

# “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

**“A COMPROMISED  
HERMENEUTIC: THE  
EXTANT AFTERMATH OF THE  
POST ‘GLACIER VIEW’  
CONSULTATION I & II  
CONFERENCES”**

### *Editor's Preface*

For some time now it has been the desire of this editor to write thought papers on the subjects of biblical interpretation principles ('hermeneutics'), and the Consultation I and II Conferences that followed in the wake of the "Glacier View" Committee meetings (in 1980 / 1981). As I began to gather ideas for consideration on both of these issues (initially, separately), it dawned on me recently that Elder William Grotheer had previously expounded upon these two topics (together) in the pages of WWN.

After further review, I came under deep conviction that a re-presentation of essentially what Elder Grotheer had penned on this whole matter is of even greater urgency now. The progressive nature of "every wind of doctrine," especially the growing, relentless, satanic opposition to the "present truth" of the "everlasting gospel" as revealed in the sanctuary teaching / message, is paramount to our understanding of end-time deception.

### **“ A BIBLICAL HERMENEUTIC ”**

Hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles used in the interpretation of the Bible. Simply stated this means the study of how to interpret the Bible to arrive at the truth. Among the principles of interpretation is the much derided "proof text" method, as well as the various methods employed by modern critics of the Scriptures including what is called the "historical-linguistic"



method. The word - hermeneutic - is derived from the Greek word (ερμηνευτικός, *hermeneutikos*) which in the infinitive form means, "to interpret." On the way to Emmaus, Luke tells us that Jesus "beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, ... expounded (Greek - διερμηνευον, *diermeneuo* - "to explain, to interpret") unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24: 27). In other words, Jesus interpreted the Scriptures to the two disciples. To interpret the Bible is not wrong, but what method one should use is the primary question.

To put the issue plainly so that there be no misunderstanding, did our pioneers who brought together the system of Adventist doctrine known as historic Adventism use the wrong method of Scriptural interpretation? Our spiritual forefathers used the proof text method in arriving at the faith they proclaimed to the world. The present day Biblical scholars of the S.D.A. Church who have received their graduate training in the "universities of Babylon" have adopted other methods in their interpretation of the Bible; and this has resulted in the denial of some of the very basic doctrines of the Adventist faith. In other words at the very foundation of the present theological crisis in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the matter of hermeneutics. To this very basic and real question we shall address ourselves in this thought paper.

What was the proof text method used by William Miller and other early Adventist students to arrive at their positions of truth? They believed the Bible was the Word of God spoken directly to the time in which they lived. To them, the Bible was a living Book, which speaks afresh to each generation a special message which God had pre-designed to be proclaimed as present truth. Sensing this, they brought together from the whole Bible supportive texts and experiences which sustained, enlarged, and gave unity to a message which they believed to be truth for

that time. This would presuppose a Divine Design in the giving of the Scriptures by the Spirit of God to chosen human instrumentalities. If this be so, then the Divine Design takes precedent over the immediate application of a given passage in the Bible to future generations as they study that portion of Scripture.

What do the Scriptures themselves teach? From the book of Hebrews, we learn that "God ... spake in times past ... by the prophets." (Hebrews 1: 1). Further, we are told in addition to the voice of the prophets, God spoke to us by a Son in humanity. (Ibid. 1: 2). Was the voice of God by any prophet – or by the Son – limited to the generation, or the locality where the prophet lived? If this be so, then the "historical-linguistic-contextual" method of Bible interpretation would have validity, and take priority. To deny a Divine Design in the giving of the Bible, we are left with only a study of the times in which a given message was given with only a hope of ascertaining from that experience some lesson that would prove helpful to meet our present need. But that Son through whom God spoke tells us plainly, there is a Divine Design. He stated to the religious leaders of His day – "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me." (John 5: 39, ARV).<sup>1</sup> To His own followers, He began at Moses, and in all the Writings, He focused their attention on revelations which pointed to His ministry and death. (Luke 24: 25-27). Jesus called them "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets" had written. (Emphasis added). The prophets had written to their own generation, the message of God for that time; but that was not all they had written! The Spirit of Christ which was in them testified to future events - His sufferings and the glory that should follow. (1 Peter 1: 10-11). To find the Divine Design of God in Scripture, one must bring together, from what the prophets

have written, all that pertains to the purposes of God for a given time, and to do so one gathers here a little, and there a little. This is to use the "proof text" method!

The "proof text" method used by Christ as He interpreted the Scriptures is the same method used by His disciples after He "opened ... their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24: 45). One has only to read the first gospel to see its use in operation. An event in the life of Jesus is cited. Then following the historical accounting is written – "Now all of this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying," – and the prophet is quoted. (See Matthew 1: 22; 2: 6, 17, 23; 3: 3). Moved by the Spirit, Peter on the Day of Pentecost used the same method. (Acts 2: 16, 25, 34-35). Paul's recorded sermon in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia follows the same hermeneutic. (Acts 13: 32-37). These chosen men of God – called and instructed by the Son – turned the world upside down altering the course of history as per the Divine Design.

An interesting summary is to be found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It reads:

"To the first Christians, who, were Jews, the law and the Prophets were already sacred. Their national sacred writings were to them the oracles of God, though they could no longer be regarded as containing the whole truth of God. The coming of the Messiah had revealed God with a completeness that could not be discovered in the Old Testament.

"The word of the Lord was authoritative as even Moses and the prophets were not. Yet since all the hopes of the Old Testament seemed to these Jewish Christians to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, they more than ever were convinced that their national sacred books were divinely inspired. From this source they drew, if not the articles of their creed, at least the proofs and supports of their doctrines. Christ died and rose again,

according to the scriptures.

"All the writings of the Old Testament spoke of Christ to them. Legal enactment, prophetic utterance, simple historical record, and more emotional psalm, – all alike could be covered by the phrase "the scripture says," all were treated as of one piece, and by diligent use of type and allegory single passages torn from any context could be used as proof texts to commend or defend belief in Christ." (Vol. 3, pg. 499, 1958 ed., *emph. added*).<sup>2</sup>

One can view the method of the apostles as "single passages torn from any context" or one can perceive it as spiritual discernment by which the Divine Design which "was kept secret since the world began" was understood from "the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God ... for the obedience of faith." (Romans 16: 25-26).

## **“ CONSULTATION CONFERENCES I AND II: FURTHER COMPROMISES TO ADVENTISM’S BIBLICAL HERITAGE ”**

Consultation I met following the Glacier View Committee meetings in August, 1980, which considered the challenge of Dr. Desmond Ford to basic Adventist teaching. Coming on the heels of the Committee meetings, the Consultation I Conference – overshadowed by the church’s dealing with Desmond Ford – was anticlimactic. Events which followed these meetings at Glacier View, Colorado, widened the gap between the Church leaders (administrators) and the theologians of the Church. Thirteen months after Consultation I, from September 30 to October 3, 1981, the Church’s scholars were called to meet with the Church’s administrators in what was designated as Consultation II. The turmoil following the Glacier View meetings had cast suspicion on the Church’s teaching ministry, and they in turn had grave doubts

in regard to the intent of the administration. This meeting in Washington, D.C., was to be an attempt to resolve the crisis, and rebuild bridges between the two groups.

Three main areas of conflict were on the agenda for discussion: Academic Freedom, Pluralism in Adventist Doctrinal Belief – a concept as dangerous as any presently facing the Church, but outside of the scope of this present thought paper – and Biblical Interpretation [ *Hermeneutics* ]. This latter item became foremost. In a *From the Editor* article written by the (then) editor of the Church's *Ministry* magazine, J. Robert (Bob) Spangler, the following was reported:

"Although a number of concerns were aired, one, I feel, is of immense importance and basic to our understanding of the Bible. I refer to our system of Biblical interpretation. It is the duty of our Adventist ministry to be acquainted with this subject. I personally want to study it more thoroughly than I had time prior to, and during, the session. To a great degree the future health and progress of our movement is contingent, I believe, on our understanding of this subject and the use of proper procedures and sound approaches to Biblical study." (*Ministry*, February 1982, pg. 26).<sup>3</sup>

A little while on in the article, Spangler discusses his comprehension / assessment of the "historical critical" interpretive method and what appears to be his dire concern regarding its use on the biblical text:

"The historical critical method basically treats the Bible as any other book. It must be accepted and interpreted as one would any piece of literature, ancient or modern. Thus even the question of the meaning of a text is answered from a quite different perspective. For example, the historical critical method questions the unity of the Bible, because it recognizes only the sociological and cultural setting out of which each individual document arose. The divine is not given the constitutive role and thus it is not recognized for

its unifying function. One passage can be used to interpret another only if it can be shown that the life setting out of which the two arose is the same. This point is crucial, I believe, and is, in fact, the key that locks up truth rather than unlocking it. If the historical critical method is correct here, we might better use Bible Readings for the Home, which has led thousands to an understanding of our message, to start fires in our fireplaces on a cold winter evening rather than expecting it to guide people into the truth. If historical criticism is correct here, Leviticus 16 throws no light on Daniel 8: 14; the Sabbath can be reinterpreted to become only a symbol of rest from sin, but not a literal memorial of a seven-day Creation week, much less a part of the three angels' messages and a test for these last days; the Old Testament can be used to help interpret the New, but the New Testament cannot be used in interpreting the Old! In short, a number of our fundamental beliefs would end up in oblivion or at best be reinterpreted to such an extent that they would lose their meaning and power." (*Ibid.*, pgs. 27-28).<sup>3</sup>

On Wednesday night, September 30, 1981, Elder Neal C. Wilson presented the delegates with position papers which represented the view of the Church administrators in regard to biblical Interpretation. These papers emphasized "the divine element and virtually ignoring the human element in inspiration, an approach which virtually the entire Adventist teaching ministry [the theologians] believed to be catastrophic." (*Spectrum*, Vol. 12, #2, pg. 44).<sup>4</sup> Simply stated the two viewpoints represented the conflict between the "proof text" method, and the "historical-critical" method.

One month following Consultation II, the Adventist Radio Network aired a panel discussion held in the Sligo S.D.A. Church which reviewed the results of the meeting. The panel was chaired by Dr. Roy Benton, President of the Washington D.C. Chapter of the

Association of Adventist Forums. Members of the panel were:

Dr. James Londis, the Senior Pastor of the Sligo Church; Dr. Wm. G. Johnsson, Associate Editor of the *Adventist Review*; Dr. Gary Roth, Associate Director of the Department of Public Affairs of the General Conference; and Elder Arthur Keough, Acting Head of the Department of Religion at Columbia Union College.

This panel discussion revealed that resulting from Consultation II a compromise was reached between the pioneer Adventist method of studying the Scriptures, and the methods used by the Church's theologians which they were taught during their graduate work in non-Adventist universities. Londis stated that the position papers presented by Wilson representing the view of the Church administrators could not be accepted by the scholars. He noted that the scholars in committee sessions presented passage after passage illustrating the difficulty of interpretation if they were not allowed the use of:

"... certain kinds of approaches to Scripture that they had really learned and developed out of their graduate study."

In the give and take of the panel discussion, Londis sought to illustrate the position of the scholars by citing Matthew's use of the writings of the prophets. He said:

"Just because Matthew uses Isaiah in a certain way that the Jews understood and were comfortable with, does not mean that I in the 20th Century can use Isaiah in quite the same way. The main thrust of the historical [critical] new methods, or the modern methods [of the interpretation of the Scripture] – the main thrust of those methods is that the first primary responsibility of anybody who studies the Bible is to determine what the original writer meant to say when he wrote the text."

Then Londis continued:

"The problem has come when it becomes obvious that Matthew does not always take

Isaiah's meaning as the primary meaning for himself. There are other meanings – Messianic meanings, meanings about Christ, for example, that Matthew sees in the text and he uses it that way. And Matthew could do that because the Jews used the Bible that way. The Jews tended to use symbolism in Scripture, any kind of analogies or parallels for them were almost the same as what we would call logical proof. We can't do that anymore."

Johnsson in his comments called for what he termed an "Adventist hermeneutic," and then defined what he didn't mean by advocating this approach. He stated:

"What I don't mean by an Adventist hermeneutic – I don't mean that an Adventist hermeneutic will be one that goes first to Ellen White and interpret the Scripture through Ellen White. I do not mean that. But I think that an Adventist hermeneutic will be aware of what Ellen White has said in any particular area, on any topic, and in any comments on Scripture that we may be studying. Seems to me that we as Adventists cannot be unmindful of that, but I would hope that we would always go first to Scripture and struggle with that."

However, in defending the compromise arrived at Consultation II, Johnsson invoked a rather non-analogous comparison of a position taken by Ellen G. White in regard to the doctrine of inspiration. Calling attention to the fact that most fundamental Christians of her day believed in verbal inspiration of the Bible, while critics denied any form of inspiration, Johnsson noted that Ellen White advocated "thought inspiration" in the writing of the Bible. This was in his thinking an example of avoiding the extremes in her day – a compromise position. Now according to this reasoning, the Church has again avoided what is perceived to be the extremes in methods of interpretation, the proof text method on the one hand, and the extreme use of the "historical critical" method on the

other hand. Roth on the panel summarized it this way:

The "methodological approaches of our scholars are more diverse than thought; used more selectively than thought; and subordinated more often than thought to revelation and the Holy Spirit." (All quotes of panel members were from a taped recording of the discussion.)

The resulting hodge-podge method, which has been functioning in application among us for about the last 4 decades, appears to have made one thing clear. The method used by our forefathers to arrive at truth has seemingly been relegated to the trash heap of history as an unacceptable extreme position in interpreting the Bible.

### **An Ongoing Hermeneutical Crisis**

What has brought about this continuing state of affairs whereby our historic position of interpretation can be cast aside so readily in confrontations between the Church administrators and theologians in an endeavor to find unity? True, we have placed in positions of responsibility in the teaching ministry – supposedly to meet accreditation requirements – individuals who are learned in the wisdom of Babylon's Seminaries. But this is not the whole story. Some of the very ones who have, and who will be weeping tears over this trend, must shoulder some of the responsibility of the present crisis.

The charge is leveled by the advocates of the "historical critical" method of interpretation that those who use the "proof text" method ignore the biblical languages and thus ignorantly approach the study of the Bible. It has been stated this way:

"The proof text method is unaware that the same Hebrew or Greek word may have different meanings, which can be determined only by the context in which it is used, or that translators may have rendered it by different English words, and that different Hebrew and Greek words are sometimes rendered into English by the same English

word." (*Spectrum*, Vol. 10, #4, pg. 21).<sup>5</sup>

This sentence is merely a refined way of saying that those who use the proof text method are ignoramuses, and really cannot be trusted with handling the Word of God. Sadly, in many instances, this is all too true. Those who thus bring reproach upon the study of the Word of God must share equally in the present crisis with those who seek to follow methods learned in the seminaries of Babylon. Concerning the former, there are "teachers of the law" among some Adventists in our day who desire to be known as such, but like their ancient Jewish (professed) Christian counterparts, mishandle the Word also "understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." (1 Timothy 1: 7).

Tragically on the latter extreme are those who are "educated fools." Walking in high places within the Church, they are not even worthy of the name, Christian. To question the interpretation of a Gospel writer in his use of the Old Testament prophets, is to question Christ Himself. To Matthew as well as to the others in the upper room, Jesus opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24: 45). If therefore, Christ gave to them the qualifications to interpret that which His Spirit (1 Peter 1: 11) had inspired the ancient prophets to pen, who am I to lift up myself and declare Matthew's interpretation unacceptable in the 20th Century? In other words, we have "antichrists" in the pulpits of the Adventist Church today. (TM, pgs. 409-410).<sup>6</sup>

### **A Scriptural Method**

The first and paramount concept in the study of the Bible is to recognize that the Holy Scripture is God's Book expressing the thoughts and objectives of God, albeit penned by human instrumentalities. To study the times in which a prophet lived, or the circumstances necessitating the message first in order to interpret the message proclaimed by the prophet is to begin at the wrong end of the process of understanding.

The Bible reveals the divine viewpoint of the matter telling us how God is viewing a particular problem, or event of history. To understand first the divine viewpoint helps one to properly evaluate the circumstances of the human event. To put it simply - Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is not a matter of private interpretation for "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy [Spirit]." (2 Peter 1: 20-21). Besides God's viewpoint expressed through prophets in regard to specific events in human history, there is over and above all specific revelation regarding a particular event, the unfolding, and revealing of the Divine Design of God's program and purpose for the human race. This is called "the scripture of truth" and it is plainly stated that only Michael held with Gabriel in the revelation of the things pertaining to this Divine Design. (Daniel 10: 21). One dare not forget that wherever in the Bible, be it Old Testament or New, Michael is the name used to designate Jesus Christ in His controversy with Satan. (Jude 1: 9; Revelation 12: 7; Daniel 12: 1). Behind all the writings of Bible is the struggle between the God of truth, and him who abode not in the truth. (John 8: 44). To gather together the revelation of this conflict between Christ and Satan is to gather here a little and there a little - the proof text method. (Isaiah 28: 9-10).

Further, to properly understand the Word of God – even in the context of the times in which that history or revelation was written –

one must consider the purpose of God in the overall conflict – the cosmic struggle. For example, all that is written about Abraham in the book of Genesis is not all that Abraham did – it is not a diary. But that which is written, and there are many intriguing items of human interest revealed, yet that which is recorded regarding Abraham is primarily a revelation of God's purpose and design to ultimately bring to pass the time when all who so choose shall enjoy the blessing which came, and which is to be realized through the Seed of Abraham. (i.e., The Lord Jesus).

It is not a matter of us telling God what we think His revelations reveal, rather one needs to understand His revelations in the earthly representations that He reveals to us. ❖

WHG (GLP)

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4. *Spectrum Magazine* (Roseville, CA: Adventist Forum, Publisher, Vol. 12 / No. 2), 44.
5. *Ibid.* (Vol. 10 / No. 4), 21.
6. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1962), 409-410

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

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