

# “Watchman, what of the night ?”

*“The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,  
the hour and the end!”*

*Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)*

## ► THIS ISSUE'S READING

### THE SANCTUARY TRUTH

#### Part 2:

#### A Central Christian Teaching



**"The heart of Adventist theology is indeed the revelation of God in the sanctuary. His way, His holiness, is revealed in its services, and in its structure. God desired to dwell with man and in man. In type and shadows God outlined how this might be realized by man. This study became the heart of the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it emerged from the Great Disappointment under Millerism." <sup>1</sup>**

**The sanctuary doctrine, necessary and crucial as it is to the existence of the Adventist Faith, is also the teaching most under attack. Critics in Christian communities outside of ours have long challenged its validity. Many question the manner and importance of Christ's post-Calvary heavenly ministry. In particular, the typological significance is usually downplayed and allegorized to the point where any attempt at a literal understanding of the biblical type/anti-type comparison under consideration is dismissed as extreme and even derided as heretical. For instance, in September, 1956, the late Donald Grey Barnhouse, a prominent evangelical leader at the time, in writing a critique about Seventh-day Adventists and their beliefs in the aftermath of a series of "conferences" held between himself and a representative group of prominent Adventist leaders stated the following:**

**"On the morning after the 'Great Disappointment,' two men were going through a corn field in order to avoid the pitiless gaze of their mocking neighbors to whom they**

had given their final witness and had said an eternal goodbye the day before. To put it in the words of Hiram Edson (the man in the corn field who first conceived this peculiar idea), he was overwhelmed with the conviction 'that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month at the end of the 2,300 days, He for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary, and that He had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this earth.' It is to my mind, therefore, nothing more than a human, face-saving idea! It should also be realized that some uninformed Seventh-day Adventists took this idea and carried it to fantastic literalistic extremes. Mr. Martin and I heard the Adventist leaders say, flatly, that they repudiate all such extremes. This they have said in no uncertain terms. Further, they do not believe, as some of their earlier teachers taught, that Jesus' atoning work was not completed on Calvary but instead that He was still carrying on a second ministering work since 1844. This idea is also totally repudiated. They believe that since His ascension Christ has been ministering the benefits of the atonement which He completed on Calvary. Since the sanctuary doctrine is based on the type of the Jewish high priest going into the Holy of Holies to complete his atoning work, it can be seen that what remains is most certainly exegetically untenable and theological speculation of a

highly imaginative order." <sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the sanctuary message has also been challenged and attacked - arguably even more egregiously - within our own community. Beginning around 1905, Elder Albion F. Ballenger, a prominent Seventh-day Adventist minister, started openly opposing the sanctuary doctrine. His main contention that Christ entered the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary at His ascension in 31 A.D. rather than 1844 A.D., became the foundation for various basic denials concerning Christ's High Priestly Mediation of the Final Atonement. A string of other Adventist leaders followed suit: William W. Fletcher, Louis R. Conradi, William W. Prescott, Harold E. Snide, and (notably) Desmond Ford to highlight a few. The cumulative effect over the years can probably be best summarized by a paper written by Dr. Raymond F. Cottrell and read at the February 9, 2002, meeting of the Association of Adventist Forums held in San Diego, California. After attempting to completely reevaluate the "sanctuary doctrine" by using a different interpretive approach than the proof text method - the historical-grammatical hermeneutic used by most higher critical scholars - Cottrell concludes:

"This review and analysis of the traditional Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14, the sanctuary, and the investigative judgment is designed to be constructive and remedial, not critical, accusatory, or punitive. I sincerely hope that it will be received in the same spirit, and that ap-

appropriate action will be taken to spare the church and its members from a repetition of the traumatic episodes of the past for which this pseudo-biblical doctrine, historicism, and obscurantism have been responsible ... In the years immediately following October 22, 1844 the traditional sanctuary doctrine was an important asset for stabilizing the faith of disappointed Adventists. Today it is an equally significant liability and deterrent to the faith, confidence, and salvation of biblically literate Adventists and non-Adventists alike. It was present truth following the great disappointment on October 22, 1844. It is not present truth in the year of our Lord 2002." <sup>3</sup>

The position taken by Cottrell is indicative of the larger general sentiment found throughout the entire professed Christian world irrespective of denominational affiliation: most simply do not see the sanctuary teaching as an essential Christian truth. The tendency to equate the completion of Jesus' earthly salvific work, which culminated with His sacrificial death on the cross, with the completion of His *total* work in the overall plan of salvation is the major contributing factor behind this attitude. Consequently, the near universal view (though widely nuanced) sees any understanding and exposition of the intercessory ministry of Christ since His ascension into heaven as marginal and peripheral at best. This places the Seventh-day Adventist perspective of the topic in direct opposition to practically all of Christendom on this issue. Therefore, the crucial

question that must be addressed is this: Does the Bible - specifically the New Testament - recognize, teach, and testify that the high priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary is an essential, central, salvific Christian doctrine or not?

Pointedly, the New Testament book of Hebrews provides the most definitive response to the subject found in the Scriptures. It was written by the Apostle Paul to Jewish Christians (see 5T, pg. 651 <sup>4</sup>) around 63 A.D., over 30 years after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The overriding purpose of the letter is to present a detailed explanation of the Hebrew ceremonial system in relation to the mission and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the second chapter of Hebrews, Jesus is introduced as "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 2: 17b). This is immediately followed by an exhortation to "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Ibid. 3: 1b). Next in chapter 4, it is declared of Him "that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Ibid. 4: 14). Then in Hebrews, chapter 5, Paul begins a more detailed examination of the priesthood. The qualifications of Aaron and Jesus are compared and discussed. As Aaron did not "[take] this honor unto himself, but ... [was] called of God ... So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest" (Ibid. 5: 4-5a). He was competent to fill the position because, like Aaron, He also is "Called of God

an high priest." But unlike Aaron, Jesus is God's Son (divine), He lived a perfect human life of obedience to the Father's will "in the days of his flesh", and is called to the priesthood "after the order of Melchisedec." (Ibid. 5: 5b-10, compare with Psalm 2: 1-12; 110: 4; and Genesis 14: 18-20). Paul continues with explaining Melchisedec's typological relationship to the high priestly ministry of Christ, "Of whom [Melchisedec] we have many things to say," (Hebrews 5: 11a). Suddenly, at this point, the topic under consideration is abruptly interrupted. The discussion changes from a theological exposition to a pastoral warning:

"and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Ibid. 5: 11b-14).

At a time when the Jewish Christians should have continued growing in their grasp and knowledge of spiritual truth, they had instead become "dull of hearing" - slow, listless, and sluggish in regard to the faith. Rather than teaching new converts the foundational doctrines, they needed someone to teach them the basics

*again*. By continuing to feed on "milk", they had actually stunted their spiritual development and deprived themselves of the "strong meat" necessary for "babes" to grow to "full age" (maturity). They were content with an elementary understanding of basic Christianity and preferred to remain at that level, rather than moving forward by comprehending the deeper, more advanced teachings "in the word of righteousness." This made it difficult for Paul to present more involved doctrinal truth. At this time, as the context clearly reveals beyond any doubt, the deeper truths that Paul earnestly desired the Jewish believers to learn and comprehend *centered* in the present ministry of Jesus in heaven. Because of their Hebrew heritage, which entailed centuries of familiarity with the earthly sanctuary services, they were the best positioned to understand a detailed and specific explanation of Christ's heavenly high priestly mediation.

For centuries the Jews had been committed by God to be the custodians of "the oracles of God" (Romans 3: 1-2), having "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, *and the service of God* [the ceremonial system including the priesthood], and the promises;" (compare Ibid. 9: 1-5, emphasis added). Sadly, when the One who was the embodiment of their entire Faith came to earth and "dwelt among us" (John 1: 14), the corporate *majority* of National Israel rejected Christ and the Gospel message (Ibid. 1: 11). However, there was a corporate *minority* of fleshly Israel who were

faithful and obedient to the Gospel Truth. This "remnant according to the election of grace" (compare Romans 11: 1-5), which originally included the Apostles and their associates, were primarily the first believers to proclaim and spread the Gospel (the meaning of Jesus' earthly ministry - see Acts 3: 12a, 25-26; compare with 1 Corinthians 15: 1-8). Although "the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation *to everyone that believeth*; [in light of all the privileges and advantages afforded the Jews, Paul confidently stipulated] *to the Jew first*, and also to the Greek." (Romans 1: 16, *emph. added*).

In view of all this, it is quite understandable that the Apostle should be so disappointed at the apparent lack of spiritual progress among these Jewish Christians. Given their historic, prophetic, and salvific background, he expected more from them. Moreover, it appears they had been firmly established believers subsequent to the writing of the book of Hebrews (see Hebrews 10: 32-35). This whole experience should have fitted them to both teach and receive the more progressive truths that God desired to reveal to them. Paul's rebuke of their condition was both an exhortation and a warning. The destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple - foretold by Jesus - loomed on the horizon (see Luke 19: 28, 41-44; 21: 5-6, 24). The full emergence of the "man of sin" - the great anti-Christian power foretold throughout the biblical prophecies - would follow sometime thereafter (see 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-12). These events would fur-

ther try the faith of the entire church, Jew and Gentile alike. Paul knew the time had come for the Jewish audience he was addressing to grow up - to change their diet from "milk" to "strong meat". With this objective in mind, he continues his discourse:

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit." (Hebrews 6: 1-3).

Notice carefully the goal that Paul sets before the Hebrew Christians - "perfection." The Greek word is "*teleiotes*" meaning "full maturity, the state of completeness, a perfecter." In this context, it denotes the "full age" that God desires His people to attain - total and complete sanctification. In order for these believers to "go on" (or more properly expressed in the Greek passive form "to be carried forward") toward this objective they first had to "leav[e] the principles of the doctrine of Christ". "The principles" referred to here are the elementary, basic, and foundational teachings of Christianity revealed in the Bible. "Leaving" these certainly does not mean to neglect, abandon, or reject them. Rather, any master builder worth his hire knows he cannot keep "laying again the foundation" to the building he has been contracted to erect. At some point, the

construction of the foundation must come to completion - the point when the foundation is evaluated as being sturdy and strong enough to support the superstructure to be built upon it. Likewise, the maturing Christian will not keep their spiritual life concentrated only on the fundamentals of the faith: "repentance from dead works ... faith toward God ... the doctrine of baptisms ... laying on of hands ... resurrection of the dead ... eternal judgment." They will instead move beyond these basic essentials and allow God to carry them forward ultimately into holiness by focusing on the deeper, more advanced teachings in God's Word.

The parallels between these first century Jewish Christians and Seventh-day Adventists today are striking. God had bestowed upon them, like us, duties and responsibilities beyond those generally imparted to most other believers. A sacred trust had been committed to them - to teach others, by precept and example, the full Gospel truths and "go on [past conversion] unto perfection." The reception of all that Christ accomplished (and finished) during His *earthly* ministry was primarily meant to direct the attention of God's people upward to the work that the risen and glorified Saviour was performing for them in *heaven*. An understanding and reception of the *biblical* progressive teachings regarding the high priestly ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary will eventually usher in the second coming of Christ, final salvation, the end of sin and death, and the universal restoration of all things (compare

Hebrews 9: 24-28; with Acts 3: 19-21; with 1 Corinthians 15: 24-28, see specifically NEB version <sup>5</sup>). This was the present truth at the time Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrew Christians; and though it was greatly obscured and lost sight of for many, many centuries, it has come down past the destruction of Jerusalem, past the pagan persecutions, past the long period of the great medieval apostasy, through the Protestant Reformation, into the modern era where it was committed by God to the trust of the Seventh-day Adventist Movement. Regrettably, many Seventh-day Adventists are in the same state of spiritual declension today as were their first century counterparts. We also have become "dull of hearing" by allowing a variety of deceptive influences - from without and within - to divert and draw us away from the present truth.

As Paul continues his warning to the Christian Jews in Hebrews 6: 4-8, he sets before them the dire result of continuing this course: *total apostasy!* He then admonishes that he expects better of them, desiring that they all "shew ... diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end" by staying steadfast "through faith and patience"; citing Abraham as an example of such (Ibid. 6: 9-19). Finally, beginning with Hebrews 6: 20, the Apostle continues with his discourse on the priesthood of Christ at the very point where in Hebrews 5: 11 he interrupted it to issue the warning. He goes on to further expound in specific detail the work and meaning of Jesus' heavenly ministry (on through to Hebrews

10: 25); primarily concentrating on its horizontal and vertical anti-typical relationship to the Hebrew ceremonial system. To believe and teach that the sanctuary doctrine is nothing more than a fringe, borderline tenet embodying little more than eschatological (end time) speculation is completely false. The evidence is clear and conclusive. Not only is the sanctuary teaching a biblical truth, it is a *central biblical truth*. Therefore, are we going to accept it and go on to perfection? Or are we going to reject it and keep laying again and again the foundation like most of the professed Christian world continues to do? It is high time that all true Seventh-day Adventists, indeed all true Christians, cooperate with God and erect the superstructure *upon* the already finished foundation, complete the *entire* building, and bring the *whole* project to its intended conclusion.

"The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven." (GC, pg. 489).<sup>6</sup>

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." (Hebrews 8: 1-2). ❖

GLP

1. William H. Grotheer, *"Watchman, what of the night?"* (Ozone, AR: Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Mississippi, Inc., XXVI - Nov. 1993), 1.
2. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?* (Philadelphia, PA: Eternity magazine, Sept. 1956).
3. Raymond F. Cottrell, *The "Sanctuary Doctrine": Asset or Liability?* (San Diego, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, Feb. 9, 2002).
4. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 651.
5. *The New English Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), 264; 138; 207-208.
6. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), 489.

\* All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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