

# “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)*

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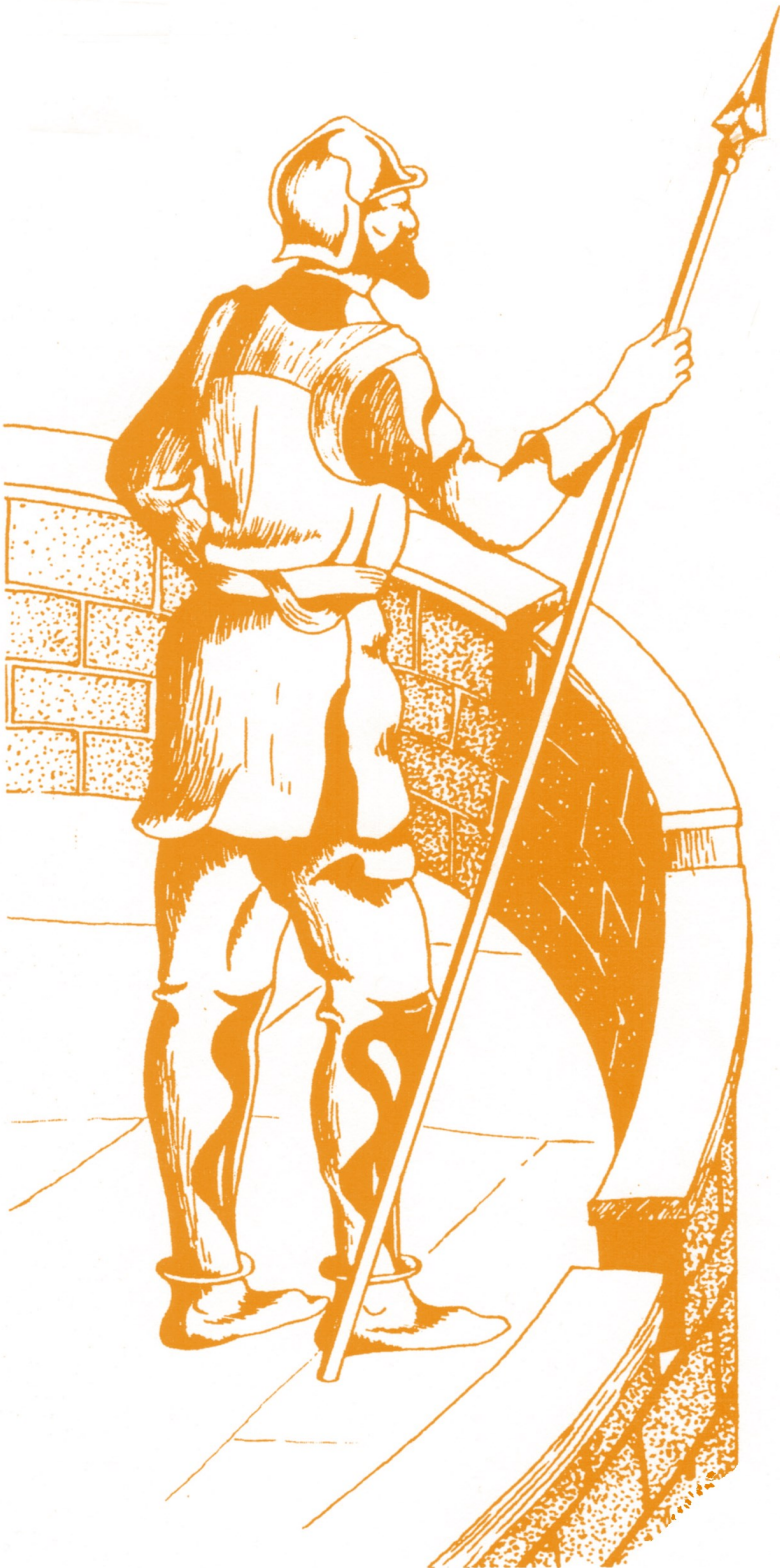
## *Editor’s Preface*

A doctrine once held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and included as a part of their Fundamental Statements of Belief until 1930, is reviewed in this issue of the thought paper. Many of us hold a limited view of the “new birth.” This was not so with the pioneers of the Advent Movement. They understood that, as Jesus said, His kingdom was “not of this world” (John 18: 36). Therefore to be born again meant more than a spiritual experience in this world. They believed Paul when he wrote, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Corinthians 15: 19, emphasis added). The application of the more comprehensive perception of what the new birth is, involves the 1888 message which God gave to this Church. These factors are discussed in the first article.

The second write-up relates the more complete understanding of the new birth to the entry of believers into the kingdom of God.

## **“The Fuller Biblical Meaning Of The ‘New Birth’”**

In 1872, a “*Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by The Seventh-day Adventists*” was printed on the Steam Press in Battle Creek, Michigan.<sup>1</sup> It was prefaced with these words:



"In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible. We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them."

Statement V reads:

"That the new birth comprises the entire change necessary to fit us for the kingdom of God, and consists of two parts: first, a moral change, wrought by conversion and a Christian life; second, a physical change at the second coming of Christ, whereby, if dead, we are raised incorruptible, and if living, are changed to immortality in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. (John 3: 3, 5; Luke 20: 36)."

This position remained constant in successive Statements of Belief with only the text upon which the last part of the statement is based – 1 Corinthians 15: 51-52 – being added. The exception to this unanimity was the aberrant Battle Creek Church's Statement released in 1894. Not until the 1931 statement, *Fundamental Beliefs Of Seventh-Day Adventists*,<sup>2</sup> was the original altered to read:

"That every person in order to obtain salvation must experience the new birth; that this comprises an entire transformation of life and character by the recreative power of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (John 3: 16; Matthew 18: 3; Acts 2: 37-39)." (# 4).

In contemplating this change, certain questions come to mind. The two Statements, though related, are not saying the same thing. One is saying much more than the other. Is the change inconsequential? The 1931 Statement does speak of the Resurrection, reading – "That there shall be a

resurrection both of the just and of the unjust. The resurrection of the just will take place at the second coming of Christ; the resurrection of the unjust will take place a thousand years later, at the close of the millennium. (John 5: 28, 29; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Revelation 20: 5-10)." (# 11). The original Statement followed the distinction of the biblical text between those who died, and those who are translated without seeing death. The 1931 Statement ignores the distinction by making no explicit mention of it. Again, is the distinction made in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 15 of vital moment?

The Scripture focuses the end, the objective, of the "new birth" experience as the "kingdom of God." (John 3: 3). He who came to provide for man an entrance into that kingdom, clearly stated – "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18: 36). It is obvious that no one is experiencing in this life, either in his spiritual experience, or in his environment, what the biblical descriptions envision the new world to be. What the "kingdom of God" will be like, escapes us both in the spiritual and in what we know the present reality of life to be. We see it only by faith. Constantly we sense a need, unless we are immersed in Laodiceanism - being "in need of nothing."

Unless we perceive the full implication of what this dual aspect of the new birth means, we cannot understand what Paul is saying in Romans, Chapter 8, let alone who the "man" of Romans, Chapter 7 is. Plainly Paul writes – "For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him (God) who subjected it, in hope" (Romans 8: 20, ARV).<sup>3</sup> "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." (Ibid. 8: 22). None escape, even those who "have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption,

to wit, the redemption of our body." (Ibid. 8: 23).

There are limitations placed on this life, but with these limitations, there is provision whereby we can hope through faith and press on. By the Spirit, we are "rebirthed" from sons of Adam, to be "the sons of God." Does that mean beginning from the moment of our "rebirthing," we cease to sin? No. But does not that objective remain our goal? Yes. "My little children, ... write I unto you, that ye sin not." But if we do? "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2: 1). The unrealized goal that we sin not, and the fact that there is One who ever liveth to make intercession for us, does not grant to us a life of indulgence in sin. Life is a battle and an onward, upward, march to our objective - a reflection of the life of Jesus.

Before us the Holy Spirit holds the vision of the objective. "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." (Galatians 5: 5). Do we experience it now? The answer is both, "Yes" and "No." To everyone who enters into the new birth experience is given "the earnest of the Spirit." This pledge, or performance bond, is God's down-payment guarantee (seal - 2 Corinthians 1: 22) "that mortality [will] be swallowed up of life." (Ibid. 5: 4-5). The Spirit now comes to convict us of sin, that we might "be renewed in the spirit of [our] mind;" and "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Ephesians 4: 23-24). This is often referred to as sanctification, but sanctification is not the end of the matter, but only the process to that goal.

Paul describes his experience of how a "renewed" mind will view life. He would be found in Christ having the "righteousness which is of God by faith" that he "might attain unto the resurrection of the

dead." Did he claim perfection? No. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" but "this one thing I do ... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Then he exhorts, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" (Philippians 3: 9-15). To one thus minded, at any point in his life, should he be called to sleep the sleep of death, he would be justified before God. When the final decree (Revelation 22: 11) goes forth - "He that is righteous (or justified; Gr. ὁ δίκαιος, *ho dikaios* - "the just[ified], the righteous"), let him be righteous (or justified) still" - he would then in the resurrection put on an incorruptible body with a perfect mind that had been "sealed unto the day of redemption." (Ephesians 4: 30). The reality of the fullness of the new birth would then be realized.

There is another category to be found both in Paul's differentiation of those who are saved at the first resurrection and in the decree that finalizes all human destiny. The mortal puts on immortality, and he that is holy (Gr. ἅγιος, *hagios* - "sacred, holy") remains holy still. These are the living ones who are translated without the experience of death. They are declared to be holy, and the decree merely confirms this state for eternity. The question arises, how is it attained? Everyone earnestly desiring to see the Lord come, and to be translated, wants this question answered.

Three possible answers are current in Adventism today. 1.) We perfect ourselves through works of righteousness. There is a great struggle to attain perfection (and much preaching about it) particularly among the "independent" Adventist ministries. 2.) A second concept is that we will keep on sinning until Jesus comes in the clouds of heaven. This position, espoused mostly by a growing number of brethren

within the denominational structure, flies directly against the decree of Revelation 22: 11 – "he that is holy, let him be holy still." In context, this experience is *prior* to the coming of Jesus. Verse 12 reads – "And, behold, I come quickly." 3.) The elusive answer has been the search in Adventism for many decades. In all honesty it must be admitted that the basic objective of both the Holy Flesh Movement (late 1890s – 1901), and the Brinsmead Movement of the 1960s, were attempts to find the answer.

God sent two "messengers" in 1888 with a message that was to lay the basis for this final experience – Elders Alonzo T. Jones and Ellet J. Waggoner. The fundamental proclamation of the 1888 message revealed that God's remnant people needed a revival of the basic Pauline concept, justification by faith alone, to be followed by the call to go on unto perfection. The agitation that this primarily 'stirred up,' both then and continuing into the present, centers around what does justification by faith alone really mean. Many independent Adventist "voices" are proclaiming a Tridentine gospel (a Romanist faith *plus* works righteousness) in substitution for the (biblical) Pauline concept. Alternatively, an increasing number of Adventists within the church structure are promoting a type of Evangelical gospel (a largely antinomian righteousness by presumption alone) instead. This places both of these erroneous extremes at variance with the purpose of the 1888 message. The continuous 'bickering' over its meaning misses the mark regarding "how" perfection will be attained for the saints who are alive to see the return of Jesus "the second time without sin unto salvation." (See Hebrews 9: 28). Presently, the real need of the hour is still being bogged down and lost in a seemingly endless, ongoing cloud of controversy

comprised of various minute details over the 'real' meaning of "justification by faith alone."

Paul declares as the climactic conclusion of his treatise on the resurrection – "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15: 57). In context, the victory is over sin. At the coming of the Lord, "Death is swallowed up in victory." (Ibid. 15: 54, compare with Isaiah 25: 8). But "The sting of death is sin" (1 Corinthians 15: 56), and Christ must reign (as King / Priest after the order of Melchizedek) till all enemies are put under His feet (Ibid. 15: 25; compare with Psalm 110: 4), "The last enemy" being death itself because of sin (1 Corinthians 15: 26). In this picture, the victory is given to us, even as justification is extended to us (Romans 3: 24). If then, I cannot understand and accept justification by faith alone in the merits of Jesus Christ, how can I accept the results of the final atonement procured for me by His intercession as High Priest in the Heavenly Sanctuary? Both are declared to be gifts of God, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

At the time in 1888 and following, the message brought by Jones and Waggoner was perceived to be the answer to the allusive how. Of this conviction, nearly forty years later after 1888, A. G. Daniells in his summary book, *Christ Our Righteousness*, wrote in 1926:

"In 1888 there came to the Seventh-day Adventist Church a very definite awakening message. It was designated at the time as 'the message of Righteousness by Faith.' Both the message itself and the manner of its coming made a deep and lasting impression upon the minds of ministers and people, and the lapse of time has not erased that impression from memory. To this day, many of those who heard the

message when it came are deeply interested in it and concerned regarding it. All these long years they have held a firm conviction, and cherished a fond hope, that someday this message would be given great prominence among us, and that it would do the cleansing, regenerating work in the church which they believed it was sent by the Lord to accomplish." (Chapter Two, pg. 23).<sup>4</sup>

During the period following 1888, heavy emphasis was placed on the Third Angel's Message. In 1893, A. T. Jones gave 25 studies on the Message at the General Conference session, and in 1895, 26 studies. This was as it should have been, for the message of 1888 – Justification by Faith – "is the third angel's message in verity." (*Review & Herald*, April 1, 1890).<sup>5</sup> Both the Three Angels' Messages and the Resurrection treatise by Paul, end in the same two groups. While Paul speaks of the saved of all time – the dead in Christ, and the living (1 Corinthians 15: 51-52) – the prophecy of the Three Angels' Messages focuses on the blessed dead "from henceforth (1844)," and the steadfastness of the living saints (Revelation 14: 12-13). These two categories answer to the last two groups of the final decree. The "blessed" dead were declared justified in life, and they will arise still justified. The "holy ones" will remain holy (The same word used in the Greek text of Revelation 22: 11, and translated, "he that is holy," is used in Revelation 14: 12 and translated, "saints"). These holy ones are keeping not only "the commandments of God," but also "the faith of Jesus."

While the "vile body" is not changed till the return of Christ, when all "in Christ" both the dead and living, are collectively changed, there must be something that happens to the final generation of believers that are translated from earth to heav-

en without passing through the experience of death that has happened to no other generation of believers. The uniqueness of their experience is of such a nature that in this life, it can be said of them – "here are they that keep (*not are trying to keep*) the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." (Verse 12, *emph. added*). That a symbolic portrayal of the second coming of Christ in Revelation 14: 14-20, immediately follows the scriptural declarations in verses 12-13, plainly reveals the end-time context as outlined. Again, the "how" we still seem to be struggling with but it most definitely must be associated with "the faith of Jesus," for only He of all the children of Adam, in the vile body of our humiliation, did not sin.

There are some "impossibles" in the biblical record that speak to the issue. Paul uses Abraham and Sarah as examples of justification by faith – Romans, Chapter 4. Is it not theologically sound to advance this concept further? Paul's evaluation of Abraham's faith speaks loud and clear to the question for which we seek an answer:

*"And being fully persuaded that, what (God) had promised, (God) was able also to perform."* (Romans 4: 21, *emph. added*).

Does the possibility overwhelm us when we look at ourselves closely? Should we as Abraham stagger "not at the promise of God through unbelief," but being "strong in faith," give "glory to God"? (*Ibid.* 4: 20). Do not the messages of Revelation 14: 6-13, begin with – "Fear God, and give glory to him"? (Verse 7). Did not God ask Abraham – "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18: 14).

Will not He "which hath begun a good work in you" also "perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"? (Philippians 1: 6). The "new birth" begun by conversion will continue till we see the kingdom of God. Keep the faith of Jesus, of which He is the Au-

thor, and the faith which He had in you, a faith for which He died. #

## **“ Born From Above - The Entrance Into ‘The Kingdom Of God ’”**

The kingdom of God is the objective of the "new birth" from above. We, too often, limit it to the kingdom which shall be inaugurated when Christ shall return the second time sitting upon "the throne of his glory" (Matthew 19: 28). In His parable teachings, Jesus spoke, however, of another "kingdom of heaven." (See Ibid. 13: 24, 31, 33, 45, 47). We are encouraged to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4: 16). That night long ago when Nicodemus conversed with Christ, the kingdom inferred was the eternal kingdom of glory. His last words to Nicodemus concerning the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness were concluded with the statement, "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3: 15).

However, the conditions for entrance into either kingdom – grace or glory – are the same. As far as the kingdoms are concerned, one succeeds the other. Our inheritance with the holy ones in light follows our deliverance from "the power of darkness" by the translation "into the kingdom of his dear Son" now, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1: 12-14).

Once I have been planted together in the likeness of His death – "Father into Thy hands, I commend myself" and give up - the same mysterious movings of the Spirit begin – "Thou dost not know where He is leading." If we are honest with ourselves, as we review the past years of our lives, be

they few or many, we have to admit that every major failure which has brought remorse, and with it regret and guilt, stems from the fact that we did not follow the Spirit's leading, but chose our own way.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray – "Our Father which art in heaven ... Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6: 9-10). But it cannot be done in earth, unless it is first done in us – dust – "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3: 19). Then the Spirit leads the recreated "dust" – to work in the accomplishment of the wider meaning of "earth." What, and how and where that will be, is not ours to define, but His to choose. "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work" (Mark 13: 34).

"Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God." (COL, pg. 327).<sup>6</sup>

In this third Chapter of John's gospel, the record of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is followed by an illustration of what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus – "Ye must be born from above." (Verse 7, marginal reading). Commenting briefly (verses 16-21) on the parting statement of Jesus (verse 15), the gospel narrative returns to the ministry of John the Baptist. (Verses 23-30).

A question concerning religious practice was used as an opportunity to plant, if possible, seeds of jealousy between John and Jesus. How did John respond? He reminded those Jews that he had told them previously that he was "not the Christ (Messiah)," but was "sent before him." (John 3: 28; Ibid. 1: 20). Then from lips which betokened a life born from above, he declared – "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Ibid. 3: 30).

Here was man of whom Jesus would testify that "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than" he. (Matthew 11: 11). He was born to an elderly couple. We are not told how old he was when he laid them to rest. He chose not to follow his father in temple service for he "was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel." (Luke 1: 80). His dress and his food was what could be found in the desert. (Matthew 3: 4). He never married. There was none to inherit his patrimony. He began to proclaim the message given to him of God the year he baptized Jesus. In less than two years the "burning and ... shining light" (John 5: 35) would be extinguished in martyrdom. The Spirit leads where it wills, and the one born from above follows, accepting in full assurance that 'Voice of gentle stillness' as it 'whispers softly, - "Wanderer, come! Follow Me, I'll guide thee home."' ❖

### WHG (GLP)

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<https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1931.pdf>

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6. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 327.

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

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