



# REFLECTIONS

## Theological Focus

Conversion, the Gift of the Holy Spirit, and  
New Testament Religious Practices ..... 1

Scientific Revolutions ..... 6

## Scripture Applied

Lessons from Matthew 3 ..... 10

## Book Notes

Out of Adventism: A Theologian's Journey..... 12

The Sabbath and the Bible..... 15

**Index to Reflections** ..... 16

## THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

# Conversion, the Gift of the Holy Spirit, and New Testament Religious Practices

By Clinton Wahlen

**T**he question of conversion and its relationship to the gift of the Holy Spirit and the practice of water baptism is an important one. In some Christian denominations they are virtually inseparable, while in others they are related but clearly separate. In a few places, the New Testament also seems to associate the gift of the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands. The question naturally arises as to whether one or both of these practices are necessary in order to receive the Holy Spirit. To answer this and related questions, we will look briefly at New Testament religious practices connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit, although a thorough examination of these subjects would require a much more detailed study than is contemplated here.<sup>1</sup>

### The Meaning and Necessity of Christian Baptism

Christian baptism has its origins in John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4; Acts 13:24).<sup>2</sup> Being baptized by John signaled the people's repentance in response to John's preaching (Matt 3:1–2; Luke 3:1–14). This compares closely with Jesus' own proclamation (Mark 1:14–15; Luke 5:32) and the work of His disciples in baptizing those who followed Him (John 3:22–4:3), as well as the later Christian proclamation calling people "to repent and be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38; cf. 22:16). John's announcement that one was coming after him who would baptize not just "with water for repentance" but also "with the Holy Spirit"

(Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 11:16) may say more about Jesus as John's successor (John 3:27–31) than about the difference between the two baptisms themselves. After all, it was the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism that identified Him as the Coming One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (John 1:29–34). Also, Jesus' submitting to John's baptism, together with His affirmation that by so doing they would "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:15), shows that Christian baptism should not be distinguished too sharply from that of John.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Jesus' own baptism is clearly unique in several respects. First, Jesus needed no repentance, which helps to explain John's reluctance to baptize Him (Matt 3:14). Second, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His unique messianic role in fulfillment of prophecy (Luke 4:18–21; Acts 10:38). Third, judging from other actions of Jesus as prophetic "signs," ranging from miraculous healings and casting out demons to cleansing the temple,<sup>4</sup> His baptism may prefigure His death and resurrection, as His references to a future "baptism" (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50) and "the sign of Jonah" suggest (Matt 12:39–41).

Nevertheless, as with other aspects of His life, the very fact that Jesus was baptized seems designed to set an example for believers in Him to follow, because both His positive teaching and His practice highlight baptism (being "born of water") as a necessary qualification for entering the kingdom of God (John

3:5). Soon after being baptized, Jesus authorized His disciples to baptize (John 3:26; 4:1–3) and, after His resurrection, He commanded the apostles to baptize His followers (Matt 28:19). Baptism even seems to be a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16).<sup>5</sup> These are some of the reasons why understanding and accepting Jesus' teaching and choosing to be baptized is necessary for church membership (1 Cor 12:13).

Christ's baptism is also instructive for believers in another way. It shows the close connection that exists between Christian baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus places the need to be born of the Spirit on the same level as water baptism (John 3:5)—both are essential, but they are also distinct.<sup>6</sup> Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit marks such an important change in a person's life that Jesus describes it as being “born again” (John 3:3) and turning “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). However, He also distinguishes water baptism from being born of the Spirit and seems not to have equated the two, in agreement with His prioritization of inner righteousness over external religious practices (e.g., Mark 7:1–23; Matt 6:1–18; 23:16–26). Paul explicitly identifies baptism as symbolic of the death and resurrection of Jesus *and* a life-changing experience. It marks one's death to sin, burial with Christ, and resurrection to a new life (Rom 6:1–7; Col 2:12–13). It is a vivid picture of “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5), and the means whereby a person is united to the body of Christ, which is His church (1 Cor 12:12–14; Gal 3:27–28; Eph 1:22–23; 2:16).<sup>7</sup>

While water baptism and a changed life are closely associated with each other, nowhere in the New Testament is baptism said to *cause* this inner change. As we have seen, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles called people to repentance as the initial step in turning (or returning) to God. And they apparently refused to baptize those whose lives showed no outward evidence of repentance (Matt 3:7–9; Luke 3:7–14; Acts 10:47). Baptism by immersion in water<sup>8</sup> vividly depicts the change in a person's life wrought by the Holy Spirit as they respond to this call. It is the outward sign of an inwardly repentant heart (1 Pet 3:21; Col 2:11–12), an inward change that is also described as being “sealed” by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30; cf. Rom 4:11). Thus, the apostles urged people to repent, be baptized, and promised them: “you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). All who receive the Holy Spirit receive it as a *gift*—a gift that can only be given by God Himself. Human beings are simply the means God uses to communicate the good news of salvation by faith to people—which leads to their repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. These elements belong together in the process of salvation. Important as the outward act of baptism is, it cannot *by itself* be efficacious for salvation. Rather, it is the seal of and public witness to the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life (Acts 10:47–48).

At the same time, although the biblical ordinance

of baptism is as necessary now as circumcision was for a previous era of believers, it is important to remind ourselves that the outward sign of baptism is of little value without the inward change it is supposed to represent (1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15).<sup>9</sup> Both John the Baptist and Jesus condemned a focus on forms of religious practice without the corresponding heart change that these practices represented (e.g., Matt 3:7–10; 6:5, 16; 23:25–28).<sup>10</sup> Just as unrepentant Jews could be “uncircumcised in heart” (Lev 26:41; Jer 9:26; Acts 7:51), so baptized Christians could in reality be “*false* brothers” (Gal 2:4) and even “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:18).

### The Laying on of Hands and the Gift of the Spirit

Turning to another New Testament religious practice, both Jesus and the apostles are described as laying their hands on people in various settings and for a variety of reasons. Often it had no necessary connection with inward change or obvious relation to the gift of the Holy Spirit:

- Jesus sometimes laid hands on people to heal them (Mark 6:5; 8:23, 25; Luke 4:40), as would His followers (Mark 16:18; Acts 28:8).
- Jesus laid His hands on children to bless them (Matt 19:13–15).
- The apostles appointed seven individuals by means of prayer and the laying on of hands for the work of ministering to people's material needs (Acts 6:1–6).<sup>11</sup>
- After fasting and prayer, the church in Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabas as missionaries by the laying on of hands, and sent them on their missionary journey (Acts 13:1–3).
- Paul instructs Timothy regarding the selection of elders not to lay hands on anyone hastily (1 Tim 5:22).

Only three New Testament passages explicitly refer to the Holy Spirit being given in connection with the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17–18; 9:17; 19:6). As a close examination of the larger context of these verses will make clear, these were unique, exceptional, and unrepeatable cases that necessitated the laying on of hands and should not be used as a model for ministry today.<sup>12</sup> As one seasoned New Testament researcher has observed, “there should be little doubt that it is normal in Luke's eyes for all believers to receive the gift of the Spirit at conversion and that it is considered anomalous when this does not happen.”<sup>13</sup>

### Acts 8:17–18

Philip's preaching of the gospel in the city of Samaria led many to believe and be baptized, including Simon Magus (Acts 8:5–13). When word reached Jerusalem that “Samaria had received the word of God,” Peter and John were sent there to help and follow up the work being done by Philip (Acts 8:14).<sup>14</sup> As the text indicates, the Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Spirit when they were baptized (Acts 8:16). It underscores the exceptional nature of this situation

with the words “not yet” (*oudepō*) and “only” (*monon*). So the apostles “laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:17).<sup>15</sup> No explanation for this action is given but there are some hints as to the reason.

First of all, it is important to recognize that the preaching of the gospel in Samaria represents a major mission advance by the early church in harmony with the instructions given them by Jesus before His ascension to heaven (Acts 1:8).<sup>16</sup> In addition, and more significantly, the text uses an unusual expression in describing the fact that the Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit: “for he [the Spirit] *had not yet fallen* on any of them” (Acts 8:17, emphasis supplied). The Greek word translated “fallen” (*epiptō*) refers to the giving of the Holy Spirit on only three occasions. This is the first of the three. The second is in reference to the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles who gathered at Cornelius’ house to hear Peter’s preaching (Acts 10:44). The third and final reference is contained in Peter’s description of this event to some in the Jerusalem church—that “the Holy Spirit fell on them *just as on us at the beginning*” (Acts 11:15, emphasis supplied)—referring to the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–8). In other words, the three stages in preaching the gospel to the world indicated in Acts 1:8—first to Jews, then to Samaritans, and, finally, to the Gentiles—is marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> This outpouring on the Samaritans occurred sometime after they were baptized. In the case of the Gentiles, however, the Holy Spirit was poured out beforehand (Acts 10:44). In both cases the sanction of the church through the apostles on the expanding mission features prominently.<sup>18</sup> It is important to notice that there is no clear pattern in the gift of the Holy Spirit in relation to baptism and the laying on of hands. The situations are unique and exceptional in their own way.

### Acts 9:17

Following his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul (who prior to Acts 13:9 is referred to by his Jewish name “Saul”), was brought into connection with the early church through the ministry of Ananias, who had been instructed in a vision to go to him (Acts 9:10–16). As with the Samaritans’ conversion, the seal of Christ’s church was to be placed on the conversion and baptism of Saul.<sup>19</sup> The text describes Ananias “laying his hands on him” (*epitheis ep auton tas cheiras*) and saying, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17). As a result, “something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). The text is not clear as to whether the act of Ananias in laying his hands on Saul effected the regaining of sight, being filled with the Holy Spirit, or both. From verse 12, it might be concluded that only healing was accomplished by this. However, the Greek

text makes no distinction between Saul regaining his sight and being filled with the Spirit. In fact, the syntactical parallelism of the two verbs (*anablepēs kai plēsthēs*) following a conjunction of purpose (*hopōs*) suggests that both results stemmed from Ananias laying his hands on him. Note this vivid description given by Ellen G. White: “In Christ’s stead Ananias touches the eyes of Saul, that they may receive sight. In Christ’s stead he places his hands upon him, and, as he prays in Christ’s name, Saul receives the Holy Ghost.”<sup>20</sup> Even though the reception of the Spirit coincides with the laying on of hands, it apparently came in response to prayer rather than being caused by the physical act itself of Ananias’ hands being laid on Saul.

### Acts 19:1–7

Acts 19 describes the gospel being brought by Paul to Ephesus, where he stayed more than two years during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:8, 10). Almost immediately, it seems, he met “some disciples” (*tinias mathētas*, Acts 19:1), about twelve in number (Acts 19:7). Most often, when not further qualified, Luke uses the term “disciples” for baptized Christian believers, especially in Acts.<sup>21</sup> However, he does not always use it this way, sometimes referring specifically to disciples of John the Baptist.<sup>22</sup> In view of the context, and the very general phraseology,<sup>23</sup> these Ephesians were, at best, “believers with partial knowledge,”<sup>24</sup> similar perhaps to Apollos (Acts 18:25).<sup>25</sup> Paul seems to recognize that their instruction and/or experience had been inadequate, because he asks: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). As we have seen, ordinarily reception of the Holy Spirit coincides with believing,<sup>26</sup> so this should have been assumed. But their reply—that they had not yet “so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2)—is hardly reassuring.<sup>27</sup> Although John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as the one who would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:7–8), these disciples from Ephesus may not have been present to hear this remark, as they were completely uninformed about Jesus. Thus Paul proceeds to explain how John had urged people to believe in “the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus” (Acts 19:4). It is not necessary to postulate the continuing existence of some first-century sect of Baptist followers in order to suppose that many who had been baptized by John, including these disciples, continued to value the religious instruction and experience thus gained without becoming followers of Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, the Spirit had led these men up to this point; Paul carried the work further by bringing them to a fuller understanding of the gospel of Christ. Their rebaptism by Paul “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5) sets a seal on their Christian commitment. It also provides an important example for believers today in two different ways. First of all, it is important to remember that baptism into Christ constitutes one’s formal acceptance of and entry into the new covenant. Normally, this should not be repeated just as a couple

who enter into marriage would never think to repeat the wedding ceremony.<sup>29</sup> But if a person has had a serious moral fall by walking away from one or more baptismal vows and living a life out of harmony with the new covenant, rebaptism would be appropriate. In such a case, the person by rebaptism makes a public confession that, subsequent to their baptism there had been a rejection of Christ, making necessary this return and reconsecration of one's life to Him. A second reason that a person may want to consider rebaptism is when seeing and embracing a whole new paradigm of truth, as the disciples of John did, leads to such a dramatic life change that rebaptism is deemed appropriate to mark this "new life."<sup>30</sup>

Acts 19 also indicates that "when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them" (Acts 19:6). This concrete manifestation of the Spirit, similar to what the apostles experienced at Pentecost (Acts 2:4, 11) and what the Gentiles experienced through Peter's preaching (Acts 10:46), was for the purpose of building up the church by preaching the gospel, because Luke immediately adds that "they began speaking in tongues and prophesying" (Acts 19:6). The apostles on the day of Pentecost had received these same gifts in order to evangelize the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–8, 16–21) and, later, the Gentiles (Acts 10:44–48; 11:15, 16)—all in fulfillment of prophecy (Joel 2:28–32).<sup>31</sup> This further impartation of the gifts of the Spirit was likewise strategic. The gospel could now be spread more rapidly in Ephesus—which, as a major Roman port and center of trade for both East and West, constituted the most important city of Asia Minor.<sup>32</sup> White indicates that, through the gift of the Spirit, these believers "were enabled to speak the languages of other nations and to prophesy. Thus they were qualified to labor as missionaries in Ephesus and its vicinity and also to go forth to proclaim the gospel in Asia Minor."<sup>33</sup>

### Conclusion

The New Testament consistently associates the gift or work of the Holy Spirit with repentance, conversion, and baptism. As Paul teaches, the Spirit is received through "the hearing of faith" (Gal 3:2). This is evident in the conversion of Paul, of the Samaritans, of Cornelius and his household, and of other Gentile believers, all of whom gave evidence of having already received the Spirit before they were baptized. While the Holy Spirit empowers individuals for specific ministries, this is distinct from the work of the Spirit at conversion. The apostles, for example, seem to have received successive endowments of the Spirit for different purposes. Before His ascension, Jesus imparts to them the Spirit and instructs them regarding their future duties in establishing and solidifying the young church (John 20:21–23).<sup>34</sup> At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out for preaching the gospel to all nations in fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18; Acts 1:8). In Acts 4 it was to preach more boldly in the face of persecution.<sup>35</sup>

Acts describes a similar outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Samaritans through prayer and the laying on of hands by Peter and John. In the case of Paul, he not only regained his sight through the laying on of hands by Ananias, but it was also an important step in his being accepted into Christian fellowship and his reception of the Holy Spirit for the Gentile ministry to which God had called him (Acts 9:15; cf. 22:21; 26:17). This was true, too, of the Ephesian believers who responded to Paul's teaching about Jesus by being rebaptized. Their deepening experience and reception of the Spirit's gifts through the laying on of hands opened doors for them to have a more effective witness in the important city of Ephesus.

In summary, while the gift of the Spirit is closely linked with baptism, which is the outward sign of its reception, this gift is always bestowed by God Himself. Also, with regard to the outpouring of the Spirit, there is no clear pattern as to whether it precedes or follows baptism. On the three occasions when the Holy Spirit was poured out on human beings through the laying on of hands, we have found that these were unique, exceptional instances. Textual indicators point to the uniqueness of each occasion and the unrepeatable nature of the event. Therefore, we should not think that through the laying on of hands, whether before or after their baptism, the Holy Spirit can be given. To the contrary, the Spirit is normally at work in a person as soon as he or she understands and believes the gospel, and is willing to receive this gift, independent of the action of other human beings. Finally, as this study indicates, before Seventh-day Adventist ministers present individuals to the congregation as candidates for baptism and church membership, care should be taken to ensure that they have been thoroughly instructed and show evidence of conversion and the gift of the Spirit in their lives (see Matt 7:18–20; 2 Tim 4:1–5).<sup>36</sup> It is the Spirit who apportions gifts "to each one individually as *He* wills" (1 Cor 12:11, emphasis supplied). Ministers are simply God's instruments to facilitate this work.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1950); G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962); James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970); Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 83–198; Craig S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997); Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "Baptismal Instruction in the New Testament and Other Related Issues," <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org>.

org/materials/church/baptismal-instruction-new-testament-and-other-related-issues (accessed January 11, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> All Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version. Debate concerning the nature and significance of the baptism administered by John, present already in the time of Jesus (Mark 11:30–33), continues unabated, on which see Bruce Chilton, “Yohanan the Purifier and His Immersion,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 14 (1998): 197–212; also Werner Bieder, “βαπτίζω, βάπτισμα, etc.” *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:193.

<sup>3</sup> See Wilson Paroschi, “Acts 19:1–7 Reconsidered in Light of Paul’s Theology of Baptism,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 47/1 (2009): 94–95, describing the distinctiveness of the post-Pentecost Christian baptism as introducing “an important ecclesiological emphasis” that includes “baptism in the name of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit” (p. 95).

<sup>4</sup> See Morna D. Hooker, *The Signs of a Prophet: The Prophetic Actions of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1997); also Clinton Wahlen, “Healing,” *DJG*<sup>2</sup>, 362–370; idem, “The Temple in Mark and Contested Authority,” *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 248–267.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that salvation is impossible without being baptized. Some, like the thief on the cross (Luke 23:40–43), would undoubtedly have been baptized had they had the possibility; others would be baptized if only they could hear the gospel and be called upon to do so (Rom 10:14; cf. 2:14–16).

<sup>6</sup> Jesus refers to being born (lit. “begotten”) “out of [ex] water” (baptism) and being begotten “of the Spirit” (conversion) as two separate but essential events (John 3:5).

<sup>7</sup> Further on the meaning of Christian baptism, see Rolf J. Pöhler, “Die theologische Bedeutung der Taufe und ihre Implikationen nach dem Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments,” in *Die Taufe: Theologie und Praxis*, ed. Roberto Badenas (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, 2002), 165–176.

<sup>8</sup> This is what the Greek word *baptō* means, from which “baptize” and “baptism” derive (Albrecht Oepke, “βάπτω, βαπτίζω κτλ,” *TDNT* 1:529–546).

<sup>9</sup> Like baptism for New Testament believers, the “sign of circumcision” (Rom 4:11) was, for Old Testament believers, to be an outward indication of an inward “circumcision of the heart” (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:29) or “seal” of the gift of righteousness that one receives “by faith” (Rom 4:11).

<sup>10</sup> See Clinton Wahlen, “Lessons from Matthew 3,” in this issue of *Reflections*.

<sup>11</sup> It is natural to connect the actions of praying and laying hands on the seven with the nearest subject, namely, “the apostles,” thereby providing confirmation by the leadership of the seven chosen by the congregation, though the Greek allows for the possibility of their having been set apart by the whole congregation (see, e.g., Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts Paideia* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008], 84). However, in addition to the grammatical considerations already mentioned, the larger context of the chapter (esp. vv. 2–3) and the authority Luke consistently ascribes to the apostles also makes this suggestion unlikely.

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Rodríguez, “Baptismal Instruction”: “The few cases where it was performed are very peculiar and should not be used to universalize the practice.”

<sup>13</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 177.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 106.

<sup>15</sup> Simon’s perception of this phenomenon as indicative

of some special power or ability to impart the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands that could be purchased with money (v. 18) need not detain us as his understanding was clearly misguided (vv. 20–23).

<sup>16</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and in the Fathers* (London: Longmans, 1951), 70.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 383: “We may say that there is a Jewish Pentecost, a Samaritan Pentecost, and a Gentile Pentecost.” The absence of the Greek article in Acts 8:15, 17 (*pneuma hagion*) is unremarkable as it is regularly absent following a preposition (e.g., Acts 1:2, 5), when describing the Spirit coming upon human beings (e.g., Acts 2:4; 4:8; 9:17), or when assimilated to an anarthrous noun (e.g., Rom 15:13, 19). See *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, eds. Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Friedrich Rehkopf, 14th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), §257 and n. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 515.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 122: “Thus Jesus gave sanction to the authority of His organized church and placed Saul in connection with His appointed agencies on earth. Christ had now a church as His representative on earth, and to it belonged the work of directing the repentant sinner in the way of life.”

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:10, 19.

<sup>22</sup> It is used in Luke’s Gospel for disciples of John the Baptist (5:33; 7:18; 11:1), the Pharisees (5:33), pre-Christian followers of Jesus (6:1, 13, 17, 20), and generically of any teacher’s pupil (6:40). In Acts 9:25, “his disciples” refers to Paul’s “sympathizers” (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954], 204), while in Acts 20:29–30, Paul warns of “fierce wolves” and men from among the Ephesian believers themselves “speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

<sup>23</sup> The indefinite pronoun *tis* (some) approximates the force of an indefinite article (H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, [Toronto, Ontario: The MacMillan Company, 1955], §145) and “is used to introduce a member of a class without further identification” (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 347).

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues: Biblical Speaking in Tongues and Contemporary Glossolalia* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1991), 99.

<sup>25</sup> This would help to explain why Luke interrupts Paul’s travel narrative at this point. On the connection of Acts 18:24–28 with 19:1–7, see Paroschi, “Acts 19:1–7 Reconsidered,” 93–94. There is no necessity, however, as Paroschi supposes (following the suggestion of C. K. Barrett), that Paul’s understanding of the necessity of rebaptism was substantially different from that of Aquila and Priscilla since they obviously worked closely together over an extended period of time (Acts 18:18; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19).

<sup>26</sup> The syntax of this question in Greek suggests the same. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934), 861, 1113, identifies this usage as “the aorist participle of simultaneous action,” indicating that it almost always occurs when the verb comes first (as in 19:2, *elabete pisteusantes*).

<sup>27</sup> The difficulty is not with the question itself because these

disciples were clearly already deficient or Paul would not have questioned them as he did. A variant reading eliminating the problem and, therefore, clearly secondary appears in a few Western manuscripts (P<sup>38, 41</sup> D) and versions: “We have not even heard that some are receiving the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Paroschi, “Acts 19:1–7 Reconsidered,” 86, who admits the possibility but dismisses it in the case of Apollos and these disciples, choosing to suppose that “at some point in Jesus’ lifetime” they became Christians but then “lost contact with the Jesus movement in Palestine and missed out on the Good Friday/Easter events” (p. 92).

<sup>29</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th ed. (2016), 50: “A member whose spiritual experience has become cold needs a spirit of repentance which leads to revival and reformation. This experience will be followed by participation in the communion service to signify renewed cleansing and fellowship in the body of Christ, making rebaptism unnecessary.”

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 49. Rebaptism in no way impugns the significance of one’s prior baptism.

<sup>31</sup> Hasel, *Speaking in Tongues* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Recognizing its strategic importance for the spread of the gospel, Paul spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). By the time John wrote the book of Revelation there were churches well established throughout the western part of Asia Minor (see Rev 2–3).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA, Pacific Press, 1940), 805.

<sup>35</sup> Further, see Clinton Wahlen, “Pentecostal Power: Basic Lessons in Spirit-Driven Growth,” November 18, 2010, 14–16, <http://archives.adventistreview.org/article/3913/archives/issue-2010-1537/pentecostal-power> (accessed January 22, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> See *Church Manual*, 44.

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# Scientific Revolutions

By L. James Gibson

Occasionally, the scientific community rejects an idea that was previously widely accepted and replaces it with a new idea, which becomes the current consensus. This rapid change in scientific opinion is known as a “scientific revolution.”

These revolutions do not come easily because science is widely regarded as the most reliable, or even the only, pathway to truth. When an idea is said to be “unscientific,” this is generally interpreted to mean it is unreliable at best, and dangerously wrong at worst. In contrast, to describe a statement as “scientific” usually means it is believed to be true.

The high epistemological value placed on science is understandable but unwise. It is understandable because science has made discoveries that have been used in technologies to make our lives more comfortable and enable us to pursue learning and pleasure to an extent far greater than in the past. We are all grateful for the benefits received from scientific discovery. However, it is unwise to uncritically accept the pronouncements of “scientists” as though they are empirically confirmed, for at least two reasons. First, it is unwise because the prestige of science is often exploited by materialists to promote personal agendas with destructive outcomes. Second, the history of science tells us that scientists are often wrong, as seen in the occasional scientific revolution. This essay will focus on the latter phenomenon—revolutions in science.

Although not adequately appreciated in the popular press, many of those who study the history of science have come to see it more as a human enterprise than an application of pure reason. A major factor in this view was the publication of the book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962, and more widely in the 1970 revision of the book.<sup>1</sup> In this book, Thomas Kuhn proposed that science is normally carried on as individuals seek application of general principles to more and more situations. Anomalies occur occasionally, but are ignored until they accumulate and people notice that there is a problem with the reigning paradigm. Attention is then focused on the anomalies, the paradigm is challenged and may be overthrown and replaced by a new paradigm. When this happens, a scientific revolution has occurred. Acceptance of a new paradigm may involve conversion of scientists, but often has to wait until the old guard dies out and is replaced by younger scientists who grew up with the new idea. In other words, new ideas are often accepted due to an influx of new people rather than by changing people’s opinions.

## The Scientific Revolution<sup>2</sup>

The first scientific revolution was the development of scientific methodology, utilizing experiment, mathematical analysis, and testing. This revolution transformed the study of the natural world from an

exercise in cataloguing to an attempt to describe nature in mechanical terms and to make predictions. Key developments in this revolution were the application of mathematics to objects in motion by Galileo and Newton in the seventeenth century, and Harvey's discovery of capillaries in the human body. Methodological developments were accompanied by formation of scientific societies with official journals, thus establishing a scientific community for the first time. This, the first scientific revolution, laid the foundation for the methodology and philosophy of modern science, and may rightly be called *the* scientific revolution.

The practice of science has expanded greatly since the original scientific revolution, and the term "revolution" has been applied<sup>3</sup> to certain structural changes in the way scientific findings are funded and communicated. However, I prefer to apply the term "revolution" in a Kuhnian sense, that is, to relatively abrupt and radical changes in the way nature is understood. These are conceptual revolutions rather than sociological revolutions.

### **Conceptual Revolutions in "the" Scientific Revolution**

Several different conceptual revolutions contributed to "the scientific revolution." Chief among them were the contributions of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), René Descartes (1596–1650), William Harvey (1578–1657), and Isaac Newton (1643–1727). The first of these was the "Copernican Revolution," which radically changed our view of the place of the earth. Previously, the earth had been regarded as the center of the solar system, in a scheme formalized by Claudius Ptolemy in the second century, A.D. Unfortunately, the Christian church incorporated Ptolemy's scheme into church dogma, using Biblical texts to attempt to support it. Copernicus proposed a different scheme in which the sun is the center of our solar system. The new view was vigorously opposed by the church, but eventually prevailed under the influence of Galileo and others. The Copernican revolution changed the public perception of humanity's place in the universe from the center to the periphery, with corresponding changes in our relationship to God. It was truly a revolutionary idea.

René Descartes is credited with advances in mathematics and philosophy that produced a revolution in science. Descartes developed a system of mathematical graphing we still call "Cartesian coordinates," which transformed mathematics, led to the development of general algebra, and enabled Newton to develop the calculus. Descartes also advocated a "mechanical philosophy," which eschewed teleology in favor of a reductionist approach involving only matter and motion. Descartes' influence was a major factor in the secularization of science, changing the scientific viewpoint from seeing the world as the handiwork of God to the point where LaPlace famously quipped to Napo-

leon, "I have no need of that hypothesis," meaning he intentionally left God out of his thinking in trying to explain the formation of the solar system.

William Harvey showed that the blood circulated in a single system linking the heart with the rest of the body, rather than being supernaturally moved by God. He accomplished this by meticulous dissection and study of the blood vessels and heart, and by direct measurement of the capacity of the heart, not only of humans, but also of sheep and dogs. Harvey's application of experiment and observation, and especially his emphasis on quantitative measurements, transformed biology from a purely descriptive endeavor largely based on ancient authorities to an experimental science based on careful observation and measurement. The discovery that blood is pumped through the body by a mechanical heart removed the need for supernatural cause of blood flow and helped bring biology into the realm of quantitative science.

Isaac Newton's work was the capstone on the scientific revolution. Newton's major contribution was the mathematization of physics. He developed the calculus and applied it to the study of motion. He developed generalized laws of motion, including curved motion, wave motion, and pendulums. His most dramatic contribution was the discovery and quantification of the force of gravity. He applied this to develop a model of the universe in which the planets and other heavenly bodies were guided in their orbits by gravitational forces. He also explained the tides as the result of gravitational forces of the sun and moon. In developing his model of a "clockwork universe," Newton transformed the common perception of cause of the motion of the planets and stars. Previously, this was explained by the direct activity of God; now it was explained by the natural law of gravity.

The scientific revolution permanently changed the way we view our world. Before the revolution, nature was seen as the handiwork of God, and was studied mostly by clergymen. After the revolution, nature was seen as autonomous, and was studied mostly by professional scientists, many of whom were deists who believed God had no interaction with the universe. This view of nature as independent of any outside influence, dominant for the past two or three centuries, is itself under attack today as science continues to uncover the precise structure and complexity of the universe and the living organisms that inhabit it. Perhaps we are on the threshold of a new scientific revolution in which the reality of the supernatural is recognized. If so, it would be one more example in a list of revolutions in science.

### **Revolutions in the Life Sciences**

The life sciences have experienced fewer revolutions than the physical sciences. The first major revolution in the biological sciences was initiated by William Harvey, as noted above. The next revolution was the Darwinian Revolution, which in

some ways has had greater impact than any other scientific revolution. Darwin (1809–1882) published his famous theory in 1859, with an almost immediate effect. Opposition was swift and strong but was mostly expressed as opposition to the implication that humans descended from apes rather than focusing on the evidence Darwin used. Darwin's friends occupied positions of power and influence and used them effectively to neutralize opposition and to give evolutionary theory a prominent place. Darwin's arguments contained significant flaws, and the theory went into decline after the deaths of himself and his supporters. It was resurrected and strengthened during the 1930s and 1940s, and is now the standard view, although it appears ripe for replacement through another scientific revolution. Darwinism may be the only paradigm in science whose believers often actively persecute dissenters from the theory. The revolutionary nature of Darwin's theory was due to its central thesis that living organisms evolved without any divine activity or purpose. This view is in direct contradiction to the general belief that our lives have purpose and are influenced by divine Providence.

Experimental refutation of the theory of spontaneous generation could be considered another revolution in biology, although a form of the theory is still advocated today. From the ancient Romans until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, people widely believed that living organisms could form from decaying material. Frogs were thought to come from mud, mice from moldy grain, flies from decaying meat, etc. Francesco Redi (1626–1697) challenged this belief in what may well be the first scientific experiment. Redi showed that flies do not grow in decaying meat unless the meat is accessible to other flies. This convinced most people that ordinary, visible organisms do not come into existence by spontaneous generation, but most still believed that microorganisms could. Lazzaro Spallanzani (1729–1799) performed a similar experiment that cast doubt on the spontaneous generation of microorganisms from soup, but the experiment was not conclusive. Finally in 1862, Louis Pasteur (1822–1895) was awarded a prize by the French Academy of Science for his famous experiment in which he showed that microorganisms come from other microorganisms and not from spontaneous generation. Pasteur's experiments overturned the previous theory that living organisms can arise from non-living material and showed that living organisms come from other living organisms. Modern evolutionists appeal to gaps in our knowledge to justify continued belief in spontaneous generation of the first living organism, but this is driven by philosophical biases rather than on scientific evidence.

There are few other developments in biology that could be considered as revolutions. Most developments in biology have come about stepwise, as new discoveries accumulate. Among the major advances are: the discovery of the cellular nature of life; the

distinction of the germline cells and the soma; the germ theory of disease; and the particulate nature of heredity. The discovery of the DNA double helix is a candidate for a revolution. This discovery changed biology from primarily an organismal approach to a chemical approach and ushered in the age of molecular biology. Many other factors contributed to this transformation, but discovery of the structure of DNA seems to be the key that opened the way for the larger changes.

### **Revolutions in Earth Sciences**

Charles Lyell (1797–1875) is responsible for a revolution in the earth sciences. Lyell strongly opposed the catastrophism of his day and promoted the idea of stability of the earth over long ages of time. This is known as the principle of uniformitarianism. Lyell was opposed by the scriptural geologists and others who held that at least parts of the geological record were produced in the Biblical flood. Through force of argument and political affiliations, Lyell's views became dominant, and catastrophism was banned, at least temporarily, from the study of earth history.

A second revolution in geology occurred in the 1960s, with acceptance of the theory of plate tectonics. Several scientists contributed to the new theory. Among these the key contribution may have been Harry Hess's 1962 publication of the idea that the earth's crust might be made of movable plates. Other evidence seemed to corroborate this idea, and the idea of a stable, unmoving crust was quickly replaced by the idea of a dynamic, mobile crust made of separate pieces, or plates. This represented a major change from the views of Lyell and opened the way for a reconsideration of catastrophism.

The re-emergence of catastrophism was another major revolution in earth sciences. The revolution began in earnest with the 1980 publication of Walter Alvarez and others, which appealed to extraterrestrial impacts as a major factor in earth history. Subsequent exploration has identified nearly 200 impact craters and confirmed the role of global catastrophes in earth history. An ongoing controversy rages over the relationship of impacts and mass extinctions. Other types of catastrophes have been identified or postulated, including massive volcanism, release of methane from the sea floor, and nearby supernovas. Recognition of catastrophes of global scale has transformed our view of earth history from a relatively quiet past to a dynamic history punctuated by numerous world-wide catastrophes, producing mass extinctions, and major geographical changes.

### **Revolutions in Physical Sciences**

Scientific revolutions are best known among the physical sciences. The work of Lavoisier (1743–1794) on combustion resulted in replacement of the phlogiston theory with a theory involving the action of oxygen. This breakthrough can be considered a scientific revolution and initiated further discoveries in chemistry.

James Clerk Maxwell (1831–1879) was able to discover and quantify the links between electricity, magnetism, and light. He showed that light is a form of electromagnetism. His discoveries united phenomena that were previously regarded as unrelated and expressed the relationship quantitatively in a famous series of equations. Maxwell’s work is considered the most important development in physics during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and foundational to the new ideas that would arise in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Several developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century combined to overturn the view of “clockwork nature” that dominated science since the time of Newton. The contributors to this new revolution in physics included Albert Einstein (1879–1955), Niels Bohr (1885–1962), Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976), and Kurt Gödel (1906–1978).

Albert Einstein proposed the theory of general relativity, in which time is relative to the velocity of the observer, mass varies with velocity of the object, and gravity is regarded as a result of curvature of space-time by the presence of matter. Einstein’s revolution was to change our perception of time and space from being fixed to being variable in nature. He also changed our perception of matter and energy being distinct phenomena, showing they are interchangeable.

Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr played a central role in the development of quantum mechanics theory. Heisenberg determined that one cannot know both the position and momentum of a subatomic particle, a rule known as the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. Bohr studied the energy levels of electrons in atoms and proposed that they can take only certain values rather than any intermediate value. He also proposed the principle of complementarity, which states that a subatomic particle may have both wave-like and particle-like properties, but both cannot be observed at the same time. The theory of quantum mechanics includes the conclusion that matter can in an indeterminate state until it is observed, the resulting state will depend on what type of observation is made, and we cannot observe all aspects of a particle at one time.

Gödel is known for his incompleteness theorem, which showed mathematically that we cannot prove anything significant without making unprovable as-

sumptions. This came at a time when other mathematician-philosophers were searching for a philosophical basis for certainty. Gödel proved mathematically, not only that attempts to derive mathematical certainty had not been successful, but that they could not, even in theory, be successful. Gödel’s incompleteness theorem had enormous consequences for the philosophy of science, and helped scientists recognize that absolute proof is unattainable.

All these developments together have contributed to a new view of the universe. Rather than being static, clock-like and deterministic, the universe is now seen as being dynamic, contingent, and probabilistic. This change has produced corresponding changes in philosophy and even in popular culture.

### Conclusions

Among the fallout from these various scientific revolutions has come the realization that science is not a straight pathway to total reality and truth, but involves numerous tentative conclusions, reversals of opinion, and inherent uncertainty. Its utility is not that it is always true, but that it is useful and leads to further discovery. Accordingly, science is properly respected but not unconditionally trusted. Ideas that everyone “knows” to be true may not be true at all, as is seen in the numerous cases of scientific revolutions. Christian faith must reckon with scientific arguments, but it must not sacrifice its own integrity on the unstable altar of “science du jour.” There is more to be learned, even by science.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> This and the next section are based largely on I. B. Cohen, *Revolution in Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> See Cohen, *ibid.*

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“Never give up your faith and hope in God. Cling to the promises. Do not trust in your feelings, but in the naked Word of God. Believe the assurances of the Lord. Take your stand upon the plain “Thus saith the Lord,” and rest there, feeling or no feeling. Faith is not always followed by feelings of ecstasy, but “hope thou in God.” Trust fully in Him...”

Ellen Gould White, *The Upward Look* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 176.

# Lessons from Matthew 3

By Clinton Wahlen

All four gospels introduce Jesus' ministry with the work of John the Baptist (cf. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:2–3; John 1:6–7). He is mentioned as baptizing in a wide area that included “the wilderness of Judea” (Matt 3:1), “all the region around the Jordan” (Luke 3:3), and “Bethabara beyond the Jordan” (John 1:28). His wide and growing influence apparently aroused the concern of the authorities in Jerusalem (Matt 3:7; John 1:19, 24). According to Josephus, John was attracting such large crowds that Herod Antipas feared his influence over the people and eventually arrested him (*Ant.* 18.118). Matthew, like the other gospels, identifies the beginning of Jesus' ministry with His baptism by John.

## Structure of the Chapter

The account of John's preaching and his baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3 may be divided into three parts: the message and work of John the Baptist (Matt 3:1–6), the rebuke of Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 3:7–12), and the baptism and identity of Jesus (Matt 3:13–17).

The first section describes John's prophetic ministry as a fulfillment of Isaiah 40, modeled after Elijah, and impacting all Israel. In the central section, John delineates two classes within Israel: trees bearing good fruit, later described as “wheat,” and trees cut down and thrown into the fire—“chaff” to be burned up with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:10, 12). These two bracketing references to fire serve to guide the central occurrence of this word in the saying of John about the Coming One (Matt 3:11). The third section acts as a transition in Matthew from John's ministry to that of Jesus and contains a threefold witness as to who Jesus is. First, John recognizes Jesus as the one who will baptize in a greater way than him (Matt 3:14). Next Jesus' identity is revealed visibly with the dove descending on Him. Finally, it is revealed audibly with a voice from heaven acknowledging Him as “My beloved Son” (Matt 3:16–17). Not only has John prepared the way for Jesus—Heaven has too.

## Interpretation of the Chapter

### Verses 1–6

- Isaiah 40:3 (quoted in Matt 3:3) is taken from the chapter that begins the second major part of Isaiah, in which the predominant themes are Israel's restoration, God's reign, and salvation. Israel's breaking of the covenant resulted in the exile (Jer 31:31–32), so a remnant's “return” to the land implies also a return to covenant righteousness by the people of Israel (Isa

10:21–22). Since to a large degree this has not yet happened, John the Baptist appears.

- John calls for repentance (Matt 3:2) in view of his announcement that God's coming in fiery judgment is imminent (Matt 3:7, 10–12; cf. Isa 40:10). Repentance, in the biblical sense, means more than a change of mind; it is a turning from transgression and turning (or returning) to God. The image of preparing the path for the coming King by smoothing it out and straightening its course illustrates the inward change that the gospel makes which will be evident also on the outside.
- John's appearance is like that of Elijah (Matt 3:4) and Jesus will later identify him as the “Elijah who is to come” (Matt 11:14; Mal 4:5; cf. John 1:21; Luke 1:17). This links his preparatory work with that of the Lord's messenger who would “prepare the way” before Him (Mal 3:1).
- The baptism of John was similar to the ritual washings Jews were familiar with in that it was by immersion (note this ritual use of *baptizō* in Mark 7:4; Luke 11:38).
  - More than 150 ritual baths, constructed in accordance with Jewish standards for total immersion and dating to the first century, have been excavated in Jerusalem alone.
  - Immersion in a moving source of water such as the Jordan was deemed by many Jews to provide the highest level of ritual purification.
- John's baptism also differed from ritual immersions in several important respects:
  - It was a one-time immersion and did not need to be repeated.
  - It was not self-administered but administered by John, which seems to explain his unusual title, “the Baptizer.”
  - It was connected with the confession of sin and was thus to reflect an inner, moral cleansing from impurity rather than the cleansing from ritual impurity necessary for worship and offering sacrifice in the temple.
  - It prefigured Christian baptism “with the Holy Spirit” that would charac-

terize the work of the one who would come after John.

- John's baptism helps us better understand Christian baptism:
  - Christian baptism is also by immersion—John baptized in the Jordan “because there was much water there” (John 3:23). Jesus went into the water and came up out of the water (Matt 3:16), setting an example for His followers.
  - By being “buried” in water and coming up again, Christians identify themselves with Christ by accepting His death in their place, receiving forgiveness for their sins, and expressing faith in His resurrection (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet 3:21).
  - Christian baptism is very significant in that it symbolizes the believer's death to sin and resurrection to a new life in the Spirit (Rom 6:3–4).

#### Verses 7–12

- The Pharisees and Sadducees were rivals and disagreed on many things but they were united in their opposition to John's work, just as later they would unite in opposition to Jesus (Matt 3:10:1, 6, 11–12).
- The Greek expression (“coming for the baptism”) is ambiguous (unlike Matt 3:13) and does not necessarily indicate that these religious leaders came to be baptized. On the other hand, John's rebuke, “Who warned you to flee...” suggests that some of them may have wanted to be baptized but without the corresponding change of heart that baptism implied (see DA 105).
- John calling the Pharisees and Sadducees “vipers” points to their poisonous spiritual influence, similar to the way Philo (commenting on Deut 32:32–33) describes the danger to the soul from “wickedness” by comparing it to the mortal danger posed by venomous snakes: “biting the soul like an asp or a viper, inflicting envenomed wounds, utterly incurable.” (*On Drunkenness*, 223). Like John the Baptist, Jesus calls the Pharisees a “brood of vipers” (Matt 3:12:34; 23:33) and sees beyond their flattery to perceive the “wickedness” of their intentions (Matt 22:18). He also warns his disciples to recognize and beware of the leavening influence of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt 16:6).
- Matthew's placement of this central and longest of the three sections empha-

sizes John's warning about trusting to physical descent from Abraham rather than bearing good fruit, a theme that Jesus will also emphasize (Matt 8:11–12). Israel tended to overlook the conditions of faith and obedience, upon which God's continued blessing on Abraham and His descendants was to be given (Gen 26:3–5; Jer 31:33–37; DA 106). The repeated use of the plural (brood, vipers, children, stones) hints at an impending judgment on the nation and its failed leadership (cf. Matt 21:43).

- Both John and Jesus employ the biblical metaphor of a tree as a symbol of people and fruit as a symbol of works (see Ps 1:3; Isa 1:30; 61:3) to illuminate the coming judgment (Matt 3:10, 12; 7:19). “Not by its name, but by its fruit, is the value of a tree determined. . . . John declared to the Jews that their standing before God was to be decided by their character and their life. Profession was worthless. If their life and character were not in harmony with God's law, they were not His people” (DA 107).
- The “ax . . . laid to the root of the trees” (v. 10) alludes to God's judgment on the nations (Isa 10:33–34; Eze 31:2–18; Amos 2:9) and, specifically, their leaders—including Israel (Isa 10:18–19; Jer 11:16; Ezek 15:6). Based on John's message, Jesus is identified as the one who will bring this judgment (cf. Matt 21:19).
- John's work of baptizing with water was just a shadow of the greater work that Jesus would do as the Messiah, which includes bestowing the gift of the Holy Spirit on His followers. Judging from the context, the baptism of fire refers to the final destruction of the wicked, when God “will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (v. 12; 13:40–42, 49–50, etc.) in “the lake of fire” (Rev 20:9, 14–15; cf. Mal 4:1; 2 Pet 3:5–7)—the likely future for at least some of John's hearers (v. 7).

#### Verses 13–17

- Jesus' approximately seventy-mile journey from Nazareth in Galilee (cf. Matt 3:2:23) to the Jordan for the purpose of being baptized by John (Matt 3:13) shows a conscious awareness of God's will as to how and when His messianic work was to begin (see also Matt 3:15).
- Even before the visible sign of Jesus' identity is given, John discerns the difference in Jesus' character and that He has no need to be baptized (Matt

3:14; DA 110). As in the other gospels Jesus announces that His messianic work *fulfills* prophecy (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:21), so here His baptism is to “*fulfill* all righteousness” (Matt 3:15; cf. 5:17). It foreshadowed His sacrificial death and resurrection and illustrates His full submission to the Father’s will (Mark 10:38; Matt 12:50; 20:18–19, 22).

- After Jesus came *up* from the water, according to Luke, it was as He was praying (Luke 3:21) that the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came *down* like a dove upon Him (Matt 3:16), anointing Him as the Messiah and equipping Him for His ministry (Acts 10:38)—a role that Matthew links here and elsewhere with the Servant of Isaiah (see especially Matt 12:18–21 quoting Isa 42:1–4, and Matt 8:17 quoting Isa 53:4).

### Application of the Chapter

Some lessons that can be drawn from this chapter are:

- It has been said that “God has no grandchildren, only children.” As Adventists, our physical heritage, even if we have

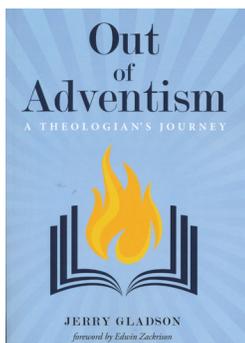
grown up in the church and can trace our Adventist roots back many generations, means nothing without a living and genuine connection with God and His Word.

- While no one can read the heart, the “fruit” we bear—the outward actions and lifestyle changes—indicate whether or not the Holy Spirit is working in our life. One of the reasons for the biblically based lifestyle standards we have as Seventh-day Adventists is as a visible indicator that a person has experienced conversion and is ready for baptism.
- At every step and stage of life, Jesus is the perfect example for us (Matt 10:25; 16:24; 1 Pet 2:21; cf. John 13:15).
- A work similar to that of John the Baptist has been given to God’s last-day people to prepare the world for Christ’s second coming (Matt 24:14; Rev 14:7–12; DA 101).
- John’s warning of judgment is an important encouragement for all of us, especially the leaders of God’s church, to be awake and ready to meet the Coming One at His second advent (Matt 24:44; Luke 18:8; Rom 13:11).

## BOOK NOTES

### Jerry Gladson Out of Adventism: A Theologian’s Journey

(Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017),  
306 pp.  
US\$36.00



The book *Out of Adventism* recounts the painful journey of a former Seventh-day Adventist theologian and teacher, Jerry Gladson, out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Gladson taught at Southern Adventist Missionary College from 1972 to 1987, but was forced to resign over divergent theological views. He later converted to The Disciples of Christ and pastored in various churches. Reading his story reveals a crucial theological trifecta that eventually led to his change of mind and church membership.

#### The Theological Trifecta

In his book Gladson states that early on he always had misgivings about certain Adventist doctrines. While he wanted to remain an Adventist, three things finally forced him to reconsider and led to a break with the Adventist Church: the gospel, Ellen G. White, and prophecy. These foundational subjects led Gladson to the conclusion “that Adventism is simply wrong in several of its core doctrines” (p. 47).

#### Justification by Faith

As in most out-of-Adventism accounts, the gospel, specifically justification

by faith, played a center role in Gladson’s departure. Adventists, as do many conservative Christians who take obedience seriously, have struggled with legalism. White had to deal with the issue in her time, and it apparently was a significant factor for Gladson in the early 1980s when he taught at Southern.

Gladson describes the lack of assurance of salvation that he felt as an Adventist, and then recounts his own discovery of grace (pp. 45–64). His personal soteriological drama unfolded against the background of the Ford-Brinsmead-Paxton controversy of the 1970s–1980s. Gladson seems to give a fairly accurate representation of the issues, even if at times he (as to be expected) puts a negative slant on Adventists and their understanding, or the lack therefore, of justification by faith.

Interestingly Jerry Gladson quotes some of the Adventist Church’s official statements on salvation by grace through Jesus Christ alone and acknowledges that they indeed present “a theology of salvation that is consistent with the common Protestant view of salvation by grace” (p. 82).

Thus, despite his personal struggles, the gospel does not seem to have been the issue that forced him out, even though,

according to his account, it did.

### **The Spirit of Prophecy**

Another crucial point of contention is Ellen G. White. Gladson spends four chapters dealing with the “crisis” surrounding her. His account is fascinating because the issue with her inspiration, the use of sources, etc., exploded during the time of the Desmond Ford crisis.

Even before the controversy with Walter Rhea and others sprang to life, Gladson had expressed his misgivings about White’s ministry and prophetic gift, which only intensified as the controversy accelerated to a full burn. What Gladson writes is not really new. He repeats stories similar to those that Rhea, Canright, Graybill, and Numbers have circulated before. He even spends a couple pages on the epilepsy theory—the argument that her visions resulted from brain damage due to the rock incident when she was a child (p. 132).

Perhaps many Adventists didn’t understand how White’s inspiration worked. One could even argue that the church back then hadn’t necessarily handled the crisis in the best manner possible. And some people undeniably abuse her writings, a problem that she herself had to deal with at times. Gladson seizes on this unfortunate fact, writing about those Adventists who “rate Ellen White equal or superior to the Bible, like the Mormons” (p. 140) even though he concedes that this is not the official church position. Why bring it up, then? An equivalent argument would be that we should dismiss the role of Mary in Scripture because Roman Catholics have venerated her.

It’s kind of ironic, too, that an Old Testament critical scholar like Gladson, who studied the sources of various biblical books, the cultural influence on them and so forth, should find it so disturbing that White used sources. Gladson should have put the issue of inspiration in perspective and moved onto a deeper appreciation of how inspiration worked in general and White and her inspiration in particular. Unfortunately, that’s not how it turned out for him.

### **Historicism versus Preterism**

Early in *Out of Adventism*, Gladson writes the following revealing statement about the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation:

Careful examination convinced me that apocalypses were actual-

ly works of creative imagination. More akin to poetry than prose, they could not legitimately be read as literal predictions and blueprints of the future. . . . They were not road maps of future events predetermined to take place during the course of human history, as I had been taught in Adventism, and on which the denomination stakes its very existence (p. 33).

In short, he rejects the validity of the two books upon which the church, the same entity that employed him to train its ministers, “stakes it very existence (p. 33).” And yet Gladson later claims that his firing was a “witch hunt” (p. 63). “Examining the apocalyptic texts against their cultural background,” he writes, “convinced me that instead of historicism or futurism, a preterist interpretation was most appropriate for apocalyptic” (p. 35). He calls historicism “obsolete,” (p. 84) as if talking about something that is no longer up to date and needed.

Of course, such an understanding of biblical-apocalyptic literature has far-reaching consequences. First of all, the book of Daniel, if its own interpretation is taken seriously, requires a historicist hermeneutic.

Daniel 2 begins in ancient history and follows historical events through the rise and fall of four major kingdoms (Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome) until the end of all earthly kingdoms (Dan 2:44). The chapter starts with Babylon, naming it (Dan 2:38), and ends in the future even from now, when “no trace” (Dan 2:35, NJKV) of any earthly empire remains and God’s eternal kingdom comes into existence: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Dan 2:44, NKJV). The prophecy, which begins in ancient history, follows the flow of history until God’s future kingdom arises. This same pattern, which begin in antiquity and ends in eternity, dominates the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel. And on this idea the historicist hermeneutic is based, the hermeneutic that Gladson explicitly rejects.

Of course, any attack on Adventist prophecy, like Gladson’s, quickly brings

in its wake the alternative of Antiochus Epiphanes IV as central to the preterist interpretation of the little horn of Daniel 7 and the little horn of Daniel 8.

One has to, however, raise a legitimate question: How does Antiochus Epiphanes, who died in 164 BC, fit, as Gladson argues, the little horn power of Daniel 7, whose demise resulted from a heavenly judgment that concludes like this: “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Dan 7:27, NKJV)? How does Antiochus Epiphanes IV be the fulfillment of a kingdom that hasn’t yet been established?

And what about the little horn of Daniel 8 as a fulfillment of Antiochus? This is equally impossible. First comes Media-Persia, described as “great” (Dan 8:4). Next comes Greece, described as “very great” (Dan 8:8). Then comes the final power, the little horn described as “exceeding great” (Dan 8:9). How can the relatively short reign of a relatively minor Seleucid king be depicted as greater than either the massive empires of Media-Persia and Greece? Wouldn’t the empire of Rome, which followed Greece, be a better fit? Of course, and that is the strength of the historicist interpretation.

In Daniel 2, 7, and 8 four world powers (three in Dan 8) dominate the prophecies. Babylon is named in Daniel 2:38. Media-Persia and Greece are named in Daniel 8:20–21. All that’s left is the final power, the one that in Daniel 2, 7, and 8 arises after Greece; that’s depicted as more powerful than the kingdoms (Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece) before it; and that extends to the end of time, when it’s supernaturally destroyed (Dan 2:45; 7:26–27; 8:25). What power arose after Greece, was more powerful than Greece and the kingdoms before it, and still exists, which means it could indeed go to the end of time? Certainly not Antiochus Epiphanes.

If that’s not enough, Jesus (Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14), by referring to “Daniel the prophet,” places the “abomination of desolation” (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) in the context of the Roman Empire—the empire in which the entire New Testament narrative unfolds. And Jesus depicted the

“abomination of desolation” as an event yet future. In other words, Jesus establishes the identity of the final empire in Daniel as Rome, and in so doing debunks Gladson’s preterist interpretation of Daniel in general, and Antiochus Epiphanes in particular.

### Out of Adventism

Much of Gladson’s book deals with his travails at Southern before leaving the school in 1987 and eventually leaving Adventism. Gladson puts his spin on events that are now more than thirty years old, and because many of those whom he depicts are dead, they can’t challenge his version of things. It was, no question, a tense and rather challenging time at Southern.

Something about Gladson’s position raises important questions. He admits not only having serious and significant doubts about several of the church’s “core doctrines,” but even flat out rejects the historicist interpretation upon which the church “stakes its very existence” (p. 33). He also openly admits that he bought into the historical-critical method, the kind of approach that, logically at least, would lead to rejection of foundational teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist church. And yet he complains about being subject to suspicions about his views?

If you believe what the church teaches and you are released of your teaching responsibility, you are indeed treated unfairly. But if you did not believe what the church teaches you shouldn’t have been teaching at church-run schools to begin with. So why complain about being dismissed for views that you really did hold that are out of line with official church teachings and even undermine the theological perspective of the Adventist Church?

Considering his positions on prophecy alone, one wonders whether Gladson should have been teaching Old Testament theology to young Adventists and training students for the Adventist ministry. Even if things might not have always been handled in the best manner, one cannot avoid the conclusion that as a historical-critical preterist who holds views contrary to Adventist teaching, Gladson had to go. And this book, at least from his side, tells the sad story of that inevitable departure.

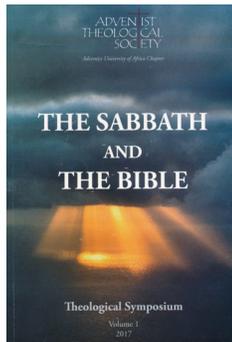
Clifford Goldstein, Editor  
Sabbath School Quarterly

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“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” (2 Tim. 3:13 NKJV)

**Eriks Galeniaks, ed.**  
**The Sabbath and  
the Bible**

Theological Symposium, vol. 1  
(Nairobi, Kenya: Adventist Theo-  
logical Society, Adventist  
University of Africa, 2017),  
141 pp.  
US\$5.00



**T**his is a collection of eight papers covering a number of topics concerning the Sabbath. These papers were presented by different Adventist scholars

at a symposium of the African Adventist Theological Society in May 2017 at the Adventist University of Africa in Kenya.

The first chapter suggests that the Sabbath cannot simply be reduced to a day of rest in the Old Testament. The notion of worship has been inherent in the Sabbath since it was instituted at Creation. Psalm 92, the only Psalm devoted to the Sabbath, makes an explicit connection between the seventh day and the cultic service. So do some of the prophetic writings. Isaiah 66:23 tells us that in the eschatological future all flesh shall come to worship God from one Sabbath to another, and Ezekiel 46:3–4 says that at that time the people of the land shall worship at the temple on Sabbath. Thus rest and worship are two complementary and important aspects of the Sabbath.

The second chapter explores the theological rationale behind the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8–11, the intertextual conceptual links, and the practical implications of keeping the Sabbath holy. Chapter 3 addresses the important question of the relationship between the Sabbath and the feast days in Leviticus 23. Most Christians believe that the Sabbath is one of the feasts of Israel that Christians do not need to keep. Through a close textual study the author shows that the seventh-day Sabbath was not a feast day, or part of the ritual system of ancient Israel. Hence the divinely designed Sabbath that God blessed and sanctified at creation remains binding for Christians.

The fourth chapter is a study of the healing of a sick woman in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath in Luke 13:10–17. It resulted in one of four Sabbath controversies in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus' action reminds us that release from physical and spiritual bondage is compatible with the spirit of the Sabbath. The ethics and sanctity of the Sabbath are not violated by acts of compassion.

Colossians 2:16, the most frequently used New Testament text against the Sabbath, is investigated in chapter 5. The traditional Adventist interpretation that the Greek *sabbata* in this text refers to the

annual Sabbaths of ancient Israel has in recent times been attacked. The author uses semantic studies, exegetical analysis, intertextual associations, and contextual and literary structure arguments to support his conclusion that *sabbata* in Colossians 2:16 does indeed refer to the ceremonial sabbaths, which were fulfilled and thus abrogated by the death of Jesus on Calvary.

Chapter 6 considers the purpose and significance of the biblical Sabbath in the writings of Ellen G. White; and chapter 7 looks at the Sabbath in the ministry of Christ and comments on the eschatological significance of the fourth commandment.

Although chapter seven has a sub-heading called “The Sabbath: An Eschatological Perspective,” there is no mention of the Sabbath as the mark of the beast in Revelation 13, which is an important eschatological aspect of the Sabbath. The African chapter of the Adventist Theological Society is to be commended for publishing the papers of this symposium on the Sabbath.

The last chapter is titled “A Biblical View of Physical Intimacy within Marriage on the Sabbath,” a topic that is hardly ever touched upon in Adventist literature. The author mentions the negative view on physical intimacy in the early church and then goes on to investigate Jewish sources on this issue. The book of *Jubilee* (ca. 100 BC) forbids sexual intercourse on the Sabbath, as do the Dead Sea Scrolls. The rabbinic writings, on the other hand, consider intercourse on Sabbath—that is, Friday night—as a command, and sacred. After considering the biblical role and purpose of physical intimacy, the author concludes that sexual union and the Sabbath are not inimical to each other.

As is often the case, books with multiple authors have some chapters that are stronger than others and a certain amount of repetition seems to be unavoidable when a topic is addressed from various angles. Apart from some typos—for example, the Hebrew word *mo'adim* is spelled backwards (p. 49)—this small volume makes a valuable contribution to the Sabbath literature of the Seventh-day Adventist Church because some of its topics are rarely mentioned in other books about the Sabbath.

Gerhard Pfandl  
Associate Director (ret.)  
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“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” (Exod. 20:8 NKJV)

## Index to *Reflections*

The first issue of *Reflections* was published in January 2003. Since then, we've published many articles.

While it's possible to use Acrobat to simultaneously search all past issues of *Reflections* for one word or phrase, some readers have asked for a formal index. From now on, you will find a pdf index at the end of each newsletter that you can download.

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*Reflections* 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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