

## PURPOSE

*Reflections* is the official newsletter of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. It seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors, and teachers.

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## NEWS AND COMMENTS

### HOW TO COPY ARTICLES OF THE BRI NEWSLETTER

We have been asked whether or not certain segments of BRI Newsletters can be copied, although they are sent as pdf-files. For instance, it may be helpful to take the Bible studies out of the newsletters, reformat them, and use them as Word or WordPerfect files. In this way, they can be used by those giving Bible studies, and they can be passed out to those receiving them.

The answer to this question is: Yes, it can be done. Here is how: After you have opened the BRI Newsletter with Adobe Reader click on “Select” or “Select Text” (depending on the version), block the paragraph that you want to copy, click “Edit” and “Copy” (or right click and click on “Copy to Clipboard”), go to your Word or WordPerfect program, and click “Edit” and “Paste” (or right click and click “Paste”). You should be able to use the document now in your word processing program. Success!

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

### THE 8TH AIIAS THEOLOGICAL FORUM

From October 29-31, 2005, the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines hosted a Theological Forum on the topic “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth.” About 150 participants filled the air-conditioned amphitheater of the new administration building listening to the three presenters from the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. Kwabena Donkor, Ekkehardt Mueller, and Gerhard Pfandl presented topics ranging from “the Reality of the Heavenly Sanctuary” to “Women’s Ordination.” The organizers of the Forum had made ample provision for question time after each presentation; and these question times turned out to be as interesting as the lectures themselves. Participants expressed their appreciation for the candid and timely messages and the opportunity to interact with the presenters on issues of concern to them and the worldwide church.

Following the Forum, the Biblical Research Institute scholars met with the seminary faculty to discuss ways in which the two institutions can work together more closely in the future.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

### “GOLIATH” IN A NEW INSCRIPTION FOUND AT GATH

The story of David and Goliath has captured the imagination of millions of Bible students through the ages. It is the story of the faith of an unprotected small boy withstanding an armored Philistine champion. It

is the story of an Israelite army cowering in the Valley of Elah while the Philistines taunt them and their God. Five stones against an iron shield, helmet, and sword. But what is the history behind the story? Was there a Goliath and a David? Recent critical scholarship actually questions this story. In 1992 Philip Davies, professor of biblical studies at the University of Sheffield, appealed to archaeology and wrote, “The biblical ‘empire’ of David and Solomon has not the faintest echo in the archaeological record—as yet.”<sup>1</sup> He concluded that David and Solomon are no more historical than King Arthur of the Round Table. But his argument is one from silence. In the view of Davies and other postmodern scholars, the characters and stories of the Bible must have a historical (archaeological) counterpart. “Unless this is done, there can be no real basis for claiming that biblical ‘Israel’ has any particular relationship to history.”<sup>2</sup> The Bible is guilty until proven innocent.<sup>3</sup> But such arguments from silence are dangerous in any discipline. In archaeology with hundreds of archaeologists working in the Middle East today it can be devastating.

Just this past summer an exciting archaeological discovery was made that sheds new light on the story of David and Goliath. According to the Bible, Goliath came from Gath, one of the five cities of the Philistines (1 Sam 17:4). Modern excavations at Gath (Tel es-Safi) directed by Aren Maeir of Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv, uncovered a broken piece of pottery with an inscription during the 2005 season. According to Dr. Maeir in his presentation to the American Schools of Oriental Research in Philadelphia this past November, 2005,<sup>4</sup> the letters are written in a proto-Canaanite script (in Semitic letters). The letters written without vowels are: 'LWT and WLT. However, while the script is Semitic, the language it is written in is Indo-European. The names could thus be constructed as “Wylattes or Alyattes.” In the hearing of an Israelite it might sound like this Wylattes/WLT/Goliath. That the names are written in Indo-European in a Semitic script is significant. Indo-European points to an Aegean (Greek) origin, which is the same place that the Bible describes as the origin of the Philistines (Gen 10:14). Its writing in a Semitic script indicates some adaptation of the language in written form to the local Canaanite environment where the Philistines settled.

Where was this inscription found? As archaeologists uncover the ancient cities layer by layer they can date artifacts stratigraphically within those layers. This inscription was clearly found below the massive destruction of the city which archaeologists have identified with the military campaign of Hazael of Syria (2 Kings 12:17). The inscription is then sealed in a stratigraphic context and can be dated to the 10th-9th centuries BC, around 950 BC to no later than 880 BC. The context is important, because it establishes that the name Goliath was known at Philistine Gath about 70 years *after* the event between David and Goliath as recorded in 1 Samuel 17. Dr. Maeir, a well respected archaeologist who is currently director of the Institute

of Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University, concludes that while the inscription probably does not name the biblical Goliath directly it does point to “a Goliath or rather two Goliath-like names.” This affirms that these names were used at Philistine Gath some years after the Bible records the conflict between David and Goliath.

Michael G. Hasel, Southern Adventist University and  
Lynn H. Wood Archaeological Museum

<sup>1</sup>Philip Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement 148 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 67.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>3</sup>On this assessment, see James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10-17.

<sup>4</sup>Aren Maeir, “An Iron Age IIA Proto-Canaanite, Philistine Inscription and Other New Finds from Tell es-Safi-Gath.” A Paper Presented to the Annual Meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Philadelphia, PA, November 18, 2005.

## PETRIFICATION OF WOOD: HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

James Gibson has reviewed the article “Rapid Wood Silification in Hot Spring Water: An Explanation of Silification of Wood during the Earth’s History,” *Sedimentary Geology* 169 (2004): 219-228 by J. Akahane et al. It has implications for those who believe in a recent creation and a worldwide flood.

Summary: Alder wood has been observed to become petrified in less than 36 years under natural conditions. The wood had fallen into an overflow stream from Tateyama Hot Spring in central Japan. Water from the hot spring (70° C, pH 3) has a high silica content, and silica granules are deposited in spaces in the wood as the water seeps through it. Pieces of wood placed in the stream were nearly 40% petrified in seven years. Wood petrified in hot spring water was compared with Miocene fossil wood, and the two samples showed the same features, indicating the same process was involved in their petrification. Most petrified wood in the fossil record is associated with volcanic sediments and was probably produced in a similar manner, as hot ground water laden with volcanic ash permeated the wood.

Comment: This report confirms that petrification of wood might not take as long as had once been thought. Rapid mineralization is consistent with the excellent preservational state of some petrified wood.

James Gibson,  
Geoscience Research Institute

## IS SCRIPTURE HISTORICALLY CONDITIONED?

### I. *The Notion of Historical Conditioning*<sup>1</sup>

What does it mean to say that the Bible is historically

conditioned, and how can this allegation be made when the Bible explicitly says that all of Scripture is inspired by God? (2 Tim 3:15-17). To begin with, when contemporary critical theologians say that the Bible is historically conditioned, they are making a statement about the cognitive status of the Bible. In other words, the factual content of the Bible is subordinated to history and hence to culture.

Two words need careful attention in order to understand the notion of historical conditioning clearly: history and condition. A condition is defined as something that is essential to the appearance or occurrence of something else. In this case, historical conditioning means that “history” is essential to the appearance of the Bible. For many theologians this is not to say that *history* is that which *caused* the Bible to appear; rather, history was an essential element

#### *The Classical Biblical Understanding of History*

- (1) The overall course of the historical process beginning with the creation is being shaped by God.
- (2) God recurrently intervenes in the process.
- (3) He intends to bring the process to a triumphant close.

in the appearance of the Bible. They will probably agree in principle that God or the Holy Spirit is the principal *cause* of the Bible, but according to their understanding *history* was a prerequisite in order for the

Bible to come about in its present form. In any case, one’s conception of the manner in which God or the Holy Spirit caused the content of the Bible to come about is essential to one’s understanding of what is implied in the phrase “historical conditioning.”

In the phrase “historical conditioning,” history is what the Bible is claimed to be subordinated to. But what is history? The classical understanding of history in theology was the biblical one which included the following convictions: (1) The overall course of the historical process beginning with the creation is being shaped by God; (2) God recurrently intervenes in the process; (3) He intends to bring the process to a triumphant close. The Enlightenment, however, generated its own view of history in which divine intervention was deemed impossible. Indeed, in the development of German historicism, the dominant idea was that each society produces its own distinctive values in the course of its history, thus making all values relative.<sup>2</sup> Biblical history from this point of view is a human product which may or may not be factual, a view that came to be applied to biblical history.

## II. Revelation/Inspiration and Historical Conditioning

What is the relationship between the idea of historical conditioning and conceptions of revelation/inspiration? Any theory of revelation/inspiration that does not give full credibility and authenticity to biblical history sooner or later succumbs to the notion that the Bible is historically conditioned.

There have been two primary ways in which the authenticity of biblical history has been undermined. The first way is what may be called “the way of transcendence.” Here, God is deemed so absolutely transcendent that He is considered incapable of *causing* revelation-inspiration at the historical level.

Neo-orthodoxy is a case in point. Karl Barth’s emphasis on God as the Wholly Other strictly makes Him unknowable and indescribable,

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even in revelation. As Harvie Conn has correctly noted, “Barth’s commentary underlined also a new indifference to history in the world of theology . . . Revelation does not enter history. It only touches history as a tangent touches a circle.”<sup>3</sup> The result of such an approach to revelation-inspiration is that the *cause* of the Bible’s cognitive content (God’s revelatory act), and the *condition* of the Bible’s appearance (history) are divorced from one another.

The second way in which the authenticity of biblical history has been undermined may be called “the way of immanence.” In Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, the case appears to have been made for limiting the grasp of reason only to space and time. The implication of this epistemological move, which Friedrich Schleiermacher keenly grasped, was that any possible divine-human interaction had to occur in a zone of the human person other than the rational. Besides the zone of reason, however, any other zone of interaction meant that the divine-human interaction would be *non-cognitive*. Schleiermacher’s choice of the zone of feeling as the locus of the divine-human encounter is well known to have blazed the trail for liberal theology. The hallmark of liberal theories of biblical inspiration, therefore, remains the persistent denial of cognitive content to the revelation-inspiration event. Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologization project is a case in point. At the heart of his project is the conviction that the presentation of Jesus in the New Testament is not history, but the thought patterns of people who wished to understand themselves in the context of their cultural circumstances. Similar approaches to the Old Testament have led some to deny any historical value to the stories of the creation, fall, flood, etc.

## III. Revelation/Inspiration, Historical Conditioning, and Interpretational Method

The undermining of revelation-inspiration noted above consists precisely in the weakening of the divine involvement in human history. Thus, human history is understood by and large as creations of human societies and cultures. This ontological levelling of history, including biblical history, is what makes room for the charge of “historical conditioning” with respect to the Bible. The conclusion

seems inevitable that if all historical products are purely human products, they are to a great degree time- and place-specific. Consequently, the Bible as a human intellectual product may be amenable to investigation and analysis using the most fitting method. For textual analysis and interpretation, the historical-critical method has come to be the definitive method of interpretation for those who follow the foregoing understanding of history.

With the presupposition that the Bible contains nothing more than subjective, human theological interpretations and utterances, the value of the historical-critical method for its practitioners is that it “is supposed to guarantee the objectivity of the interpretation and its suitability for the biblical text in question.”<sup>4</sup> The significance of this point is worth recommitting to the historical-critical method is it is one’s means of what is of objective value in the Bible. But the issue is that when such a commitment is made to the historical-critical method, it comes with a certain understanding of history, of inspiration, and consequently of the Bible as a historically-conditioned human document. Of course Seventh-day Adventists also attempt to make distinctions in Scripture regarding matters that have universal and eternal applications over against those that have local and temporary significance. Such differences, however, are established on criteria and principles that are quite different from those discussed above.

#### IV. *Historical Conditioning vs. Historical Constitution*

Traditional Adventist biblical interpretation follows New Testament practice by assuming “the transcultural and transtemporal relevancy of biblical instruction unless Scripture itself gives criteria limiting this relevancy.”<sup>5</sup> Implied in this transcultural assessment of biblical instruction is the belief that there is no vicious hermeneutical gap as such between biblical times and our own day. But if Adventists deny any historical conditioning of the Bible, it is not the same thing as disregarding any historical component of it.

One of the remarkable things in E. G. White’s view of Scripture is the fact that while she affirmed the Bible’s absolute authority, she recognized its human element.<sup>6</sup> Recognizing the absolute authority of the Bible, even in its imperfect human form is a way of acknowledging that the Bible is historically constituted.

In regard to the Bible, Adventist thought, therefore, distinguishes “conditioning” from “constituting.” While the former implies a negative and even pejorative subordination of the *cause* of the Bible (God’s revelatory act) to history, the latter sees history as the very zone or mode within which God *causes* revelation-inspiration to take

place. To say that the Bible is historically constituted is to say that its cognitive content is *caused* by God in the historical realm. Understanding the Bible as historically constituted causes the issue of historical conditioning to become a non-issue since the supposed gap between cause and condition is eliminated.

#### V. *Revelation/Inspiration and Historical Constitution*

Traditional Adventist theology sees the Bible as historically constituted because of its understanding of the nature of revelation-inspiration. 2 Peter 1:19 shows clearly that God is the originator of Scripture. As Raoul Dederen puts it, “What Peter emphasizes here—and what is emphasized in the whole corpus of prophetic writings when this particular topic is addressed—is that the prophets spoke *because* they were ‘moved by the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>7</sup> In other words, God is the *cause* of Scripture, not the impulse of man, although He employs historical means—the prophets and other historical phenomena—to bring about biblical meanings. In Hebrews 1:1 we are told that in speaking to the prophets God used “many ways,” to which the prophets as historical beings could relate. Yet the Bible places no hermeneutical distance between God’s causal activity and the human speaking or writing, that is, the prophets were careful not to identify what they said and wrote as their own message. The prophets’ various expressions bear this point out: “The word of the Lord came” (Jer 1:11-13; Joel 1:1); “The hand of the Lord was on me” (Eze 3:22); “Thus says the Lord” (Amos 1:3); and “Hear the word of the Lord” (Hos 4:1). Moreover, through the activity of the Holy Spirit, all of the prophets’ speaking and writing is made dependable and trustworthy (2 Tim 3:16). From these biblical indicators, it seems quite clear that the basic cognitive content of the Bible, as a historical phenomenon, is as God would have it. This is what it means to say that the Bible is historically *constituted*.

#### VI. *Revelation/Inspiration, Historical Constitution, and Biblical Interpretation*

To take the position that the Bible is historically constituted has important ramifications for its interpretation. Meaning is directly related to the method one employs, while method in turn ought to be determined by the subject matter to be studied. In Adventist hermeneutical practice, the method deemed best fitted for a *historically constituted* Scripture, in which divine and human elements are inextricably interwoven, is the grammatical-historical method.

The practitioner of the grammatical-historical method intends to take seriously not only the grammatical and literary features of the text, but also the history recorded

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forcing. To the use of cal-critical to say that primary deciding

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in Scripture. Such an approach has a few notable implications. First, it carries the implication that the interpreter wishes to hear the text on its own terms. Behind this first implication is a second concern, that the text has a fixed, definite meaning that should not be muffled. Closely allied to the second concern is a third, namely, that the text, when correctly understood reveals truth that corresponds to reality and, therefore, has transcultural significance.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

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<sup>1</sup>For a short discussion on this issue see Fernando Canale, *Understanding Revelation-Inspiration in a Postmodern World* (Berrien Springs, MI: Fernando Canale, 2001), 188-190.

<sup>2</sup>D. W. Bebbington, "History," in Sinclair. B. Ferguson, David E. Wright, and J. I. Packer, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 307.

<sup>3</sup>Harvie M. Conn, *Contemporary World Theology: A Layman's Guidebook* ([Nutley, NJ] Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), 15.

<sup>4</sup>Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 87.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, edited by Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 86.

<sup>6</sup>"The writers of the Bible had to express their ideas in human language" (1 SM, 16). "There is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scriptures . . . The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect" (1 SM, 20). "The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity" (1 SM, 21).

<sup>7</sup>Raoul Dederen, "The Revelation-Inspiration Phenomenon According to the Bible Writers," in Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (eds.) *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), 16.

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## FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

### SCRIPTURE AND THE PARADOX

#### I. What Is a Paradox?

A recent newspaper article discussed the "paradox of plenty." In the long run, resources in oil, gas, diamonds etc. lead to poverty in developing countries. Economists talk about the "Dutch disease." Exports of resources strengthen the currency but weaken the national industry and agriculture and lead to dependence on the natural resources. In these countries the risks of war and corruption are higher than in countries poor in natural resources. There is a curse of the oil.

The statement "Now I am lying" is a paradox, for if it is true, it is wrong. If it is wrong, it is true. Normally a paradox is something that is apparently contradictory and yet makes sense and is "profoundly true."<sup>1</sup> It is a statement which is opposed to widespread expectations. It conveys meaning and sense in apparent nonsense and contains an element of surprise.

K. S. Kantzer suggests that a paradox as found in Scripture consists of "(1) an assertion which is self-contradictory, or (2) two or more assertions which are mutually contradictory, or (3) an assertion which contradicts some very commonly held position on the matter in question."<sup>2</sup> He also distinguishes between rhetorical paradoxes and logical paradoxes. A rhetorical paradox is, for instance, a statement such as the following: "Allow the dead to bury their own dead . . ." (Luke 9:60b). It is a figure of speech. A logical paradox "arises from the attempt by the human mind to unify or to coordinate the multiple facets of experience."<sup>3</sup>

#### II. Paradoxes in Scripture

Both types of paradoxes are found in Scripture. Jesus spoke in paradoxes. Actually, his speeches were filled with paradoxes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:3-5). "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matt 5:39). "So the last shall be first, and the first last" (Matt 20:16). "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35). "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14b). "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35b).

Paradoxes are also used in the Old Testament—"One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty" (Prov 11:24). Paul in his writings has his share of paradoxes: "For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave" (1 Cor 7:22). "As unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things" (2 Cor 6:9-10). "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10b). "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil 3:7).

All these statements do not make much sense humanly speaking. Jesus' commandment to love one's enemies is called "an ultimately unnatural demand, contrary to empirical human nature."<sup>4</sup> Whereas Greek ethics "culminates in the fulfillment of human nature," Christian ethics "teaches that human nature is to be transcended."<sup>5</sup> That may be one reason why some of these statements are paradoxes in our opinions. Another reason may be that reality is more complex than we are able to perceive and understand.

But there are broader theological concepts expressed in Scripture that also sound like paradoxes to our ears. We have already been saved, and yet we are not completely saved. We are still waiting for the final consummation and yet possess already eternal life here and now. We are saved

by faith through grace, but will be judged by our works. Although works do not contribute to our salvation, they are not unimportant. Or “how is it possible for humans to be simultaneously sinful and saved?”<sup>6</sup> Our salvation is paradoxical.

God is portrayed in Scripture as one, and yet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are called God. Jesus is eternal. He is Yahweh. He is worshiped. To Him we pray. Christians have expressed the biblical concept of one God and three persons within the Godhead by the doctrine of the Trinity. Three equals one does not make much sense mathematically; it is a paradox, and yet it is true. What about Christ’s nature who was completely human and completely divine while living among us?

Giving tithe borders on the paradoxical. When we give money to support God’s cause, we have more than when we withhold it.

The ultimate paradox is the cross of Christ. “In Christian theology, and in Pauline thought particularly, the crucifixion of the Christ is the foundational paradox (1 Cor. 1:22-25).”<sup>7</sup> God dies for us so that we might be saved. No wonder that the cross is a stumbling block and foolishness for many. No wonder that the cross is reinterpreted even in our days and that a bloodless religion is created replacing the substitutionary atonement of Christ with a sentimental love of God the Father toward humankind.

### III. How to Deal with Paradoxes?

Since Scripture is full of paradoxes, the question arises: How to deal with them? Some of these paradoxes come as a surprise but are to some extent self-explanatory. But what about those that consist of apparent contradictory biblical statements not found in one verse or passage only? Oftentimes they reveal important theological concepts and have tremendous implications. They shape the relationship of humans to God and affect the everyday life of Christians.

In these cases we have to learn to live with statements which in human perspective may seem to be illogical and nevertheless are true. To choose one set of assertions and disregard the seemingly contradictory set leads to heresy. To opt for the oneness of God and thereby exclude the divinity of Christ is as wrong as to accept the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but make them three Gods. To limit salvation to the present or the future only does not do justice to the biblical account. Kantzer correctly states: “In such cases man may be nearer the truth when he espouses both sides of a paradoxical issue than when he gives up one side in favor of the other.”<sup>8</sup> As Christians we have to learn to live with tensions, because sometimes truth can be expressed in paradoxical terms only.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 826.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 77.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>R. V. Schnucker, “Neo-orthodoxy,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 755.

<sup>7</sup>Soulen, 140.

<sup>8</sup>Kantzer, 826.

## SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY

### SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Humans are interested in the future. They must plan ahead. So they check weather predictions. Economists must guess what future developments could bring about so that correct choices can be made today. How should money be invested? Futurology has become an important tool. Since people are interested in their own future as well as that of planet earth, some of them consult horoscopes, astrologers, and psychics. They plunge into spiritualism in order to find answers to pressing questions.

Jesus’ disciples were also interested in future developments. When Jesus pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, they asked Him when that would happen and what would be the sign of His coming. Fortunately they turned to Jesus who provides correct answers. So in Matthew 24 (Mark 13; Luke 21) Jesus pointed to signs of the times.

#### I. The Disciples and Their Question

- (1) The disciples asked a double question, assuming that the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming of Jesus would coincide--Matt 24:1-3.
- (2) Jesus answered to both questions simultaneously without informing them that the two events were not directly connected. Obviously He did not want to discourage them. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple took place in A.D. 70.
- (3) A closer look at the chapter allows us to see that verses 4-20 refer primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem. Verses 21-31 seem to relate specifically to the Second Coming.

#### II. Signs for the Destruction of Jerusalem

- (1) Signs in the political world:  
Matt 24:6-7 Wars
- (2) Signs in nature:  
Matt 24:7 Famines and earthquakes.  
Luke 21:11 Pestilences, terrors, signs from heaven.

But these signs are just a beginning and not yet the end (Matt 24:6, 8).

- (3) Signs in the social world:  
Matt 24:12 Love grows cold.

<sup>1</sup>Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, second edition (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 140.

<sup>2</sup>K. S. Kantzer, “Paradox,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*,

## (4) Signs in the religious world:

Matt 24:4-5	False Christs
Matt 24:9-12	Persecution, martyrdom, defection, betrayal, false prophets.
Matt 24:14	Proclamation of the gospel.

These signs were fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem as we know from history and the New Testament (Acts 5:36; 7:59, 8:1; 11:28; 16:26; Rom 15:23-24). Christians following Christ's advice in Matt 24:15-20 fled to Pella, and it is said that not one of them lost his or her life.

*III. Signs for the Second Coming of Jesus*

(1) In a secondary sense the signs mentioned above also apply to the time before Christ's second coming. The number of wars increases. Weapons become more and more terrible and disastrous, and more and more money is spent on them. Scientists talk about an increase of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and discuss catastrophes unprecedented in magnitude. We have to fight hunger and pestilences so far unknown. Social problems are described in Jam 5:1-8 and 2 Tim 3:1-5.

## (2) Signs in nature:

Matt 24:29-30	Darkening of the sun and the moon, falling of the stars.
Luke 21:25-26	Roaring of the sea, the powers of heaven are shaken.

A fulfilment of the darkening of the sun and the moon happened May 19, 1780, when for hours extreme darkness prevailed in certain parts of the world. The greatest meteor shower known in history happened Nov. 13, 1833, fulfilling Jesus' predictions. It lasted for hours, and it is said that more than a billion shooting stars appeared.

## (3) Signs in the religious world:

Matt. 24:23-25	False Christs and false prophets, extremely deceptive signs and miracles.
Matt. 24:37-39	Indifference, preoccupation with the material world.

The emphasis of Matthew 24 is clearly on the religious aspect. Here the greatest challenge for believers seems to be found.

## (4) The real sign:

Matt 24:30	All the other events are not called "signs" by Jesus. The real sign is His coming in the sky, probably described in the second part of the verse, namely on the clouds with power and great glory.
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*III. The Purpose of the Signs*

(1) Matt 24:32-33 The signs may roughly tell us

that we are getting closer to the predicted event. They do not allow us to produce a time table or set a date. They call us to count on the imminent fulfilment of Christ's promise.

(2) Matt. 24:36

Although there are signs, nevertheless only God knows the date of Christ's second coming.

(3) Matt. 24:42

Therefore we must watch always.

The main point of Matthew 24 is not to present a prophetic outline of future events, but to call upon God's people to stay awake and watch at all times. Then they are ready when Jesus comes.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

*BOOK NOTES*

Thomas Mostert, *Hidden Heresy: Is Spiritualism Invading Adventist Churches Today?* Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005. 112 pp. US\$10.99.

This book is a wake up call for Adventist pastors and administrators who have in some way been involved with the church-growth movement in North America and in other parts of the world. That has resulted in what is known today as mega-churches (they have an average of 2,000 worshipers every week) and giga-churches (those with 10,000 or more worshipers). Many Adventist ministers and even administrators, sincerely interested in the growth of our church, have been using the methods employed by the church-growth movement without realizing the potential dangers inherent in the system. According to Mostert, we are now realizing that it is impossible to separate the theology of the movement from its methodology for church-growth. He argues that the incursion of the movement into Adventism has resulted in a de-emphasis of our distinctive truths and mission and in the marketing of religious services in order to please our church members and to attract outsiders. He makes reference to pastors who have publicly stated that they no longer preach Adventist distinctive truths, because they are a hindrance to the growth of the church.

Mostert goes on to argue that what we have in the modern church-growth movement is veiled spiritualism. By allowing the movement to influence Adventist growth we have unintentionally made ourselves vulnerable to spiritualism. Veiled spiritualism is defined by him as that type of spiritualism that assumes a Christian identity and that blinds the eyes of people in such a way that the deception is not discerned. It denies the ultimate reality of death and defines sin as low self-esteem. The new birth is declared to be a change from a negative to a positive self-image. Self-esteem is the ultimate human value, all believers are

one with Christ independent of their denominations, and believing in Jesus is all that is needed for salvation—its impact on your daily life is not important, because He always loves you. This type of spiritualism also emphasizes the rejection of the Sabbath commandment and preaches a sentimental gospel of a generic type that is not spiritually offensive to the sinful nature of those who listen to it.

Mostert demonstrates that this type of spiritualism characterizes the church-growth movement. He calls Adventist pastors to reconsider their association with the movement and insists that Adventists should continue to proclaim the message God entrusted to them without diluting it through the veiled spiritualism that is slowly engulfing the Christian world and that could lead to the end-time demonic deception predicted in the Scriptures. This is a book that every church pastor and leader should read. More work is needed in the study of the church-growth movement and on its potential damaging influence on the Adventist movement; but for now this is a good beginning.

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

Gilbert M. Valentine, *W. W. Prescott*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005. 336 pp. US\$19.99.

This biography of William Warren Prescott (1855–1944) is a condensed version of G. M. Valentine’s massive 1982 Ph.D. dissertation (660 pages) at Andrews University. In the interest of space many references have been dropped and those retained have been abbreviated. Nevertheless, the book ably recreates for contemporary Adventists the life and work of one of the towering figures in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

W. W. Prescott’s parents were followers of W. Miller in New England, who keenly felt the bitterness of the 1844 disappointment. William was only three years old when his parents accepted the Sabbath in 1858. He was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church by John N. Andrews at the Massachusetts campmeeting in 1872. His interest in ancient languages led him to take the classical course at South Berwick Academy in Maine, where he taught Latin and Greek in his last year in the academy. Among his students was his future wife Sarah Sanders, whom he married on July 8, 1880. Following his graduation from Dartmouth College in 1877 he was principal of high schools in Northfield and Montpelier, Vermont, from 1877 to 1880. Leaving the teaching work, he published, with his brother, the Biddeford, Maine, *Journal*, and then for five years he owned and edited the *Montpelier State Republican*.

With his B.A. and M.A. degrees from Dartmouth College, W. W. Prescott was one of the best educated men in the Seventh-day Adventist Church at that time. In 1885, therefore, he was asked to assume the presidency of Battle Creek College. With this step he entered upon a career unique in many respects in Seventh-day Adven-

tist history. While still president of Battle Creek College (1885–1894), he helped found Union College and became its first president in 1891. He appointed principals for the two institutions to act while he was absent from one or the other. Then late in 1892 he assumed the presidency of the newly founded Walla Walla College. Thus, he was simultaneously president of three colleges in that year.

Well known as a biblical scholar, he was called upon to hold Bible institutes and strengthen the developing educational work of the church. During a world tour (1894-96) he spent 10 months in Australia helping to get the Avondale school established. In 1902, he was asked to accept the position of vice president of the General Conference, the first person ever to officially serve in that capacity. At the same time he was chairman of the Education Department (1902-1903) and editor of the *Review and Herald* (1903-1909). On relinquishing the *Review* editorship in 1909, he edited the *Protestant Magazine*, the only intentionally anti-Catholic paper ever published by the denomination, for another seven years until it was discontinued in 1915.

From 1915 until his retirement in 1937, W. W. Prescott was a field secretary of the General Conference. During this time he served a brief period in 1922 as principal of the Australasian Missionary College (Avondale College), and four years as president and then head of the Bible Department at Union College (1924–1928). In 1933 the Fleming H. Revell publishing house published his book *The Spade Confirms the Book*, the first volume on the relationship between archaeology and the Bible by an Adventist writer. As a teacher, editor, administrator, and secretary of the Department of Education, W. W. Prescott left a strong impression on the entire educational work of the denomination.

Gilbert’s volume throws light on the administrative struggles, the political conflicts, the personal quarrels, and the theological and educational debates that swirled through the church for much of Prescott’s career in the church from 1885 to 1937. As the definitive study on the life of W. W. Prescott it is a “must read” for every student of Adventist history.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

George R. Knight, *Exploring Galatians and Ephesians: A Devotional Commentary*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005. 310 pp. US\$16.99.

*Exploring Galatians and Ephesians* is G. R. Knight’s third volume in the Devotional Commentary series. The series seems to follow the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide rather than the New Testament. The author’s approach is similar to that of his previously published volumes which were also discussed in *Reflections*. The book contains good summaries, helpful outlines, excellent treatments of theological issues, for instance, the role of the law in Galatians and faith and marriage in Ephesians, and useful applications to modern readers. The book is to

be praised for its wide employment of literature and the utilization of boxes and tables, e.g., on spirituals gifts (p. 245). It makes a contribution to the current debates on salvation within the Adventist church by providing a balanced biblical view.

There are issues that would need some more attention such as the topic of the covenant. It may not suffice to point the reader to another book by the same author when discussing such an important topic. Furthermore,

although it may be worthwhile to quote other scholars, this can easily become too much. It would be helpful, if the Bible verse under discussion would appear at the beginning of the respective paragraph(s) and that the verses discussed on a page would be listed on top of the page. However, these issues do not diminish the worth of a good and valuable contribution to the understanding of Scripture.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

**BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

**GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS**

12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA

Webpage: <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>; phone: 301-680-6790

fax: 301-680-6788; e-mail: [biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org](mailto:biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org)

Editor: Ekkehardt Mueller, Th.D., D.Min.

Production Manager: Marlene Bacchus

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### An Index to the BRI Newsletter

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