

# LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES, INC Proclamation!

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FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED EVANGELICALS

## The story of *Grace Place*

By Clay Peck  
April, 2002

There are not many examples of Seventh-day Adventist congregations that have made complete transitions out of Adventism and become healthy, evangelical churches. Grace Place in Berthoud, Colorado, along with our like-minded, sister congregation, Damascus Road Community

New Testament gospel of grace, the more problems I had with Adventist theology. But Adventists were my people, and like the apostle Paul, who had a special burden for the Jews, I longed to see a grace awakening happen in Adventism.

*The first year was a rocket ride! Crowds of new people were coming, and every week I would look out and see tears running down people's faces...*

When I linked up with a small group of like-minded Adventists who were frustrated and looking for a new and vibrant church experience, we agreed prayerfully to attempt an "evangelistic experiment" targeting especially former and inactive Adventists who had become discouraged and quit church altogether—the burned, the bored and the by-passed. We obtained a mailing list, extended invitations, and 405 people showed up on our opening day, September 14, 1996.

Church in Maryland, are notable exceptions.

In the last five and half years the Grace Place congregation has journeyed through three distinct and diverse phases: from an Adventist experiment, through a painful yet necessary transition, and into a healthy, growing, evangelical church.

The first year was a rocket ride! Crowds of new people were coming, and every week I would look out and see tears running down people's faces as many were experiencing true worship and hearing the liberating message of grace for the first time. For many, it seemed too good to be true that they could be accepted as sons and daughters of God, based solely on Christ's perfect and finished work, and that they could be secure

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### LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES (LAM), INC

**Mission:** To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

**Motto:** 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.

**Message:** "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

## “Come over to Africa and help us!”

I have been contacted by a representative of five SDA pastors in Africa who are planning on leaving the SDA church. They have requested that I come over there for several weeks to help them hold a series of meetings to launch their new “Amazing Grace” Churches. They have a combined membership of some 2,000. They have no funds to help with expenses. I have been in contact with several former SDA pastors who have expressed an interest in helping. It would cost about \$4,000 for each person who goes. We are praying that three of us will be able to go. We are putting this in the hands of the Lord. I sent out an e-mail newsletter some weeks ago mentioning this and about \$2,400 has been pledged for this ministry project. I sent each of the five pastors a complete set of our books and tapes for their ministry. Please join us in prayer over this matter.

### **Proclamation to feature present ministries of former Adventist pastors**

In each of the next several issues of *Proclamation* we will be featuring the present ministry of a former Seventh-day Adventist pastor. In this issue we are happy to highlight Clay Peck and Grace Place.

### **Nagging questions about Ecclesiastes 9:5**

“Formers” who still have questions about man’s condition in death will appreciate Dr. Jerry Gladson’s timely article “The Dead Know Nothing.” We thank Dr. Gladson for his careful and detailed work in preparing this for *Proclamation*.

**Steve Kurtright** is new to many of us. Pastor Kurtright was a leading administrator and theologian in the Seventh-day Church of God in the Denver area. Some years ago, Steve ordered *Sabbath in Crisis* and has continued his study of this topic. Some time ago he felt to be true to his conscience he had to resign his position. He now attends Grace Place where he teaches Sunday school for Clay Peck. His article on 2 Corinthians 3 is outstanding. Thanks, Steve, for your courage to

stand for truth and for sharing your insights with the readers of *Proclamation*.

### **Thanks for the many Letters, Letters and Letter**

I wish I had the time to answer every letter in person! We get so many heart warming, encouraging letters, yes and a few others as well. “Thank you!” One letter, Kristin Joy Jackson’s, was of special interest and I felt that it would be of great help to our readers. In her letter, she refers to a larger research paper she did on Adventism. That research can be downloaded from [www.ratzlaf.com/downloads.htm](http://www.ratzlaf.com/downloads.htm). “Well done” to Kristin Joy and “thanks for sharing!”

### **Update on *The Clear Word* (“Bible”)**

Dr. Verle Streifling has just completed in-depth evaluation of SDA’s *The Clear Word*. You will be amazed at the extent of deliberate deception that runs throughout this book—Yes, even to compromising the central message of the gospel by purposely changing the tense of the Greek verbs and many additions, subtractions and deletions! You can download this free 22 page work at [www.ratzlaf.com/downloads.htm](http://www.ratzlaf.com/downloads.htm).

### **God still providing! Please keep praying!**

Near the end of last year we received a number of donations that gave us a strong financial start for 2002. However, we were short about \$7,000 to publish this issue of *Proclamation*. God still answers prayer. Yesterday, (as I write this) one of our supporters sent a check for \$7,000! Thanks you and You! We ask that you continue to pray for this ministry. From private conversations I know that *Proclamation* and the books we send out are making more of a difference in people’s lives than is immediately evident. “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

## Proclamation!

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# A contrast of the Old and **New Covenants**

## A study of 2 Corinthians 3

**Steve Kurtright**

**L**ooking for a job? Anticipating a career change? Your marketability to a prospective employer is not based entirely on the content of your resume. Many employers are looking for letters of reference as well. They want to know how others assess your strengths and abilities. The decision an employer makes about who to hire for a particular position may rest more with the commendations you receive from others than on your job history outlined in your resume.

Hard as it may be to believe, Paul's authority to minister was questioned because some accused him of not having the proper letters of reference to present to the congregation at Corinth. It was common practice for one congregation or individual to commend another to a distant congregation where that person may not be known e.g. Paul's commendation of Phoebe (Romans 16:1,2). Some of those who opposed Paul's message of salvation by grace alone through Christ alone questioned his authority to minister to the Corinthian fellowship.

His opponents have traditionally been identified as Judiazers from Jerusalem who were promoting themselves as apostles (11:15) and true Israelites. It was their contention Paul was neither. Seeing themselves as servants of righteousness (11:15), they were insisting on the observance of the Old Covenant tenets for salvation. Passing themselves off as servants of Christ (11:23) they were promoting their views as being nearer to Jesus' teaching than Paul's.

Contrary to the claims of his opponents, Paul sets out in 2 Corinthians 3 to establish his authority to minister. Even though acceptable in the church, Paul chooses not to commend himself. Paul was saying that he did not need letters of

introduction such as those his opponents had apparently produced. Examples of these letters of recommendation can be seen in Acts 9:2; 18:27; 22:5.

### **Paul's Commendation**

Paul did not need external evidence of his authority. The Corinthian's position in Christ was the test he regarded as commendation of valid ministry. They were his letter of reference (3:2). To produce a letter of another kind would have been an insult to the work of Christ among them. Paul attributes his standing as a minister to God who made him a servant of the new covenant (3:6).

The ministry of the new covenant brings salvation, and with such credentials it has no rivals. Paul was a minister of the new covenant—that was his commendation. Once he establishes the Corinthian's standing in Christ as his authority, he introduces a contrast between the old and new covenants.

### **Contrasting the Covenants**

The element of obedience to the old covenant is missing from Paul; rather, he offers a contrast between the old and new covenants. The contrast deals with the old covenant in total. The core of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, represents that covenant. The contrast begins early in the chapter. Paul first characterizes the Corinthians as a letter of Christ written not with ink as was the book of the Law, nor on tables of stone as were the Ten Commandments. Rather, Paul states they were a letter written on tablets of human hearts (3:3). His mention of human hearts is a clear refer-

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## *The old covenant had a glory, but it was a glory that was fading away.*

ence to Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Ezekiel 36:26, which allude to the place where the new covenant will be written. Paul clearly establishes that as living letters written by the Spirit of God, the Corinthian's were superior to any letters of reference that his opponents might produce.

The contrast between new and old continues with the statement that the new covenant is not of the letter, but of the Spirit. Further, the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. The essential problem with the old covenant is that it cannot give life. But how does the letter kill? The old covenant declares what God commands without giving power to fulfill them, and then it pronounces death on all those who do not live up to them. In verses 6-9 when describing the activity of the old covenant, Paul uses terms linked with death and judgment. Paul believes the old covenant deals out death to those who live within its confines by condemning them.

The obvious meaning of the term letter comes from verse 7. There he uses the term in the plural to refer to letters engraved onto the stone tablets of the law. Because the letter kills, he describes that which was carved in stone as the ministry of death. This letter simply means the old covenant.

The remedy for this death and condemnation is the establishment of a new covenant through the power of the life-giving Spirit. This is the new covenant of which Paul is a competent minister (3:6).

### **The Context of Verses 7-13**

It has been suggested that verse 7 does not refer to the stone tablets on which the ten commandments were written, but rather to the stone altar built by Joshua on which he wrote "a copy of the law of Moses. . ." (Joshua 8:30-32). The instruction to do so was given by Moses prior to Israel's entry into Canaan (Deuteronomy 27:2-8). This view separates the Ten Commandments from the law of Moses and creates two codes of law – the Ten Commandments and the law of Moses. That view suggests these verses do not address the Ten Commandments as the core of the old covenant. Instead, they make the law of Moses the core of the old covenant. This suggestion overlooks significant clues needed to pinpoint the historical context described in these verses.

Even a casual reading of verses 7 and 13 reveals the main character of this account is Moses, not Joshua. It is the face of Moses that is shining (albeit fading) to the point that the sons

of Israel could not look at him. So these sons of Israel would not see the fading glory, Moses veiled his face. What event is being described in these verses?

For the complete story read Exodus 34:27–35. The account is of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments written on the two tables of stone. The contrast in 2 Corinthians 3 is of the old covenant in total as represented by the Ten Commandments.

### **Fading Glory**

Paul does not say the old covenant was without glory. Clearly verses 9-11 state it did have glory. However, that glory was fading (3:7,11,13). While it is true Moses' face shone with such glory that the sons of Israel were afraid to come near him (Exodus 34:30), he did not veil his face. The brightness of his face is not why he put a veil over it.

Moses did not veil his face until after he had finished talking with them (34:33). The balance of Exodus 34 clearly indicates the reason Moses veiled his face is that he did not want the sons of Israel to see the glory fade. Moses would remove the veil before each audience with God. He would appear before the sons of Israel so they could see his face shine. Following that Moses would veil his face until he went in to speak with God again. The veil was not to shield the sons of Israel from the glory, but to hide the fading of the glory.

The fading glory was key to Paul's contrast of the old and new covenants. The old covenant had a glory, but it was a glory that was fading away. In contrast, Paul states that what had glory, has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. Paul's presentation is carefully constructed. Notice how verses 9-11 begin with the word, if, coupled with some variation of the phrase "how much more." Each comparison shows that the new era of the Spirit is more glorious than the era of the old covenant. That surpassing glory is identified as the ministry of righteousness (3:9) and the ministry of the Spirit, (3:8).

### **We Are Not As Moses**

To perceive the glory of the new covenant we have to remove the veil from our faces. Without taking that step we cannot see the fading glory of the old covenant. That veil is only lifted in Christ,

“whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (3:16). Only in Christ is it seen to be old. In other words, those outside Christ cannot understand that the old covenant is surpassed in glory by the new—they remain under its condemnation. He virtually repeats verse 14 in verse 15 to emphasize this point, “but to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart.” (3:15).

The new covenant, which is the better and more complete revelation of truth, must be allowed to interpret the old covenant in a Christ-centered manner. This is an important interpretive principle. We should not accept any practices of the old covenant on the basis of old covenant statements themselves. Rather, we must examine the content of the old covenant from a new covenant perspective.

## Conclusion

2 Corinthians 3 is clear. Paul regarded the era of the old covenant’s domination as fading away (3:7,11,13,14). The old covenant as it functioned in the time of Moses and as it was understood in the synagogue during Paul’s day is revealed as a ministry of death and condemnation (3:6,7,9). Paul describes an old covenant whose end had come (3:13).

This chapter presents a defense of Paul’s ministry against the claims of the Judiazers. He set forth a series of contrasts between the old and new covenants. He declares himself to be a minister of the new covenant. The contrasts illustrate that the new covenant has replaced the old as more glorious. It is in this manner Paul establishes the superiority of his ministry over that of his opponents. !

## Take the step of Truth

Deciding to leave Adventism is one of the most difficult decisions an Adventist ever makes. When a person commits to saying “Yes” to God as he reveals truth, each new understanding the Holy Spirit brings from the word of God requires a response.

Embracing truth requires that we act on God’s revelations to us, and eventually those revelations of truth invite us to walk by faith into situations that leave us feeling completely vulnerable.

When God opens a door of truth that invites us to walk out of our Adventist identity and into a deeper, more intimate relationship with him, many of us struggle. The invitation to leave requires that we be willing to surrender our identity, our social circle, our traditions, and our futures to God. He asks us to trust him enough to risk leaving behind everything upon which we depended.

God is faithful. When a person walks through the door leading out of Adventism into the completely unseen beyond, Love bigger than our fears and losses envelopes us. There is security; there is hope; there is eternity—and there are new brothers and sisters that begin to fill the void left by leaving the old behind.

Taking that step out of Adventism and into a new life of faith, however, is also a step into new kinds of suffering and spiritual attack. Jesus forewarned us that he did not bring

peace but a sword to the earth. Family members will turn on each other when the gospel comes between them. (Matt. 10:34) “All men will hate you because of me,” Jesus said; “but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” (Matt. 10:22)

Most people who leave Adventism for the sake of the gospel of the Lord Jesus experience some degree of loss and rejection and even persecution. Former Adventist Fellowship online helps to fill the void that many find in their lives as they struggle with the loss and change of leaving. The stories of others who have left, the studies, and the live forum all provide insight and support for those experiencing the unique doubts, questions, and pain caused by severing Adventist ties.

Walking into truth requires that we be willing to leave everything behind for the sake of Christ. Jesus, the Truth we embrace, walks with us into that loss. The miracle we discover is that the Lord himself is our reward. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” Jesus said just before he ascended to his Father. (Matthew 28:20b)

Join others who have risked everything for the sake of Jesus. Log onto [FormerAdventist.com](http://FormerAdventist.com) and discover fellowship and support from others who have also suffered doubts and loss.

The Holy Spirit unites the hearts of those who are alive in Jesus, and that miracle creates an environment of love and growth wherever God’s people gather—even if they gather in cyberspace!



A re-examination of Ecclesiastes 9:5-6  
and the state of humanity in death

# “The dead know nothing”

**Jerry A. Gladson, Ph.D.**

Most Seventh-day Adventists can cite from memory an obscure text in an equally obscure book of the Bible:

The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun. Ecclesiastes 9:5-6<sup>1</sup>

Adventists quote this text because they regard it as primary biblical evidence for the belief that at death, upon the disintegration of life, individuals lapse into unconsciousness until they are again raised to life in the resurrection at the last day.<sup>2</sup> In death, this view maintains, there is no consciousness and no social intercourse with the living. Instead of passing on to their reward, whether good or ill, the dead remain in the grave until resurrected. Ecclesiastes 9 provides a key passage used to sustain this Adventist notion of soul-sleep, the non-immortality of the soul, a view technically known as conditionalism.<sup>3</sup>

In view of Ecclesiastes' unusual literary character, however, it strikes me as somewhat odd Seventh-day Adventists continue to rely upon this wisdom book for support of the view of the human condition in death.

Fifty years ago, Adventists warned adherents to avoid use of selected passages in the book of Job—

a similar critical wisdom writing—in support of doctrine.<sup>4</sup> But they have curiously failed to extend the same caveat to Ecclesiastes.<sup>5</sup> The reason for this apparent hermeneutical lapse is not hard to see. From the time Seventh-day Adventists adopted the conditionalist view, apparently largely through the influence of George Storrs (1796-1879), a former Methodist minister, this passage from Ecclesiastes has been regularly cited in support of the doctrine. Thus, without critical review that would have naturally developed as the denomination matured in its scholarship, it has been passed along as part of the larger Adventist tradition about death. Furthermore, Ellen White, in most circles the principal interpreter of Scripture for Adventists, frequently used Ecclesiastes 9 in her discussion of death.<sup>6</sup> Once, while alluding to this passage, White claims that, should anyone deny the conditionalist view of death, they expose themselves to the deceptions of modern spiritualism:

The theory which forms the very foundation of spiritualism is at war with the plainest statements of Scripture. The Bible declares that the dead know not anything, that their thoughts have perished; they have no part in anything that is done under the sun; they know nothing of the joys or sorrows of those who were dearest to them on earth.<sup>7</sup>

Given the overwhelming power of the now one-hundred-fifty-year-old Adventist tradition, fear of



Jerry A. Gladson, Ph.D. was professor of religion at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee. He now serves as senior minister of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Marietta, Georgia.

spiritualism, and the corroborating belief in White's inspired status, it is no wonder Adventism has never felt a need to re-examine the denomination's traditional use of Ecclesiastes 9. It has merely assumed the accuracy of this interpretation of the passage.

The hermeneutical question, even though it has been ignored, no doubt unwittingly, remains. Is it really appropriate for Adventists to appeal to Ecclesiastes in support of the doctrine of the unconscious state of the dead? Granted, Adventists cite many other passages, and it is upon all these, and not merely Ecclesiastes 9, that the denomination depends. But Ecclesiastes 9 remains a stock reference to which the church continues to appeal. To devote an article to this specific passage, to re-examine its usefulness in supporting this doctrine, may seem to be of trivial importance. However, Adventists have placed considerably more weight upon this passage than is usually the case in constructing doctrines, and have furthermore utilized Ecclesiastes without taking account of the special literary and historical considerations that must be kept in mind when interpreting such an enigmatic wisdom text.

In thus citing Ecclesiastes uncritically, have Adventists innocently fallen prey to the ever-present danger lurking in the proof-text method of interpretation? It is not necessary to repeat here the oft-mentioned warnings about the proof-text method. It is important to recall, nevertheless, that the Bible may not be cited in all of its parts in equal measure, as though it were a dictionary or manual, when developing doctrine. For a theological system like Adventism that makes the state of humanity in death a "testing truth," or a crucial doctrinal teaching the adherence to which is essential for church membership,<sup>8</sup> accurate use of the Bible in all its parts becomes imperative. For doctrine regarded as criteria for membership, Adventism should be held to a higher standard of absolute accuracy. The use of Ecclesiastes in a primary supporting role, without qualification, is therefore of no small consequence for Adventism.

In this article I will take a closer look at Ecclesiastes 9 in the context of the book of Ecclesiastes and its setting in social and religious history in order to discern more accurately the meaning of Eccl. 9:5-6 as it refers to the nature of death. My aim, while not exhaustive, will be to test the Adventist usage of this passage. At the outset it may help the reader to recognize that personally and confessionally, in regard to personal eschatology of which this question is a part, I am a condi-

tionalist and in substantial agreement with the Adventist position on the status of humanity in death. I therefore write from within conditionalist understanding and not as a critic outside it. My intent in this article is not to provoke a change in Adventist belief, but to urge the denomination to assume a stronger sense of exegetical honesty in interpreting the biblical passages it uses to support doctrine.

### The Times and Character of Ecclesiastes

One of the first matters to discover in interpreting any biblical passage is the *intention* of the writer. Does the writer intend to be taken literally? Symbolically? As expressing an opinion? Purporting to relate objective truth? The question of intent is not easily decided with Ecclesiastes. Without question, Ecclesiastes is the strangest book in the Bible. Almost every other sacred text affirms that life, under God, is filled with meaning because of God's abiding presence.

Not Ecclesiastes. "All is vanity and a chasing after wind," occurs at the beginning as some form of the theme of the book (1:14, see also v. 2). This odd phrase or its equivalent, mentioned twenty-seven times in the book,<sup>9</sup> can in several of these places arguably be rendered, "utterly meaningless . . . all is meaningless" (v. 2). Such a pessimistic sentiment goes far to make Ecclesiastes virtually a stranger on the biblical landscape. We recognize the book clearly enough as wisdom literature, that is, as a class of gnomic literature aimed at observation and mastery of life,<sup>10</sup> yet, like Job, Ecclesiastes chafes at the boundaries of traditional Hebrew wisdom. Ecclesiastes even defies attempts to reduce it to an orderly literary structure. Its pungent ambiguity frustrates interpreters. Perhaps that is the reason, as in no other book of the Old Testament, interpreters tend to read their own faith or unfaith into Ecclesiastes. As with critical research into the historical Jesus, interpreters are thus inclined to read their own *intent* into Ecclesiastes, in the immortal words of Albert Schweitzer, to see their own reflection in the water at the bottom of the well.

The book of Ecclesiastes challenges established religious beliefs. It belongs, most think, among the writers of critical wisdom, the true dissidents of the Bible.<sup>11</sup> It openly disputes the general religious traditions of Israel, and particularly those of Hebrew wisdom (see 1:2-15). The author apparently belonged to the class of wisdom teachers or sages whose task it was to observe life and distill from these observations principles for efficient living (see

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CULTURE WHERE  
ARAMAIC WAS SPOKEN,  
A CONDITION THAT DID  
NOT PREVAIL IN ISRAEL  
UNTIL AFTER THE  
BABYLONIAN EXILE.**

12:9-11). Despite his social and professional standing, the author is at odds with the usual assumptions of this very task. What these assumptions may be gleaned from the classic wisdom book of Proverbs: (1) There is a basic (divine) order in the world; (2) discovery of this order is possible on the part of humanity; and (3) persons who align themselves with this order will experience a positive life.<sup>12</sup> It follows, then, that a well-ordered life naturally leads to positive moral reward, and that disordered living results in calamity. Ecclesiastes flatly denies this cherished wisdom conclusion. Right-doing does not always lead to a positive life; evil does not always bode ill. His observation and experience confirms the reverse is often the case (see 7:15). Ecclesiastes oddly seems to have no place for the idea that God has chosen Israel as a special people and made known the divine will to them (see 3:11-15). In fact, the book appears to have no place for special divine revelation at all. Human beings can know nothing substantial about God either through revelation or wisdom.<sup>13</sup> Because it advances such cynical, skeptical ideas, Ecclesiastes has been called the most modern, if not the most dangerous book, in the Bible.

Who wrote such a strange, unconventional book? What is its primary intention? These questions lead directly into the social and religious background of Ecclesiastes.

The author is introduced as "the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:12). The word "teacher" (NRSV) renders the Hebrew participle *qoheleth*, which in turn derives from *qahal*, "congregation." The Hebrew participle form suggests something like "an assembler," or "convener," and by extension, one who "speaks in an assembly." An assembler, convener, or speaker of what? A congregation? If so, the translation in the Greek Septuagint *Ekklesiastes*, "one who leads a congregation," from which we get our title Ecclesiastes, is accurate. Or does it mean an assembler of proverbs and sayings? The author is said to engage in "weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs" (12:9). That *qoheleth* evidently designates a man and yet is feminine in form intimates the word may be a title, perhaps of an office or function, not a proper name. The book consistently portrays the author, whom I will henceforth refer to as "Qoheleth," as a person who searches wisdom and records his observations. Often he says, "I saw . . .," or its equivalent, and follows with an observation that must be regarded as a personal response to some kind of experience (see 1:14; 2:13; 4:4; 6:1; 9:11, etc.). He constantly eval-

uates proverbial wisdom, and then expresses his conclusions in plain words (see 12:9-10). This book is the work of a sage or wise man, a member of the wisdom class in ancient Israel, which is responsible for the book of Proverbs, Job, and perhaps some of the psalms, as well as the later books of Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon in the Old Testament Apocrypha.

Who is this unnamed author, referred to as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1, 12)? We recall immediately that Solomon is portrayed in the Bible as a master of wisdom (see 1 Kgs. 4:29-34). Is Solomon the author of Ecclesiastes?

Tradition has accorded him that identification, in spite of the fact the book nowhere makes such an explicit claim. "Son of David, king in Jerusalem" could refer to any royal descendent of David, although it has been generally taken as a reference to Solomon. But if the author intended to make this identification, why did he not come out and plainly say it? What is the meaning of his unexpressed hint?

Qoheleth refers to his extensive building projects, great numbers of slaves, and huge flocks, "more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem." He boasts of "silver and gold and the treasure of kings," and of "many concubines," all reminiscent of Solomon's extravagance (2:1-11; see 1 Kgs. 9:14-23). These comments again point to Solomon, but stop short of actual identification. Why?

Several considerations count against this implied Solomonic identification.

The Hebrew of the book is of much more recent vintage than the age of Solomon (tenth century B.C.E.). A recent detailed linguistic study indicates it can be no earlier than the eighth or seventh century B.C.E.<sup>14</sup> More than any other book of the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes employs words borrowed from Aramaic, suggesting that the author lived in a culture where Aramaic was spoken,<sup>15</sup> a condition that did not prevail in Israel until after the Babylonian Exile (sixth century B.C.E. and afterwards). If written during Solomon's time, the language of the book would have had to be updated or modernized at some subsequent time, just as we have modernized the King James Version of the Bible. While this is possible, it is much more likely that the language of the book reflects a time much later than Solomon.

The royal persona is dropped after chapter 2, and a final editorial note, as noted above, refers to the author as a sage, not a king, who "collected say-



ings . . . weighing and studying and arranging” them (12:9-11).<sup>16</sup> Many scholars think, therefore, that the royal Solomonic persona is a literary device, or *nom de plume*, such as was well known in Egyptian wisdom literature of the time. It is not intended to be taken literally. Egyptian wisdom, like the teaching of Amen-em-het I for his son, often places sagacious teaching on the lips of a pharaoh of the past.<sup>17</sup> In ancient times, when authorship was thought of more as a communal task, it was customary to write works such as this in honor or memory of an ancient worthy. The Apocrypha contains another wisdom book that uses the same *nom de plume* in its title, “The Wisdom of Solomon,” which clearly comes from the first century B.C.E.

So the identity of the author of Ecclesiastes remains a mystery. The question of who wrote this book has to remain open.<sup>18</sup>

All this leaves us with a difficult choice to make with respect to the historical occasion of the book. If the book comes from Solomon’s era, that is, the tenth century B.C.E.,<sup>19</sup> then its theology would reflect the discussion in wisdom circles at that time. This would make the book roughly contemporary with the earlier portions of Proverbs and some of the Psalms.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, if the book is dated to the post-exilic era, e.g., the fourth or third century B.C.E.,<sup>21</sup> its theology would reflect discussions of a vastly different time period. Both positions have problems, but when all things are taken into account, the latter era seems to be the most likely for Ecclesiastes.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ecclesiastes, Adventism, and the Meaning of Death**

Accepting then that Ecclesiastes was written by a sage in the post-exilic era who is disputing with or perhaps attempting to offer a corrective to the wisdom tradition, we have in hand the first factors necessary to determine its meaning. Properly understanding a book like Ecclesiastes from a Christian perspective, as we have observed, involves crucial decisions about the book’s intent, its particular literary form of the material, and the nature of its place among the books of the Bible. Since the literary genre of a document is determinative of how it is to be interpreted, what kind of literature is Ecclesiastes?

Ecclesiastes begins as a royal testament, but this form is dropped after 2:23. After this, it follows more the general form of an instruction or reflection.<sup>23</sup> “The book is a kind of philosopher’s diary,” writes Blank, “pages from an artist’s notebook, a thinking

aloud, a gathering of literary fragments published without plan.”<sup>24</sup> In modern times, we might compare it to Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées*<sup>25</sup> or Dag Hammarskjöld’s *Markings*.<sup>26</sup> Anciently, its closest comparisons are found among the Egyptian and Babylonian wisdom texts, particularly the “Dialogue about Human Misery,” sometimes called the Babylonian Ecclesiastes, and the Egyptian “Song of the Harper.”<sup>27</sup> Considered as a whole, Ecclesiastes presents the somewhat random observations about life by a sage who is reflecting on his experiences and drawing conclusions from them. While he assumes the experiential epistemology of the wisdom tradition, his observations are personal and, at many points, different from the normative tradition of wisdom reflected in Proverbs. This is why his book is often called “critical” wisdom, because it is suspicious of the conclusions that wisdom traditionally fostered. The observations of the author, Qoheleth, are personal observations and conclusions, not necessarily ones that accord with accepted Jewish or Christian understanding. They are not vested with the authority of the prophet or priest. Like other wisdom observations, they are intended to reflect the experience of the teacher, experience that is to be tested in the life of the hearer and accordingly accepted as valid or rejected as unsound. Given this intent, it is inaccurate to cite Qoheleth’s observations about life as a form of final truth, especially if these observations stand in tension with the general tenor of Hebrew or Christian belief. This principle would apply to all views expressed in the book, as well as to Qoheleth’s view of death and the afterlife.

If Qoheleth’s observations are to be accepted as largely subjective, or even, in specific instances, to be thought of as contradictory to a Christian point of view, how is the book of Ecclesiastes inspired? My own view of the inspiration of such books as Ecclesiastes (along with Job and Proverbs) is that these books reflect the knowledge of God that comes indirectly, rather than directly, through human observation of life and the world. These books are more akin to what theologians have called indirect, or general revelation, such as might be found in philosophy, than to direct, or special revelation, which occurs in the prophets. When applied to the Wisdom writings, inspiration means more that the books report accurately the subjective observations of the author than that they reflect an objective reflection of reality. A good example of this same phenomenon would be many of the statements of Job’s friends—or even of Job

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OF ECCLESIASTES  
INSPIRED?**

**FOR THE AUTHOR OF  
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THE WISDOM TRADITION  
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himself (see Job 4:17-19; 9:13-24). Similarly, no one would accept the sentiments of some of the complaint psalms as objective statements of the way things are to be (see Ps. 137:7-9).

If Qoheleth's observations are understood in this light, then one cannot simply accept his conclusions about death and the afterlife as descriptive of the actual conditions in death. They are rather *what Qoheleth imagines death to be like*. One can no more cite Qoheleth as an authority on death than one can cite his view that everything is meaningless, or use a comment from Job's friend, Bildad, to show that human beings are to be regarded as maggots or worms! (See Job 25:6.)

**What does Qoheleth think death is like?**

Space precludes anything but a brief overview. Qoheleth takes umbrage at life's difficulty and inequity. He consequently prefers death to life. To have never existed at all seems even more inviting (4:2). One who has never existed has never been exposed, like the living, to the evils that exist. It is better, therefore, to go to the "house of mourning" than to the "house of mirth," because at the grave side one grasps bitter reality, the "end of a thing" (7:1-8).<sup>28</sup> There is utterly no reprieve from death. And since all end up in its clutches, the problem of injustice in life is particularly urgent, since one must accrue reward for good or ill in the present life, if it is to be obtained at all (8:8-14). This "realized eschatology" affects Ecclesiastes' view of death. With such a bleak outlook, the author naturally commends the enjoyment of the life one experiences daily, because that is all that is left for human beings (v 15).

Chapter 9 summarizes and builds upon these observations. It is, in Gordis' words, a "passionate expression . . . which is virtually the culmination of the preceding."<sup>29</sup> The same "evil" fate comes to both the righteous and wicked. All die, and in the grave know nothing nor have any part "ever again" in what happens in life. "They never again have a share" in life (v. 5b, author's translation). All their emotions perish along with them, and sadly, their memory, too, is lost (vv. 5-6). "The dead vanish in memory as if they never were."<sup>30</sup> For Qoheleth, "the divine support of life has entirely vanished. . . the final word is death's chilling summons."<sup>31</sup>

The ethic the author recommends here and throughout the book grows directly out of this view of death. Because all will be ultimately lost in the grave, one should try to extract from life the most possible enjoyment. *Carpe diem!* Seize the day!

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol [the grave], to which you are going" (vv. 8-10). If there is nothing more beyond this life, it is all the more urgent to gain from life pleasure and significance.

For the author of Ecclesiastes, as for the wisdom tradition in general, life ends in death. There is nothing more beyond. The "eternal home" of all is the grave, a time when "dust returns to the earth as it was and the breath returns to God who gave it." This inexorable march to the grave, to nothingness, he says, makes everything "utterly meaningless" (12:8, author's translation).

In one respect, however, Ecclesiastes does show continuity with the main Hebrew wisdom tradition with respect to life after death and the resurrection from the dead. Hebrew wisdom lacks a view of future life beyond death. In wisdom thinking life is played out strictly within the bounds of human mortality.<sup>32</sup> Ecclesiastes shares this view.

It may come as a shock to many Adventists to realize that the notion of a general resurrection—and life after death—only emerges late in the Old Testament period.<sup>33</sup> Although there were hints of more, the people of the Old Testament generally lived an existence devoid of individual hope beyond the grave.<sup>34</sup>

Even some of the most poignant prophetic pictures of the messianic age include death as a part of the future age (see Isa. 66:20). The idea of resurrection constitutes a good example of how theological tenets develop within Scripture, and how this growth must be taken into account in the understanding of doctrine in Christian faith. A proof-text approach to Scripture, which Adventism has fostered, at least on a popular level, obscures this development.

Be this as it may, Adventists have rightly understood the author of Ecclesiastes to say that the grave brings an end to conscious life in this world. They have failed, however, to recognize the intent of this statement. Qoheleth is not expressing what objectively happens after death; he is stating what he *thinks* happens. The failure of Adventist interpretation at this point may be illustrated by the fact that for Qoheleth there is also no resurrection to eternal life.<sup>35</sup> The significance of this oversight may not at first be obvious. If the view of Ecclesiastes with regard to the state of humanity in death, reflected particularly in chap. 9, is accepted as normative, then his view of life after death, and hence the impossibility of the resurrection, must also be

accepted as normative. The idea of resurrection or eternal life is missing from the personal eschatology of Ecclesiastes. One cannot consistently cite this passage as an authority to prove the unconsciousness of the dead, on the one hand, while holding onto the idea of resurrection, on the other. If the passage is “proof” of unconsciousness in death, it is logically also “proof” there is no resurrection. One cannot cite Ecclesiastes 9 when it comes to unconsciousness in death, but leave it behind when it fails to affirm resurrection.<sup>36</sup> The most one could say would be that the author of Ecclesiastes favors one of the ancient Hebrew views of death,<sup>37</sup> although this may be merely his own opinion. By the same token, he seems also to know of no life beyond the present one. In both cases, we are dealing with Qoheleth’s bitter conclusions about life, not offering a normative personal eschatology.

Seventh-day Adventists have failed to read Ecclesiastes in the light of its original intention. The intent of Ecclesiastes is not to give final truth on death but rather to capture the personal reflection of its author, the sage. The truth of Ecclesiastes resides in the fact that the book adequately discloses the opinion of its author, not that it provides final truth on death.

Here we see an example of a fundamental error in the “proof-text” method of biblical study.<sup>38</sup> Biblical texts must be interpreted in the light of their contexts, not strung together like beads on the basis of preconceived ideas. It is inaccurate to take this text in what it affirms while not respecting what it denies. It is unsound to cite Ecclesiastes without giving attention to its intent and its unusual literary, idiosyncratic character. Adventism has done disservice to the church by wrenching Ecclesiastes 9 from its literary and historical setting and using it—without qualification—to support a particular theory of the nature of death.

### **Ecclesiastes and Christian Eschatology**

Ecclesiastes is a problem, not only for Adventist interest in the nature of death, but for Christian faith as well. How are we to relate Ecclesiastes’ pessimism to Christian faith, with its life-affirming optimism?

Ecclesiastes cynically finds little or no meaning in life. There is little basis for a positive outlook. Nothing we do can make any difference. It is all finally pointless. Such is a view of life one must take apart from God, especially apart from God revealed in Jesus Christ. Without God, there simply is no discoverable ultimate meaning. Without God, we—

and all around us—are destined for a cosmic graveyard. Qoheleth’s pessimism and negative outlook on the meaning of life has turned away many well-intentioned readers of the Bible.

Why such a cynical outlook? It should be noticed that the criticism Ecclesiastes mounts against the religious traditions, particularly those of Wisdom, in his day constitute the very kind of analysis with which every theology or religious belief needs to be constantly confronted in order to keep religion honest. Beliefs, however tenaciously held, if not subjected to re-assessment from time to time, grow stale and flabby. Had the church taken Ecclesiastes on this score more seriously, it might have been in a better position to relate to contemporary skepticism.<sup>39</sup>

Ecclesiastes poses a challenge to any attempt to fit the Old Testament into a theological framework. The difficulty, we have noted, is that the book represents the ruminations of a sage who is presenting his own conclusions regarding the subjects he entertains. While Christians affirm that Ecclesiastes is a part of inspired Scripture, this conviction does not mean that the observations or conclusions made within the book are themselves the final truth. If one holds that the whole canon of Scripture as a larger benchmark against which individual authors and literature within the canon are to be measured, then the truth of Qoheleth’s statements would be decided in the context of the canon received by the church, that is, the Old and New Testaments. With reference to Qoheleth’s view of death, this criterion would mean—over against Qoheleth—life after death would have to be affirmed and, with it, the resurrection from the dead. Qoheleth’s view that death is the final end would have to be regarded as one of his more cynical conclusions.

That Qoheleth is advancing his own view on this matter is confirmed by a later writer in the wisdom tradition, the Wisdom of Solomon. True to dialogical nature of wisdom, this author, writing in the first century B.C.E., takes on Qoheleth and attempts to refute him. Alluding to Qoheleth, he quotes the “ungodly” as saying:

Our name will be forgotten in time,  
and no one will remember our works;  
our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud,  
and be scattered like mist that is chased by rays  
of the sun  
and overcome by its heat.  
For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow,  
and there is no return from our death.

Wisdom of Solomon 2:4-5

**ECCLESIASTES IS A  
PROBLEM, NOT ONLY FOR  
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THE NATURE OF DEATH,  
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AS WELL.**

## A FULL-ORBED CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY TAKES INTO ACCOUNT BOTH THE CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS OF THE BIBLICAL WITNESS.

Then, responding to Qoheleth's ideas, he sets forth a belief in immortality:

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,  
and no torment will ever touch them...  
their hope is full of immortality.

Wisdom 3:1

What results when we test Qoheleth against the rest of the biblical canon? In the early parts of the Old Testament, the dead who were believed to be in Sheol, the grave. While in Sheol, however, they were thought to have some form of consciousness, which meant, at times, they could be brought back from Sheol.<sup>40</sup> At a later time, the concept of resurrection from the dead emerges.<sup>41</sup> Alongside this belief in the unconsciousness of the dead and the resurrection appears the belief reflected in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, the immortality of the righteous.<sup>42</sup>

The New Testament also contains passages that can be read as implying some form of life immediately following death and before the resurrection, and other passages that imply an unconsciousness in death.<sup>43</sup> Since the canon itself presents a mixed picture, we cannot accurately measure Qoheleth against it. He represents one view of death found in the Old Testament, but not the only one. Because this is the case, and because Qoheleth is to be understood as advancing his own opinions, it is improper to cite Ecclesiastes as a definitive authority on the state of humanity in death.

As a part of the canon, Ecclesiastes does not stand alone. It is a voice among a whole chorus of voices intended to be heard together, like a choir, each with its own consenting or contrasting tone. While I cannot solve all the dilemmas connected with Ecclesiastes, I find it appropriate here to make a concluding observation that understands the book in its larger canonical situation.<sup>44</sup>

The canon would be decidedly poorer had Ecclesiastes not been included. The early tradition in both Judaism and Christianity seems to have affirmed as much. In Judaism the book eventually found its way into the five Megilloth, or scrolls, appointed to be read at the major Jewish festivals.<sup>45</sup> Qoheleth is read at the Feast of Booths, now a part of the Jewish High Holy Days. Ecclesiastes may be found among those mentioned as canonical in the earliest Christian list of canonical writings, that of Melito of Sardis (c. 190 C.E.). It remains a part of the biblical canon, and if we take the Bible seriously, we must come to terms with it.

In terms of our topic, this means that Ecclesiastes within the canon does not represent the final theological disclosure. His is not a final viewpoint on the nature of death or of personal eschatology or of God or of anything else. His is reflection on the way to something else that reaches beyond him. The book should not be cited as conclusive on these or other topics. Because there is development within the biblical canon, this does not reflect adversely upon the inspiration of Ecclesiastes. Rather, Ecclesiastes must be seen as one seeker's journey along a path that, for Christians, eventually arrives at the cross and the resurrection. Ecclesiastes is part of the development of biblical theology. A full-orbed Christian theology takes into account both the chronological development as well as conceptual aspects of the biblical witness. Thus it recognizes that for Ecclesiastes, the distant cross, and hence, the resurrection, had not yet come into view. For Christians the revelation of God in Christ dominates the landscape. It is the grand saving Event that transforms all things. Christians believe, in tension with Ecclesiastes, that Christ is "the meaning of history and that human labor done in his service is not meaningless."<sup>46</sup> "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all" (Tit. 2:11). And in that revelation we find life and meaning unavailable to Ecclesiastes. In Jesus, we are rescued from sin—and also from final despair. In Jesus, we have life everlasting. The editors of the *New American Bible* have correctly sensed this:

These statements [in Ecclesiastes] are based on a very imperfect concept of life beyond the grave. With Christian revelation about the future life came the only satisfactory solution of the problem which so perplexed the author.<sup>47</sup>

The premature ease with which Adventism has glibly seized upon Ecclesiastes 9 as a final statement of the human condition in death without reference to the development on this subject in the biblical canon should warn the denomination against making issues like the nature of death "tests" of Christian fellowship. Great and good Christians, devout followers of Jesus Christ, have and continue to hold many diverse views on this question. Adventism should concede this, and strike its view of the state of humanity in death from the list of *statis confessionis* doctrines. At the very least, the church should discontinue citing Ecclesiastes 9 to prove its point. !



## Notes

1. All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *New Revised Standard Version*, copyright ©1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and used by permission.

2. See the article, "Death," in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, ed. D. F. Neufeld (Washington: Review and Herald, 1966), pp. 333-36. The *Encyclopedia* lists Eccl. 9:5, 10, among the several passages that "support this view" (p. 336). This is also the case in the official *Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists* (see *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* [Rev. ed.; Washington: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986], art. 25, p. 31); and *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1957), p. 522; *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. 352.

3. "Conditionalism," writes L. E. Froom, "is the Christian doctrine that immortality, or everlasting life, is offered to man only upon God's terms and conditions," in contrast to the idea that humanity is "innately and indefeasibly immortal" (*The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers* [2 vols.; Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1966], vol. 1, p. 19). Emphasis Froom.

4. This warning calls upon the interpreter of Job to make a distinction between ideas in the book that express divine truth and those that represent the "personal feeling and opinion" of the characters. An example would be the philosophy of suffering advocated by Job's friends. This "reflects the faulty thinking of the times" (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol [7 vols.; Washington: Review and Herald, 1954], vol. 3, p. 495).

5. The commentator on a milder note, it seems, states: "In studying the book of Ecclesiastes, it is therefore most important to differentiate between the subtle, perverted reasoning to which Solomon refers, and the clearer insight that came with his repentance." (*Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1060). From which side does Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 come? Does repentance clear his mind sufficiently so that the sentiments he expresses are theologically infallible? What criteria does one use to distinguish between the author's unrepentant

pessimistic thought and his post-regenerative eternal truth? Judging from the discussion that follows in the *Commentary*, from chap. 9 only v. 11 is mentioned in this regard. This differentiation becomes crucial, according to this criterion, in the use of 9:5-6 for its teaching about death.

6. See *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911), pp. 546, 551, 560; *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1958), p. 685; *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 289; *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1900), p. 270.

7. *Great Controversy*, p. 556. This is a paraphrase of Eccl. 9:5-6, 10.

8. A member of the Adventist Church may be excommunicated for "denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the cardinal doctrines of the church" (*Church Manual*, p. 162). One of these cardinal doctrines (Art. 25, p. 31) is the state of humanity in death. Adventist evangelists regularly teach this doctrine as a "testing truth," i.e., a truth that compels a decision for or against Adventism. If one fails to accept this doctrine, they are disqualified from membership.

9. Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; 4:4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16; 5:8-9, 10; 6:2, 11; 7:6; 8:14; 11:8, 10; 12:8.

10. The first century B.C.E. book of 4 Maccabees, included as an appendix to Greek Bible (LXX), offers this definition of wisdom: "Wisdom . . . is the knowledge of divine and human matters and the causes of these. This, in turn, is education in the law, by which we learn divine matters reverently and human affairs to our advantage" (1:16-17). While this definition reflects the later Jewish identification of the law, or Torah, with wisdom, it nonetheless provides a root definition of wisdom as the discerning and mastery of life. Cf. Prov. 1:2-7.

11. That the Bible can be "broad minded" enough to include literature that is subversive may come as a surprise to most readers. Nevertheless, material such as Job, Ecclesiastes, and Prov. 30:1-4 (The Sayings of Agur) must certainly be classified as such. The Bible aims at as complete a picture of humanity as possible—including the troubled thoughts into which all of us from time-to-time fall. The presence of such literature gives the Bible a refreshing honesty not found in many other holy books. For a

fuller study of this question, see my "Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10-29" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1978).

12. See Alan Jenks, "Theological Presuppositions of Israel's Wisdom Literature" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association, St. Paul, Minn., August 1983).

13. R. B. Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 170.

14. Daniel C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-evaluating its Nature and Date* (ANETS 3; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

15. For example, -) b~tël, "stop working" (12:3), and 0/ zem~n, "time" (3:1), are Aramaic.

16. Ecclesiastes 12:9-11, along with vv. 13-14, are generally regarded as editorial comments, added once the book was essentially complete (see S. H. Blank, "Ecclesiastes," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* [4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962], vol. 2, p. 9).

17. This text begins: "The beginning of the instruction which the majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Sehetep-ib-Re; the Son of Re: Amen-em-het, the triumphant, made, when he spoke in a message of truth to his son, the All-Lord" (*Ancient Near Eastern Texts* [3rd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University, 1969], p. 418). Although this text purports to be the instruction of Amen-em-het I, the first pharaoh of the Twelfth Dynasty, Amen-em-het I (d. 1960 B.C.E.) died before the text was written. Here we see the custom of using the name of a deceased prominent individual as the nom de plume of a latter document.

18. Prominent conservative Old Testament scholar, R. K. Harrison, also endorses the theory that Ecclesiastes was written much later than Solomon under a nom de plume, and places it in the latter part of the fifth century B.C.E. (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1969], pp. 1073, 1077). So also E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. 349.

19. Solomon's reign is generally dated c. 961-922 B.C.E.

20. Proverbs 10-29 is generally dated to the pre-exilic or monarchical period of Israel's history, while many of the Psalms no doubt come from this period, including psalms generally associated with wisdom.

21. See, for example, Otto Eissfeldt (*The Old*



*Testament: An Introduction* [tran. P. R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper & Row, 1965], who places the book in the post-exilic period, no later than the third century B.C.E. (pp. 496-97); see also Blank, "Ecclesiastes," (p. 9).

22. A post-exilic time frame seems more likely for Ecclesiastes because of the historical development of wisdom theology. While the book's radical debate with the wisdom tradition would have been possible in the tenth century B.C.E., it is much more likely that it assumes a later time when the theology of wisdom had more fully formed and thus subjected to debate. See my "Retributive Paradoxes," pp. 344-56.

23. W. Sibley Towner, "The Book of Ecclesiastes," *New Interpreter's Bible* (12 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), vol. 5, p. 270.

24. "Ecclesiastes," p. 10.

25. First published in 1670.

26. (Tran. Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968).

27. See *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 438-40, 467.

28. A further complication in interpreting individual passages in Ecclesiastes is illustrated by 7:1-14. This appears to be a series of aphorisms cited by the author. Does he agree or disagree with them? In such a series of quotations, it is difficult to discern the author's intention. See Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World, a Study of Ecclesiastes* (3rd ed.; New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 95-108.

29. Gordis, p. 302.

30. Towner, *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 5, p. 340.

31. James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), p. 133.

32. If they included among the wisdom writings, Ps. 49 ("God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me," v. 15) and 73 ("You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor," v. 24), appear to teach life beyond death. These two references are too vague, however, to be regarded confidently as affirmations of such life. Similarly, Job's mention of a resurrection (14:10-14; 19:23-27), are best taken as desperation, not ringing affirmations of resurrection.

33. In Dan. 12:1-3. Even in Daniel, however, the resurrection only pertains to some, not all. Other passages that are sometimes cited as evi-

dence of resurrection (e.g., Ps. 17:15; Isa 26:19; Job 19:25-27) are too ambiguous to support the idea of an early notion of general resurrection.

34. Even in the first century C.E. Judaism, the idea of bodily resurrection may not have been widespread (Steven Fine, "Why Bone Boxes?" *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 27 [September-October 2001]: 41).

35. Under Eccl. 9:5, "the dead know nothing; they have no more reward," the *Adventist Commentary* observes this is "not a reference to eternal rewards, whether of death for the wicked (Rev. 20:11-15) or of immortality for the righteous" (vol. 3, p. 1095). This is a tacit admission the passage does not apply to Christian eschatology.

36. Interestingly, L. E. Froom re-interprets Eccl. 9:5-6 to make it coincide with the general resurrection. *Until the resurrection*, he claims, "the dead know not any thing" (v. 5), and there is no "knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (*Conditionalist Faith*, vol. 1, p. 361). Froom was one of the leading opponents of the proof-text method among Adventists. That he would use Eccl. 9:5-6 in this manner shows the subtle power of the traditional usage of this passage among Adventists.

37. See my article, "Re-thinking Life after Death: Confessions of a Troubled Conditionalist," in *Proclamation* 2/3 (May-June 2001) 4-9, for a survey of the key passages and views.

38. This problem, as Desmond Ford and others have shown, lies at the basis of the denomination's dispute over the meaning of Daniel 8:14 and the Investigative Judgment. Daniel 8:9-14, as is widely known, refers to the brief reign of the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. It is his desecration of the Temple in 167 B.C.E. that is described in vv. 13-14, not that of the Papacy many centuries later. This desecration was to last approximately three and one-half years, 1,150 days. Had Daniel 8 been interpreted within its literary and historical milieu, it would never have been taken as an indication that 1844 was a terminal date for the prophecy of the 2,300 evenings and mornings (=1,150 days). See Ford, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberg, FL: Euangelion, 1980); Daniel Smith-Christopher, "The Book of Daniel," *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7, pp. 113-14).

39. "One may even ask whether the church," writes Gerhard von Rad, "if it had also remained open over the centuries to the theological perspectives of the book of Job [and Ecclesiastes], might not have been able to confront the fierce attacks of modern man more effectively and more calmly" (*Wisdom in Israel* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1972], p. 239).

40. See Isa. 14:9-22; 1 Sam. 28:8-19. Return of the dead from Sheol was not an ordinary occurrence (Job 14:7-22).

41. See Dan. 12:1-3; 2 Maccabees 7:9-23.

42. The writer of the Wisdom of Solomon appears to have been influenced in this by Platonic philosophy, which emphasized the distinction between the soul and the body (see Robert Doran, "2 Maccabees," *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4, p. 241). This same influence appears in the New Testament (see below).

43. On the possibility of life immediately after death, see 2 Cor. 5:1-5; 1 Pet. 3:18-22; 4:6; Rev. 6:9-10. On unconsciousness in death, see Jn. 5:28-29; 6:39-40; Rev. 14:13; 20:4-5. See my article, "Re-thinking Life after Death," pp. 4-9.

44. This is essentially the method known as "canonical criticism," or the interpreting of the Old Testament (and New) in the light of its final configuration as a canon for the believing community. In the canonical shaping, "different parts of the canon were increasingly interchanged to produce a new angle of vision on the tradition" (Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], p. 13). Thus, when in the Christian church, the Old was joined with the New Testament, a new angle of vision was formed, stemming from the life and teachings of Jesus. This shed new light upon death and developed the concept of a general resurrection, patterned upon that of Jesus Christ.

45. In most Hebrew manuscripts, it is the fourth scroll, and thus would be read at Tabernacles. The order differs in the manuscripts, however. In Codex Leningradensis (eleventh cent. C.E.), it appears as the third. The Greek Septuagint places it between Proverbs and the Song of Solomon.

46. J. A. Loader, *Ecclesiastes: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 23-24.

47. Ed. R. A. Broderick (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1971), n.on Eccl. 9:1-10.

# Grace Place

## The story of Grace Place CONTINUED FROM FRONT

and confident of their salvation—received by faith alone, dependent on grace alone.

From the start, the Adventist denomination was nervous about this group who talked so much about the cross of Calvary and avoided discussion of Adventist “distinctives.” The conference cautiously approved “company” (pre-church) status for our congregation, but there were other Adventist congregations in the surrounding area who didn’t like what was happening. Just as the first century Jews didn’t like the early Christians coming to town, so a lot of modern day Judaizers had a big problem with Grace Place. The first year was a constant, stressful barrage of scrutiny, accusations, rumors, and attacks.

When the denomination became threatened by the fact that our members were directing a larger percentage of their offerings to the local church, rather than to denominational headquarters, the conference decided to try and shut us down. In November of 1997 I was fired from

from an Adventist background, we had to do some theological processing together as a group. As a result, for a few years our church size went the wrong way—it declined.

I did a teaching series called *New Covenant Christians* in 1998, which is now available in booklet form. At the end of that series another 50 or so people left. That was emotionally painful for the congregation, but it was a necessary and defining study as we learned the scriptural distinctions between the old and new covenants.

Most people do not process out of Adventism easily or in a hurry. It takes time to consider all the evidence, deal with emotions, break the news to family and friends, and process all of the tapes that keep playing in minds. I have heard it said that the average Adventist needs two years to process out, and that’s about how long it took us as a group.

In 1999 I led the congregation through a 20-week study of the book of Galatians. The message of Galatians was exactly what we needed to wrestle with, understand, and embrace. Galatians seems to be written to Adventists. The Judaizers that Paul confronted preached Christ, but they wanted to tack on the law. They preached a Christ-plus-something gospel—which is really no gospel at all (Gal. 1:6–8). The Judaizers especially stressed three outward boundary markers, turning them into salvation issues: circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath. Adventists push two of the three. At the end of that study we kind of drew a line in the sand and said, “Our past is over, we’re moving on!” Once again people left, maybe another 50 or so, and once again that was a painful experience emotionally.

During the summer of 2000 our congregational morale was probably as low as it has ever been. Summer attendance averaged 187. Finances were at an all time low. Our staff team took a pay cut. People were silently grieving because of church members who had left, strained relationships that some were having with Adventist friends and family, and because the church which had been so alive and growing was now declining. We were tired of bouncing around to different rental facilities when schedule conflicts arose and tired of setting up

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the denomination I had grown up in—for the sake of the gospel, for preaching the cross too much and not emphasizing denominational “distinctives.” Unfortunately, as many as 100 people left our congregation, most returning to Adventism. But God wasn’t finished with Grace Place!

### **A Painful Yet Necessary Transition**

We continued to worship on Saturday as an independent congregation adopting the statement of faith of the National Association of Evangelicals. But we still had to figure out who we really were theologically as a congregation. Because we had such a large percentage of folks

# Grace Place

and taking down equipment every week. It was a low point in our history. But we were still convinced that God had a plan and a future for Grace Place!

## **A Healthy, Growing, Evangelical Church**

In the fall of 2000 we basically re-launched Grace Place at our fourth anniversary. We moved our worship service to Sunday morning, and I preached a message entitled, "Never Giving Up." At the end of that message I told the story of Cortez of Spain, who took his soldiers to Mexico and then burned the ships after they arrived so there would be no temptation to turn back when the going got rough. Our worship pastor sang a song by Steven Curtis Chapman, "Burn the Ships," that tells that story, and we re-launched Grace Place. We had 268 at that service, and the contagious energy and enthusiasm of the early days returned. There was a fresh sense of God's presence and activity in the congregation.

Ever since then Grace Place has been growing steadily every month. We are currently averaging 550 in attendance with two services on

Sunday. We added a third service at Easter and rejoiced to see a total attendance of 933. We turned an old hardware store in downtown Berthoud into a worship center with a 300-seat theater-style auditorium. We have just finished a commercial restaurant in the front part of our building, complete with tables and chairs around a fireplace, a game room with pool table, and a Christian bookstore. The Lighthouse Café and Bookstore will open daily to the community next month. We are excited about this creative opportunity to build bridges to those who are disconnected from God or from church. Many new ministries are starting, and people who were previously unchurched are coming to Christ on a regular basis. Our building is being used for numerous community activities as well as church ministry. Grace Place has truly gone from being a "seventh-day" church to a "seven-day-a-week" ministry.

It hasn't been an easy journey; I wouldn't want to go through it again. But looking back, we see God's hand leading along the way. We are grateful to Him and fully convinced that the best is yet to come!



## **Grace Place and Damascus Road Community Church**

### **Where Are They Now?**



In the *Adventist Review* (February 17, 2000), William Johnsson wrote an editorial entitled "Where Are They Now?" Johnsson talked about the Damascus Road Community Church (DRCC) and Grace Place and mentioned that he had earlier made "a prediction that these split-off congregations would not prosper." He went on to argue that his prediction was coming true. He also predicted that "the Sabbath would cease to be significant for them." He was correct with his second prediction but not the first. Johnsson concluded his article with these words: "I wish no ill on DRCC and like fellowships. But I fear that a wasteland lies ahead for them."

Such is not the case! DRCC is alive and well and growing—both spiritually and numerically. Dr. Richard Fredericks leads a talented staff team and a committed congregation of 500-600. DRCC leases space in downtown Damascus, MD while they prepare to build on their 200+ acres outside town. With a million dollar annual budget, their total attendance at three Easter services this year was 1009. Grace Place had 933 at Easter. Of course, the numbers do not tell the whole story. To get the full picture, you would have to visit these congregations to experience what God is doing. You would discover vibrant worship, gift-based service, rich fellowship, solid Bible-teaching, and creative evangelism. Contrary to what some are told and believe, there is life outside Adventism.

## An important letter CONTINUED FROM BACK

Rodriguez. Mr. Bostrom released me to be away for the proposed 40 day fast, which is very commendable, but Mr. Rodriguez felt that because I was 20 I should not submit to my parent's authority in this area since I had the right to take a stand for my religious beliefs. However, once I got Mr. Bostrom's OK, I submitted, trusting that God would use this time to reveal things I did not see. I wanted to be under my parents' covering, and by getting baptized I knew that I had gone so far out from under them.

I went through horrible withdrawals from being separated. I ached being apart from the group, but God used that to show me how much my decisions had been fueled by the quantity of time I had spent with the group. The Lord began softening my heart, which had grown hard and defensive. I started reading

***I will forever be changed by this experience for I now have a tremendous love for Adventists. I now understand how they think and operate. I know the doctrine and it has forced me to really learn what I believe.***

the Word again and finally began reading the material off the web, initially Mark Martin's site. My dad ordered his tapes *Gospel and the Covenants I & II* and the video *Seventh-day Adventism: The Spirit Behind the Church*. Then he called your ministry and purchased *Sabbath in Crisis*, *Theologian's Journey*, *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, and *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*. I devoured these over the course of 2001. It was interesting to see that within two weeks of being away from the Adventist community, my heart let go, and I knew I could not stay on that path.

City Bible Church has Portland Bible College. I enrolled for classes and moved on campus the third week of the 40 days. This was a drastic step of separation. However, it really came as a challenge directly from the Lord. I had a choice as to whether I wanted to continue with Him or not, but choosing Him would cost me the cutting off of the connection and was a point of no return. For a while I was afraid to discuss doctrine with the Bostroms. But I have witnessed a tremendous healing take place slowly. It started as I began saying "No" to their invitations. When they discovered I didn't keep the Sabbath anymore it was very hard for them and understandably so. You see, when I was on the 40 days the entire church was praying for me. To them, my leaving confirmed their suspicions of what would happen. I would be 'bewitched' by my parents and the several interceding people from my church.

I actually left because the Holy Spirit removed the veil that had blinded me. Ever since I entered Bible College in January 2001, I wanted to write a paper documenting my position regarding the fallacies in Adventist arguments for the Sabbath.

The combination of reading your resources and taking classes from my Bible college, I have gotten a clearer picture and established some solid theology. I finished the paper in January, 2002. Jon had wanted a copy to begin with, so I gave him one as well as giving copies to my seven closest college friends from Ridge Dell. I didn't want things to travel second hand, and I wanted them to understand my heart, so along with the paper I encouraged them in a personal letter to get together and discuss it. The other thing that was bothering me was that I was still considered an SDA member because I had been baptized. I wanted to be removed as an SDA member, to be focused on my church, so in my letter to Mr. & Mrs. Bostrom I requested that my name be removed from Adventist membership. I had wanted to do this sooner, but knew that without providing a context and a

position the move would seem shallow and based on family sentiment. This paper would also be a vehicle to deliver the volumes of things I had found and knew the college group had not heard before. It would at least put questions in their minds.

I am sending you my story and the paper I wrote to say thank you. Your ministry was part of what got me heading on the right direction. I needed facts that got around the common Adventist answers and defenses, and you had them. Thank you for digging deep into all these topics. My family always enjoys the *Proclamation* issues as well. I gave the SDAs my paper January 27, 2002, and have not been contacted by any of them, although when I asked Jon he said the paper is before the elders of the church who are reviewing it and will give me a response. He said this is a very 'pins and needles' situation. He sees that their response is very crucial. They also said that because it took me one year to pull together what I would write, I should not expect a quick response. One elder said that my writing the paper was very responsible and brought appropriate closure, which impressed me.

I will forever be changed by this experience for I now have a tremendous love for Adventists. I now understand how they think and operate. I know the doctrine and it has forced me to really learn what I believe. I feel that all I can do is wait, knowing that my responsibility was to obey and write the paper and it is the Holy Spirit's job to bring conviction and change. God bless your ministry. I can't wait for the day to come down to Arizona and meet you in person.

Love,  
Kristin Joy Jackson



### If only people would listen and believe

We thank God for what you are doing for Him. The truth needs to be told. If only people would listen and believe. I have several family members in the SDA church. My \_\_\_\_\_ and his wife are high up in the church and travel almost continually for SDA. \_\_\_\_\_ has written many Sabbath School materials for children. Thank you again for getting the truth out. Please use this gift from our Lord where needed. May God richly bless you.

### With tears I thanked the Lord

Dear Pastor Dale and Carolyn, I am giving thanks to the Lord daily for LAM and pray for you; may He give you strength, courage, wisdom and His blessing to continue... It was mainly LAM which God used to lead me out of Adventism and to bring me to the better understanding of His love—the Gospel. Today I was listening (maybe the fourth time) to a tape of your sermon “Living the Eternal Life.” What a beautiful perspective, what priceless value we have in Jesus Christ. I can much better understand Paul’s statement: “My Life is Christ.” During the Christmas season I read Sydney Cleveland’s book *White Washed*. I was horrified. Several times I put the book down and with tears I thanked the Lord that He forgave my ignorance, rescued me from all that deception, and brought me to Himself. It is really God’s grace and mercy that frees from the grip of Adventism...

### A couple of further points

I was pleasantly surprised reading your article “The Role of Conscience in Belief.” It is good to see that you are not afraid to address issues that normally remain untouched by Christians. Though I am in basic agreement with you, I have a couple of further points for you to consider. (1) It is not that “our moral database may be deficient.” Rather, to some degree, it is ALWAYS deficient, on the account of our limited humanity and capacity. This is a very uncomfortable fact, especially to fundamentalists. It goes against the very fabric of “we know it all” and “we are the ones”—thinking of SDAs. (2) As for your point number 3, clearly, in my experience, while God does overlook honest ignorance, He does not always enlighten, certainly not fully. He disperses light as He sees fit. In some cases, it means leaving people where they are. Think of honest people who died without ever hearing anything about Christ or the Bible. Moreover, think of the

ones living today who do now have the spiritual capacity to handle enlightenment or a spiritual revelation—in the spirit of “I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.” Radek Dobias radekdobias@hotmail.com (Author requested that we use his name and e-mail)

### His word plus the Spirit of Prophecy are enough

We are confident members of the SDA Church and believe God is leading this people despite our human failings. God is faithful. His word plus the Spirit of Prophecy are enough for us to believe that we have not followed “cunningly devised fables.” Please do not send us any more copies of “Proclamation” magazine. Thank you.

### So much guilt to try to overcome

I received the e-mail newsletter concerning your possibility of going to Africa. You will be in my prayers. Also, if you could e-mail me an address I would like to send a little something to help out. I have been prayerful reading and studying the books that you sent me. So many years of deceit to undo... So much guilt to try to overcome... Your website has been a blessing to me. I have been sharing with a co-worker of mine who was also raised in a very legalistic SDA family. She has been receptive, for which I am happy. I am now looking for a church to attend. I have been going to \_\_\_\_\_ Community Church here in \_\_\_\_\_. It is a contemporary SDA church and the pastors are very wonderful, but EGW is still under the surface. I grew up in \_\_\_\_\_ and went to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. My parents were very active in all the goings-on, and my grandmother was friends with \_\_\_\_\_, EGW’s granddaughter. I can still remember as a little girl her coming over to our house and how scared I was of her!! I grew up thinking (because I was so often told) I was never going to be good enough to make it to heaven. I know that God is using you and others like you who have been brave enough to stand up for the truth... to let people like me know that it is really the most simple truth in the world... that we are all one in Jesus and that He died for all of us and not just a few. Thank you for your courage and conviction. I hope to someday meet you and Pastor Rea. I can’t begin to imagine what you all had to go through, but it is helping people to see the truth, so be of good courage... I know that wherever God sees fit to use you, you will be in

His care. You will be in my prayers and also if you will e-mail me an address I would like to help you with whatever I can. God Bless.

### You are providing a path

I wish to thank you for the new issue of *Proclamation*. I could comment on each article but won’t take the time. You are providing a path for those who wish to be delivered from the quagmire of SDAism. I think of the many brave souls who made that transition in yesteryears without very much help in comparison with what we have available today. Anyone can go online and within a short time have every bit of information that they would ever need to make an informed decision...

### Fill all the trash cans on our street

First, I had a notion to ask for 100 *Proclamations* so I could fill all the trash cans on our street, then felt I would be as ugly as you are! If you are so perfect and wonderful why not just preach your message and not have only articles condemning the SDAs. That was not what Jesus did.

*Editor’s note: Jesus spoke out very boldly concerning the error of the religious leaders of His day.*

### I could not find Him there

I am so, so, so thankful to have come across your website just recently; I know the Lord is in this. I am a fourth generation Adventist, one that has always been somewhat rebellious of the “system.” But within the last few years have had a yearning, strong desire to really KNOW Jesus Christ as my Savior. No matter how much I went to church, it seemed I could not find Him there. I have grown so much in my Christian walk by listening to a local Evangelical radio station. It seemed like THEY were the ones who were displaying the Christ-like character that we as Adventist were striving so hard to be and falling so very short of attaining. The first thing I happened to come across was Greg Taylor’s letter to his friends and family explaining his reasons for leaving the church. It really spoke to my heart, because he put in much better words all the things I had been struggling with the last few years. I wondered if you could possibly give me his e-mail address or forward this letter and see if perhaps he could write to me? I live about 40 miles from Asheville and was wondering if he might be starting some sort of place



for us "former Adventists" to begin meeting. I would like to let him know that he and his family are in my prayers and I am just so grateful for all of you!!!! Now I don't feel so alone!!! Rather a long letter I guess when wanting to ask to be put on your mailing lists, but I am just so excited about finding you guys I just had to let you know!! My prayers are with you all and this ministry.

#### **Predicted so long ago of people like you**

We're so thankful for God's messenger who predicted so long ago of people like you—so we are not surprised, but saddened.

#### **Surprised to find my own sad story**

Thank you for the last order, which arrived safely a short while ago. It arrived in very good time, but it's taken me a while to get my son off the computer long enough for me to type this. Thanks also for *Proclamation!* While reading in the letters section I was surprised to find my own sad story. I recall that you were offered the opportunity to remain in SDA service and conceal your differences on certain beliefs. If I remember correctly, you were advised to 'say what they want to hear and preserve your employment.' My experience was similar with a slightly different twist. When called to teaching service in the mission field (where my wife and I were already resident citizens) in 1986, my refusal on doctrinal grounds drew the attention of the Union office, and I was pursued to a remote corner of the country for 'some dialogue.' During four hours of rather torrid discussion with the Union officer and local pastor, the Union officer became rather agitated and stood to thump the table (in our house, mind you). A deaf and dumb (non-Adventist) friend who was in the house, misunderstanding our guest's violent gesture, sprang to my defense. My wife and I had to restrain our friend and explain that our 'guest' was just a little excited but not dangerous. The 'guest' spent most of the four hours assassinating the person whose writings had induced my investigation into suspect doctrine. He didn't conduct any meaningful Bible study and I didn't change my position. I was surprised, therefore, when a few days later I received a phone call from the Union office to tell me that the visiting officer had given me a 95% bill of health and I was still welcome in the mission service despite the difficulties I had with certain

beliefs (EGW and the Sabbath). Since I would be employed as a teacher not a preacher, there would be no problem as long as I agreed not to influence or disturb the students with controversial ideas. Since I was still researching, I agreed and my 12 years of denominational service began. Of course, when I read your testimony, I felt rather ashamed that I hadn't had the courage to do what you did when confronted with a similar choice. I really appreciate your ministry and urge you NOT to stop ... as someone suggested you should. While teaching the Gospel is your primary purpose, you do have a special ministry to SDA people and that needs to continue until the Lord returns... I will pray for LAM. I would appreciate your prayers for my family and SDA friends (that they also will have an honest look at the issues). Please keep me on your mailing list. I will provide financial support to LAM as available, hopefully on a monthly basis. You can call me for help with special needs and projects. Thank you so much, for all you and your ministry are providing!

#### **We have been deceived**

Thank you so, so much for the two parcels posted March 30, that arrived today April 10 with Video, tapes and books. They arrived at 7:15 a.m. and I was so excited I woke Don up and showed him and we put the Video on and watched it immediately. We'd just been sharing the previous night with SDA's till late into the night the Bible truth on soul sleep and trying to help them see we are a three part being etc. The Sabbath issue is always in the background too. We listened to the tapes by lunchtime and they were so good. It's so timely to get this now as we have weekly meetings with Adventist friends that want to study out all the issues. The blunt reality of how we have been deceived for so long on EG White and the doctrines of the church is such a painful experience to process when it all becomes plain. I said to my husband its possibly like the grief a spouse must feel when told there marriage partner has been unfaithful, as we are that tied into the system, especially when you've been denominationally employed for 30 years. However we don't feel bitter, just free, and ever so glad to have now found out about God's Grace and our Righteousness in Christ. We still have a heart for the SDA people as so many are now starting to search for the truth.

#### **I had put EGW ahead of Christ my Redeemer**

I want to thank God for connecting me to you. You particularly, I don't even know how God put you in contact with me. I surely read your last mail with a sobbing mood. I imagined the many people I took astray believing me, for I was their Pastor. I imagined how I had put EGW ahead of Christ my Redeemer even as I write Imagine how I found the truth but because I need salary I fear to speak for how long should I keep in that state, your articles have given me a new start. My blessed hope has grown stronger and future more bright. I am sorry I did not write yesterday Internet is a new development in Uganda and expensive so every hour I pay 1500Ush (equal to \$1) because of the study and your good material I ran out of funds but God in His mercy I have managed to write. I just wanted to tell you God will Provide I have decided to use every penny till I understand this things and many people understand them in Uganda, I'm not writing to get from You I just wanted to put things in light such that when I take long to write you do not wonder what is up. You only pray for me then God's providing hand will do the rest. I feel I cannot get such good food and keep quiet; please allow to forward some of your e-mails to friends especially Pastors, I have forwarded only the previous one to my closest friend. If you do not mind I will forward to even others. One computer expert has advised me how I can get all my messages and read them at my own pace in office so I am glad. Also when you sent printable materials please squeeze them because printing is expensive by internet providers also it can be easy for to print a lot and send to people. Like the previous letter I will translate it and give to some friends and non-friends. Please continually talk about Jesus for when you do so I feel at home. I look as if I have never been to school. For I'm unlearning what I learnt. I remain yours in a Blessed hope.

#### **Mail letters and donations to:**

**Life Assurance Ministries  
PO Box 11587  
Glendale, AZ 85318**

# AN IMPORTANT LETTER

From **Kristin Joy Jackson** March 25, 2002

THE AUTHOR HAS GRANTED PERMISSION TO PUBLISH THIS LETTER INCLUDING ALL NAMES.  
FIND HER WELL-DONE RESEARCH PAPER AT [www.ratzlaf.com/downloads/htm](http://www.ratzlaf.com/downloads/htm)

Dear Mr. Ratzlaff,

Your ministry was strategically used by God to pull me out of Adventism. At 19, I was attending a community college and I connected with a wonderful Adventist. We had met a year before in a health class, but for some reason it clicked a year later. He is a mountain climber, rock climber, snowboarder, and runner; you name it he can do it, and that was very fascinating to me. We started talking about hiking, and he invited me on a 'Sabbath hike' with his family. He is very evangelistic and this really stuck out as well. On the college campus I always saw him with a Bible in hand and witnessing to many people. He would invite others to go snowboarding and hiking as well. So I went and immediately fell in love with the entire family. I had never met such an enthusiastic, pure, athletic, and peaceful family, and although we were from different streams, both our two families had a Bill Gothard, Basic Life Principles, background. I have grown up in a Christian home with incredible, godly parents and I have always had a passionate love for God and my family.

The Bostrom family was attractive to me because they held the same values and passion for God and knew how to have clean fun. Mr. Bostrom is the pastor of Ridge Dell Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ridgefield, WA. He and Mrs. Bostrom have pastored for 39 years. This family, Jon (26), Debbie (24), MaryAnn (21), and Rebekah (12) ended up changing my life. They embraced me, and I them, and we all felt a unique chemistry. There were many weekends I spent the night at their house, becoming very close to MaryAnn. I started painting for Jon and cleaning houses with MaryAnn. In September and October 2000, there was an Amazing Facts Prophecy Seminar that came through. I had already been convinced of the Sabbath and became a vegetarian and was pulling out of my church (City Bible Church, which is a charismatic, non-denominational church in Portland, OR) so I could be more involved with Ridge Dell and the college group.

I didn't miss one of the Amazing Facts meetings despite my father's ever increasing concern that he was losing me, not only to their family, but also to the Adventist doctrine. Needless to say this was causing a wedge to grow between my family and I. Overall, I thought I was so smart learning all these new things, and my parents were so blind not to see the Sabbath truth. I also found a 'superior'- 'God's Plan A' way of eating and exercise. Once the Seminar ended, I had to make a decision for baptism. I had been baptized at 14, but as you know this new baptism is to align yourself with the Adventist Church. Although I agreed with the Adventist church, I was in horrible turmoil because of how much pressure I felt to do what was right, and the two groups that I loved the most saw truth as two different things. I didn't know which was God's way. I had absolutely no peace.

The Adventists said, "You need to love Christ more than your family. You're not having peace with going all the way because you are afraid of their rejection." My parents said, "You should wait to get baptized to study things more thoroughly and when you feel more at peace go ahead with it if that is what you feel, but wait." Honestly, I finally said, "What is the worst that can happen if I got baptized?" There were things I didn't understand, such as Investigative Judgement, things I thought brought shame to the church, such as Ellen G. White's plagiarism, and things that were new to me, such as the state of the dead. But I figured I would figure it out later. Everything came to a head after I got baptized in November, 2000. My mom came to the baptism although she didn't agree, and my dad was grieved that I wasn't waiting to study the Evangelical side.

It was in December that my mom asked that I take a 'fast' from the Bostroms and the church and separate to study the other side. Initially, I was dead set against any such idea. However, both my parents addressed Mr. Bostrom and the Head Elder, Mr.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

**Life Assurance Ministries, Inc.**

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