of the Greek beast. I could not find a good, convenient connection between Daniel 8:14 and Leviticus 16, needed to support the Adventist interpretation. I recognized that Daniel 8:14 had a context, and that context did not fit the Adventist doctrine. It was clear to me that Daniel 8:14 was the answer to the question asked in Daniel 8:13. I knew the 2300 day prophecy chart by heart, and in trying to make it fit the context of Daniel 8, I wondered what was "trampled" in 457 BC that was "untrampled" in 1844. I asked several of my teachers and did not get a good answer. I asked several other theology students, and they did not have one either. Thinking the problem was *my* lack of understanding, I went to Dr. Leslie Harding, from whom I was taking the "Spirit of Prophecy" class. I had faith in him because he, like me, was a strong believer in Ellen White. I will never forget the day I asked him my question: "Dr. Harding," I said, "What was 'trampled' in 457 BC that was 'untrampled' in 1844?" Suddenly his demeanor changed. He peered at me with a cold, penetrating, lengthy stare, with an expression I had never seen from him before. After a long, uncomfortable silence, he said, "Dale, aren't you studying

¹⁸ *Cultic Doctrine* is dedicated to an in-depth study of this problem, and I only give it here as part of my journey in a historical sense.

for the ministry? You should not be asking questions like that!” The tone and manner in which he answered caused me to wonder what awful thing I had broached by my question. Afterward, I pondered this experience. Had I, by my lack of understanding, shown my ignorance to such an extent that I should be ashamed? Or, had I asked a question that was “off-limits”? If so, *why* was it off-limits? Dr. Harding was one of my favorite teachers. I got A’s in his class and had, previous to this encounter, felt that I was one of his favorite students. Why this sudden change in attitude?

I never asked Dr. Harding questions about the subject again. However, I did ask Dr. Fred Veltman, my Greek teacher. He told me, “Dale, the investigative judgment is not a biblical doctrine.” I was shocked and secretly thought he, too, was a heretic. Yet at the same time, I knew Dr. Veltman was a brilliant man, a careful biblical scholar, a deeply honest Christian, and loyal to the SDA church.

This issue of 1844, the little horn of Daniel 8, and the investigative judgment created a lot of buzz among the theology students. It was announced that one of the teachers would make a presentation showing that it indeed was a biblical doctrine. There were not many theology students present when the presentation was made, but I was there, and I remember there were many “holes” in the logic, and texts were taken out of context and given a meaning foreign to their context. Still, however, I felt the problem must be with *my* understanding.

In my senior year at PUC, I was fortunate enough to get the assignment to be an “Associate Pastor”—the title seemed to give me clout—at a little SDA church in Calistoga, about twenty miles from the college. Here I preached once or twice a month and conducted the Wednesday Bible study and prayer meetings. I fell in love

with the congregation and looked forward to the day I could do full-time ministry.

At the end of my senior year, I was scheduled to take the final comprehensive examinations. There was to be both a written and oral test given to the theology students. I received the highest score on the written exam, and because of this achievement, I was exempted from the orals.

I knew God had called me to ministry and decided that I would do nothing to get a “call.” Most of the theology students were making resumes and mailing out dozens of letters to conference presidents around the country. I felt that if God had called me, He would know where to find me. I prayed and had told the Lord I would accept the first official call I received, no matter where it was. I remembered my commitment to God to do His will, not mine. I also remembered that I told Him I was not too good at discerning His will and felt this was a reasonable way to discover it. I did, however, decide I should visit with every conference president who came to interview the theology students. Elder Helmouth Retzer, from the Southern California Conference, was the first to come. I met with him and told him that I did not want to go to the seminary. I had been working so hard trying to support the family and studying at the same time, I felt I needed a break from school and wanted to get out into the work of ministry. Also, I told Elder Retzer that I did not want to go to the big, bad city of Los Angeles. He told me that all the men he called would go to the seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan. I felt certain after what I had said he would not call me. However, the next day I received a phone call from Elder Retzer. He stated he was officially asking me to serve in the Southern California Conference, and he wanted to sponsor me to the seminary. I was the first of my

class to get a “call” and felt God was leading. So as soon as graduation was over, we were off to Berrien Springs.

The old '55 Chevy had given out on us. We now had an old Rambler. The only thing good about that car was that the seats reclined. We arrived in Berrien Springs late one night, nearly broke and tired from the long trip. We did not have money for a motel, so we slept in the car—a difficult thing to do for four people. The next day we moved into Garland Apartments, F-4.

At that time, the seminary was trying to pack three years of graduate work into two. They had “preessions”—a short class before the fall quarter, “intersessions”—a class between quarters and “post sessions”—classes after the spring quarter and then summer school. I was told I should not plan to work more than five hours per week. However, even though Carolyn had a part-time job, our budget still had a shortfall. After the preession, I was hired to clean the halls of our sixteen unit apartment building, empty the trash, keep salt in the huge softener, and wax the floors. However, this job did not provide enough money for the family. I have always been resourceful when it comes to finding a job. I got a night job answering the phone at the YMCA in Benton Harbor. I noticed that the cleaning crew did not do a good job, and it seemed the employees did not last long. There was some new person almost every week. The manager was not happy with the firm, so I proposed that I contract the cleaning. I figured I could find some other hungry seminary students to help me. If I worked the cleaning areas and schedules right, I figured I could clean close to the phone, and in this way, get paid for doing *two* jobs at the *same* time.

I was approached by another seminary student with the opportunity to teach modern math for parents—a government sponsored project—in Benton Harbor in the evening. I

loved math and accepted that job too. There was a period of time when I would go to school all day, come home in the late afternoon, clean the apartments, study a little, drive to Benton Harbor and teach modern math until 9:00 p.m. I would then go to the YMCA and answer the phone until about 10:00 p.m. I would sleep there on one of the benches, get up at 2:00 in the morning, clean the lobby near the phone, and try to study until 7:30. I would then drive back to Berrien Springs and go to class. I kept this pace up for some time. One day after class, I almost lost it. I could not remember driving from Benton Harbor and had no idea where I had parked the car. There were several large parking lots that were filled differently on different days because of changing class schedules, so I did not have a regular place to park. After class, I went out and just started walking through those large parking lots trying to find my car. It was then I realized that I had to cut back on the work.

I loved my classes at the seminary, all but two: pastoral counseling and Hebrew. I thought I had done well on the pastoral counseling final, but I did not get an “A” on it. I went to the teacher and asked to see my final test. However, he said he had destroyed all tests immediately after they were graded. I took Hebrew during the time I was working so hard. Because I did not have sufficient time to study, I did not learn it as well as I should have. It was announced that our final test would be translations taken from several chapters of Genesis. Therefore, I read and re-read this section in the English Bible until I practically had it memorized. I could then pick up the Hebrew words I knew and intelligently guess at the ones I did not know. I told the Lord that I would never trust my theology to my knowledge of Hebrew, and I have kept that promise.

My favorite classes at the seminary were “Theology of the Sabbath” and “Eschatology,” taught by Dr. Hans LaRondelle. Both of these were filled with material from Ellen White as well as biblical study. I enjoyed Dr. Raoul Dederen’s class, “Christology.” But the one that was to have the most influence in my life was a class taught by Dr. Wilber Alexander entitled, “Righteousness by Faith.” He was an inductive teacher. Many of the other teachers would lecture, and we would take notes. To pass the test, all we had to do was to regurgitate what the teacher had given to us. Little creative thought was required. Dr. Alexander, however, asked a lot of questions, rather than lecturing, and did not give answers. He made *us* think. I recall one question he asked repeatedly over a period of several days. It was, “When God justifies us, are we really righteous?” Different people in the class had different answers. There was no consensus. I don’t think Dr. Alexander ever did give the answer. I recall some of the older men in the class became angry because they had to come up with the answers themselves. While Dr. Alexander did not give us the answers, he did give us some suggested reading assignments where we could find the answers. These included several chapters from Romans and selections from the writings of Ellen White, including *Selected Messages*, Book 2, which has the best material on this topic. Whoever combed the writings of Ellen White to pull out the quotations for this section did a good job. After much study, it was my conclusion that when a man is justified, he is *not* intrinsically righteous, but only *accounted as if* he were righteous. He was, to put in into the terms of the reformers, “same time righteous, same time sinner.”¹⁹ When it came time to fill up

¹⁹ This wording, however, was never used in my seminary classes. I think it was purposely avoided as it does not fit Adventist theology.

the little blue test booklet, I must have made a good case for this view because I got an “A” in the class and a few good words from Dr. Alexander.

One disappointment, however, was the class entitled, “Atonement,” also taught by Dr. Alexander. Not that the class was not good, but near the end of the printed outline for the class was a section dealing with 1844 and the investigative judgment. Adventists do not believe in a finished Atonement at the cross but believe in a “final Atonement” made in the heavenly sanctuary when God blots out the record of sins from the books of heaven.²⁰ This is said to happen just before He places the sins of the righteous upon Satan, who must suffer for them in the lake of fire.²¹ This is part of the 1844 investigative judgment theology, and as such, found its place in this class. Having had difficulty understanding this in college, I looked forward with anticipation to find the answers from those whom I was *sure* knew them. For some reason, we fell behind schedule, and the part on 1844 was left out. I did not suspect any ulterior reason at the time. Now I do.

The last summer of seminary work included a “Field School” where I was to help with a series of evangelistic meetings in Columbus, Ohio. I enjoyed this assignment and had no problems with the traditional Adventist message, delivered in the traditional Adventist evangelistic style. Little did I know what lay ahead.

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 486. See also Ellen. G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 266.

²¹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 422. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 266.

Chapter 5



Gospel Clarity

My first church assignment was to be associate pastor in Santa Monica, California. As an intern, my job was to serve the senior pastor in whatever way he suggested. He gave me a week to get unpacked and the house settled, and then I reported for duty. We did not visit long that first day before he opened his desk drawer and pulled out a stack of papers with names and addresses typed on them. He told me I was to visit each of these names and then report back to him. These were names of children, I was told, who had come to Vacation Bible School, along with a few other miscellaneous interests I was to follow up. I liked visiting and accepted the assignment joyfully.

When I knocked at the first door, I explained who I was and that I was following up on the kids who had come to Vacation Bible School to see if our church could serve them in some way. The lady at the door suddenly had the strangest look on her face. Then she began to laugh. She told me her boy who had attended the VBS was now in college.

The next incident was even worse. I knocked at the door and asked to see the gentleman whose name was on my

sheet. The lady said it was her husband, but he had died some ten years ago.

I reported to Pastor Adams, the senior pastor, that the list appeared to be an old, outdated list. He said that it did not matter, just continue to visit. I did. About two weeks later, I found out he was leaving. Apparently, he just wanted me to be out of his hair.

Soon Elder Morton came to be the new senior pastor. He had an old Cadillac that always needed work. I was a “shade-tree” mechanic and had a good set of tools left over from my trucking days. Often our weekly pastor’s meeting was visiting under his old car. I enjoyed it as it gave me a chance to talk informally with this man. We had many good discussions.

I decided I wanted to conduct an evangelistic series and asked Elder Morton’s permission, which he heartily gave. The church had a large multipurpose auditorium just right for the occasion. Remembering the series with black-light illustrations held in Riverbank, that Carolyn and I attended while in high school, and the one I recently participated in during the evangelism field school, I felt certain I could do a good job. I made a flyer stating I would have black-light illustrations and printed sermons each night. Had I known what was soon to happen, I would have shelved this idea.

To save money on the printing, I purchased an old AB Dick offset press and learned how to run it. I was just getting ready to make the outline and start putting together ideas for the black-light illustrations when Elder Morton accepted a “call” to pastor in Georgia. Now I was to fill his shoes as interim pastor *and* prepare for and conduct an evangelistic series. The Santa Monica church at that time had, as I recall, some four hundred names on the membership rolls. However, I doubt if there were more than two to three

hundred who attended. It was an older congregation, and there was a funeral every few weeks. Each week I had a sermon to make for a sizable church, a Wednesday night prayer meeting to conduct, frequent funerals, and new people as well as church members that needed to be visited. Then, on top of that, I had to prepare for the evangelistic series.

Happily, people rallied to my help. I remember one family, Lon and Bonnie Wilson, who supported my efforts. They spent many hours cutting out the black-light illustrations. I would meet them later as members of my last SDA congregation in Watsonville, California. Yes, again, they would play a key role in my ministry.

When it came time for the series to start, I had one or two of the 21 sermons completed. With meetings several nights each week, I had to work long and hard to keep up. But I was used to working hard, thanks to all the hard work in my past experience. With the help of Carolyn, who proofed and typed my sermons after she got home from her full-time employment, I managed to hold up under the grind. I had four sermons a week to prepare, type, and then print on that old AB Dick. Little did I realize where that printing experience would be used many years later and how it would influence my life and, ultimately, the lives of many others.

My series was entitled, “Focus on Christ,” and the first few sermons had a lot of “gospel” in them, thanks to the class on righteousness by faith.

While working on the prophecy charts and the thousand years, I remember using the “proof text” from Jeremiah²² to describe the conditions during the thousand years. At the time I wondered how one could be sure that Jeremiah was describing the thousand years when the heading was

²² Jeremiah 4:23–26.

“Lament over Judah’s Devastation,” but it seemed to fit the conditions that Ellen White described for the thousand years of Revelation 20. The process seemed like circular reasoning. Nevertheless, I figured there was some good reason why others, more scholarly than I, had used it, even if I did not understand what it was. Several people were baptized into the Adventist church from that series, and it was a good experience for me.

We ministered in the Santa Monica SDA church about a year, and then I was asked to be the pastor of the Hacienda Heights SDA church in the east valley of Los Angeles. It was a little church, and I jumped at the chance. About this time, I received in the mail a journal entitled, *Present Truth*, a title taken from an early SDA periodical. It was written by Robert Brinsmead, who had been a controversial figure—“thorn in the flesh” might be more accurate—in Adventism for many years. I did not order this journal; it just came to me, a pattern I was to see played out over and over again by chance—or was it Providence? Month after month, I received this journal, and I found the articles *very* provocative. The theme of most of the early articles was the gospel. Like Dr. Alexander, Brinsmead made me think. His crisp writing style, his scriptural insight, his penetrating questions, the provocative illustrations captured my attention. I found myself digging deeper into the Bible and understanding new depths of meaning in the cross of Christ. I was beginning to see a deeper assurance of salvation than I had ever known before. I had always understood that *both* justification and sanctification were in the foundation of one’s acceptance with God. Ellen White taught that justification was our title to heaven, and sanctification was our fitness for heaven. Both, it seemed to me, were *required* to get to heaven. Brinsmead, however, was building the case that our ground

of acceptance before God was based upon justification alone—Christ’s work of grace *for* us, and sanctification was the *result* of Christ’s work but was in no way the basis of our assurance with God. At first, I thought he was only proclaiming half of the gospel.

About this same time, the Southern California Conference had a team from Campus Crusade give a presentation on the *Four Spiritual Laws* at a Workers Meeting.²³ I could see that they, like Brinsmead, were teaching the same assurance of salvation based upon nothing but faith in *Christ’s* work and not based upon one’s behavior in any way.

That meeting, which was full of joy and peace for me, was met with biting sarcasm by some of the Adventist pastors. Some were very upset “that Adventists, who had ‘the truth,’ would stoop to invite ‘these Babylonians’ to teach us how to witness!”²⁴

I was beginning to see, as never before, that many in the SDA church, including many pastors, had no concept of what I considered true “righteousness by faith,” but were trusting partly to Christ and partly to their own good works in keeping the law.

After this conference, on several occasions, I took members from the Hacienda Heights church with me as we went out door to door using the *Four Spiritual Laws*. We made many calls and led many people to pray the prayer of acceptance of Christ.

I began to preach gospel-centered sermons bringing in the assurance of trusting in Christ *alone*. I was somewhat

²³ A term common in SDA circles for meetings held by the conference for conference employees, most of whom were pastors.

²⁴ These were the approximate words several pastors used during one of the breaks in the meeting.

fearful, however, as I knew many SDAs were not open to the simple gospel.

While in Hacienda Heights, I made a request to the conference president, Elder Retzer, to take a speed-reading class. I outlined my reasons for wanting to take it. I told him that I would pay the tuition, my church was growing, and it would not interfere with my pastoral ministry. I wanted to take this class because it would allow me to read faster and thus make my study time more efficient. I thought for sure this request would be granted. However, when I received Elder Retzer's letter, he told me that I had been to the seminary, and I did not need any more classes at this time. I accepted it but felt he was narrow and ridged.

At the next Workers Meeting, I visited with several of the other interns whom I had known at the seminary in Michigan. In the course of our conversation, I told them about my request and its denial. A couple of the other men said they, too, had made requests to take additional classwork and had been turned down. One of the men said that he was taking classes, but was not letting Elder Retzer or his church know about it. After that, Workers Meeting provided a place where several of us interns could commiserate with each other.

One day I got a phone call from Elder Harvey Voth, who had been dean of boys when I was a student at Monterey Bay Academy. He was now principal, and he asked if I would come up and be the speaker for Alumni Day. I was happy to do so. I had forgotten how nice the campus was: a half-mile of private beach and beautiful views of green lawns overlooking the blue Pacific Ocean. For Carolyn and me, this trip brought back many sacred memories of our high school days at "good old MBA!" After the service, I said, "Harvey, if you ever need a good Bible teacher, let me

know.” I really was not trying to get a job; I just said that on the spur of the moment and never gave it another thought. I did not know one of his Bible teachers was leaving that year, and he would be looking for another Bible teacher. Some months later, I got a “call” to go to Monterey Bay Academy to become Associate Pastor and Bible teacher.

Unlike Elder Retzer, however, MBA required that I attend a class called “Basic Youth Conflicts” taught by Bill Gothard in Los Angeles. I knew things were going to be better at Monterey Bay Academy. Therefore, after we moved to MBA, I drove back to Los Angeles to attend this class.

Part of the material Gothard presented was on how to have a clear conscience and included detailed material on the confession of sin.²⁵ I felt this would be excellent material to share with my students at MBA.

Carolyn and the boys stayed at Monterey Bay Academy during this conference, which ended on a Saturday night. The next morning I started driving back to MBA, looking forward to being with the family again.

As I was leaving the Los Angeles basin, my thoughts recounted all the events of the last two years. Suddenly, my conscience hit me. I had done wrong in the way I talked about Elder Retzer behind his back. True, I had not taken the speed-reading class, so in that sense, I obeyed his leadership. However, I also knew that I had talked, gossiped, and even criticized him. As I drove along, I contemplated the idea of confessing this to him. I had a thousand reasons not to do so. I was unordained, he might be on my ordination committee, and if he knew I had gossiped about him, he might vote against me. He did not even know I had said anything negative about him. “Let a sleeping dog lie.” “Why open up

²⁵ Gothard had some good material but was very legalistic in many of his concepts.

a can of worms at this stage of the game?” I was leaving his authority, so why bother? He was, I felt, very narrow anyway. These and many more reasons went through my mind. Then I recalled that day in Phoenix. “Lord,” I said, “I will do whatever you want me to do if you make it clear to me.” Well, He *was* making it clear. But I did not want to do it. I felt so heavy I thought the tires on the car might blow any minute. I vacillated back and forth. Finally, I decided that I must do it—now. So I pulled over into a service station, went to a payphone, and called Elder Retzer early Sunday morning, thinking to myself that I would get him out of bed, and he would be angry for that. When he answered the phone, I told him what I had done and asked for his forgiveness, which he freely gave me. Wow! What a weight off my soul. When I got back in the car, it now seemed so light that I could hardly hold it on the road. I started singing and praising God, experiencing the joy of a clear conscience. Looking back, I can see how God tested me in little things to see if I was able to endure the big tests.

At Monterey Bay Academy, we moved into one of the old World War II hospital buildings converted into a home and went to work. Carolyn worked for Principle Voth as his secretary, and I set about to prepare my lesson plans. I was to teach three sections of eleventh grade Bible doctrines, two sections of sophomore Bible, preach about once each month, and be in charge of their “Seminar” program—the same program that Carolyn and I had been in years before.

I immediately made good friends with Fred Speyer, who was the pastor of the school and taught twelfth grade Bible. After our friendship was secure, I shared with him some of the issues of *Present Truth*. About that time, the name of this periodical was changed to *Verdict*. We often discussed this material and came to a better understanding of the Gospel.

The curriculum for one quarter of the Bible doctrines class was based upon the first eight chapters of Romans. I had taken my juniors through it the year before and was richly blessed by this most powerful book. I found that even though I had taught from this section of Scripture before, each time, it seemed to be fresh with new insights that had been hidden the previous year. I liked to teach inductively—like Dr. Alexander had done—helping the students to think and discover for themselves. Therefore, I was always making and revising study guides with questions that, I hoped, would cause them to discover the gold that was hidden in this rich vein of theological ore.

I was revising a study guide for Romans 4. As I read verses 17–20, I began to question the choice of Paul’s illustration.

(As it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God (Rom. 4:17–20).

The more I contemplated this illustration, the more it bothered me. I knew the context, and that was part of my problem. In Chapter 3, Paul had, in the most majestic terms, described the gospel of righteousness by faith.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified

as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:21–26).

Then, Paul gave one of his most powerful statements:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law (Rom. 3:28).

The church at Rome, I knew from previous study, was a church comprised of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. This is why throughout the book of Romans, Paul first addresses one group and then the other. Paul’s statement that a Christian is justified “apart from works of the law” would instantly raise questions in the minds of his Jewish-Christian readers who placed high value on the observance of the law. To keep his Jewish-Christian readers from rejecting his theology, Paul had to prove *from the law* that the Gentiles could be justified *without the law*. He must use *their* source of truth (old covenant) to prove *his* (new covenant) theology. I knew this was the context of Romans 4. Admittedly, I had not yet realized the future implications this truth would have on my own life. In Romans 4, Paul used two of the most revered characters of Judaism as illustrations of his doctrine of righteousness by faith: Abraham and David.

There are only two simple requirements for salvation—simple, not easy. One only needs perfect righteousness and no sin. The problem, however, is that “all have sinned and (continue to) fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).²⁶ All of us are in the same predicament. We are helpless, and

²⁶ In Greek, “fall short,” is in the present continuous tense.

keeping the law (if we could do that) won't help solve our problem one bit.

At this point, Paul uses two illustrations to prove his theology. First, he states that Abraham was *not* justified by works, but “Abraham *believed* God and it was *credited* to him as righteousness.” It is important to note that the experience of Abraham, to which Paul alludes, is recorded in Genesis 15:1–6, where God took Abraham outside one night and compared the number of Abraham's children to the stars.

I can still remember the thrill I had when I realized the depth of good news in Romans 4:5. “But to the one who *does not work*, [I could qualify here] but believes in Him who justifies the *ungodly* [I could qualify here too], his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”

Paul used the illustration of Abraham to prove that a person is declared righteous solely on the basis of his faith *without* any works. But does God's declaration of righteousness also take care of the sins of the past?

To answer this implied question, Paul brings David onto the witness stand. Everyone knows David sinned—big time. So from David's Psalm 32, he quotes:

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account (Rom. 4:7, 8).

By the end of Romans 4:8, Paul had proved his point. He had shown that *ungodly* men (and women) who *do not work* can be counted righteous based *solely* upon their faith. He had also shown that sinners, even like David who committed adultery and murder, can be *counted* righteous. When these sinners are declared righteous by God, their sin is no longer counted against them. That, I found, is the good news of the gospel of justification by faith.

Thus far, I could follow Paul, and I was rejoicing in my deeper understanding of righteousness by faith. But why, I had to ask, did Paul use the next illustration? Why would Paul choose *this* illustration to further illustrate the most profound truth of the New Testament—righteousness by faith? What, you say, is this illustration? Come with me to the salient verses in Genesis 17 to which Paul alludes in Romans 4:17–21.

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless...No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations (Gen. 17:1, 6).

At this time, God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, which would become the entrance sign into the covenant community for the Israelites. Then we have this conversation between God and Abraham.

Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!” (Gen. 17:15–18).

Try as I would, I could not find any evidence *in this account* that Abraham expressed *any* faith. I went to the commentaries. Some said it was the “laugh of faith.” But I ruled this out because Abraham said, “Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!” It appeared to me that Abraham had *absolutely no faith* that he, now 99 and Sarah, now 90, could have a child. The thought must have hit him like a joke, and he laughed so hard he fell down.

Again, I had to ask myself why *this* illustration? If Paul wanted to illustrate the nature of victorious faith and use the faith of Abraham as an example, why didn't Paul choose Abraham's offering of Isaac? *That* was real faith. Then, I thought—still hoping to find some sense in Paul's choice—perhaps Sarah was the one who had the faith. So I turned to Genesis 18 where I read,

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent." And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh." (Gen. 18:9–15).

I found no help here. In fact, the picture only got worse. Not only did Abraham laugh and express *no* faith, but Sarah did the same thing and then topped it off with an outright lie. Further, I noted that if Sarah's laugh was a "laugh of faith," as some claim, then God would not have questioned her laugh, and she would not have lied. So my conclusion, *based upon this record in Genesis*, was that both Abraham and Sarah had *no* faith in their ability to have a child—none, zero.

Why, Paul? Why *this* illustration of "faith" to illustrate the most important truth of the New Testament? So with these conclusions and questions, I went back to Romans 4. Then it hit me.

My first time through Romans 4 with my Bible doctrines class at MBA, I had missed it. Although I vividly recall, I had a sense there was something more to this verse than I had yet discovered.

(As it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls things which do not exist as existing (Rom. 4:17).²⁷

This verse teaches that God *called* Abraham a “Father of many nations” *before* Isaac was even conceived. After the experience recorded in Genesis 17, Scripture never again refers to Abraham as Abram. God *accounted* Abraham a father *before* he was a father and *treated* him as such. Isaac and the multitude of nations were there *only* by the *declaration of God*.

In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, “So shall your descendents be.” And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform (Rom. 4:18–21).

Now I saw it! While Abraham had *no* faith in what *he* could do, He did have faith in the *promise of God*, being fully assured that what God had promised, *God was able also to perform*.

So Abraham’s faith was not directed toward himself, rather it was centered *only* in *God’s* promise and *God’s* power.

²⁷ NASB marginal reading at Rom. 4:17.

Therefore also it [faith] was reckoned to him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification (Rom. 4:22–25).

Now I understood new dimensions of righteousness by faith that would alter the course of my life:

- When God declares us righteous by faith, He changes our name from “sinner-man” or “sinner-woman” to “saint.”²⁸
- As God changed Abraham’s name *before* he was a father and counted him as a father, so God changes our name to “saint” and counts us as righteous *before* we are righteous when the *only* righteousness we have is the *declaration* of God.
- We express “the faith of Abraham,” which is saving faith, not by our faith in what *we* can or will do. Rather, we are to react like Abraham and recognize the *utter impossibility* of our ever achieving righteousness. We laugh at the impossibility of the command, “Be perfect as God is perfect.” Or, “Be holy for I am holy.”
- Yet, because God declares us righteous, we believe it based *solely* on *God’s promise* and *God’s power* to fulfill His own promise.
- As Abraham accepted his changed name, so we should accept ours.

²⁸ Paul calls Christians “saints” some 37 times in his epistles.

- As Abraham was never again known by his old name so we should never again consider ourselves as lost sinners.
- As God considers us righteous “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”²⁹ We are to see ourselves as God sees us—in Christ, saved with the very “righteousness of God.”

Righteousness by faith is *everything* we need: It includes Christ’s perfect righteousness (I remembered Abraham). It includes forgiveness for all sin (I remembered David). And it brings the Holy Spirit into our lives “Who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Eph. 3:20).

Yes, indeed, God counts things which do not exist as existing. And therein lies our only hope. Now I realized how *careful* Paul had been in his choice of illustrations.

Now, with the understanding received from Dr. Alexander’s class on righteousness by faith, the insights gained in *Verdict*, and my own discovery from Romans, I was thoroughly gospel-centered in my teaching and preaching.³⁰

Sometimes the students in my Bible doctrines class came up to the end of the quarter with grades lower than they wanted. I made it a policy that I would raise their grade by one letter if they memorized all of Romans 5 or 6. Several did this. One student who had seemed somewhat rebellious

²⁹ Rom. 6:11.

³⁰ My understanding of this most important truth has been dynamic with new discoveries, insights and applications unfolding through the years as I keep finding new facets of the love and grace of God.

prior to this, after she finished repeating Romans 5 from memory said, “This chapter really says something, doesn’t it?” She had *earned* a “D” in Bible class the first quarter, so I gave her a “C.” After that, she *earned* “A”s the rest of the year.

I found that the qualifications for those whom God justifies are within reach of all. Romans 5 made it clear that God accepts *helpless, ungodly sinners* who are *enemies* of God³¹ if they will only place their faith in Christ.

I recall meditating on Rom. 5:12–14.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

I never came to grips with the full meaning of this text until years after I left the SDA church. While still an SDA, I could not bring myself to accept what is the obvious teaching of Paul: the law was not in effect between the time of Adam and the time of Moses. I tried to insert law there to fit SDA theology. I did this by showing that where there is no law, there is no transgression. Therefore, I concluded that Paul must be stating that even though there was no *written* law, the law was there nonetheless. I completely missed the point that Paul was trying to make: the people who lived between Adam and Moses suffered the consequences of sin, both moral and legal, because of the *imputed* sin of Adam. In the same way, we are now declared righteous by the *imputed* moral and legal righteousness of Christ.³²

³¹ Rom. 5:6–10.

³² Rom. 5:17–21.

In Romans 6, I discovered that those who have been justified by faith should consider *themselves* to be dead to sin.³³ Yes, I came, at last, to accept that it is OK to believe and have the assurance that one is “saved,” something Ellen White said we should never do.³⁴

The full truth of Romans 7 also did not hit me until years after I left the SDA church. While at Monterey Bay Academy, I tried to make Paul harmonize with SDA theology by simply adding words to Paul’s thought. After all, did not even Peter say Paul was hard to understand?³⁵ I understood Romans 7:6 to read—with my additions,

But now we have been released from the [condemnation of the] Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.

Later, I saw that Paul had it right without my help. According to Paul, we are not only released from the *condemnation* of the law, but we *serve* “in newness of the Spirit and *not* in the oldness of the letter.”

Further, Paul made it clear that those who try to be “married” to Christ *and* the law, as I was trying to do while in Adventism, were committing spiritual adultery.³⁶

Romans 7 and 8 taught me that the justified Christian is no longer to live in the continual struggle between law and sin. That is life lived from the perspective of the old covenant.³⁷ Now, under the new covenant, the secret of Christian service springs from a heart of gratitude for God’s justifying, saving grace, and now our desire is to allow the

³³ Rom. 6:11.

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Kress Collection*, p. 120; *Review and Herald*, 1890-06-17; *Medical Ministry*, p. 123.

³⁵ 2 Pet. 3:15, 16.

³⁶ Rom. 7:1–6.

³⁷ Rom. 7:18–25.

Holy Spirit, Who creates a new life within us,³⁸ to live out *His* life *through* us.³⁹

Now that Paul has laid the theological foundation, he can clearly state:

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).

Sanctification, I found, was God's work. Just as Abraham trusted God to bring the promised son, so we must trust God to bring the promised character development. True, there is cooperation between the human and the divine, but that cooperation in no way becomes a part of the solid foundation of the imputed righteousness in Christ.

I can say without hesitation that it was gospel clarity that caused me to begin to question Adventism. I began to see cracks in the Adventist theological paradigm and tried my best to patch these cracks. Little did I realize that these cracks would lead to others and those to still wider chasms until large canyons appeared in the Adventist theological landscape.

³⁸ 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:6.

³⁹ 2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 8:11f.

Chapter 6



Secret Meetings

While teaching at Monterey Bay Academy, I would often run on the beach for my morning exercise, sometimes as many as six miles a day. One summer, a visitor from Australia spent his vacation at our school. Little did I know the far-reaching results of my asking him to run with me. His name was Dr. Desmond Ford. Des had taught theology at Avondale, an Adventist College in Australia, and was, after his vacation, accepting a position on the religion faculty at Pacific Union College.

Accepting my invitation to run with me, I thought I should not go my usual distance or run as fast as I usually did. I did not want to put too much stress on this older man whom I did not know. However, on the first run, while I was breathing hard, Des kept up a continual conversation asking me penetrating questions about the gospel. The next day I decided to go further and faster—same thing. The third day I realized that Des was in better shape than I.

Some months later, Des detonated a theological time bomb that made reverberations around the Adventist world. At the request of the PUC chapter of the Adventist Forum, Des gave a presentation on the investigative judgment. Dr.

Ford showed convincingly that the investigative judgment, the heart of Adventist theology, was in error. This meeting was taped, and soon copies were sent around the world. I don't recall if I ordered the tape or if someone sent it to me. Nevertheless, I received one and listened to it. Knowing Des to be a sincere man from our running encounter made me take his biblical arguments seriously.

Des was immediately suspended from his teaching position and given six months to prepare materials as to why he should (or should not) be allowed to continue in the Adventist ministry. During this time, Des was given free access to SDA historical sources at Andrews University Seminary. Using a number of secretaries, he prepared about 1,000 pages of material for his infamous Glacier View trial in Colorado. At this gathering, a number of leading pastors and church administrators were in attendance. At the conclusion of the trial, the ministerial credentials of Dr. Ford were pulled. He could no longer teach at PUC or pastor in the SDA church. The material he prepared was *only* for the official delegates at the trial and was *not* to be copied. However, unknown to me, one church administrator⁴⁰ copied it and gave it to a dentist friend. He copied it and at the SDA camp meeting in Soquel, California, gave me a copy. In this, I now see a continued, providential pattern.

It was now 1980, and I was the pastor of the Watsonville, California, SDA Church. As I had problems with the investigative judgment from college days that had never been addressed, I decided it was time I got to the bottom of this issue once and for all.

I remembered Dr. Harding's comment, "Dale, you should not be asking questions like that." Well, the time had

⁴⁰ On the front page of my copy was the hand written name of Earl Amundsen, the person who ordained me into the ministry.

come for me not only to ask those questions but to find the answers. Even though there were places where I disagreed with Ellen White, I still considered her a true prophet and explained the difficulties by using other good statements she had made⁴¹. I knew that she clearly taught the investigative judgment, so I was not trying to disprove it, but rather find a way I could support it. The fact that I knew Des Ford and knew he understood the gospel, caused me to give his views serious study. As I went through his thousand-page manuscript, I began to see there were many more problems associated with the investigative judgment than I had ever known.

Carolyn was now working as a Conference “Bible Worker,” giving evangelistic Bible studies to small groups of women within our district of several churches. When she understood I was having problems with the investigative judgment, she warned me to be careful and not cause her to lose her job.

Shortly after reading through Dr. Ford’s manuscript, I was ill for about a week. The first day I was sick, I received a package of tapes from the late Dr. Zane Kime. Was this another divine providence? Dr. Kime was a strong supporter of Ellen White’s health message. The tapes were of a secret meeting held in the basement of the Glendale Seventh-day Adventist church in Southern California. Pastor Walter Rea, whom I had known while pastoring in the Los Angeles area,

⁴¹ Ellen White has many more self-contradictions than most realize. By picking and choosing in her writings one can make her say almost anything. As Walter Rea said, “Ellen White has a wax nose one can point in any direction.” I find that Adventists are still using this method to confront her obvious errors. When confronted with a specific statement of Ellen White, most Adventists will immediately say, “in such and such a place she says this...” It is almost like saying that one truthful statement completely erases a false statement.

was a strong supporter of Ellen White and had written several books gathering together her statements on certain subjects. In the course of his studies he happened across some old books on the life of Christ containing wording and ideas very much like certain portions of the writings of Ellen White. This aroused his curiosity, and he acquired the list of books that Ellen White had in her library. As he gathered and studied more of these old books, it became evident that Ellen White and her secretaries had plagiarized—Adventists call it “borrowed”—huge amounts of material. This plagiarism was spread throughout most of her books and was even found in individual “testimonies,” visions and dreams.⁴² In her writings there are times she quotes what her angel told her. Walter pointed out that even quotes from her angel or statements introduced with her familiar, “I was shown,” were plagiarized. These facts so alarmed Pastor Rea that he made an appointment with the White Estates to meet with him to help him evaluate the material he had discovered. This, too, was to be a secret meeting. It was taped, but no copies were to get out as this was “too sensitive” for the lay Adventist to handle. To this day, I do not know who copied the first tape set, but whoever it was, gave it to Dr. Kime, and he sent me a set, again without my knowledge or request. As I remember, there were about six long cassette tapes.

Therefore, because I was sick that week, I had time to lie on the couch and listen to all of these tapes documenting the plagiarism of Ellen White.

As my students and fellow teachers at Monterey Bay Academy will testify, I was a strong believer in the writings

⁴² Ellen White wrote numerous letters or “testimonies” to correct the errors of individual Adventists. These were then published leaving out the names of the person addressed. There are nine volumes of *Testimonies for the Church*.

of Ellen White. In my classes, I made many study guides designed to help the students find the truth from her writings. I was, looking back, probably a sore spot with some teachers as I tried to influence students and school policy to line up with her counsel. The school store sold Halva candy bars between meals. Ellen White had said it was a sin to eat between meals, and I expressed my desire that the store not sell these things to the students causing them to sin.

Now I was faced with facts which seemed to point to the conclusion that Ellen White not only copied from others what she said she received from God but did so even when she denied it. When others saw similarities in her writings, she seemed to act surprised. There were times, however, that she admitted to borrowing a little of the wording of others, but only to help her relate what God had shown her in vision.

I had memorized many “gems,” as we called them, from the writings of Ellen White. I was dumbfounded to find that some of her most beautiful statements expressing the truth in such beautiful and picturesque language that I had memorized, were taken from other authors.

That week was a “sick” week for me. However, I was not yet ready to give up the Adventist faith.

There was yet a third secret meeting I had to come to grips with.⁴³ Dr. Raymond Cottrell, a careful Hebrew scholar, loyal Adventist, and known by his friends to be a man of high integrity, had been one of the editors of the *SDA Bible Commentary*. After his retirement, he revealed in an Adventist Forum meeting in San Diego that the SDA church had long known about the problems associated with their sanctuary theology. He disclosed that in the 1950s, the president of the general conference, R. R. Figuhr, had formed a top-secret committee comprised of the best minds

⁴³ This is detailed in Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, pages 198–201.

in Adventism and had given them the assignment to work on this problem “until it was solved.” The committee met over a five-year period, could not solve the problems, disbanded, and left no minutes. He also carefully laid out the Biblical problems associated with the Adventist sanctuary theology. In essence, Dr. Cottrell showed that either Adventists have to take Daniel 8:14 *out* of its context or they make *Christ* into the wicked little horn mentioned in its context—a serious dilemma indeed.

These facts were difficult for me to process. First, the integrity of the investigative judgment was called in question. I had never been able to find the investigative judgment in Scripture, and now that I had studied Des Ford’s manuscript, I *knew* there were *no* answers. This theology was built on shifting sand, so those in the 1844 “disappointment” would not have to admit error, as did William Miller and the other “open door Adventists.” I knew the far-reaching results of giving up this tenet of faith. The octopus of the investigative judgment had its tentacles entwined in and around and under every aspect of Adventist theology. Daniel 8:14, the key text of the investigative judgment and SDA Sanctuary theology was, to quote Ellen White, “the central pillar of Adventism.” Ellen G. White and the investigative judgment stood or fell together.

Second, regardless of what one felt about the investigative judgment, the work of Walter Rae had called into question the integrity of the writings of Ellen G. White. I loved the writings of Ellen White—at least for the most part. I always thought she received her teachings from God, as she stated over and over again. To find out that she copied from others, what she claimed to have received from God was a bitter pill for me to swallow.

Third, Raymond Cottrell's tape of the five-year, secret committee on the problems in the book of Daniel,⁴⁴ called into question the integrity of Adventist leadership. These things were never told to me in my master of divinity work at Andrews University. I had always thought that the discovery of truth was the heartbeat of Adventism. To find that it contained error, which was known and covered up, was devastating. This evidence hit me like a triple whammy. The central pillar of Adventism was crumbling and ready to fall. The plagiarizing and subsequent denial of its founding prophet undermined this other "source of truth." The fact that Adventist leadership knew all this and tried to cover it up called into question the integrity of Adventist leadership and, subsequently, the whole Adventist movement.

I loved Adventism. It was my life, my heritage, my culture, my past, and my future. Was I brainwashed? Was I not thinking clearly? Was I wrong in looking at the evidence? Was some malevolent force deceiving me? Having read the writings of Ellen White, the tapes began to play. Over and over again, she had said that those who leave Adventism would end up becoming deceived by Satan and lose their own souls. But I had the evidence that undermined the whole structure and the integrity of those statements. "Where, Lord, do I go from here?"

I recalled Dr. Harding's cold, penetrating stare. He, too, must have known these things and must have decided to be on the side of those who wanted to bury the problems, thus his statement to me; "Dale, you should not be asking questions like that!" had new insight.

⁴⁴ See Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, p. A-107-116

Chapter 7



Adventist Underground

As I look back I am utterly amazed at the amount of material that came bubbling up from the seething Adventist underground which was boiling like the mud pots in Yellowstone. I have referred to *Present Truth*, which was later renamed *Verdict*, *Ford's Glacier View Manuscript*, the tapes of the secret meeting with Walter Rea and Dr. Cottrell's tape—all providentially sent to me without my request. These, however, were only the first trickle of what soon become raging torrents of materials. There seemed to be no one spring from which it all issued. Rather, like a thundershower in the hills, each little ravine gathered what it received and sent it rushing downstream to be added to the mighty river below. Copy machines were busy; each person in the Adventist underground would copy what he/she received and pass it on to a few trusted others.

The Adventist underground was not an organized group. There was no "head"—nor tail, for that matter. There were no membership lists or rules for disseminating information, at least as far as I knew, yet it was efficient. Contributing to the underground was *Spectrum*, a scholarly Adventist journal, several independent journals that sprang up in the fertile soil of Glacier View such as *Limboline*, *Adventist*

Currents, Adventist Laymen's Pipeline, etc., and the various chapters of the Adventist Forum. Yes, I, too, played a small but important part of that underground.

As I read Des Ford's Glacier View manuscript, I felt impressed that this material should be readily available. Truth is of the light and can stand investigation. Secrecy and covering up of error seemed wrong to me. Like me, millions of Adventists trusted the denominational leaders to be honest. How wrong, it seemed to me, for church leaders to pass off error as truth and then hide the fact that it was error and not truth. I decided I would print 500 copies of this huge, 1000-plus page manuscript.

I had learned how to run offset printing presses from my first evangelistic meetings. Now instead of an old AB Dick, I had a Multilith 1250 printing press—old but still a trusted workhorse. I reduced the page size so that I could print it “four up,” which meant I had about 250 runs of 500 each. When the work was completed—making a full pickup load—it was delivered to a person who lived near Pacific Union College who sold them to the Adventist underground. In this way, Des Ford's research and the wealth of source material became *immediately* available for others to study.⁴⁵

Before I printed this manuscript, I called Des to get his permission. However, Des said he could not give me permission as it was not to be copied. However, I felt Des really wanted it done, but could not give me the verbal O.K. I asked him what would happen if I did it without his permission. His answer was that he could not give me

⁴⁵ Much of this material is now included in Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment*, (Euangelion Press, PO Box 1264, Casselberry, FL 32707) p. 37–43. Now available from Good News Unlimited, Auburn California and LAM Publications, LLC.

permission to do it. Therefore, let history know that Des did not authorize this; it was my act and mine alone.

I cannot now go into detail on all the material I received from the Adventist underground. I still have several file drawers and boxes full of it. I will briefly summarize by listing some of the main items that would influence my thinking.

I received a copy of the 1919 Bible conference, which showed the SDA leaders such as A.G. Daniels, General Conference President, J.N. Andrews, F.M. Wilcox, and W.W. Prescott, and several other leading Adventist scholars knew of the errors—theological, factual and historical—in the writings of EGW. They spoke of the “false impression” that was given to her writings and said that sooner or later, the SDA church would face a crisis over them. They were afraid of the “shock” the truth about her writings would bring to the laity. They admitted, “the shock is because we have not taught the truth.”

Someone sent me a copy of a notarized copy of the 100 page October 7, 1907, interview between G. W. Amadon, Elder Bordeau, and Dr. J. H. Kellog. It became evident that the scathing remarks of EGW against Dr. Kellog regarding the supposed pantheism in Dr. Kellog’s book, *Living Temple*, were not the real issue but a red herring. Rather, the real issues were power and money. Ellen White wanted her books to be sold, not his. She wanted power over the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Dr. Kellog documented how others influenced EGW to write letters or testimonies to certain people. Some of these contained “facts” supposedly given to her from God that were shown to be in error. On one occasion, she wrote about buildings she supposedly saw in visions that were not even there. On other occasions, she gave counsel to

situations that proved she did not know what she was talking about.

I had read the attack EGW made against A. F. Ballenger. She said his theories were so deceptive they should not even be read.⁴⁶ I found a Ballenger letter to EGW in Des Ford's material. Ballenger's questions were logical and biblical. In fact, his letter regarding EGW's erroneous interpretation of Hebrews 6:19, 20 *by itself*, completely disproved SDA sanctuary theology.

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters *within the veil*, where Jesus *has entered* as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:19, 20). (emphasis added)

Ballenger showed beyond the shadow of a doubt, that biblically the term "within the veil" could refer to nothing other than the curtain between the holy and the most holy place.⁴⁷ This text, then, says that Jesus entered (past tense, one time) the most holy place upon his ascension, not "for the first time" in 1844 as Adventists teach.

Adventists have castigated D. M. Canright throughout their history. Originally, a firm believer in EGW and the Adventist message, he left the denomination and wrote a number of books and articles exposing the errors of Adventism. I read two of his books, *Adventism Renounced* and *Life of Mrs. E.G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet, Her False Claims Refuted*.⁴⁸ Both books reveal a man with a

⁴⁶ Ballenger certainly did have some divergent ideas about the sanctuary. However, his letter and questions are a masterpiece of good, biblical study with all the appearance of an honest heart seeking truth.

⁴⁷ See Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, p. 35–45, for Ballenger's Scriptural arguments that show the Adventist teaching to be in error.

⁴⁸ Recently reprinted and available from LAM Publications, LLC.

keen mind, who was committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking truth through honest Bible study.

Someone sent me a Xeroxed copy of L. Richard Conradi's book, *The Founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*. In it he states,

Personal and careful research among their own documents has fully persuaded me, after long, active leadership among them, that it is my duty as a Christian and lover of divine truth to show the danger of their blending truth with error.⁴⁹

Conradi goes on to show the many problems surrounding the founding of the SDA church and EGW's divine endorsement of many of the early errors.

In Des Ford's material, I found information on Adventism's "shut door of mercy." I also received a number of other documents dealing with the same issue. It seemed clear to me from the early literature that Adventists did believe in a "shut door of mercy," and Ellen White endorsed this view in her letters to other Adventists and also *through a vision* supposedly from God.⁵⁰

Someone in the Adventist underground sent me Bert Haloviak's 66 page paper on A. F. Ballenger and other SDAs. In it he shows how Adventists have held EGW to be "the infallible interpreter of the Bible." He quotes Spicer, a leading Adventist, showing these Adventist leaders knew the lack of support for the Adventist sanctuary theology.

When I used to give Bible readings in the earlier days in London, and took the people through the eighth of Daniel, I always skipped hastily over those texts where we made the sanctuary one minute in heaven and the next on earth, and the host one time the angels and the next the pagans, and I skipped over the statement that the taking away of the "daily" meant the

⁴⁹ Page 5 of his book noted in the text above.

⁵⁰ See *Cultic Doctrine*, "The Swinging Door" p. 115f.

taking away of paganism by suggesting the rendering in the original was a bit obscure so that the translation was difficult. That is what we used to be taught in the Bible school in Battle Creek in the old days. And all that was making no particular use of that particular portion of Scripture. It was simply passing over it to get down to the cleansing of the sanctuary...⁵¹

I received a copy of a paper entitled, “Standing Up To The Omega: A Call For Repentance” by Aage Rendalin in Norway. It was a tongue-in-cheek list of EGW bloopers. It listed isolated incidents such as the time EGW purchased some potion to make her husband’s hair quit falling out.

I have made applications of these preparations upon the head of my husband, to prevent the falling off of the hair. I observed that when using these preparation, he frequently complained of giddiness of the head...⁵²

Rendalin went on to quote EGW’s statements about tight-lacing causing lung protrusions in the neck, wigs causing insanity and other horrible diseases, the brain containing animal organs, children not being allowed to play on the Sabbath—in the house or out of doors, amalgamation (sexual union) of man and beast which is now “evident in certain races of men” and many other nonsensical statements.

Someone gave me *Seeking A Sanctuary*, by Malcom Bull and Keith Lockhart. It also showed the errors in Adventist sanctuary theology.

I read the approximately 250-page document known as “The McAdams Manuscript.” While trying to support EGW, he very clearly shows that based upon his research,⁵³ *Great*

⁵¹ Page 45 in my loose-leaf copy.

⁵² Page 2 of my copy.

⁵³ McAdams limited himself, for the most part, to material dealing with John Huss.

Controversy is largely copied from historians and did not come from vision.

I read material from Ron Numbers indicating that EGW did not receive her health teaching from the great health reform vision, as stated by her and claimed by the Adventist church. Rather, most of her instruction came from others, even though she denied it.⁵⁴

During the time I was struggling with this information, I attended a union conference meeting in southern California. While there, Dr. Hans LaRondelle, whom I had taken classes from at the seminary, fielded questions about some of the hot issues of the day. Someone asked him what to do with the errors in the writings of EGW. His answer was by way of illustration. “When eating fish,” he said, “eat the meat and throw away the bones.”

On the way home from the conference, I went by the home of Walter Rae. I wanted to see with my own eyes the evidence for the statements Rae had made. He showed me page after page of plagiarism. Often it was not exactly word for word. Words had been changed here and there to make it less evident that EGW and her secretary were copying. It was clear, however, that the facts, ideas, order, moral lessons, and errors came from the people she copied.

I also learned that two of EGW’s secretaries, for all intents and purposes, committed suicide. Marian Davis went on a hunger strike⁵⁵ because she could no longer endure “this

⁵⁴ See Ron Numbers, *Prophetess of Health*.

⁵⁵ “In looking through C. C. Crisler’s correspondence to W. C. White in the latter part of 1904 he describes her [Marian Davis’] condition in terms of a lack of ability to sleep at night and any desire to eat. She weighed about 57 pounds by September. In fact, she exhibited many of the traits of those who go on those starving diets. She would claim to have stuffed herself, when in fact she had only eaten a few morsels (sic).”

terrible plagiarism”⁵⁶ that EGW required her to perform. She finally died of malnutrition. Fanny Bolton, who compiled *Steps to Christ*, came under such condemnation from EGW that she was finally committed to a mental institution where she died.

When I was a student at PUC there was a period of time when Carolyn took care of Sarah Peck, who had been EGW’s last secretary. One day as Carolyn wheeled her up to the table for lunch, Carolyn remarked to her, “It must have been wonderful to work for God’s Messenger.” Miss Peck, without saying a word, glared in disgust, and then angrily grabbed the flowers that were in a vase on the table and threw them at Carolyn. At the time, we did not understand her communication. Now we believe it is clear.

As I write, I have several file drawers containing over 100 folders plus several boxes full of SDA information. This chapter could be extended for many pages, but I think I have made my point. After Dr. Ford detonated Adventist’s ticking, theological time bomb at the PUC Adventist Forum, the reverberations shook the Adventist church around the world. Then the Adventist underground spewed forth its hidden, secret facts like a volcano, or to change to an Adventist metaphor, “like the leaves of autumn” on a windy day. Somehow in the sovereign will of God, I was privy to much of this material. Now, what was I to do with these facts?

Tim Poirier, Assistant to the Secretary of the White Estate, in a letter addressed to Alice Gregg, July 7, 1983.

⁵⁶ “Miss Marian Davis...was one day heard moaning in her room. Going in, another worker inquired the cause of her trouble. Miss Davis replied ‘I wish I could die! I wish I could die!’ ‘Why, what is the matter?’ asked the other, ‘Oh,’ Miss Davis said, ‘this terrible plagiarism!’” D.M. Canright, *The Life of Mrs. E.G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet, Her False Claims Refuted*, p. 203–205.

Chapter 8



The Gathering Storm

Here I was a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, pastoring the growing Watsonville, California, SDA church, and nearly through my doctor of ministry program at Andrews University. Now I had serious questions about the validity of the writings of Ellen White, the truthfulness of “the central pillar” of SDA theology, and the integrity of Adventist leadership.

Carolyn also was employed by the Central California Conference of SDAs and gave Bible studies to groups of women. One day in a Bible study that included both Adventists and non-Adventists, the discussion led to the types of judgment, particularly the investigative judgment. The non-Adventist ladies questioned such an idea. Carolyn decided she, too, needed to get to the bottom of this issue. Only instead of reading all I had read, she would get it from the Bible and the Bible alone. She got a long roll of shelf paper, took her concordance, and started writing every text in the Bible that had anything to do with the judgment. When she finished, her “Judgment Scroll” was, as I recall, over 12 feet long. She brought her findings to me and said, “I cannot find the investigative judgment anywhere in the Bible.” Carolyn had warned me not to get her fired by my study and

its conclusions. Fortunately for our marriage, we both studied the issues.

Our joint conclusion was that the historic Adventist investigative judgment was not only unbiblical but was contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture and undermined the assurance found in the gospel of Christ.

I worked up about a three hour Bible study contrasting the Adventist teaching of the investigative judgment with the biblical teaching of judgment. With the stakes so high, I felt I should seek the counsel of “experienced brethren” who could show me where I was wrong—if I were wrong, or where I could find *biblical* support for the Adventist teaching. I asked two of my most trusted ordained Adventist pastor friends, Elder Fred Speyer and Elder Harvey Voth,⁵⁷ whom I had worked with for seven years while teaching at Monterey Bay Academy, for three hours of their time to present my study. At the conclusion of the three hours, they agreed it “appeared” the Adventist teaching was wrong, and I was following the Bible.⁵⁸ They counseled me to be careful and not do something that would ruin my ministry.

The Watsonville SDA church had a number of well-educated, professional leaders, several of whom were elders on the church board. Lon and Bonnie Wilson, who had helped me so much when I was pastor in Santa Monica, were again under my pastoral care. Bonnie played the organ, and Dr. Wilson, now teaching in the post-graduate naval school in Monterey, was one of our church elders. After Des Ford’s “bomb” mentioned in the last chapter and the Glacier View meeting, it was open season on the discussion of Adventist

⁵⁷ Now deceased.

⁵⁸ This statement is not intended to say that they agreed with me fully as they had, at that time, not given full study to the subject, nor do I know what their final decision was.

issues. The information from the Adventist underground came pouring down each rivulet in the Adventist mountainside and flooded the homes of many families in my church. Soon I was questioned regarding my understanding and research.

From my youth I was taught that *truth* was the hallmark of Adventism. If you ask an Adventist about their experience of joining the SDA church, it was usually framed, “When did you come into the truth?” Likewise, the expected answer was, “I came into the truth...” Because of this mindset, I saw myself then, and still do, as a “truth seeker.” I have never left the pursuit of truth, no matter what the cost, and I hope I never will. Therefore, when Dr. Raymond Cottrell’s tape of his Adventist Forum presentation of the problems with the traditional interpretation of Daniel 8, and his revelation of the top secret committee was circulated, I felt free to give it to several of my educated, professional elders for their comments.

About this time, Walter Rea’s research on the huge amount of plagiarism in the writings of Ellen White found its way into the Adventist underground pipeline and was speedily pumped throughout the network. I knew he was soon to publish more of his findings and that this material could decimate the faith of historic Adventists in her inspiration. Therefore, I felt it my pastoral duty to prepare my congregation for this. As strange as it seems to me now as I write this, at that time I had not lost faith in the inspiration of Ellen White but was changing my view of inspiration to allow for both the errors and the copying. This seemed to be the method taken by loyal Adventists at the time.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ It appears to be the path still followed by the SDA church. Rather than admit the error of EGW’s writings, the church seems to be determined

Once each year in the Adventist Church, there is a “Spirit of Prophecy Day.”⁶⁰ On this day, all pastors are asked to preach a sermon designed to engender faith in the writings of Ellen White.⁶¹ I carefully prepared a sermon for this day designed to do three things: first, encourage people to maintain faith in Ellen G. White. Second, alert them to the problems that were soon to be announced; these problems included, plagiarism, historical and factual errors in her writings, and places where her writings actually contradicted Scripture. Third, help reshape the church members’ concept of inspiration to allow for these glitches.

I felt—and many agreed—that I had dealt with a very delicate subject in a very appropriate way. However, Elder Bunker, a retired union conference president, was a member of my congregation. At the conclusion of my message, he immediately stood and addressed the congregation and me. He said there were no discrepancies in the writings of Ellen White. He quoted a statement from her writings that said they are either all of God or are entirely of the devil.⁶² There was to be no watering down of her inspiration. It was either black or white, and if Ellen White disagreed with Scripture, she was a false prophet. However, he went on to assure

to find similar problems in Scripture, (though not in the same context) and then say, “Well, if the Bible writers copied, why should we not expect Ellen White to do the same?” Since leaving the Adventist church, my concept of inspiration has become more conservative while Adventism’s has become more liberal to allow for the obvious errors in EGW and still claim divine inspiration for them.

⁶⁰ At least this used to be the practice. With the importance of the writings of Ellen White to the Adventist Church, I can only assume it still is.

⁶¹ The Ellen G. White Estates, or the General Conference Ministerial Department, prepared sermons for this special day that pastors were encouraged, but not required, to use.

⁶² “The testimonies either bear the signet of God or that of Satan.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 98.

everyone that she never contradicted Scripture. I had just told the church in my sermon that she did, on occasion, give an interpretation that was not supported by Scripture or that was contrary to the Bible. Elder Bunker looked at me with all the authority of a union conference president and challenged me before the whole church to point out just one place where she disagreed with Scripture.

I had not expected such an outburst and had not carefully thought through what I should do on such an occasion. I tried to get out of answering, but He insisted that I give one place where EGW disagreed with Scripture.

In retrospect, I should have taken control, dismissed the congregation, and told him I would meet with him personally. Nevertheless, I accepted his challenge, and having studied the subject thoroughly; I immediately pointed out that Hebrews 6:19, 20 very clearly showed that Jesus *had already* entered “within the veil” when the book of Hebrews was written. I explained that *every time* Scripture uses the term “within the veil” or “before the veil” it *always* has reference to the veil separating the holy place from the most holy place. Ellen White said this veil was the curtain that separated the outer court from the holy place and endorsed the teaching that on October 22, 1844, Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary *for the first time*. My illustration not only showed that Ellen White had contradicted Scripture, that the whole 1844 judgment message was wrong but even worse, I had shown this retired union conference president to be in error.

You can imagine the fallout from this meeting! I soon got a phone call from the conference office asking me to meet with Charles Cook, the conference president. When we met, I told Elder Cook of my struggle in trying to support the investigative judgment from Scripture and my inability to do

so. He responded that he knew there were problems but did not know any better interpretation than the traditional one.

Another issue was polarizing Adventism at the time. Des Ford had been a strong promoter of the gospel of justification by faith. Historic Adventism, however, made sanctification part of the *foundation of acceptance* with God, and that clouded the gospel. One never knew, according to Ellen White, if one was saved. One should never say he/she is saved because one does not know if he/she will stand the test of future temptations or if his/her righteousness is good enough to pass in the judgment. Des Ford and many other “gospel Adventists,” as we called ourselves, were rejoicing in the good news of justification by faith. There were some Adventist leaders and writers, however, who were strongly opposed to the teaching of Ford. About this time, a book came out entitled, *Omega*. This book was based upon the term “omega of deadly heresies” in Ellen White’s writings. By this term, she pictured some terrible future heresy that would confront Adventism.⁶³ This book tried to make it appear that the gospel teaching of Des. Ford, dubbed, “new theology,” was the terrible heresy she had predicted.

⁶³ Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Physicians and Pastors*, SPTB02.016.003: I am instructed to speak plainly. “Meet it,” is the word spoken to me. “Meet it firmly, and without delay.” But it is not to be met by our taking our working forces from the field to investigate doctrines and points of difference. We have no such investigation to make. In the book “Living Temple” there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given. *Ibid.*, SPTB02.050.003.

On one of several trips to the conference office, I was cornered. Present were President Charles Cook, Secretary George Elstrom, and Treasurer Gordon Bullock. Elder Bullock asked me if I agreed more with Des Ford or the writers of the book, *Omega*. I answered that I did not base my theology on either, but on Scripture. I simply believed in Paul's gospel, spelled out most clearly in the book of Romans. However, this was not sufficient for them; I had to choose between these two. I told them I thought Dr. Ford was closer to the teachings of Paul. I could tell by the "I've got you now" look on their faces as they glanced toward each other, that they had what they were fishing for. Now I was labeled a "Fordite," which was anathema for many.

One day one of the ladies of our church came by our house and talked with Carolyn and me. She presented herself as one honestly seeking truth. She wanted to know what I believed regarding the "issues." I told her that I did not want to promote anything against the teachings of Adventism. After some time of dealing with her pressing questions, I told her some of the problems with 1844 and Ellen White. She, I learned later, went home and immediately called the conference president. She had come for the express purpose of gathering information that could be used against me. Yes, there was indeed a gathering storm.

I was invited to be the speaker for a week of prayer at a non-denominational school in the Dominican Republic. Carolyn and I took nearly two weeks off for this trip, which included a stop in Haiti. Here I preached a gospel sermon in an Adventist church on Sabbath. Upon returning home, we could not believe our eyes. Across the lobby of the San Francisco Airport was a huge banner, reading, "WELCOME HOME." There were about 20 of our church members with outstretched arms. We were elated at such a grand

reception. As we rode home with one of the church families, however, we began to sense that all was not well. They began to relate to us what had transpired in our absence. They said Elder Bunker had called a group of the church members together and they had banded together to get me out of the church. I was told many of them had contacted the conference officials and told them they were withholding their tithe until I was removed.

I was called to meet with Charles Cook again. I asked him for three hours of his time, so I could present the results of my Bible study on the subject of the investigative judgment. He promised he would give me the time, and later, he called and asked if Elder Elstrom, the conference secretary, could also sit in on the study. I assured him it would be O.K. with me. I told Elder Cook if I were ever fired from the ministry, I wanted the person who fired me to know I was doing my best, to be honest in my study of Scripture and true to my conscience. However, when the time came near, he backed out⁶⁴ and had me meet with Harold West, the conference ministerial secretary, and Dr. Robert M. Zamora, who had been at Dr. Ford's Glacier View hearing and who pastored a large SDA church in the San Jose area. The three of us met for about four hours, and the conversation was taped. I was never given a set of these tapes even though I asked for them, and I am sure that if they still exist, they will never be released. In those four hours of conversation, both of these men admitted that Daniel 8 primarily referred to Antiochus Epiphanies, the investigative judgment was in error, and they downplayed the authority of EGW, especially for doctrinal issues. However, it wasn't long until I heard both men strongly support the traditional denominational

⁶⁴ I have always assumed that Elder Cook did not want to study with me as he did not want to be forced to face the biblical evidence.

position at the Soquel camp meeting, a large public gathering, and quote EGW in an authoritative way in their presentations. I began to question the integrity of the present denominational leaders and workers.

One day Harold West asked to speak with me. We went for a short walk so we could speak privately. In the course of our conversation, he said, "Dale, we both know the doctrine (investigative judgment was implied) is wrong. It is not our fault, and we can't do anything about it. We are too old to go out and find employment outside of the church. Consider the church to be your employer. Do what you can with a clear conscience, and don't make any waves."

"Harold," I told him, "I feel God called me to preach the truth; perhaps I am in the wrong denomination." That conversation deepened my conviction that denominational integrity was lacking.

Another one of my pastor friends, Barry Crabtree, was being interviewed for the position of conference president in Australia. Barry related to me the essence of part of his interview. As the sanctuary topic was the hot issue, the union conference president asked him, "Do you believe in 1844?" Barry's answer was, "Sure, don't you?" As he was telling me of this interview, he said in a lowered voice, "Dale, I not only believe in 1844, I also believe in 1981."

Another pastor in the same conference told me that he would tell the conference president whatever he wanted to hear just to keep his job.

The book, *Omega*, was highly promoted at the camp meeting in Soquel. It was said "If you only have the funds to purchase one book, get *Omega*." Many, if not most, of the people purchased and read it.

It was my custom to arrive at church early and greet the people, often shaking hands with them. On the first Sabbath

after camp meeting, when I reached out my hand to greet one of our deacons, he pulled his hand back and said, "I will not shake hands with the omega of heresies." I was dumbfounded. How could reading a book bring such a division between me and one I had considered my friend?

The days clicked by mechanically like the second hand on a grandfather clock. There is no way to slow them down or turn them back. Soon I would meet with Charles Cook again. Was I beyond the point of no return?

Chapter 9



Decision Day

Not long after camp meeting, I was told by Charles Cook that I would have to agree to *teach all 27* doctrines as listed in the *Fundamental Beliefs of SDAs* or resign. I told him that I could not teach the investigative judgment unless someone, using sound principles of interpretation, could show me *from Scripture* how to do it.

One of the elders, Dr. Terry Haskin, a dentist in the Watsonville church where I was pastoring at the time, said he knew Dr. Graham Maxwell could answer my questions. Dr. Maxwell was a professor in the religion department at Loma Linda University. He had served on the top-secret committee, “Problems in the Book of Daniel,” and, according to Dr. Haskin, “had all the answers.” Dr. Haskin, knowing that my job was on the line, offered to fly me to meet with this SDA scholar. I assured him that it would be a waste of time because *there were no answers*. He insisted I go, however, and arranged a lengthy appointment for himself, Dr. Lon Wilson, and me to meet with Dr. Graham Maxwell. At this meeting, I explained my problem and asked that if he had the answers to the problems surrounding the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative

judgment, to please give them to me as my job was on the line. Over the next five hours, I outlined what I considered to be the main problems with the 1844 investigative judgment doctrine.

- Daniel 8:13 is a summary of Daniel 8:9–12, plus a question. That question is answered in Daniel 8:14. Therefore, Daniel 8:14 does have a context—contrary to traditional SDA interpretation.
- It is the wicked little horn that pollutes or desecrates the sanctuary, not the sins of the saints—contrary to the Adventist interpretation.
- The descriptions of the wicked little horn in Daniel 9–12 match the timing, the directions of conquest, and the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes IV—contrary to Adventist interpretation.
- The 2300 “days” are actually 2300 evening morning (singular in the original), and most likely refer to the daily sacrifice, but it is unclear. To say that these “days” refer to whole “days” is an unprovable assumption needed for the Adventist interpretation.
- The year-day principle, needed for Adventist interpretation, is without foundation, or at best, it is a weak assumption.
- The link between Daniel 8 and Daniel 9 is weak. The word “decreed” or “cut off” (KJV) is a word used only once in Scripture, the meaning of which is unclear—another assumption.
- If it is assumed “decreed” means “cut off” and if it is also assumed the 70 week⁶⁵ period is cut off from the 2300 “days,” it is not clear if the seventy week period

⁶⁵ Literally, “seventy unites of seven.”

is cut off from the beginning or the end of this 2300 days—another uncertainty.

- Using the date of 457 for the decree in Ezra 7, supported by Adventist scholar Dr. Siegfried Horn, even though non-Adventist scholars put the date at 456, this cannot be the decree “to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” mentioned in Daniel 9, as Adventists teach. If “restore and rebuild Jerusalem” refers to the *Jerusalem temple*, then that took place approximately in 516 BC and is the event recorded in Ezra 6:15. If “restore and rebuild Jerusalem” refers to the *city*, then that event is recorded in Nehemiah 2:5 and took place in approximately 444 or 445 BC.
- There is no link between Daniel 8:14 and the Leviticus 16 Day of Atonement, as Adventists teach. The word “cleansed” used in Daniel 8:14 (KJV) is a mistranslation of the original. Modern literal Bibles use the word “restored.”
- Even if one assumes that “cleansed” is the correct word, the “cleansing” of the sanctuary mentioned in Daniel 8 would be the cleansing or restoration of the sanctuary ordered by Judas Maccabeus mentioned in 1 Maccabees 4:38. This was the removal of “the stones of the abomination to an unclean place” and has nothing to do with the Leviticus 16 Day of Atonement—contrary to Adventist interpretation.
- The dates used in the Adventist interpretation of the 70 weeks are poorly established or are at best assumptions. Most non-Adventist scholars date the crucifixion either in AD 30 or AD 33, not AD 31, as Adventists teach. The date for the stoning of Steven at AD 34 is without foundation and is admitted to be merely a guess.

- Using the event of the stoning of Stephen for the gospel going to the Gentiles to fit the Adventist interpretation of the 70 weeks is probably in error. The event recorded in Acts 13:46 where “Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles,’” would be the event that has biblical support and this took place somewhere around AD 45.
- Reading through Leviticus 16, there is no focus on the individual sins of the people. Even if we assume that type explains the antitype, it does not yield an investigative judgment.
- There is no record in Leviticus that the individual sins of the people were transferred to the sanctuary.
- Hebrews 6:19 states that Christ *had already* entered “within the veil” when Hebrews was written. When “within the veil” or “before the veil” are used in the Old Testament, they *always* refer to the veil between the holy and the most holy place. Therefore, to say that Christ entered into the most holy place *for the first time* in 1844, as Ellen White taught, is in error.
- The hermeneutic used by Ellen White for interpreting the events of the heavenly sanctuary is faulty. She says, “To obtain a further knowledge of the cleansing to which the prophecy points, it was **necessary** to understand the ministration of the heavenly sanctuary. This could be learned **only** from the ministration of the earthly sanctuary.”⁶⁶ “As the sins

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 263. (emphasis added)

of the people were anciently transferred in *figure* in the earthly sanctuary by the blood of the sin offering [which Adventist scholars know to be untrue] so our sins are *in fact* transferred into the heavenly sanctuary by the blood of Christ.”⁶⁷ Ellen White says, as in the earthly type, so in the heavenly reality—a one to one comparison. She uses the earthly typical sanctuary services to explain the reality of the heavenly sanctuary services. Hebrews, however, explains the *futility* of the Atonement made in the earthly service by *contrasting* it to the *once and for all atonement* made by Christ’s death.

- Hebrews 9:7 specifically *contrasts* the work of Christ with the Old Testament Day of Atonement.
- Hebrews does not teach a two-phase ministry in the heavenly sanctuary—contrary to Adventist teaching.
- The judgment, as recorded in the New Testament, has nothing to do with an 1844 investigative judgment. Christ was judged as a sinner in our stead at the cross.⁶⁸ We are judged when we hear and understand the gospel.⁶⁹ The results of our accepting and/or rejecting Christ are revealed at the judgment at the second coming of Christ.⁷⁰
- If one uses the statements of Ellen White to support the 1844 investigative judgment, then to be consistent,

⁶⁷ See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 421. (emphasis added)

⁶⁸ 2 Cor. 5:21.

⁶⁹ “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” Jn. 3:18.

⁷⁰ Mt. 25:31–46.

one must also take seriously her other statements made at that time including the following:

- The date of 1843 set for the coming of Christ, was a God-given date designed to test His people regarding the truth.⁷¹
- Ministers who did not accept the 1843 date for the coming of Christ had the blood of souls on them.⁷²
- Miller's 1843 chart, which detailed his 15 "proofs" was just as God wanted it, and it should never be changed.⁷³
- Unless one understood that Christ moved from the holy place to the most holy place in 1844, he could not be benefitted by Christ's intercession.⁷⁴
- Jesus turned his face from the churches which rejected the 1843 date for the second coming.⁷⁵
- God designed that His people meet with disappointment.⁷⁶
- God rejected all the wicked world in 1844.⁷⁷
- God was responsible for the misunderstanding of the early Millerite dating error.⁷⁸

We found Dr. Maxwell to be a very gracious, kind, and sincere person. He was well-versed in the whole of Scripture and also well-informed about the problems with SDA

⁷¹ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 232.

⁷² *Early Writings*, p. 233.

⁷³ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 1850-11-1.

⁷⁴ *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 172.

⁷⁵ *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 136.

⁷⁶ *Early Writings*, p. 137.

⁷⁷ Ellen G. White, *To The Remnant Scattered Abroad*.

⁷⁸ *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 139.

sanctuary theology. However, it seemed he continually tried and often succeeded, to get us off the subject at hand onto what he called “the larger view.” This was, according to him, that one must simply know and trust the character of God. Dr. Maxwell *never* answered *any* of the *specific problems*. Rather, his method of dealing with them consisted in the following points. (These are my summaries and wording, but I have just reviewed this five-hour tape).

- Immediately move from a specific problem statement in EGW to some problem in Scripture and say, “if I can accept this problem in the Bible, then I can accept it in Ellen White.”
- Immediately move to “the larger view,” which is that Satan has accused God of saying, “Love me or I will torture you.” Spend much time dealing with the issues in “the great controversy,” showing that God is not going to punish the wicked—ever—and that any punishment is only the result of natural consequences and is not the act of God.
- The forensic, or substitutionary view of the Atonement gives the wrong picture of God, and the investigative judgment only makes sense when seen through the “great controversy” motif.
- God is not at all concerned with the forgiveness of sins, but only wants to know if we are willing to trust Him so we can be “safe to save.”
- The requirement for salvation is not forgiveness of sin, but a willingness to listen to God and take what He says seriously.
- The investigative judgment serves a vital part in the closing up of the great controversy where God calls the heavenly family together and presents evidence that settles all the remaining issues dealing with who

is “safe to save.” The angels need to be convinced that if they live next door to us in heaven, we are not going to start another rebellion.

- God must prove to the heavenly family that we have a changed character, a new heart, and a right spirit.
- Refer often to the writings of Ellen White as a source of theology.
- We may not see how to logically get from Daniel 8:14 to 1844 using the Bible, but because we accept Ellen White, who gives an inspired interpretation of the Bible, we take her statements very seriously.
- The New Testament writers saw things in the Old Testament text, which we do not clearly see. Likewise, Ellen White, as a true prophet and inspired by God, gives interpretations of the Bible that we may not clearly see. If we accept the New Testament prophets’ interpretation of the Old Testament, then we should also accept Ellen White’s interpretation of the Bible.
- We are not to be worried about the writings of Ellen White becoming a second canon. Rather our concern is with truth.
- When we present our truth to non-Adventists, we start with the Bible, and then as Ellen White is found to be in harmony with Bible truth, we show how the investigative judgment within the setting of the great controversy makes sense.
- Ignore the statements of Ellen White that go against the great controversy theme and the larger view of the investigative judgment. If you must deal with specific problems that have no logical answer, conclude they were necessary for the people at that time.

- One way to avoid taking a stand on the problem issues of the day is to say you are still studying them and have not yet reached a conclusion.⁷⁹

In our discussion, it was mentioned by the elders⁸⁰ that there were people on the conference committee who considered the Dallas Statement to be inspired. They said that because it was formulated and approved at a world gathering of the General Conference, and Ellen White said the judgment of the General Conference is God's highest authority on earth, then the Dallas Statement is essentially God's Word.⁸¹

As I pointed out the many problems associated with the 1844 investigative judgment, Dr. Maxwell, on several occasions, brought out the real, underlying reason why Adventists *cannot* reject the 1844 investigative judgment doctrine. "If she misled us here," he said, "then she probably misled us elsewhere."

To accept the obvious conclusion that the 1844 doctrine is without *any* biblical foundation would completely undermine the authority of Ellen White, causing the unique teachings of Adventism to fall like dominoes. For that reason, Dr. Maxwell and many other leaders in the SDA

⁷⁹ It appears to me that the church, in harmony with some of the points Dr. Maxwell mentioned in our discussion in 1981, has chosen to solve the ongoing, continually reoccurring crises of Adventist sanctuary theology by continuing to study it into infinitude and thereby putting off the obvious conclusion.

⁸⁰ The church elders had gone to the conference committee to support my ministry on one occasion when I was not present.

⁸¹ "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." Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for The Church*, Vol. 3, p. 492.

church were not about to admit Adventist's 1844 sanctuary theology was error.

Dr. Maxwell, on several occasions, suggested to me that really all the conference brethren wanted was my loyalty. He suggested that if I would just get my ingathering goal,⁸² keep my baptism count high and let the leaders know I supported the SDA church, all would be well. Then he asked me if there were some way I could carefully select my words so I could be "honest" with my disagreement with the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment doctrine, and yet at the same time, convey to the conference president my loyalty to the church. I don't know if my face showed it or not, but I was internally shocked. I recalled the many charges Adventists had directed toward the Catholic Jesuits for using these practices.

This five-hour discussion with a leading Adventist theologian who was on the Daniel committee, and served on the biblical research committee for many years, but was unable to bring *any* real answers to the many *specific* problems associated with Adventism's 1844 doctrine, only confirmed my conclusion—*there are no answers*.

In the following days, as I contemplated this discussion and the other meetings mentioned earlier, I was deeply troubled. What was going on? Was I wrong? I had always been taught to submit to the counsel of "the brethren." But how could I promise to teach something that none of the brethren could honestly show me from Scripture? Why was it that the Adventist leadership, whom I had always held in high esteem, seemed now to be so full of duplicity?

⁸² "Ingathering" was a yearly fund raising activity where each church was given a goal. Money was to be raised through donations, usually solicited from the community.

Soon I would have to meet with Charles Cook again and tell him whether or not I would teach all 27 of the *Fundamental Beliefs*. How easy it would be just to tell him that I could, and keep my ministry in Adventism. Yet, somehow, I knew I could not. I did not look forward to that day, but we mortals cannot stop the clock, and it was ticking steadily.

When I met with Charles Cook, I again told him I would be happy to teach the investigative judgment if someone could show me how to do it *from scripture* using sound principles of interpretation. However, all he wanted from me was either a “Yes” or “No” in regard to the 27. I told him I could not teach this doctrine, and I was suspended from the ministry. Immediately upon my suspension, Elder Cook said to me, “Dale, your main fault is you are too honest.”⁸³ This was not a final act, but one that removed me from pastoral leadership.

The conference appointed a peer review committee to meet with me and make a recommendation as to my future. Chairing the committee was Barry L. Crabtree, and the secretary was Robert M. Zamora. From previous conversations, I *knew* both these men did not believe in the traditional Adventist sanctuary message either. The report of this committee reads:

...After extensive examinations of Elder Ratzlaff’s theological stance, his professional competence, and the positive manner in which he responded to the committee, and its concerns for the well-being of the church and its fundamental beliefs, it is our unanimous opinion that Elder Ratzlaff can function as a loyal minister of the Seventh-day Adventist church within the

⁸³ This is quoted from “Crisis in Freedom” which I wrote only a few hours after my meeting with Charles Cook when my memory was fresh. I was told that he later denied saying this. Find “Crisis in Freedom” on my website at: www.lifeassuranceministries.com/art.html.

framework of the fundamental statement of beliefs as articulated in the Dallas Statement.

Therefore, we recommend that the Conference Executive Committee take a redemptive action in reinstating Elder Dale Ratzlaff to the gospel ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁸⁴

However, at my hearing before the conference committee, the report of the peer review committee was never read or even referred to. It was obvious that the decision had already been made, why bother with the details. I was expressly told that I could not ask any questions about the biblical interpretation of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment. During the discussion, one of the lay members of the committee asked a profound question. She said, “I don’t comprehend what is going on here. I understand that all Pastor Ratzlaff wants is for someone to show him how to prove the investigative judgment from the Bible. Here we are in a room full of pastors; why doesn’t someone do it now?” There was a long moment of tense, nervous silence; the question was ignored, and the subject was changed.

In retrospect, I have often wished I had not been so submissive. I wish I had stood up, handed my Bible to the conference president and said, “Here, you give us a Bible study on the investigative judgment, if you can get from Daniel 8:14 to 1844 using sound principles of interpretation, I want to see you do it!”

These were difficult days for Carolyn and me. I vividly recall walking alone down the quiet country road in front of our home one evening as the chilling fog from the ocean a few miles away came rolling in on the westward wind. Why Lord? Why me? Why can’t I just go along as many of the

⁸⁴ Quoted from my copy.

other pastors are doing? Am I wrong? Should I just submit to the judgment of the experienced conference officers? Are my motives pure? How far should I go in compromising my conscience and teaching things I know aren't true?

My mind raced back to the "tapes"—and there were many good quotations I had memorized.

The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.⁸⁵

Even though I knew some of Ellen White's statements were patently wrong, I also had great admiration for many of the quotations I had memorized.

How could I turn back now? I realized that even if I did, I was now a "marked man" and my future with the denomination was tentative at best. Carolyn and I spent many hours talking over these things, reading our Bibles, and crying out to God in prayer for guidance.

We had recently purchased five acres, and our sons had built us a nice home on it. We had scraped together everything we had and more besides to complete the project. Our payments were large as those were the days of 12–18% interest. Both Carolyn and I were employed by the church. We considered that if we resigned from the church, we could lose our new home, which we had worked so hard to obtain.

Then there were those other pesky EGW "tapes" that plagued our steps and haunted our thoughts.

It is Satan's plan to weaken the faith of God's people in the *Testimonies*. Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital

⁸⁵ Ellen. G. White, *Education*, p. 57. I later learned this statement was plagiarized from others.

points of our faith, the pillars of our position, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition. When the *Testimonies*, which were once believed are doubted and given up, Satan knows the deceived ones will not stop at this; and he redoubles his efforts till he launches them into open rebellion, which becomes incurable and ends in destruction.⁸⁶

Would we be lost if we left the SDA church, as Ellen White said? Had Satan somehow blinded our hearts and minds? Having started on the journey away from Adventism, would we end up rejecting every point of truth and become infidels? When these plaguing thoughts bubbled up from our memories, which had been saturated with the writings of Ellen White, we would be driven back to Scripture, where we found solace. The simple gospel of belief in Christ in the book of John and the clear teaching of righteousness by faith in the book of Romans and Galatians became our solid foundation and assurance. I had memorized a number of chapters from Romans, and when the condemning “tapes” from Ellen White would run, I would change channels and flee back to the good news in Christ, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.” “He who believes *has* eternal life.”

The day came when I had to make the final decision to either resign or promise to *teach all 27* SDA doctrines. At first, I told Elder Cook that I was not going to resign. I felt that the church was leaving me rather than me leaving the church. By this, I meant I had always thought the church stood for truth, and that was all I was seeking. Now the church, it seemed to me, was not concerned with seeking and following truth; rather, its main interest was in its own preservation, even if that meant using deceptive practices of covering up known error. He told me, however, that if I were

⁸⁶ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 211.

fired, which he was prepared to do if I did not resign, I would not receive any severance pay. He assured me that if I resigned, I would receive severance pay.

I resigned. I knew I could never go back. That door was closed. Now, what would Carolyn and I do?

Chapter 10



Free—To Discover

I will never forget the feeling of emancipation I experienced after my decision—forced as it was—to resign. To be out from under the weight of all the denomination hassle I had been through over the past months lifted my spirit and my feet. When I arrived home from my final trip to the conference office, I began mowing our front lawn. As I pushed the mower around the yard, I would *literally* jump and say, “I’m free! I’m free!” I did this over and over again. This was not something I planned or forced myself to do; it was just a spontaneous reaction to being out from under the load of restrictions and false guilt.

Even though I faced many uncertainties ahead, there was a secure feeling of trust. My conscience was clear. Carolyn and I were united in our decision. Whatever the future held, we would face it together with God.

My mind went back to my near-death experience when I had given my life fully to God. At that time, I made a commitment to live each day as a new gift from Him. I had determined to do His will. My covenant with God—or was it His with me?—was that if He made His will clear, I would do it. I remembered telling the Lord that I was not always

good at determining His will, and He would need to be patient with me.

Now that both Carolyn and I were no longer employed by the denomination, what were we going to do? Every spare dollar we had was invested in our new home. We had no savings to get us through. A number of our friends at the Watsonville church suggested that I start a gospel fellowship. Others, however, were just as persuasive in trying to do everything they could to keep us from starting a new church, knowing it would cause a split in the Watsonville SDA church.

Carolyn and I spent much time praying and seeking God for direction. What should we do? We had not turned our back on God, ministry, His Word, or truth. We studied Acts and realized that by teaching truth, Paul had split many Jewish synagogues. Should we start a new church? We needed some kind of confirmation.

The first Sabbath after our decision, we were invited to attend a potluck dinner at the home of Dr. Haskins. On the way there, we picked up our mail and found a letter from the conference office mailed out before I had resigned. It provided a way for both of us to remain in conference employment. Carolyn was to stay in Watsonville as a Bible Worker. I was to be “placed on probationary status for a period of one year as an associate pastor under the watchful, trusted and respected senior pastor” in a church about 100 miles away. My performance in ministry was to be based on “loyalty to church doctrine and policy, to peers and church members...Integrity regarding all that is involved in the vows of ordination and be amenable to counsel from Conference Administration and Conference Executive Committee.” When we read this letter with its stipulations

and apparent desire to separate us, we knew we had made the right decision.

When we arrived at the Haskin home, many of our friends were there. At this gathering, it was suggested to have a meeting at our home Sunday evening to discuss the situation and evaluate several possibilities. About 50 people showed up. Enthusiasm was high. We discussed the idea of starting a new church. At the conclusion of this meeting, someone suggested that an offering be taken, and when it was counted, there was about \$7,000.⁸⁷ We had our confirmation.

The next Sabbath, we had church at our home. About 70 people came. In the following weeks, we elected a board, formed a non-profit church corporation, and started looking for a place to worship. We called ourselves the “BAC” which stood for the “Biblical Adventist Church.” We soon rented the Aptos Assembly church building on Saturday.

Some of our friends from Monterey Bay Academy visited our church. We found out that people from the Watsonville SDA church had parked nearby, followed our friends back to MBA, and then reported them to the conference. One MBA couple was asked not to attend our church anymore, or their jobs would be in jeopardy.

Someone in the Watsonville church said that Carolyn and I had built our home with tithe money stolen from the church. Of course, this was untrue. A conference auditor checked all the donation receipts and church books and proved there was no truth to this claim.

Shortly after that, someone stole the public address system from the Watsonville SDA church. Some of the

⁸⁷ This money was given to Teresa Fann, who was present at this meeting. She was until then, the treasurer of the Watsonville SDA church. She immediately joined our new church and served as its treasurer.

members accused our son, Bruce, saying he did it to get even. Of course, this also was untrue. Some months later, the real thieves were found.

I don't recall getting any letters or calls of apology, but we did get one letter addressed "To the Church of Satan" from a member of the Watsonville SDA church.

We understood these accusations were coming from people who were seeking security in their own "truth paradigm." We sent letters offering our forgiveness to several of them, including the Bunkers, who had led out in trying to get us fired. We carry no bitterness toward anyone. We feel very much like Joseph when he said to his brothers,

As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result (Gen. 50:20).

Hardly a day goes by that we do not thank God for freeing us from Adventism.

I include these facts here not to cast aspersion on anyone but for the sake⁸⁸ of history to demonstrate once again the end result of believing the exclusive, toxic doctrines of Adventism.

Many of the Adventists were telling the people attending the BAC, that we would soon leave the Sabbath and turn our backs on Christ. Not long after we started the BAC I gave a four-part sermon series showing why we still believed the Sabbath truth.

With freedom comes responsibility. Yes, we were free to believe what we wanted and to teach what we wanted. We

⁸⁸ Adventist history is riddled with similar tactics. It appears that Ellen White set this pattern by her scathing rebukes of those who disagreed with her. *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 207, 313, 430; *Review and Herald*, 1864-01-19.011; *Loma Linda Manuscript*, No. 150; *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 135, 136, 139, 140, 144. See also Ford, *Daniel 8:14*, p. 44f.

had left Adventism; now the question I had to answer was, what would we teach? What would we cherish, and what would we reject from our former training? I knew from my study that the Adventist claim to be the remnant church of Bible prophecy was unfounded.⁸⁹ I also knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the 1844 sanctuary, investigative judgment doctrine was not only unbiblical but contrary to the gospel. These facts, along with my knowledge of Ellen White's plagiarism and denial thereof, undermined her writings as a trustworthy source of truth.

Now that I was no longer a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, I decided I would teach and preach from the Bible *alone*. But what about my personal study? I loved the writings of EGW. I would seldom prepare a Sabbath school class lesson or sermon without surveying what she had to say on the subject. But now, knowing that she was wrong on a number of points, I decided I would also make a commitment not to look at her writings, even in my study, for six months. I boxed up all her books—and I had all or nearly all of her then published books—and put them in the garage for a final assessment at the end of six months. I prepared study guides for our “Searching the Word” hour (Sabbath School) and home Bible studies, and I preached contextually through books of the Bible. Often, while preparing for these studies and presentations, I would remember what EGW said in some of her “golden quotations,” of which there are many, and I wanted to quote them and look for her comments. I had a strong desire to do this. However, I had determined that for the first six months I would not allow myself this “luxury.” For the first time in my ministry, I was *forced* to go directly to the Bible *alone*

⁸⁹ See Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Christ*, p. 372–381.

and seek to discover what *it* said and meant today, without looking at it through the Adventist, EGW filter.

As the weeks went by, I began to see a new beauty and harmony in the Word. I began to see that much of what I had thought was real Bible study before, was nothing more than trying to prove from the Bible the Adventist doctrines I already believed. I began to see that the Bible ought to be studied book by book, and not a text here and a text there.

When the end of the six-month period came, the Bible had become a new book. I now realized the writings of EGW, which I had previously held in high esteem, were more of a hindrance to understanding the Bible, than a help. I view this conclusion as one of the most important post-Adventist ministry conclusions I have ever made. Through the years, my ministry to Adventists and former Adventists has only reinforced its importance time and again. In fact, while some may consider the following statement offensive, I believe it is nevertheless patently true. *One cannot understand the Bible correctly while continuing to study the writings of Ellen White.* It is easier for Adventists to accept this *principle* when it is applied to *other* organizations such as the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses. A Mormon will never understand the Bible correctly as long as he studies it through the filter of Joseph Smith. A Jehovah's Witness will never understand the Bible as long as he continually reads the *Watchtower*. Both of these groups, like Adventists, consider themselves devoted students of Scripture, and vehemently argue that they are correctly understanding what the Bible teaches, not knowing that the veil of a modern "prophet," or religious system, lies over their eyes, and keeps them from seeing the real, *biblical* truth.

I made another equally important discovery, which has also deepened over the years. I still had many associations

with SDAs after leaving the Adventist ministry. Knowing that I had rejected the sanctuary and remnant teaching of Adventism, they would often quiz me on the interpretation of some passage in Daniel or Revelation. I was at first quite embarrassed to say that I was not sure what these passages meant. My discovery was that I did not have to have all the answers, especially to questions dealing with the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecies. Rather, I came to the conclusion that *where the Bible is clear, I could and should be certain. Where the Bible is unclear, I must be tentative.*

To be dogmatic in the interpretation of Scriptures that are unclear or are honestly open to more than one interpretation is the foundation of the disunity within the Christian church and the recipe for cultic teaching. As the years have gone by I, have seen this principle played out over and over again, not only with reference to Adventism, but Evangelicalism as well. Remember the book, *Eighty-eight Reasons the Rapture Will Be in 1988*? I also recall listening to the Bible teacher on Family Radio state emphatically that the rapture was going to take place on a certain date in 1994. To prove his point, he had amassed many linking proof texts, most of which were nothing but assumptions, much like early Adventists had done with Daniel 8:14 and 1844. Now I am no longer embarrassed to say that I do not know exactly what many of the passages in Revelation mean. Those who say they do know the correct interpretation are usually building on many linking and questionable assumptions.

When I was a Seventh-day Adventist, I read mostly Adventist periodicals, with the exception of *Verdict*, by Robert Brinsmead and occasionally *Christianity Today*. After leaving Adventism, I ordered several new-to-me Christian publications. One of these publications had an

advertisement for a large set of tapes by John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, on healing, which I ordered. Right after they arrived, I had a ministry appointment in Mt. Shasta, and we listened to these tapes all the way there and back. We came to the conclusion that either Wimber was really being used by God, or he was a very deceptive fake. We discussed driving down to Yorba Linda and seeing for ourselves. One Saturday night, our church had rented a school gym for a church volleyball game. I love volleyball and played hard. That night on the way home, we discussed the possibility of driving down to see Wimber the next morning. We calculated that if we were to get there in time for the church service, we would have to leave about 2:00 a.m. So we prayed, “Lord if you want us to drive down to see Wimber, wake us up at 2:00 a.m., and if not, let us sleep.” In those days, I rarely woke up at night, especially after playing hard. However, exactly at 2:00 a.m. we both woke up and were wide awake, hopped in the car, and started for our next discovery.

It was nearly time for the service to start, and we did not even know where we were going. As we were stopped at a red light, Carolyn rolled down her window and asked the people in the car stopped next to ours if they knew where the Yorba Linda High School was. Their answer was, “Yes, just follow us; that’s where we are going.” Worship was just beginning when we arrived. This was the first time we had ever experienced Vineyard-style worship. People were standing, many with arms out-stretched, deeply involved in worship. We sensed an intimacy with God—a presence of the Holy Spirit—we had never experienced before.

After the service, I introduced myself to John Wimber and told him of my experience in leaving the SDA church and listening to his tapes, and asked for a time to meet. He

said he would be willing to meet with us but wanted us to come to the evening service, and after that, we could spend some time together.

That night we again experienced a new depth in worship. After a short time of teaching, John Wimber asked the Holy Spirit to come and minister. For us, this was all totally new. Little bands of people were praying for one another. Some appeared to be speaking in tongues very quietly; others seemed to be overcome with the Spirit.

After the service, we visited with John and his wife in a local restaurant. We told John we were ready to receive whatever the Lord had for us. He gave us some Bible passages to read and made an appointment for us to come by his office Monday morning for prayer.

In our motel, we read the passages John had assigned, prayed for guidance, and went to his office the next morning. There John and his assistant laid hands on us. We experienced deep emotion, spoke in tongues, and sensed a new filling of the Holy Spirit. As we went home, we were singing some of the new songs we had learned.

“Now, what have I done?” the thought hit me with a jolt. We had just left Adventism, and the people who comprised our new church were still very uncertain. Were they ready for this? No way! We decided we would tell no one. But they were soon to find out anyway. Carolyn had a ladies’ Bible study that week. At the study, one of the ladies, out of the blue, looked at Carolyn and said, “Carolyn, something is different, have you been filled with the Holy Spirit?”⁹⁰

That same week, another lady from our church group was getting her hair done, and the beautician said to her.

⁹⁰ I believe a person receives the Holy Spirit the moment he believes in Christ. I also believe there are times when there is a special empowering of the Holy Spirit for ministry functions.

“You go to the new church where your pastor has just been filled with the Holy Spirit, don’t you?” At the time, our church member knew nothing of our experience, so she answered, “Well, I guess so, he preaches from the Bible.” When our church member told us of this incident, we then told her of our experience and asked her to go back to the beautician and inquire as to why she had made that statement. When our friend asked the beautician, her answer was, “While you were sitting in my chair, the Holy Spirit told me.”

Both Carolyn and I experienced a new hunger for personal Bible study. As we would read familiar sections of Scripture, new insights seemed to jump from the page as the Word became alive with meaning.

Sometime after our experience at the Vineyard with John Wimber, I prepared a series of lessons on the Holy Spirit so our group could study this together. Our Searching the Word hour on Sabbath morning had about 40 or so attending. I had them divide into four or five groups that met around small, round tables. Each group had the same inductive study guide. About five minutes or so before the end of the study time, I would ask some summary questions to see what each group had discovered.

Shortly after we started our study on the Holy Spirit, a lady started coming to our church and shared with me that she was “very experienced in the things of the Spirit.” She shared how she had prayed for people, and they had been healed and how heat would go through her hands when she prayed for others. I was happy to have someone who was more experienced than I in the things of the Spirit. However, each week I noticed that whatever study group she was in, there seemed to be arguments and bad feelings. I pondered this, and it bothered me. I thought perhaps she was going too

fast in trying to initiate people into the things of the Spirit. But from week to week, the situation did not improve; now, I was troubled. One day at the conclusion of the service, I invited people to come to the front for prayer for any need. She spoke up and said that someone was there with a hearing problem and would be healed if they came to the front for prayer. Several came forward. I was just getting ready to pray for one of them when this lady said, “Dale, spit on your fingers and put them in her ears.” Something inside of me said, “No.” I sensed this “gifted lady” was seeking to control others, including me.

Not long after that incident, about nine o’clock one evening, I received a phone call from a lady whom I did not know. She said she had a problem with someone in our church and wanted me to come over right then. It was my practice to take Carolyn with me when I visited women, and I was not about to visit this unknown woman alone at night, so Carolyn went with me. When we got to her home, she explained how this “spiritually gifted” lady, referred to above who had been coming to our church, had run off with her lesbian lover and was, at that very time, honeymooning in Hawaii. She wanted me to intervene to get her lover back.

That night I did some re-evaluation. I said, “Lord if this is the spirit that is in our church, I don’t want any more of it! I backed off—fast. And in retrospect, a lot of what Wimber taught is suspect. He seemed to be more interested in supernatural experiences than the presentation of the gospel.

Chapter 11



The Sabbath Revisited

We had now changed the name of our little church from BAC to BFC standing for Biblical Fellowship Church. We did this for two reasons. First, we were getting flack from Adventists for using their name. It was not our intent to cause hard feelings, so we thought a new name would be appropriate. A second, and perhaps more weighty reason, was that the longer we were out of the Adventist church, the more we realized we were moving further and further from Adventism and no longer wanted to be closely associated with it.

Someone suggested that we study the Sabbath in our Searching the Word hour. I pondered this idea. I had reached the conclusion that the Sabbath was not the seal of God for the last days. I knew the Holy Spirit was what sealed believers. I knew the problems associated with appropriate Sabbath observance. What was allowed and what was disallowed to be done on the Sabbath continued to be a point of discussion. Some members of our group watched sporting events on the Sabbath. Carolyn and I did not feel this was right. But I did not want to get caught up in Sabbath observance controversy—been there, done that. I recalled

the many discussions on appropriate Sabbath observance we had at Monterey Bay Academy, both in faculty meetings and with my Bible doctrines classes. Was it permissible to ride bicycles on the Sabbath? The school's position was, No. Was it appropriate Sabbath-keeping to experience nature on the Sabbath? Yes. Some of my students were scuba divers and said the best way to see the beauties of nature was to go scuba diving, and they considered this an appropriate Sabbath observance. I did not think so. While at Andrews University, I took a geo-science class that went on a field trip one Sabbath afternoon to find fossils along a little riverbank. I was appalled that the professor's son, about nine years old, put on his swimming trunks and went swimming at this Adventist outing for pastors on Sabbath. My first week as associate pastor at the Santa Monica Seventh-day Adventist church was another shock. I was fresh from the seminary and had heard of the "worldliness" of Southern California Adventists. After church, we were invited by some of the younger couples to a potluck in a neighboring park. We went, and to our dismay, after the meal was over, they brought out bats, balls, and gloves, chose sides, and had a baseball game. I felt so foolish. I could not join them and do my own pleasure because that was against the commandment. Yet at the same time, I wanted to bond with them. Should I, as the brand new associate pastor, ask them to stop? After all, Ellen White at one time even said baseball was wrong, let alone baseball on the Sabbath.

As I continued contemplating studying the Sabbath, I recalled the advanced Bible class I taught at Monterey Bay Academy. This was an elective class for seniors and had a section on contemporary denominations. I enjoyed inviting other pastors to come and give a short summary of their beliefs to our class. We would study the particular church's

beliefs before the presentation, and I would prime the students to ask certain questions. Many of my questions were designed to show the inconstancy of the Protestant world that accepts the 10 Commandments but rejects the Sabbath. We had a Mormon, Lutheran, Baptist, and others make short presentations to our class. I felt fully comfortable in doing this as “we had the truth” that could stand up to any other church.

The Baptist minister, however, brought up some texts that I had not fully considered. He showed how the Ten Commandments were part of the old Sinaitic Covenant, and then he turned to the New Testament and read several texts that showed the old Sinaitic Covenant had been done away with. At the time, I thought I should do more study here so I could better answer his objections. I passed it off, however, for I knew that the law was “just and good.” As Paul said, “Do we make void the law? By no means, we establish the law.”

The *Verdict* journal, by Robert Brinsmead, had several articles on the covenants and Sabbath. These, too, were challenging some of my old paradigms. I did not see how these new ideas fit all that I knew to be true, so I just dropped them.

Remembering these things, I told the church I would be willing to restudy the Sabbath, but only upon several conditions: (1) we do a thorough study of the subject from *all* points of view; (2) we go slowly so we could keep together in our conclusions that would be based solely upon the biblical evidence; (3) we throw out all our presuppositions and do a truly inductive study. This would mean that we did not know where our study would lead or what our final conclusions would be. They agreed.

We were, in retrospect, in a unique setting to do a *truly* inductive study. We were still meeting on the Sabbath and felt no reason to change, yet we were far enough out of Adventism to be open to change if the conclusions from our Bible study so warranted. I had never done a *truly inductive* study on such a major doctrine before.

This study turned out to be one of the most rewarding and interesting studies I have ever done. I truly did not care what our conclusion would be. I was not trying to make our study reach any preconceived or predetermined goal. We decided we would not try to harmonize our tentative conclusions as we studied individual sections; rather, we would for the time being, only summarize *that* section and leave the final conclusion until we got to the end.

We studied Desmond Ford, *The Forgotten Day*, Samuelle Bachaccii, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, D.A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, and several *Verdicts* on the topic of the Sabbath and the Covenants by Robert Brinsmead. I listened to a set of tapes by Nordon Winger, a former SDA pastor who left the Adventist church about the same time as I did, and who had taken the Paradise Gospel Fellowship through a study of the Sabbath. For the most part, however, we studied the Bible.

I made inductive study guides on each section of Scripture, and during our Searching the Word hour, we divided into small groups to do our study; then, near the conclusion of the hour, we would share our findings. It was exciting as none of us knew where our study would lead. I stayed only one week or so ahead of the group. For me, this study could be compared to an exploration through new country that I had never entered before. Each new discovery opened up vistas of pristine grandeur.

Sure, I had studied the Sabbath before, plenty of times. I took “Theology of the Sabbath” at Andrews University from Dr. Hans LaRondelle, one of my favorite professors. I loved it and received an “A” grade. Every SDA pastor knows the SDA position on the Sabbath and how to defend it well. Yet the study we were doing was different. *We were not going down a list of proof texts and explaining each one with another.* Rather, we were seeking to squeeze everything out of a given text or section that was there and tried not to make the text say more than it did. For the first several months, I thought for sure we would end up with the traditional SDA understanding of the Sabbath, except, as mentioned before, I had already concluded that the Sabbath was not the “seal of God.”

When we did a thorough, inductive study of the covenants, the tentative conclusions we reached on individual passages seemed contradictory to what we had believed. I was not sure we could find harmony. Then it happened. Like the explorers who first discovered Yosemite Valley must have felt, that “eureka experience” took us by surprise. I was struggling to fit some of Paul’s “difficult statements” in Romans, Galatians, 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews into our old paradigm. I had always “forced” them to fit before like putting a puzzle piece into an opening that looked correct, but upon trying to make the piece fit it would be close enough that one could force it in, but then it messed up the picture because it was not the right piece. Now, however, I had no reason to force anything. Instead, I thought, perhaps I need to accept a new paradigm and see if our tentative conclusions fit it. Therefore, I took Paul’s statements about law at face value: the law was “added” at the time of Moses and was to last “until Christ.” Christians are not under the

law.⁹¹ Rather than try to fit Paul's statements into my old paradigm, which I could not do, I took Paul's paradigm and tried to fit the other conclusions of our study into it. They fit! Suddenly, in an instant of time, my whole theological "picture" changed. No longer was the law the focus, no longer was the Sabbath the "testing truth." Now Christ *alone* was at the center of theology and life. *He* was the testing truth. *He* was my true rest.

I will not go into the details of our Sabbath study as I have written extensively on this subject in *Sabbath in Crisis*, now revised, enlarged and reprinted under the title, *Sabbath in Christ*.

In summary, we found there is only one "law of the Lord" in the Old Testament, not two or three.⁹² The 10 Commandments are the very words of the Sinaitic Covenant document. The other laws—still part of the one law of the Lord—expanded and applied this covenant to the life experiences of the Israelites. In this arrangement, the Sabbath played a central, important role and served as the covenant reduced to a dynastic sign. The covenant was made between God and Israel *only*. It was hard for me to accept this, but we found it was the clear and undisputed teaching of Scripture. We found that circumcision was the one-time *entrance sign* of the Sinaitic Covenant,⁹³ and the Sabbath was the *repeatable sign* Israel was to remember.

When we came to the new covenant, we found that the covenant partners were the Father and the Son. Jesus is the

⁹¹ Gal. 3:16, 17, 19; Jn. 1:17; 7:19; Rom. 5:13, 14, 20; 9:14; Heb. 7:11; 9:19.

⁹² See Riggle, *The Sabbath and the Lord's Day*, p. 53–73 for an excellent summary of biblical evidence supporting this statement.

⁹³ Actually, it was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, but as the Jews were descendents of Abraham, it continued in the Sinaitic Covenant.

new covenant center. We receive the benefits of the covenant through our faith in Christ as “our Covenant Keeper.” This covenant was not limited to one nation or people—or denomination but was specifically stated to be for all nations, tongues, and peoples. The new covenant was *not like* the Sinai covenant, which was centered on law with only shadows of grace.⁹⁴ Rather, the new covenant was ablaze with the glory of God’s grace and Spirit.⁹⁵ The new covenant also required a change of law,⁹⁶ a law suitable for any nation, culture, or geographical area, devoid of all the “ceremonial” practices⁹⁷ and one that would allow for Christian evangelism to penetrate all cultures without creating culture wars.⁹⁸ Hence, the new covenant law was reduced to *only* the eternal, moral principles⁹⁹ and the two new covenant signs. Baptism, not circumcision, we found was the *entrance sign* in to the new covenant church.¹⁰⁰ As Jesus inaugurated the new covenant with His disciples, he gave them a new *repeatable sign* they were to “remember” in the Lord’s supper.¹⁰¹ Unlike the old covenant, which is filled with detailed instructions for every aspect of worship, in the new covenant, the details are left out so that our attention may be focused on the object: Christ—and not the form.¹⁰²

⁹⁴ Heb. 10:1.

⁹⁵ 2 Cor. 3.

⁹⁶ Heb. 7:12.

⁹⁷ Col. 2:16, 17.

⁹⁸ 1 Cor. 9:19–23.

⁹⁹ Jn. 13:34, 35; 14:17; 15:12; Rom. 13:9, 10; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8.

¹⁰⁰ Matt. 28:19; Col. 2:11,12.

¹⁰¹ Matt. 26:26–29; Lk. 22:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:24, 25.

¹⁰² Compare the instructions for making the bread of presence in the Old Testament with the new. In the old there was a recipe, they were told just how to arrange the plates and how often to put fresh bread out. However, in the new covenant the only instruction we have is “as often as you eat

We found there is good reason to believe the Gentile Christians were never instructed to keep the Sabbath. There is no command to keep the Sabbath in the New Testament. Every Sabbath meeting in the book of Acts is in a Jewish setting. Sabbath-breaking is never mentioned in any of the lists of New Testament sins. The Epistles never give any instruction on Sabbath observance. If Sabbath observance is to continue in the new covenant, as we had previously believed, how could it be that the subject of appropriate Sabbath observance is conspicuously absent from the letters written to young Gentile churches? Anyone who has tried to keep the seventh-day Sabbath according to biblical guidelines will tell you that there are *many, many gray areas that require clarification*. While this may be an argument from silence, it nevertheless shouts its importance and authenticity. Further, the Epistles never place positive emphasis on Sabbath-keeping. Rather, the Sabbath is listed with the other old covenant observances as a shadow of Christ.¹⁰³

When we studied the Sabbath in eschatology, we found that SDA's proof texts, when studied without bias and *within their own contexts*, do not yield the Adventist conclusions. There is no compelling reason to believe that the "commandments" in Rev. 14:12 have the Ten Commandments in view. John *nowhere*, in any of his writings, uses the Greek word, "*entole*" (translated commandment) for any old covenant law. Rather, he *always* uses "*nomos*" (translated law) when referring to the old covenant.¹⁰⁴

this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." See Lev. 24:6 and 1 Cor. 11:26.

¹⁰³ Col. 2:16, 17.

¹⁰⁴ See Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Christ*, p. 374–376 for a complete listing of John's uses of these two words.

Our conclusion after seven months of study was that there was nothing wrong with worship on Saturday (Sabbath).¹⁰⁵ We also concluded that Sabbath observance was not required, or even expected, of new covenant Christians.¹⁰⁶ We continued to meet on Saturday, but no longer could use Sabbath-keeping as an evangelistic tool to persuade people to join our fellowship.

Nearly everyone in our fellowship accepted our conclusions. However, some felt that because of family and other social considerations, they wanted to continue to meet on Saturday, which we did.

In time, however, we found it harder to get people of the community to visit our church. People moving into the community would not look for a new church that met on Saturday.

We also noticed we were getting a few non-Adventist Sabbatarians. Often these people came with a truckload of weird ideas and hang-ups, and some were legalistic and controlling.

Therefore, as pastor, I wanted to move to Sunday services—not Sunday “worship.” While we did find evidence that the “Lord’s day” referred to Sunday, we could not find any transference of Sabbath “observance” to Sunday “observance.” This conclusion fit our new covenant paradigm where ceremonies are of minimal value because everything important centers on Christ.

When we had completed our study, many encouraged me to put it in book form. This I did, but it took me many years to complete the task.

¹⁰⁵ Rom. 14:5.

¹⁰⁶ The reader is referred to *Sabbath in Crisis* and Riggle, *The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day*, for additional evidence supporting this statement.

Soon I was to revisit the topic of the Holy Spirit. I was forced to repent, not for rejecting the counterfeit, but for “backing off” from the true. This time God really got my attention.



Encounter With the Holy Spirit

After the experience I had with the lesbian lady and the “holy spirit,” I backed off from my openness to the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. I had, so to speak, thrown out the baby with the bathwater. The following two experiences jerked me back to attention—to a more balanced view. I believe God was trying to show me that the Holy Spirit is present today and is working through the gifts of the Spirit, yet not every manifestation is of God. Some are from God, others may be from the self (*psyche*), and a number could well be from the devil. Therefore, rather than make sweeping generalizations, careful discernment was in order.

One Friday night, Carolyn and I had attended a spiritual gifts seminar in Salinas. The teaching seemed to be very biblical and not “far out” as some charismatic teaching is. It was about 10:30 that night we went to bed.

Our bedroom had an eight-foot sliding door that opened to a fenced redwood deck to the east of our home. Often, because we lived in the country and no houses were close by,

we left the drapes pulled back. This night there was a bright moon in the sky.

I woke up about two in the morning and was just musing with the Lord when my thoughts alarmed me. Why was I thinking what I was thinking?

We were now meeting with the Neighborhood Christian and Missionary Alliance Church¹⁰⁷ in Santa Cruz. Some weeks before this night, I had made an announcement that our church needed a new hot water heater. When we had a baptism, we had to run a long hose from another part of the church to fill the baptistry, and by the time it was full, the water had already cooled off. What we needed was a fast-recovery, high-capacity water heater that could be installed by the baptistry. I put an announcement in the church bulletin explaining our need. A few weeks later, the husband of one of our church members brought a new water heater that filled our requirements and donated it to the church. However, it had not yet been installed.

As I lay in bed, my thoughts (or was it God's voice) said, "I can't bless your church as long as that hot water heater is there; it was stolen."

"Where did that thought come from?" was my first reaction. But it came again, "I can't bless your church as long as that hot water heater is there; it was stolen."

Just that week, I had written a letter to the donor thanking him for his gift. I was not about to accuse him of stealing. I had no evidence. No way!

But that thought came again, "I can't bless your church as long as that hot water heater is there; it was stolen." I began to think that God was speaking to me. My reaction

¹⁰⁷ I was pastor of both the Biblical Fellowship Church and the Neighborhood Church at the same time.

was, “No, Lord, I am not going to accuse this man. I have no evidence that it was stolen.”

Then I went into terrible torment. I cannot explain it other than to say I sensed God was not at all pleased with me and was letting me know it. Yet I did not give in. I was not about to accuse this person without some evidence.

The moonlight was streaming into our bedroom, and I could make out our furniture in the dim light. Suddenly I realized that my right eye was blind. Now, I was really under torment. Then, just as suddenly, my right eye came back and my left eye went blind. There was a minute or two—it seemed longer but probably was not—that my eyes went in and out of vision. First one eye then the other, like a highway patrol car with alternating headlights flashing.

I now realized that God was trying to tell me that He wanted me to get that hot water heater out and do it now. I had told Him that sometimes I had a hard time discerning His will, so He would have to make it clear. Well, He was making it clear! So I said, “O.K. Lord, I will confront this man tomorrow.” Instantly I was back to normal. Now I had peace, and my eyes were working properly.

I arose early that Sabbath morning and typed a letter to this man. I told him of my experience, how I felt God was telling me that the hot water heater was stolen, and He could not bless our church as long as it was there. I suggested that if it were true, we could pay for it and he could give the money to the person from whom it was stolen. Then I added, “You be the judge if this is from the Lord.”

While this man’s wife was a regular attendee, he only came occasionally. I took the letter with me to church and secretly hoped he would not come. However, he did. At the end of the service, I asked him to stay and meet with me in the church office. With some trepidation, I handed him the

letter and asked him to read it. I saw his face turn ashen. I knew it had hit home.

“Tell me,” I said, “Where did you get this water heater?”

“I work at Fort Ord¹⁰⁸ in the plumbing department,” he said. “The base did not have the heater the church needed, so I contacted a plumbing contractor who was doing some work for the base. He gave me the heater, and I gave him four times its value in plumbing fixtures from the base.”

“___”, I said; “you must pay for it.”

“I can’t do that,” he said, “If I paid for it, I would have to explain what happened, and I would get fired.”

“Well then,” I said, “You must take it back because God can’t bless our church with it here.”

He was to pick it up the next week but failed to do so. Therefore, I somehow tied it into the trunk of my car and took it to his home. No one was home, so I left it standing on his front porch. I had encouraged him to make it right. I don’t know if he ever did.

This taught me several things: God knows all, and He can, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, communicate to us things that we would otherwise not know. Second, God’s blessings are hindered by a lack of integrity.

The next experience happened some months after the first. I had an important elders’ meeting that was to take place in a few days. I woke up sometime after midnight and was thinking about some of the issues on the agenda. I was not consciously trying to visualize the meeting, but as I was considering some of the items, I saw myself in the meeting. I turned to one elder and said, “God sees all the things you are doing for Him. You don’t need to keep reminding everyone of all the good things you are doing.” Then I turned to the next elder and said, “You are involved in pornography,

¹⁰⁸ An army base near Monterey, California. It has since been closed.

and if you want to continue in church leadership, you must overcome this vice.” Then, I spoke to the third elder, “You must be careful that you do not grieve the Holy Spirit but allow Him to do His work in this church.” Then, I turned to the last elder and said, “God is pleased with your service.”

After I had finished, I said to myself, “where did all this come from?” I began to question this, thinking it was just my thoughts. Suddenly I seemed to be under the same torment—although this time without any of the physical symptoms I had with the stolen hot water heater incident. Remembering what happened then, I said, “O.K., Lord, I will tell these men what I have seen.”

When the day came for the elders’ meeting, I began to have serious second thoughts. Who was I to give this kind of confrontation, advice, and evaluation? This could ruin my relationship with these men. Should I go ahead?

After the church secretary left, I locked myself in my office and prayed. I cried out to God using every name for God I could think of: YHWH, Jehovah, Jesus, Adoni, Savior, Lord, El Shadai, etc. “Please, Lord, give me some kind of confirmation if I should go ahead with this.” I would pray and then wait, pray, and wait. Thinking back on my thoughts in the night, I remembered where I had seen each elder sitting. They were in a circle with five chairs, one for each of them and one for me. There was no audible voice, but God seemed to be saying (or was it just my mind?) “Why not use this as a test? If the elders come in and sit in exactly the same configuration, then you will know to go ahead, and this is from God.” I accepted this “test” and set up five folding chairs in a circle in my office where we were to meet. I spent the rest of the time in prayerful meditation. I took a piece of paper out of my desk, drew a diagram of the five chairs with the names by each chair, and put it into my top desk drawer.

As the elders began to arrive, I sat on the edge of my desk and breathlessly waited to see where they would sit. They came in, shared a few bits of conversation, and then sat down exactly as I had seen them in the night!

One of the elders had a few words of devotion and opening prayer. I then broke into the conversation. I pulled out the paper from my desk drawer, laid it on the floor in the center of the circle for all to see, and rehearsed with them my experience. Then, I spoke to each elder using the words as I remembered them. What was the result? First, let me give the context.

After my experience with the stolen hot water heater, where it was deeply impressed upon me that God could not bless our church if open sin were present, I prepared a series of sermons on repentance and confession of sin. I used the illustration of Achan. I had pressed home this point, stating that it could well be “that some of us have cherished sin in our lives which is blocking the flow of God’s grace and power in our church.”

The first elder I spoke to accepted the “word” that he had been doing his works for recognition. Later this same person came to me confessing he had taken a large metal vice from his employer. I encouraged him to make it right, and he did.

When I turned to the second elder and shared with him the thoughts I had been given, he shared the following: Yes, he had been involved with pornography for some years and knew it was wrong. He had, he said, almost gone to the last pastor to get help but did not. He said that during the sermons on repentance and confession that I had given, the Holy Spirit had convicted him that he should confess. Then, he shared with the group that he *knew* I was going to confront him *that night*. He repented, and we all prayed that God would give him the victory.

I spoke to the third elder warning him not to grieve the Holy Spirit by hindering what He was doing in the church, but there was little response. I encouraged the fourth elder with words of acceptance.

I believe that the gifts of the Spirit are still present in the church today. I also believe there are many counterfeit and misuses of spiritual gifts.¹⁰⁹ Discernment is one of the gifts and is certainly needed.¹¹⁰ However, let us not quench the Spirit for He is the presence of God in our lives by which we are sealed.¹¹¹ The Holy Spirit is the one Who testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.¹¹² The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit,¹¹³ and working with the Word, He testifies of Christ,¹¹⁴ guides us into all truth and will disclose to us what is to come.¹¹⁵

There is great danger in rejecting the true manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said,

...whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin (Mk. 3:29).

This statement seems hard, but by *continually* rejecting the Holy Spirit Who speaks to our conscience, our conscience becomes seared, the voice of God is silenced, and we close our eyes and ears to the very means God has ordained for our salvation.

¹⁰⁹ Over the years I have been given numerous “prophecies” by Christians who believed they had a message from God. Most have proven to be in error.

¹¹⁰ 1 Cor. 12:10.

¹¹¹ 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13, 4:30.

¹¹² Rom. 8:16.

¹¹³ Eph. 6:17.

¹¹⁴ Jn. 15:26.

¹¹⁵ Jn. 16:3.

Therefore, let us be true to His Word and the promptings of His Spirit by which we are changed from one glory into the greater glory.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18–4:1).

Chapter 13



Expanding Ministry

When I was pastoring the Sedona Christian Fellowship in Sedona, Arizona, one day Don and Vesta Muth, whom we had known for many years, both before and after we all left Adventism, invited me to accompany them on a Bible study with a Seventh-day Adventist doctor and his wife. At the Bible study, the doctor's wife gave us each a printed sheet with headings, which I immediately saw were the Adventist doctrines. Under each heading was a series of numbered proof texts designed to support each particular doctrine. I had seen the sheet many times before as it had been used back in the '70s. This study guide was usually offered in conjunction with a free Bible.

We let them lead, and they just went down the list of proof texts in the order printed on the sheet. We wanted to build rapport with them before we confronted them with the errors of Adventism. Some weeks later, in the course of our study, the Adventist doctor presented *The Clear Word Bible* (TCWB).¹¹⁶ He prefaced its use by telling us this was the

¹¹⁶ The title of this work has been changed to *The Clear Word*. However, his copy and the copy that I purchased shortly thereafter were both titled, *The Clear Word Bible*.

most accurate Bible translation available today. On the jacket of this “Bible” are the following comments.

For everyone who hungers for a clearer understanding of God’s Word and a richer devotional life....Imagine how much more you would get out of the Bible if the meaning of every passage was crystal clear...*The Clear Word Bible* lets the power of ancient texts come through today...The result of this careful paraphrasing is that you find not only more understanding in reading the Bible, you find more joy. As the meaning of Scripture becomes more transparent...every text is phrased to make its original meaning as plain as possible to a modern reader.

On this particular evening, our study led us to Daniel 8:14. I was dumbfounded when we read this text in the *TCWB*. I had studied this topic thoroughly and knew this verse inside and out. When I read this text in *The Clear Word Bible*, something inside of me rose up and said, “This must stop!” Thousands of Adventists, like this educated doctor and his wife, would read this text, trusting Adventist “scholars” as they were taught to do, thinking this was what the Bible actually said. I invite the reader to compare *any* literal translation of the Bible to *The Clear Word Bible* rendering below. I have listed verses 12–14. Note the words that I have bolded as they have no support in the original manuscripts and are *deliberately* added, subtracted, or changed, to teach Adventist theology.

¹²Because of their sins, the people of God were given over to this power, and the services of the Temple ceased. Then I saw the little horn change its appearance and attack the truth about the Sanctuary of God and the daily intercession **in heaven**. The little horn practiced and prospered.

¹³ Now one of the angels said something to my angel and my angel asked him the very questions I wanted to ask, He said, “How long will God let the little horn try to take God’s place? How much longer will God continue to let it pervert the truth

about Himself and the Sanctuary **in heaven** and allow it to persecute His people?”

¹⁴ He said to him, “After two thousand three hundred **prophetic days (or two thousand three hundred years)**, God will step in, **proclaim the truth about Himself and restore the ministry of the Sanctuary in heaven to its rightful place. This is when the judgment will begin, of which the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary was a type.**”

I had no idea that the Adventist church would stoop to this. Jack J. Blanco, author of TCWB and chair of the religion department of Southern Adventist University, holds a doctor of theology degree in New Testament, and he added words to the text to *change the meaning of the text to fit Adventist theology*. This was done without *any* manuscript support whatsoever. Not only that, but you will notice that the added or changed words are inside the quotation marks indicating they came from the angel who was speaking to Daniel. This must be seen for what it is: *blatant, purposeful deception*. I knew *why* it was done—because there is *no* biblical support for Adventist’s 1844 investigative judgment doctrine.

After this study I felt impelled to write *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*. I knew I had the needed source materials as I had gathered these in my study before leaving Adventism. After that “Bible study” at the doctor’s home, I devoted every spare minute to this new book.

It had taken me many years to write *Sabbath in Crisis*.¹¹⁷ However, as *Cultic Doctrine* simply was a review and reorganization of my previous study, it went must faster. I do not claim divine inspiration (aren’t you glad!), but I felt that the Holy Spirit guided my mind and research. This book has 388

¹¹⁷ Now revised and enlarged in *Sabbath in Christ*.

pages and over 700 footnotes, and it was ready for printing in about six months.

Before *Cultic Doctrine* was printed, I sent out manuscripts of this book to about a dozen Adventist pastors and a few evangelical pastors. One Adventist pastor in his evaluation said, “You have written my book.” He went on to explain that his study had led him to the same conclusions, but he was not in a position to publish them. Several others also expressed their approval. One reader responded: “I feel like I have been hit between the eyes with a sledge hammer.” Many of the Adventist pastors were supportive, and some actually provided me with considerable additional documentation. Some, however, for obvious reasons, were not in favor of the book

While I was in Sedona, I started getting more orders for *Sabbath in Crisis*. Most of these came from members or pastors in the Worldwide Church of God. I noticed that a number of orders came from 300 W. Green Street, Pasadena, California, the central office for the Worldwide Church of God (WWCOG). Sometime later, a WWCOG pastor in the eastern US read *Sabbath in Crisis*, and we talked on the phone on several occasions. He told me he was ready to resign because he could no longer support the WWCOG position on the Sabbath and the feasts. I encouraged him to stay in the church as long as he could and just focus on the gospel. Some of the surrounding WWCOG pastors, however, began to suspect that my friend was not supporting the full teachings of the WWCOG and began to complain to the headquarters in Pasadena.

Joe Tkach,¹¹⁸ Pastor General of the WWCOG, went to the district and announced he was going to have a two-hour meeting for all the pastors in the area. My pastor friend

¹¹⁸ This was Joe Tkach Senior, now deceased.

realized his days were numbered, so he typed up his letter of resignation and took it to the hotel where Joe Tkach was staying. However, when my friend presented his letter of resignation to Joe Tkach, Pastor Tkach said, “Don’t turn it in; hear what I have to say tomorrow.”

About 2:00 a.m. Arizona time, my pastor friend called me, and excitedly told me about the meeting. He said, “Joe Tkach went right down the outline of your book.”

Not long after that, all the pastors of the WWCOG were to show a video to their congregations on the same Sabbath. In the video,¹¹⁹ Pastor General Tkach announced to the church at large that they were accepting the new covenant gospel and that the old covenant observances of Sabbath and feast days were no longer required.

The WWCOG purchased *Sabbath in Crisis* for all their pastors, and many WWCOG pastors ordered *Sabbath in Crisis* by the case for their members. I had no idea when I wrote this book that it would ever influence anyone other than a few former Adventists. I feel very humbled that it played a small role in helping the Worldwide Church of God move from its cultic, legalistic, old covenant focus toward new covenant theology.

Sedona Christian Fellowship had grown to about 150 in attendance when I began to have problems with irregular heartbeats. Several times my heart started jumping and skipping beats during a sermon. One time I almost fainted. One day these episodes became so bad that Carolyn took me to the emergency room. On the way there, I recalled the time Carolyn had taken me to the hospital many years before in Phoenix, and how, at that time, I knew I was *not* ready to meet the Lord. This time, however, it was different. I had no

¹¹⁹ I have never seen the video but this is what I have been told by several WWCOG pastors.

fear of dying, other than of leaving my beloved Carolyn and life in the here and now. I *knew* that I was accepted by God based *solely* upon my faith in the righteousness of Christ and God's abundant grace.

I had an evaluation by a cardiologist who recommended that I go on a heart medication that had detrimental side effects; I gave serious consideration to retiring from the ministry. I never wanted to pastor past the time when I was effective.

After prayer and much thought, I turned in my resignation letter, and we moved to Glendale in the northwest Phoenix area. Not long after I resigned, I discovered that my heart problems could be controlled by taking large amounts of magnesium. Both Carolyn and I went back into sales. Some months later, we got our real estate licenses. We visited some fifteen churches trying to find a church where we would feel comfortable.

One day we decided, rather than trying to find the ideal church, we would just go to some little church, pitch in, and help the pastor by doing whatever he wanted us to do. We had seen a little old church from the freeway that only had a few cars. The Sunday we visited, there were fourteen people present, nine of whom were visitors. We found out that the pastor was preaching his last sermon the next week. In conversations with the elder of the church, I learned that no one was scheduled to take over, and there was some talk of the church closing its doors. The church was called Christian Community Church (CCC) and was associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance organization. I told the elder that I had been a pastor of the C&MA some years before in Santa Cruz, California, and I would preach for a week or two until some action was taken about the future of the church. He was overjoyed. The next week

I was invited to meet with Rev. Bill Vaughn, the district superintendent,¹²⁰ who was visiting in Phoenix, and he asked me to take over the church. As the funds were not sufficient to provide a living salary, I was hesitant. Having gone through financial difficulty before, I did not want to go there again. I prayed about it, seeking some kind of confirmation from God. While praying, I considered the idea of trying to raise money from the many former SDA friends we had. I did not like the idea of asking for money, but it would be something that would be a blessing to the church. I started calling, and in just a few days, I had enough commitments to allow me to accept this position.

Carolyn started her real estate career, and I started pastoring with less than ten members. I went door to door inviting people to come, outlining my vision for the church, and people came. Our music consisted of playing worship music tapes on a little cassette player. One lady later told us she came because she felt sorry for us. During the next several years, God blessed our efforts. We saw our group grow to over 150, had many baptisms, a good youth program, a worship team, and did major church remodeling.

I worked hard at sermon preparation and usually preached without any notes. One Sunday after preaching without notes, something happened. After the service I lost my memory. I could not even remember the topic or passage I had preached on just a few minutes before. I tried to get into my car which had combination buttons to unlock the door, but I could not remember the combination which I had used for several years. Carolyn said that I repeated myself over and over again that day. She took me to the emergency room, and after many tests, the doctor's con-

¹²⁰ Comparable to the conference president in the Adventist organization.

cluded that I had experienced a mini-stroke. I also started having a number of other physical symptoms that caused me much frustration.

During my ministry at CCC I also became more involved with former Adventist ministries with increasing book sales. Also, at this time, I started the periodical, *Proclamation!* I spent many hours talking with Adventists, and Adventist pastors who were seeking answers. This, along with my declining health, caused me to retire from active pastoral ministry again and allowed me to spend more time with ministry to transitioning Adventists.

As my health allowed, I joined Carolyn in real estate and continued working with Life Assurance Ministries, enlarging and revising *Sabbath in Crisis* into *Sabbath in Christ*, printing *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventist "Truth"*, reprinting *Cultic Doctrine* and printing several other books authored by former Adventists.

Working with several Spanish-speaking former Seventh-day Adventists, we translated several of our books into Spanish.

Now, in January of 2008, we are in reasonably good health working with Richard and Colleen Tinker in Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., writing many articles for *Proclamation!* and working with our ever-expanding mailing database which is at this writing about 35,000. I just finished a major revision of the *Truth about Adventist "Truth."* I am now finishing this book and have another huge project in view.

I feel God is calling us to expand our ministry to questioning, transitioning and former Seventh-day Adventists *and* to help evangelical pastors and lay members learn how to better minister to the approximately 470,000 Adventist members who leave that church every year.

One of the biggest encouragements of our lives has been the hundreds, if not thousands, of letters and emails we receive from people who have read our articles and books. Many tell us they have been freed from the errors of Adventism and have come to a personal relationship with Christ and a better understanding of the simple, new covenant gospel of God's abundant grace in Christ.

Carolyn and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary in June, 2007. Both our dear boys, Bruce and Mike, were present with their wives and our four grandchildren. Also attending were many of our friends: Adventists, former Adventists, neighbors and people from the church we now attend. It was one of the highlights of our journey together.

We feel so blessed to have traveled our spiritual journey together, and we look forward to many more years of active ministry as God leads, blesses us with health and provides for our needs, according to the promises of His trustworthy Word. Looking back, we thank God for His sovereign grace. He truly has worked all things together for good.

Chapter 14



Christian

Years ago when someone asked me, in the context of religion, who I was, without a moment's hesitation I would answer, "I'm a Seventh-day Adventist." Today, my answer is, "I'm a Christian."

I could attend many different churches, but they no longer define who I am. While there is nothing wrong with being known by a particular church or denomination, as long as it is a healthy, Bible-based church, it is enough to be known as a follower of Christ.

Reflecting back on my life in Adventism, I spent too much time and energy on non-essentials and not enough on the simple gospel of Christ. Adventism is not alone in promoting peripherals. Many churches have some fossilized baggage that could be questioned.

Contemplating the ministry of Christ, it becomes demonstrably evident that He did not center on doctrinal minutia. His emphasis was on who He is, what He came to do, and the necessity of receiving Him for eternal life. For example, the woman of Samaria came with a load of sinful baggage and an incomplete understanding of "truth." Still, she drank of the "living water"—belief in Christ as Savior of the world—and immediately became a child of God and a successful evangelist.

The Apostle John was a member of Christ's inner circle of disciples and was known as "the one whom Jesus loved." Years later he wrote, "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."¹²¹ The gospel of John was written as an evangelistic document.

I recall how frustrated I was in my early years of pastoring in Adventism when neighboring evangelical pastors would promote passing out large numbers of John's Gospel with the intent of winning people to Christ. If a person read through the Gospel of John, he would not find the "testing truths" of Adventism, which we said were necessary in order to receive the seal of God, avoid the mark of the beast, and to pass in the judgment. In other words, the "testing truths" of Adventism were made a necessary component of salvation. However, John's Gospel claims to contain *all the truth necessary for salvation*.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life (Jn. 6:47).

This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent (Jn. 6:29).

The gospel is the good news of who Christ is and what He has done for us; it is not good advice about what we must do to be saved, other than to receive Him. Real, genuine Christianity can be *proclaimed*:

- To the self-righteous Pharisee
- To the sinful woman of Samaria
- To the royal official
- To the sick man at Bethesda

¹²¹ John 20:31.

-
- To the woman caught in adultery
 - To the multitudes
 - To the man born blind
 - To the Greeks
 - To the thief on the cross
 - To whoever calls
 - To whoever believes
 - To you and me!

Once the gospel is heard and accepted, we are “born again”—“born from above”—and we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise Who is given as a pledge of our inheritance and as a seal of our redemption.¹²² The Christian will then experience the gifts¹²³ and fruit of the Spirit¹²⁴ and a life filled with the assurance of salvation.¹²⁵ There will be many trials, tests, and hardships, but all the while, it is enough to be a Christian living “the eternal kind of life” here and now.

Several years have passed since I received the email message from the Adventist pastor, who was seeking answers to his doctrinal questions about Adventism and wanting to know my experience in leaving the SDA church. Since that time, I am aware of many hundreds, if not thousands, of Adventists who have made the transition, including many SDA pastors.

¹²² Eph. 1:13, 14; 4:30.

¹²³ Rom. 12:3-21; 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4.

¹²⁴ Gal. 16-26.

¹²⁵ 1 John 5:10-15.

It is my prayer that this book, along with the other books distributed by LAM Publications, will help you, the reader, discover the good news of the new covenant gospel of God's grace in Christ and give you the courage to take a stand for *biblical* truth.

Yes, truth led me out—and truth set me free!

Buy truth, and do not sell *it*, *Get* wisdom and instruction and understanding. Pro. 23:23

Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. Ps. 51:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Jn. 14:6

You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. Jn. 8:32

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. 1 Tim. 1:5–7

Keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 1 Tim. 1:19

In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men. Acts 24:16

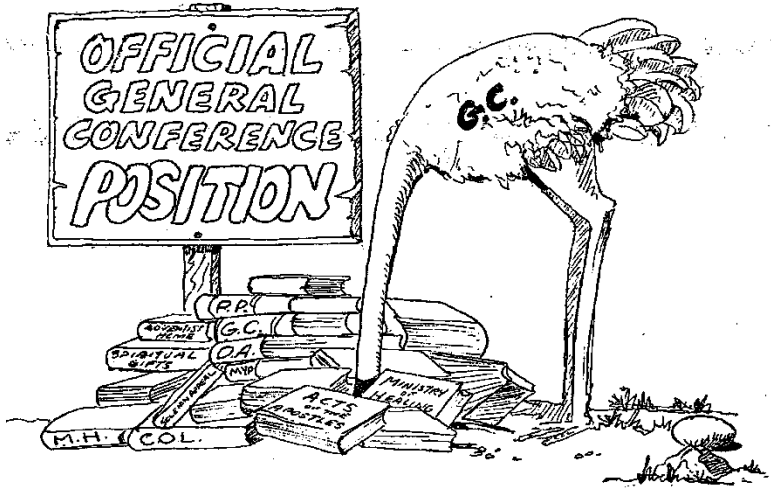
Appendix

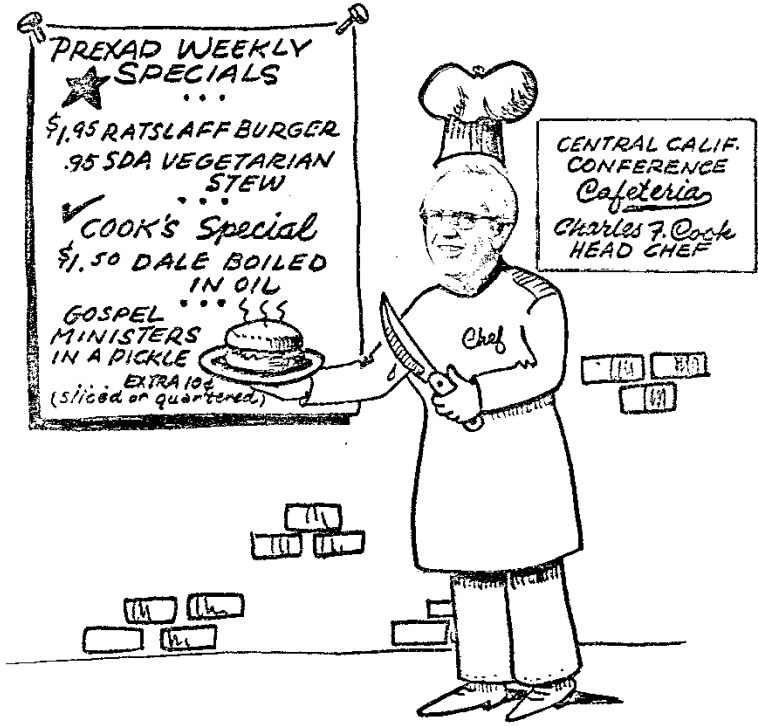
The following cartoons are printed here for the sake of history. They are not intended to cast reproach on any person or institution. They are, however, part of Adventist history as the church sought once again to cleanse itself from those who pointed out its embedded errors. Don Muth has given me permission to print his drawings. However, I do not know who the other artists are. If they identify themselves to me and if they wish to be recognized, I will give them credit on my website or when this book is reprinted.

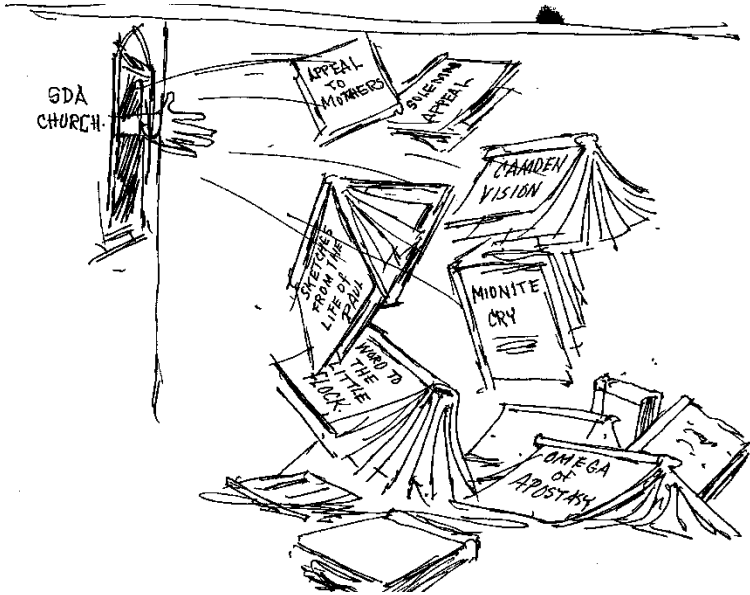


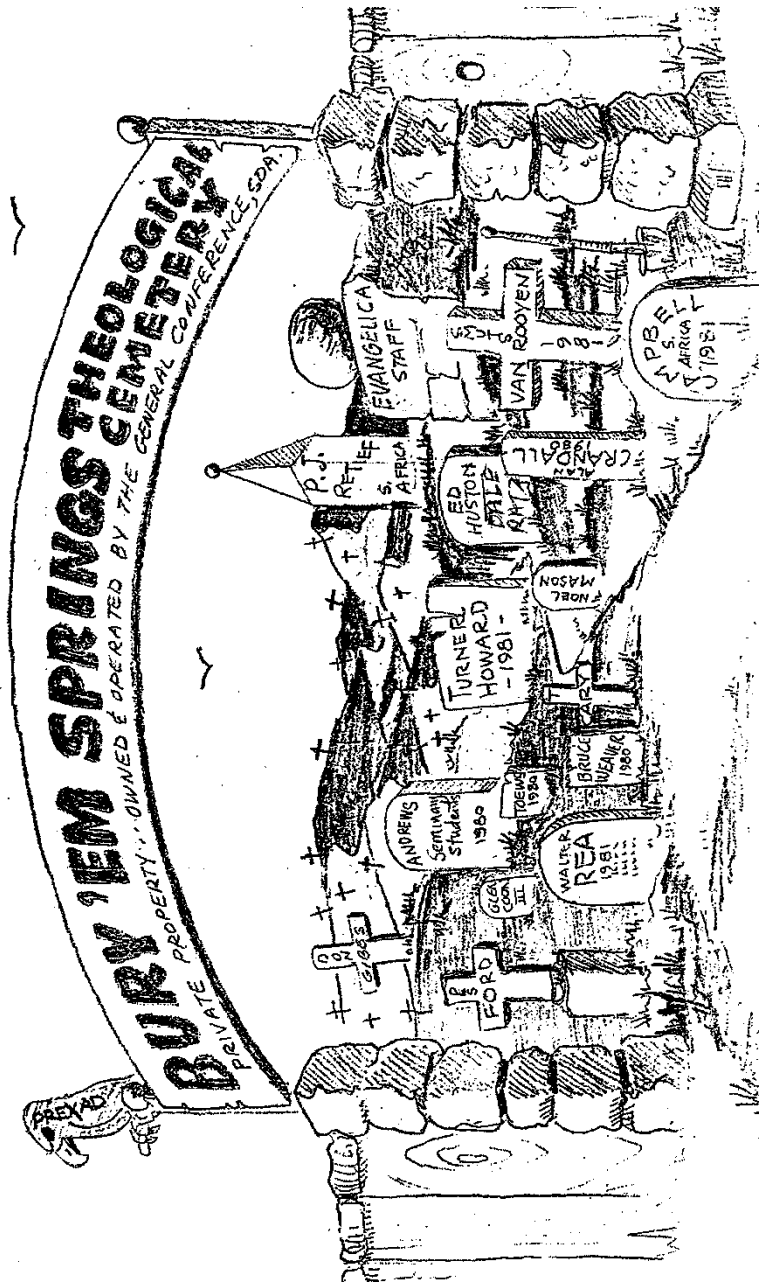
“Olga, Sr. White says here that the antediluvians Amalgamated with the beasts.”...













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Sabbath in Christ—by Dale Ratzlaff. This is an easy to read, thorough, biblical study of the gospel, the old and new covenants, and the Sabbath. Sabbath in Christ is endorsed by John MacArthur and many other theologians and pastors. “Dale Ratzlaff has done us a real service in providing the best all-around treatment of the Sabbath question to date.” Jerry Gladson, Ph.D.

The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists: An Evangelical Resource, An Appeal to SDA Leadership—by Dale Ratzlaff, This book reviews the early beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It documents how Ellen White—the prophetess of the SDA church—gave a glowing, comprehensive endorsement of William Miller’s Bible study methods, his conclusions, and his message, and then lists Miller’s fifteen “biblical proofs” that Christ would return in

1843. It follows the flip-flop teachings of the “shut door of mercy”, listing facts unknown to many SDAs and evangelicals. It traces the development of the SDA doctrine of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment—Adventism’s unique “contribution” (they say) to Christianity. It then contrasts this SDA doctrine with the biblical teaching of the judgment and the gospel.

Truth about Adventist “Truth”—by Dale Ratzlaff, This is a powerful book with a foreword by Paul Carden, Executive Director, The Centers for Apologetics Research. This book gives a sweeping overview of what many consider to be the main problems with Adventist teachings and practice. It answers two important questions: What are the differences between Adventism and evangelical Christianity? And do these differences matter? Enough documented evidence is given for the reader to settle this question once and for all.

White Out—by Dirk Anderson, This is another must-read book for those who want to know the full truth about Ellen White. Mr. Anderson has compiled many historical documents about Ellen White and early Adventism. He compares these records with those passed down by the SDA denomination.

A Theologian’s Journey from Seventh-day Adventism to Mainstream Christianity—by Jerry Gladson, Ph.D. Dr. Gladson was an SDA theologian, professor, and pastor serving an important role at the central core of Adventist scholarship for many years. Drawing from his meticulously kept journals, Dr. Gladson describes events at the center of the crisis in Adventism.

Discovering the New Covenant—Why I am no longer a Seventh-day Adventist—by Greg Taylor, Pastor Taylor shares how his life was changed when, through careful Bible study, he discovered the truth of the new covenant. Then he saw that Adventist theology did not line up with the new covenant truth.

White Washed—Uncovering the Myths of Ellen G. White—by Sydney Cleveland, Pastor Cleveland shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that the writings of Ellen White disagree with Scripture on a number of points, including some fundamental to the faith.

Life of Mrs. E.G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet, Her False Claims Refuted—by D. M. Canright. This was written the year of Canright's death in 1919. It fills in many missing gaps in SDA history—gaps that the Adventist church would like to forget.

The Sabbath and the Lord's Day—by H. M. Riggle. This is an old book but remains an easy-to-read, excellent resource for those who want more biblical answers to the Sabbath question.

E-Books

www.SabbathInChrist.com has a number of eBooks both in English and Spanish.

Español: Libros acerca de temas bíblicos.

Sábado en Cristo, de Dale Ratzlaff, traducido por Ben Escalante.

www.SabadoenCristo.org. The three books below are available as a free download on this site.

La doctrina sectaria de los adventistas del séptimo día, Este libro es solo para los que desean conocer la verdad y no temen descubrir verdades que los harán libres. Rey G. Cantú y William E. Castillo.

La verdad acerca de la “verdad” de los adventistas del séptimo día, de Dale Ratzlaff

Websites on Adventism

www.SabbathInChrist.com, Books, DVDs, and articles by former SDAs, including former SDA pastors and theologians.

www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org is the website for Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., publisher of *Proclamation!*

www.FormerAdventist.com is the website for the Former Adventist Forum and annual former Adventist conferences.

www.TruthOrFables.com This website has hundreds of pages of valuable information on the errors of Adventism and current events within Adventism.

www.EllenWhiteExposed.com. This website has hundreds of pages of material on Ellen G. White.

www.ExAdventist.com This is a ministry website for inquiring and transitioning Adventists.

www.ThinkAboutEternity.org This website is a ministry to the cults, including Mormons, Adventists and Jehovah Witnesses.

www.OneFlockMinistries.org This website coordinates and oversees ministry to inquiring and transitioning Adventists in Africa and helps former Adventist pastors find ministry opportunities in evangelical churches.

www.Watchman.org Watchman Fellowship is well known for its apologetic ministry to the cults and has a sizeable section dealing with Seventh-day Adventists.

www.MMOutReachInc.com This site has information on many cultic groups, including Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witness.

www.adventist.org The official website for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.