

"Watchman, what of the night?"

"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)

The Doctrine of the Incarnation in Adventism 1844 to 1888

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Editor's Preface

The Second chapter of the revised and re-edited manuscript on the history of the doctrine of the Incarnation as taught in Adventism took up the major share of the space in this issue of WVN. This left little room for some thoughts arising from the life and experience of King Manasses of Judah. As noted in the article, he would not have been born had not God reversed the fatal illness which had overtaken Hezekiah. But God did, and He also answered Manasses' prayer from a Babylonian dungeon, even though he had been involved in what we would term Spiritism (II Kings 21:6), and had led Israel into sin equaled only by the inhabitants of the land prior to Israel's deliverance from Egypt (ver. 11).

There are some other thoughts for contemplation. When Manasses returned to Jerusalem, he attempted to turn Judah around even to the extent of issuing a commandment that they should serve "the Lord God of Israel" (II Chron. 33:16). He was followed shortly by Josiah, who also sought to bring about a national reformation (II Kings 23:25). While it is evident that some of the royal family did alter course (Dan. 1:3), yet God declared that even though this were true, His judgment on corporate Judah, because of the sin of Manasses, would not be forgiven (v. 26). Simply stated, there had been no corporate repentance. Not a king who followed Josiah reflected the Divine objectives even with Jeremiah's prophetic ministry in their midst. Corporate repentance seems such an elusive experience for the professed people of God in all ages. Manasses, a sinner above sinners, found the forgiving grace of God. He urged a turn around and yet with God's judgments hanging over Judah they would not respond to the calls of Jeremiah to seek the same grace Manasses had found.



An interpretive history of the doctrine of the Incarnation as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church— 2

II

From 1844 – 1888

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's roots are to be found in the Seventh-month Movement which followed the first disappointment in the Spring of 1844. It, too, ended in a disappointment that Fall on October 22, 1844. The Seventh-month Movement was itself rooted in the Great Second Advent Awakening led by William Miller. Miller had predicted on the basis of his prophetic studies that "sometime between March 21st, 1843, and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come" (Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism*, p. 147).

After the disappointment on March 21, 1844, Miller wanted to tone down the enthusiasm based in time-setting. Many of his followers were not ready to accept his desire to keep the hope of Christ's return as imminent with no date set. He lost control of the movement, and it passed to the leadership of George Storrs and Samuel Snow, who emphasized a limited sanctuary typology in connection with the prophecy of Daniel 8:14. The day for the cleansing of the earthly sanctuary each year was the tenth day of the seventh month. Thus they reasoned that the day for the antitypical cleansing in 1844 would be October 22. It was during the summer of 1844 that the Seventh-month Movement flourished. It was out of the pangs of the disappointment which followed that Seventh-day Adventism was birthed (Arasola, *op. cit.*, p. 90).

Because of his emphasis on prophecy, Miller's doctrinal positions have been given little consideration; however, in 1822 he prepared a "brief statement of faith" composed of twenty articles, one of which was left incomplete. His biographer, Sylvester Bliss, comments that "the last article was thus left incomplete, and the series of articles was not extended, as it was evidently designed to have been, so as to give an expression of his faith on subjects not

included in the foregoing" (Memoirs of William Miller, p. 80). Among the subjects not included in the twenty articles of faith was the doctrine of the Incarnation. This is not to say that Miller overlooked major concepts of theology. He did not. He stated his belief in regard to the Godhead, the substitutionary death of Christ for man, the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, the resurrection, and the free will of man (*ibid.*, pp. 77-80).

Articles Seven, Eight, and Nine of Miller's Statement of Faith are most interesting in the light of the Great Disappointment which engulfed the Movement. In these he declared his belief in Jesus Christ as "an offering to God" and the "sacrifice for sin which justice demanded." Then, in Article Nine, he wrote, "I believe the atonement to be made by the intercession of Jesus Christ, and the sprinkling of His blood in the holy of holies, and upon the mercy-seat and people." Yet with this clear perception between the sacrifice and the ministration of that sacrifice, Miller failed to comprehend the cleansing as it related to Christ's ministry in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly tabernacle. He did not see the two apartments and the antitypical services which they prefigured. To him verily "the door" was shut, and only He who had the "key of David" would open it at the proper time (Rev. 3:7).

While here in America the Advent Movement was very pronounced and more definitely organized than in other countries of the world, nevertheless, during the first decades of the 19th century, "devout men in different lands were simultaneously quickened to search the Scriptures on the subject of the second advent of Christ" (The Midnight Cry, p. 9). In England, one of the men who proclaimed the Second Advent, Edward Irving, did give thought and expression to the subject of the Incarnation. He taught that "Christ took human nature as it was in Adam, not before the Fall, but after the Fall (Strong's Systematic Theology, p. 744), stating "that Christ took our fallen nature, is most manifest, because there was no other in existence to take" (*ibid.*, p. 745). He believed that the "soul" of Christ "did mourn and grieve and pray to God continually, that it might be

delivered from the mortality, corruption, and temptation which it felt in its fleshly tabernacle" (ibid.).

Edward Irving sought to relate the incarnation of Christ to the experience necessary for man to have victory over sin. He conceived of Christ's victory in the flesh as the atonement – the sacrifice at Calvary being merely the offering to God of that humanity which He had cleansed through a life-long struggle with sin. Thus the salvation of man depended upon his participation through faith in the same victory that Christ achieved. He did not understand the ministry of Christ as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. To him the "door" was shut as it was to Miller, and thus he could not properly relate the truth of the Incarnation to the final atonement.

Irving made another mistake in his thinking in regard to the human nature of our Lord. He failed to differentiate between the cultivated sins of man and the inherited tendencies which are common to all man. He lumped the whole and described human nature as "corrupt to the core and black as hell, and this," he said, "is the human nature the Son of God took upon Himself and was clothed with" (Strong, op. cit.). Irving never believed that Christ sinned; but because of this position, he was so charged and defrocked from the ministry by the Presbytery of Scotland. Thus the truth was covered with the zeal of over statement. The doctrine of the Incarnation was to remain muted in the preaching and teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church until 1888.

After the passing of the time in 1844, certain brethren – James White, Joseph Bates, Hiram Edson, Stephen Pierce, and others - who had been involved in the Millerite Movement met together to study the Word of God, and to find answers to the questions that were perplexing them. These week-end gatherings which began in 1848 covered a period of two years and eight months and were known as "Sabbath Conferences" or "1848 Conferences" (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11, pp. 507-8). Evidently, during this time "all the principal points" of the faith were made clear to the minds of those studying together. Emphasis was

given to the understanding of the Scriptures "in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood" (*Special Testimonies, Series B, #2*, p. 57). What all was involved in the study of Christ and "His mission" is not spelled out.

Evidence indicates that little study was given to the doctrine of the Incarnation for in articles written, tracts printed, and books published during the period from 1844 to 1888 the emphasis was on the Sabbath question, the state of man in death, and the sanctuary services. However, in a publication by J. H. Waggoner in 1884 on the atonement is to be found this comment regarding the Incarnation of Christ :

He left that throne of glory and of power and took upon Him the nature of fallen man. In Him were blended "the brightness of the Father's glory" and the weakness of the "seed of Abraham." In Himself He united the Lawgiver to the law-breaker - the Creator to the creature; for He was made "sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (*The Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation*, p. 161).

Ten years prior to this statement in Waggoner's book, James White, in an editorial appearing in the first issue of the *Signs of the Times*, wrote "a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity" believed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Second Article of the "concise statement of the more prominent features of our faith" declared:

That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, and Son of the Eternal Father, the One by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist; that He took upon Him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race; . . . (July 4, 1874).

In 1901, Ellen White would borrow Waggoner's thought and write:

In Christ were united the divine and the human - the Creator and the creature. The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and the nature of Adam the transgressor, meet in Jesus - the Son of God, and the Son of man (Ms. 141, 1901: 7BC:926).

Most of the Statements from 1844-1888 in regard to the human nature which Christ assumed at Bethlehem are to be found in the

early writings of Ellen G. White. These statements are specific and clearly enunciated. The first statement appeared in 1858. In describing the time when Jesus made the announcement of the plan of redemption to the un-fallen angels, she writes that He told them that ---

He would leave all His glory in heaven, appear on earth as a man, humble Himself as a man, become acquainted in His own experience with the various temptations with which men would be beset, that He might know how to succour those who should be tempted (*Spiritual Gifts*, Vol I., p. 24).

This was difficult for the angels to accept, and they offered themselves as substitutes; but Jesus informed them that the life of an angel could not pay the debt for sin. He, however, assured them that they would have a part to play in the plan for man's redemption. Note carefully the words -- what Jesus Himself said would take place:

Jesus also told them that they should have a part to act, to be with Him, and at different times strengthen Him. That *He should take man's fallen nature*, and His strength would not be even equal with theirs (*ibid*, p. 25; emphasis supplied).

In the 1870s as Ellen White began to write more fully on the life and mission of Jesus Christ, comprehensive statements on the Incarnation appeared. Except for two articles on the subject of tithing, all the written material from her pen in the *Review* for the year 1874 was on the subject of the plan of redemption and the temptations of Christ. In these articles the following specific statements are to be found which define the nature of the humanity Christ took upon Himself in becoming man (all emphases are supplied).

The great work of redemption could be carried out *only* by the Redeemer *taking the place of fallen Adam*. . . .

What love! What amazing condescension! The King of glory proposed to *humble Himself to fallen humanity!* He would place His feet in Adam's steps. He would take *man's fallen nature* and engage to cope with the strong foe who (had) triumphed over Adam (*R & H*, Feb. 24, 1874).

The Son of God humbled Himself and *took man's nature after the race had wandered four thousand years from Eden and from the original state of purity and uprightness*. Sin had been making its terrible marks upon the race for ages; and physical, mental, and moral degeneracy prevailed throughout the human family.

When Adam was assailed by the tempter in Eden he was without the taint of sin. He stood in the strength of his perfection before God. All the organs and faculties of his being were equally developed, and harmoniously balanced.

Christ, in the wilderness of temptation, stood in Adam's place to bear the test he failed to endure. Here Christ overcame in the sinner's behalf, four thousand years after Adam turned his back upon the light of his home. Separated from the presence of God, the human family had been departing every successive generation farther from the original purity, wisdom, and knowledge which Adam possessed in Eden. *Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to earth to help man*. In behalf of the race, with the weaknesses of *fallen* man upon him, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed. . . .

In what contrast is the second Adam as He entered the gloomy wilderness to cope with Satan single-handed. Since the fall the race had been decreasing in size and physical strength, and sinking lower in the scale of moral worth, up to the period of Christ's advent to earth. And in order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he was. *He took human nature, and bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race*. *He, who knew no sin, became sin for us*. *He humiliated himself to the lowest depths of human woe*, that he might be qualified to reach man, and bring him up from the degradation in which sin had plunged him (*ibid.*, July 28, 1874).

The humanity of Christ reached to the very depths of human wretchedness, and, identified itself with the weaknesses and necessities of fallen man, while His divine nature grasped the Eternal. . . . Christ's work was to reconcile man to God through His human nature, and God to man through His divine nature (*ibid.*, August 4, 1874).

Because man fallen could not overcome Satan with his human strength, Christ came from the royal courts of Heaven to help him with His human and divine strength combined. Christ knew that Adam in Eden, with his superior advantages, might have withstood the temptations of Satan, and conquered him. He also knew that it is not possible for man,

out of Eden, separated from the light and love of God since the Fall, to resist the temptations of Satan in his own strength. In order to bring hope to man, and save him from complete ruin, He humbled Himself to take man's nature, that, with His divine power combined with the human, He might reach man where he is. He obtains for the fallen sons and daughters of Adam that strength which it is impossible for them to obtain for themselves, that in His name they may overcome the temptations of Satan (*ibid.*, August 18, 1874).

During the first part of the year 1875, the articles from the pen of Ellen White continued to present the temptations of Christ. She commented – “How few can understand the love of God for the fallen race in that He withheld not His divine Son from taking upon Him the humiliation of humanity” (*ibid.*, March 18, 1875). She pointed to the fact that Satan put forth his strongest efforts to overcome Christ on the point of appetite at a time when He was enduring the keenest pangs of hunger. Then she wrote:

The victory gained was designed, not only to set an example to those who have fallen under the power of appetite, but to qualify the Redeemer for His special work of reaching to the very depths of human woe. *By experiencing in Himself* the strength of Satan's temptation, and of human sufferings and infirmities, He would know better how to succour those who should put forth efforts to help themselves (*ibid.*; *emphasis supplied*).

In 1878, Ellen White wrote a letter to a young man setting Christ before him as the “great Exemplar.” She quoted Hebrews 2:17 that “Christ was made like unto His brethren.” Then she commented:

He felt both joy and grief as they feel. His body was susceptible to weariness, as yours. His mind, like yours, could be harassed and perplexed. If you have hardships, so did He. Satan could tempt Him. His enemies could annoy Him. . . . Jesus was sinless and had no dread of the consequences of sin. *With this exception His condition was as yours.* You have not a difficulty that did not press with equal weight upon Him, not a sorrow that His heart has not experienced. His feelings could be hurt with neglect, with indifferences of professed friends, as easily as yours. Is your pathway thorny? Christ's was so in a tenfold sense. Are you distressed? So was He. How well fitted was Christ to be an example! (Letter 17, 1878)

About this time, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, was published. In this volume a specific contrast between man's fallen nature and Christ's humanity is made. Ellen G. White wrote:

Our Saviour identifies Himself with our needs and weaknesses, in that He became a suppliant, a mighty petitioner, seeking from His Father fresh supplies of strength, to come forth invigorated and refreshed, braced for duty and trial. He is our example in all things. He is a brother in our infirmities, but *not in possessing like passions.* As the sinless One, His nature recoiled from evil. His humanity made prayer a necessity and privilege (pp. 201-202; *emphasis supplied*).

Commenting further on the prayer life of Jesus, she penned the following:

He prayed for His disciples and for Himself, thus identifying Himself with our needs, our weaknesses, and our failings, which are so common with humanity. He was a mighty petitioner, *not possessing the passions of our human fallen natures*, but compassed with like infirmities, tempted in all points even as we are. Jesus endured agony which required help and support from His Father (*ibid.*, pp. 508-509).

As one reads the last two references, it would appear these statements are at variance with what had been written prior to, and contemporary, with these statements. There is neither conflict nor a contradiction when one understands how Ellen White understood and used the word “passion.” The following paragraph illustrates her use and understanding of the word as well as the phrase – “the inclinations of the natural heart.” It reads:

No man can be forced to transgress. His own consent must first be gained; *the soul must purpose the sinful act, before passion can dominate over reason, or iniquity triumph over conscience.* Temptation, however strong, is never an excuse for sin. . . . Cast yourself, helpless, unworthy, upon Jesus, and claim His very promise. The Lord will hear. *He knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart*, and He will help in every time of need (op. cit., Vol. 5, p. 177; *emphasis supplied*).

In our experience, we have purposed the sinful acts; our passions have dominated over reason; iniquity has triumphed over conscience. We

have become possessed with evil. Not so Christ! He did not choose to sin. Although understanding the strength of human inclination, the desires of our fallen human nature never dominated His reason nor ever triumphed over His conscience. He conquered the tendencies of the humanity He took upon Himself. In Him were no cultivated tendencies to do evil for He never permitted human passions to dominate His thinking, nor control His actions.

Another statement defining the nature of the humanity Christ assumed appeared in 1877. In this statement a clear distinction is made between "form" and "nature" as pertaining to fallen man, and what Christ accepted as a part of the plan devised by the Godhead for man's redemption. Christ accept both the "form" and "nature" of fallen man. It reads:

It was in the order of God that Christ should take upon Himself *the form and nature of fallen man*, that He might be made perfect through suffering, and Himself endure the strength of Satan's fierce temptation, that He might understand how to succour those that should be tempted (*Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 2, p. 39; emphasis supplied).

Ten years later – 1887 – Ellen White wrote an article for the *Review* regarding pride that was leading to strife for supremacy. She set before the reader Christ's sacrifice as an example to be emulated. In so doing she stated certain facts that involved the nature of the humanity Christ assumed. Three points were clearly enunciated:

- 1) He was God, but the glories of the form of God He for a little while relinquished.
- 2) He humbled Himself and took mortality upon Him. As a member of the human family He was mortal.
- 3) He brought into His human nature all the life-giving energies that human beings will need and must receive.

Then was pictured the abuse, insult, and reproach which Jesus suffered as a man; and finally His humiliating death as a condemned criminal. In view of this, a question is asked – "Shall pride be harboured after you have seen Deity humble Himself, and then debasing

Himself, till there was no lower point to which He could descend? (*Review*, July 5, 1887).

Summary

During the four decades from 1848 to 1888 – those years which have been termed as the formative years of Adventist doctrine – clear, specific statements were given via the Spirit of Prophecy in regard to the nature of Christ's humanity. Christ, in becoming man, took the place of "fallen Adam" after the race had wandered four thousand years in sin. He accepted "the sins and infirmities" of humanity "as they existed when He came to earth to help man." By "experiencing in Himself" human infirmities, He came to know "how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart." He accepted not only the "form" but also the "nature" of fallen man, "reaching to the very depths of human wretchedness" "that He might be qualified to reach man, and bring him up from the degradation in which sin had plunged him." In His struggle with sin, He did not permit evil passion to possess Him; He was its master, its conqueror. His "nature" – not the human He accepted in union with Himself, but that which was His – His very Self from all eternity – "recoiled from evil." He took "mortality upon Him" so that He could yield His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The victory gained qualified Him to be not only an Example, but also a Redeemer from sin. Without controversy, great is the mystery of the sublime condescension.

Manasses

The most wicked king to sit upon the Throne of David was Manasses, son of Hezekiah. "He built altars for all the hosts of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. He caused his children to pass through fire in the valley of the son of Hinnon; also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit. . . . he did worse than the

heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel" (II Chron.33:5-6, 9).

He should never have been born. He ascended the throne at the age of twelve (II Chron. 33:1). Fifteen years previously, when Hezekiah was "sick unto death," and the Lord sent a message through Isaiah telling him to set his house in order for he would die. Hezekiah pled with the Lord in prayer that his life be spared, and the Lord added fifteen years to his life (Isa. 38:1-5). During that extension of life Manasses was born.

When the wickedness of Manasses exceeded the wickedness of the heathen, who had previously occupied the land of Judah, God permitted the Assyrians to carry him off in chains to Babylon (II Chron 33:11). There he prayed, and God hearing his prayer, restored him to his throne in Jerusalem (vs. 12-13). While God heard the prayer of Manasses and forgave him, he did not forgive the corporate sin of Israel (II Kings 23:24-26). Herein is left on record a revelation of God's way of dealing in judgment with corporate guilt compared with individual sin and repentance. This needs to be carefully considered.

The prayer of Manasses, though recorded in the Apocrypha, echoes the revelation of God as revealed in the New Testament. He prayed:

O Lord Almighty, that art in heaven, thou God of our fathers, of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and of their righteous seed; who hast made heaven and earth, with all the array there of; ... for thou art the Lord Most High, of great compassion, long suffering and abundant in mercy, and repentance of bringing evils upon men. Thou, O Lord, according to thy great goodness hast promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned against thee: and of thine infinite mercies hast appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved. Thou therefore, O Lord, that art the God of the just, hast not appointed repentance to the just, ... which have not sinned against thee; but thou hast appointed repentance unto me a sinner: for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea. O Lord, my transgressions are multiplied, and I am not worthy to behold and see the height of heaven for the multitude of mine iniquities. I am bowed down with many iron bands, that I cannot lift up my head by reason of my sins, neither have I any respite: for I have provoked thy wrath, and done that which was

evil before thee: for I did not thy will, neither kept I thy commandments: I have set up abominations, and have multiplied detestable things. Now I bow the knee of mine heart, beseeching thee of grace. I have sinned, and I acknowledge mine iniquities: but I humbly beseech thee, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. Be not angry with me forever; neither condemn me into the lower parts of the earth. For thou, O Lord, art the God of them that repent; and in me thou wilt show thy goodness: for thou wilt save me, that am unworthy, according to thy great mercy. And I will praise thee for ever all the days of my life; for all the host of heaven doth sing thy praise, and thine is the glory for ever and ever. Amen (Revised Version).

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"The Remnant of Her Seed" Rev. 12:17 #2

Shane Rohrich

The pinnacle promise, a unique promise made by Jesus Himself to the "remnant" of the seed of the woman" is that they would overcome "even as He overcame" (Rev. 3:21). They will keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. The mystery of God will be finished (Rev. 10:7; Col. 1:26-27). Long has the expectation of the creation of God waited for "the manifestation of the sons of God" that are to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:19, 29).

From the human viewpoint, the promises of God seem impossible of realization. Can God really perfect from out of sinners a remnant who will sin no more? Can God take the weakest of the weak, those bearing the sins of their forefathers, and in them show the power of God? Can they be subjected to every temptation, and the arsenal of the dragon, and yet not yield? "They will demonstrate that it is possible to live without sin – the very demonstration for which the world has been looking and for which God has been preparing. It will be evident to all that the gospel really can save to the uttermost." (M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, p. 302)

The final atonement, the final mediation of our High Priest, is central in the validation of God's

objective. (Lev. 16:16, 30). "To produce a people that will keep the law is the task which God has set Himself and which He expects to accomplish. When the statement is made and the challenge issued by Satan: 'No one can keep the law. It is impossible. If there be any that can do it or that have done it, show them to me. Where are they that keep the commandments?' God will quietly answer, Here, they are. 'Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.' Rev. 14:12" (*Ibid.*, pp. 310-311).

Satan challenged Christ at every step from the Wilderness of Temptation to the Cross. Yet Christ could say, "I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 16:10). Now Satan's bitter warfare focuses on the weakest of men, the "remnant of her seed." His objective is to completely obliterate the image of God in them. Yet God is counting on the "remnant of her seed" as He counted on Job to honor Him and His truth. (Job 1:8; 2:3). It is in the last generation that God cleanses His own from all sin. They are without fault before the throne; in their mouths are found no "guile" (perversion of truth) (Rev. 14:5 Gr.) As the ten virgins, they are prepared, and go out to meet Him. This is suggested by Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown: "the remnant of her seed" is "distinct in some sense from the woman herself" (pp. 581-582).

It is this theology – the third phase of the final atonement – that is highly contentious in Adventism. See Annotated edition of *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. xx-xxi. To Elder Andreasen, "the foundations of Adventism were being removed," and the "betrayal of Adventist theology for evangelical recognition" was "nothing less than apostasy" (*ibid.*). In his *Letters to the Churches*, Series A, #6, he stated it more forcefully – "This is more than apostasy. This is giving up Adventism. It is the rape of the whole people" (p. 86).