

*"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 (Moffau)



Clanton, Alabama, SDA Church
versus Charles Wheeling

THE DEFENDANT'S CASE

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In the previous issue of WWN (XXIV-3, p. 6), we mentioned receiving a packet of material which contained Charles Wheeling's defense for his forthcoming Church trial. The issue is primarily over the method of interpretation which he uses in the analysis and projection of Bible prophecy. His hermeneutic is in direct opposition to the method of interpretation which has been used by the Church in its understanding of Bible prophecy.

The packet we received also included the Church's answer to Wheeling's teachings. I doubt that would have been included in his packet as circulated to the members of the Clanton, Alabama, Seventh-day Adventist Church, but was added for our information. We will comment on this following the review of Wheeling's defense materials.

Among the material circulated by Wheeling were copies of letters taken from his "fan mail." These have no value unless one knows who wrote them, and is thus able to evaluate the writer's ability and qualifications to accurately assess Wheeling's interpretations. Anyone who publishes knows that the response to what one writes is not always favorable. "Fan mail" only fans the human ego. It is the negative reply which challenges one's thinking that has corrective value. It seems quite naive for Wheeling to include as a part of his defense "personal letters and responses ... regarding his message."

He does include "significant statements from the pen of Ellen White." It would seem that certain counsel which he quotes has served to motivate him to go to the lengths he has gone in interpreting the prophecies. One such quotes will illustrate. It reads:

Like the first disciples, William Miller and his associates did not, themselves, fully comprehend the import of the messages they bore. Errors that had been long established in the church prevented them from arriving at a correct interpretation of an important point in prophecy." (Emphasis his)

Wheeling notes the source of this quote as Maranatha, p. 16, but it is in reality from The Great Controversy, pp. 351-352. This is a bit strange in the light of the fact that he is now giving this book wide distribution. Does he really not know what is in the book he is distributing? Hardly. Did he realize that to document it from its original source would reveal that he was using the reference out of context? "The errors that had been long established in the church" was not referring to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

It is true that Ellen G. White did not consider the truth as conveyed to the Church in sacred trust to be static, but rather an on-going progression. This means that corrections will be made, and errors sifted out. However, she set the perimeter and the goal to be achieved. On March 30, 1897, she wrote:

The Lord has made His people the repository of sacred truth. Upon every individual who has the light of present truth devolves the duty of developing that truth on a higher scale than it has hitherto been done. (Emphasis supplied)

Observe, it says it is our duty to develop "that truth" - not, the advancing of some fanciful speculation. And it is even possible that in such a development, errors could be discovered within the Writings themselves since Ellen White did not claim infallibility. The "sacred truth" committed to God's people was a deeper understanding of the Bible both in prophetic interpretation, and theological perceptions than had marked the Protestant Reformation. But this does not mean that when we come to the study of prophecy we discard the basic method of interpretation used by the Reformers and substitute in its place the method set forth by the Jesuits. Wheeling's motives may have been good, but his lack of scholarship plunged him into the abyss of error.

Passing from the "quotes" from the Writings, Wheeling next bases his defense on "Important research on prophetic interpretations done by Seventh-day Adventist ministers, laymen, [and] scholars." In support of this, he submits two articles from Spectrum, the official organ of the Association of Adventist Forums (AAF). He urges - "Please become acquainted with Spectrum." This is a good suggestion, but for

what purpose? To accept what it teaches, to be knowledgeable as to what is being taught by the liberal wing of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? We dare not forget that it was from the podium provided by the AAF that Dr. Desmond Ford launched his attack on the sanctuary teaching of the Church. Not only this, but also the AAF questions the whole fabric of Creationism as taught in the Scriptures..

In an article in Christianity Today (Feb. 9, 1990), Kenneth R. Samples of the Christian Research Institute, accurately pinpoints the "roots" of this liberal element in the Church. He wrote:

Liberal Adventism comes out of that church's attempt to achieve theological and cultural respectability. In the 1950s and 1960s, many Adventist students began receiving graduate degrees from non-Adventist universities. In many cases, the schools attended by these Adventists were theologically liberal. Thus, Adventist scholars were influenced by modern biblical criticism and liberal theology. (p. 21)

[Note - Some students and teachers attended graduate schools with an evangelical orientation. Thus there has been a mingling between the two groups, not because of theological agreement, but primarily because of the scholastic level each has attained.]

In closing his appeal to become acquainted with Spectrum, Wheeling writes - "Truth must and will prevail, brothers and sisters. Please read this material carefully." One of the two articles reproduced from Spectrum (Vol. 12, #4) asked the question - Is Ellen White's Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy Final? This article directed its primary focus on the interpretation of the seals and trumpets in the book of Revelation. The brevity of each issue of WWN prevents a complete analysis of any sizeable amount of material such as Wheeling has included in his defense packet. One illustration must suffice to reveal the quality of scholarship Wheeling has chosen for his study, and whether it is truth or not.

The author of the article, Donald Casebolt, attacks the Millerite position on the sixth trumpet wherein Josiah Litch pinpointed the date of the demise of the Turkish power in 1840 based on the year-day principle of prophetic interpretation he applied to Revelation 9:15. Of this, Casebolt writes:

The 1840 date has both exegetical and historical problems. Exegetically, the hour, day, month, and year of Revelation 9:15 refer to a point in time rather than a

period of time. (pp. 5-6; emphasis his)

In this verse, the Greek article appears, only before "hour" of the series of time designations. Further, each of the words, hour, day, month, and year are in the Greek accusative case. First, consider the force of the single article: Though not repeated, it belongs to each noun of this time series. All are connected by the particle, kai. This fact demands that the four time symbols be combined as one period, a sum total of prophetic days added together. S. G. Green in his Handbook of the Grammar of the Greek Testament, states the principle. It reads:

In the enumeration of several persons or things, joined by a connective particle, an article before the first only, intimates a connection between the whole, as forming one object of thought. This is termed, "combined enumeration." (p. 198)

When the force of the Greek accusative is added to this, which denotes duration, rather than punctiliar action, Casebolt's assumption is completely discredited. The noted Greek grammarian, A. T. Robertson, has written plainly - "The accusative when used of time expresses duration over the period..." (A Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 495)

Historical Data

The third item in Wheeling's defense concerns "Historical data." In this section, he questions the terminal date for the prophecy of the 1260 days found in both Daniel and Revelation. He asks the question - "Did Papal rule end in 1798? Or did it end in 1797? Perhaps 1799? Then he submits a page from the Encyclopedia Britannica, supposedly verifying the 1799 date. The paragraph in question from the Encyclopedia reads:

Pius [VI] was on good terms with the allies against the French in 1793 and felt that he could rely on them, but in 1796 his territory was invaded after the last Austrian defeat by Napoleon who forced the Pope to sign a peace treaty at Tolentino on Feb. 19, 1797. In the following December, a riot in Rome led to French occupation of that city on Feb. 15, 1798, and the proclamation of a republic by a group of Italian patriots. Pius and the Curia were expelled from Rome, and in March 1799 he was seized by the French. Aged and physically crippled, he died a prisoner. (1987 edition) *

What is the issue in question, the Pope, or the government of the Papacy? Is the date for the end of the temporal power of the Papacy, 1799, or 1798? The same Encyclopedia (Vol. 17, p. 221, 1958 edition), states concerning the reign

of Pius VI - "the destruction of his temporal authority by the armies of the [French] Revolution in 1798 and his death in captivity the following year presaged a new epoch for the Papacy." Trevor, Canon of York, writing about the events of the year, 1798, stated that "the object of the French Directory was the destruction of the pontifical government, as the irreconcilable enemy of the republic." (Quoted in Facts of Faith, p. 59) The French General, Berthier, entered Rome on the 10th of February, 1798, and on the 15th issued a formal declaration establishing a Roman Republic. The declaration stated that "every other temporal authority emanating from the old government of the Pope, is suppressed, and it shall no more exercise any function." (The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, Vol. II, p. 756) Little wonder then that Trevor could write of the events in 1798:

The Papacy was extinct; not a vestige of its existence remained; and among all the Roman Catholic powers not a finger was stirred in its defence. The Eternal City had no longer prince nor pontiff; its bishop was a dying captive in foreign lands; and the decree was already announced that no successor would be allowed in his place. (Facts of Faith, op.cit.)

[*The same record on Pius VI in the 1958 edition reads:

Pius was on good terms with the allies against France in 1793 and felt that he could rely on them; but in 1796 he saw his territory invaded by Gen. Napoleon Bonaparte. He sued for peace, which was granted on Feb. 19, 1797, at Tolentino; but in the following December a riot in Rome, in which the French general L. Duphot was killed, led to the occupation of Rome itself (Feb. 15, 1798) and the proclamation of a republic. Pius was taken into captivity and died, still a prisoner, at Valence, on Aug. 29, 1799. (Vol. 17, p. 983)

Wheeling says those who question the record in the 1987 edition charge that the Encyclopedia Britannica is "a Roman Catholic encyclopedia." There was an altering of the text of the encyclopedia between 1958 and 1987. The preciseness of fact involving the dates, 1797, 1798, and 1799, was removed. Who influenced the blurring? Who would be interested in such a blurring?]

A Summary

Wheeling's defense is weak when one carefully studies key points in the data he has submitted. Ellen G. White does teach that we should advance in the perception of truth which would

surely include the freeing of "that truth" from any vestige of error. But she did not suggest that we alter truth, and declare truth to be error. To base one's message on the research of other men - even though they may be sincere men - without checking that research by the Word of God with all the available tools of scholarship, is to lean on the arm of flesh. The historical data submitted fails to take into account the complete picture of all the facts of the submitted evidence, and thus leads to a faulty conclusion.

What went wrong with Wheeling? He claims that his conclusions are the result of "more than 25 years of serious study and prayerful reflection." Did he study the wrong things? Perhaps. Did he lack the spirit of discernment to be able to distinguish truth from error in the things he did study? Possible. Did he lack the tools of scholarship so as to adequately get to the bottom of the issues? Maybe. Or did he reject truth, and God permitted strong delusion to overcome him? (II Thess. 2:10-11) Only the Lord knows, but the evidence is strongly suggestive that when a human being comes to know more than the angel Gabriel knows as to the meaning of the symbols given in vision to Daniel, a power other than the Spirit of truth is controlling that person's mind.

PLAINTIFF'S CASE

The Church's response to Charles Wheeling's teachings consists of two documents: one, prepared by Russell Burrill, Director of the North American Division's Institute of Evangelism, and a second written by Garland Cross, a former church school teacher and local elder of the Clanton, Alabama, Seventh-day Adventist Church, who is now serving in the same capacities at the Bass Academy Church in Mississippi.

The document by Burrill is concise - 18 pages in length. The protracted manuscript of Cross's - 52 pages - follows page after page a consistent format, a quote from "Charles" taken from a transcript, and then an "Answer." A contrast is immediately observable between the two answers besides just the lengths of the manuscripts. In his conclusion, Burrill asks a question - "What is

the Adventist answer to Charles Wheeling?" Then he answers his own question - "The Bible and the Bible only." On the whole, Burrill is consistent with this criterion, but Cross's lengthy discussion is the antithesis of this, and for the most part uses nothing but the Writings to reply to certain of Wheeling's positions. There are some exceptions where technical linguistic data is discussed, or where reference is made to historical events.

The reason why this factor is acute needs to be noted and understood. Wheeling - and Desmond Ford as well - hold that the Adventist position on the sanctuary and its relationship to Daniel 7 & 8 cannot be verified from the Bible, but can be sustained only from the Writings of Ellen G. White. Burrill notes this position of Wheeling. Using a transcript of one of Wheeling's presentations, a conversation he tells between himself and "a good friend" is quoted. The friend of Wheeling observed - "You said that the twenty-three hundred years cannot be proven from the Bible. That it's in the Spirit of Prophecy." To this Wheeling replied - "That is exactly correct." This issue of the basis for the Adventist understanding of both the prophecies of Daniel and the typical services of the sanctuary, whether based in the Bible, or solely in the Writings illustrates the crisis in theology in the Church. But this same factor pervades the teachings and publications of those on the right wing periphery of Adventism who professedly abhor the "new theology" represented in Ford's teachings. Instead of answering Ford - and now Wheeling - from the Bible, they prefer to quote the Writings. This is a tragic deception being foisted on God's concerned people by those professing to stand on a firm foundation. Our doctrine regarding the antitypical Day of Atonement, and the prophecies of Daniel involved therewith, should be sustained by the Bible and the Bible only. To do this is not a rejection of the work assigned to Ellen G. White as a "messenger of the Lord," but rather in harmony with her own counsel in this matter.

Cross discusses Wheeling's position on Daniel 8:14, answering him first with a quote from The Great Controversy followed by several paragraphs from Clifford Goldstein's book, 1844 Made Simple. The paragraphs quoted from Goldstein's book start off well, showing the use of the same word for "cleansed" in the LXX in both Lev. 16:30 and Daniel 8:14. Then the statement is made - "Clearly, the translators of the Septuagint [LXX] saw a link between the taher [Hebrew, "cleansed" in Lev. 16] and the

tsadaq! [The Hebrew word for "cleansed" in Daniel 8:14 KJV.] This is pure assumption which cannot be verified linguistically. Strong's questionable lexicons connected with his Concordance, quoted by Goldstein, is just as inaccurate here as in other places. The two Hebrew words, taher and tsadaq, when checked with such standard works as Gesenius and Brown-Driver-Briggs' edited edition of Gesenius' A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament reveal no connection by which to associate Daniel 8:14 with Leviticus 16. It is the Masoretic text of the Old Testament which uses tsadaq in Daniel 8:14 in its Niphal form, which in that form means - "be justified, its cause vindicated." (p. 842) The word, taher, found in the Hebrew text on Lev. 16:30 means, "made clean." (p. 372)

What Goldstein has done is to assume that the translators of the LXX, who worked and lived before Christ, translated from a Hebrew text which was not produced till 900 years after Christ! While the Hebrew manuscripts upon which the Masoretic text was based were no doubt extant from the first century A.D., it cannot be assumed that such a text was used by the translators of the LXX. In fact, Hebrew scholarship today indicates that the whole of the Book of Daniel was originally written in Aramaic, which had been made the official language of the Persian Empire, and that parts of it were translated into the Hebrew. These same Hebrew scholars show that the use of the Hebrew word, tsadaq for the original Aramaic of Daniel 8:14 was a gross mistranslation into the Hebrew. These scholars hold that the Aramaic word meant "cleansed." See Studies in Daniel, Chapter V, "The Hebrew of Daniel as a Translation," by H. Louis Ginsberg, Sabato Morais Professor of Bible at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

Goldstein instead of doing original research on this point merely followed Gerhard Hasel whom he admits "speculates" on the use of the word, tsadaq, in the Masoretic text. I have personally talked to Hasel about the linguistic determinations of the Jewish scholars. He rejects these men's research because of their interpretations of the prophecies of Daniel. This attitude lacks maturity. For example, an archeologist makes a find from an excavation project. He may make certain interpretations based on this find. Do I have to deny the find because I do not concur in his interpretations? This less than honest evaluation of all the factors involved with Daniel 8:14 does not enhance the position of

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All Could Have Known

In the January, 1985 issue of WWN, we called attention to the developing apostasy in prophetic interpretation which marked the expositions of both Dr. Robert W. Hauser and Charles Wheeling. The sub-heading of the lead article read - "Hauser and Wheeling Follow Ford." The interpretation, which Ford calls "the apotelesmatic principle," defines that "a particular prophecy in outline, or as regards a dominate feature may have more than one application in time."

In August of 1984, Wheeling gave a week-end series of studies in the Gentry, Arkansas, Seventh-day Adventist Church. In one study, he discussed the four beasts of Daniel 7. He asked the congregation regarding the four kingdoms -

Can you name them? Babylon, Medo-Persia, [Greece], and Rome. But we have some problems, and you need to be aware of them. Before I share the problems with you, I want to tell you that I subscribe to the historical application, and I preach it. However, I am also aware that the passage very likely has another application. And I think that you need to be aware of that. (Tape)

To clinch his emphasis of a double application for Daniel 7, Wheeling directed his listeners -

Would you go to verse 17 in that chapter [7] with me. Daniel wanted to know the truth and the angel said to him - "These four beasts are four kings which" - what does it say? - "shall arise..." Tell me, is that past tense, present tense, or future tense? That is future tense! (ibid.)

"Now I want to ask Brother Wheeling something. Brother Wheeling take your Bible, and please turn to Daniel 7:10, and read with me - 'A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him, and thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.' Tell me, is that word, 'stood,' past, present, or future tense? As translated into English, it is past tense, but Brother Wheeling, in the Aramaic, the same identical word is used for 'stood' as is translated, 'shall arise' in Daniel 7:17. In other words, Daniel 7:17 could be translated - "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings which stood out of the earth." ...

"So that all the readers might know the principles of grammar involved here, Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar states - 'In moods and tenses

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LET'S TALK IT OVER

After writing the comments on the "defense" which Charles Wheeling made in support of his position, my attention was called to page 1 of his "brief" whereon he had given in his judgment "significant statements from the pen of Ellen White." I had noted the quotation from The Great Controversy taken from the book, Maranatha. (See page 2) However, I did not check the quotation from A Word to the Little Flock (AWLF), because I did not believe that Wheeling would stoop to such a level as to attribute to Ellen White something she did not write for the sole purpose of seeking to strengthen his position. **But he did!** Then to transpose Ellen G. White's signature by layout techniques to the quotation is nothing less than raw deception and deceit. The letter to Brother Eli Curtis, dated April 21, 1847, ends on page 12 of AWLF, and Ellen White's name is printed at the bottom of the page. Page 13 from which Wheeling quotes can be assumed to have been written by James White as his name appears at the end of the booklet.

Why do men do such things? It had to have been purposely done because the evidence is too clear to have unwittingly made such a mistake. Does Wheeling not use proof readers to check what he has written? He must, but apparently they are mere "lackies," devotees who no longer think for themselves, or readers who, if they recognize such a glaring mistake, dare not question the "oracle." This state of affairs can develop only when a man assumes to know more about the significance of prophetic symbols than the angel Gabriel who alone with Michael is privy to these things. This is little short of blasphemy for a mere man to place his judgment above a "ministering spirit" and a divine Being, such as Michael is!

One does not arrive at this self deceived state overnight. It is gradual, and often to the individual an unperceived deviation from truth. Rejection of any ray of light at any point of time dims one's perceptions of truth. Basking in the adulation of devotees only adds to the exaltation of one's opinions above the plain word of God. Yielding to the use of mind control on those devotees often reacts back on the user, and his mind in turn becomes controlled by a power beyond the human ken. The supreme tragedy occurs in what happens to the souls thus deceived when they place one, who is self deceived, as their "guru."

Consider for a few moments the ones who cast

the ninety-nine votes on February 3, 1991, at the Clanton Seventh-day Adventist Church. Forty-six voted to side with Wheeling. Of this number, a proportion had to be family and those employed by Wheeling in his Countdown Ministries. But there were some not in these categories who voted for Wheeling against the Church's design. Why? They alone know why they so voted; but it could not have been that they were supporters of truth, because Wheeling's teachings are not truth. Were they then among those who have been deceived into believing a lie? Or were they voting against the Church, having become anti-church because of the controversy? In such a case it would have been better if they had abstained.

What about the fifty three who voted to sustain the desired objective of the Church? Here again a proportion of these votes were by paid employees of the Church with their families. But what about the others? Were they anti-Wheeling? Were they pro-Church? It could not have been altogether pro-truth, for some of the Church's positions as set forth in their "briefs" were just as weak as those held by Wheeling. What then is the bottom line? Every individual will have to know for himself what is truth based on the Sacred Scriptures. In the conflict upon which we are entering, whether it be in the Clanton Seventh-day Adventist Church or some other Adventist Church, "the faith of individual members of the church will be tested as though there were not another person in the world." (Ms. 1a, 1890)

This is not a time for men to be pigmies in what constitutes truth, but rather giants in the Word of God. If such had been the case - "giants" in the Clanton Church - the majority of the members would have left both the warring factions to settle their own conflict, and would have walked out to form a True and Free Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Plaintiff's Case - from page 5, col. 1

Adventism, and those who are less than scholarly in their research play into the hands of Ford and Wheeling. Sadly this appears to be the type of scholarship dominating the thinking and work of the so-called "conservative" Adventist theologians.

There is another point that needs to be noted in the Church's actions. It is true that the Clanton, Alabama, Seventh-day Adventist Church is an entity in itself within the body of the structure and has the power to determine who shall and who shall not be a member on the Clerk's roll. But how can the leadership of the Church condone such unilateral action as is contemplated by that local church and not recommend similar action where Dr. Desmond Ford and Dr. Robert Hauser still hold membership? The leadership of the Church needs to set its own house in order, and cut a straight line in dealing with these variant and heretical views on prophetic interpretation, plus other errant theological interpretations first, before dealing with individuals in "independent ministries" because of the "cash-flo" problem. Let us have truth, but not the use of truth to serve as a facade to cover up the lust for "greenbacks."

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POSTSCRIPT

While the above analysis was being written of the data involved in the trial of the SDA Church v. Charles Wheeling, a church business meeting of the Clanton Seventh-day Adventist Church was held. On Sunday, February 3, Charles Wheeling was disfellowshipped by a vote of 53 to 46. It is obvious; the church split down the middle. The following Sabbath, the 9th, the two groups met separately with the Wheeling devotees meeting in the worship room of Countdown Ministries.

According to reliable sources, for the "trial," Wheeling had prepared a statement to read. He asked that following the reading of his statement the vote be taken. It was so moved and voted. When Wheeling finished, the Pastor attempted to make a statement but was held to the motion. This a new twist to what is usual - the Church making their accusations, and the defendant denied a voice. It did save what could have been some emotional exchanges between the supporters of both sides. The Church achieved its objective but at a price.

Just prior to the called business meeting of the Clanton Church, Elder Joe Crews got into the act. He sent a letter pleading with Charles Wheeling to alter his course. Copies of this letter were sent to the members of the Church. A letter was also written by Dr. Mervyn Maxwell, author of the pro-Roman Catholic book on Daniel, God Cares, Vol. 1. The Church used this letter to bolster their position. When a church calls in such poles-apart voices as Crews and Maxwell, confusion is compounded. Then when the "futurism" of Wheeling is added to the melee, a veritable "Babel" results, yet with each disputant believing he is still "the gate of God" - the basic meaning of the word. (See Young's Analytical Concordance.)

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"All Could Have Known" - from page 5, col. 2

it [the Hebrew verb] is very poor, having only two tenses (Perfect and Imperfect),... (p. 81, 1858 edition)" Further:

The name Imperfect is used in direct contrast with Perfect;... The Hebrew Perfect denotes, in general, the finished and past, what is come to pass or is gone into effect; but at the same time, that which is represented as perfected, whether still in the present, or in reality yet future. The Imperfect, on the contrary, denotes the unfinished and continuing, that which is being done, or coming to pass, and is future (hence called also future); but also that which is in progress and in connected succession, in past time. (ibid. p. 88)

The Aramaic word, koom, as used in both Daniel 7:10 and 17 is in the imperfect tense and in Daniel 7:17 carries the force of that which is being done, in progress, extending from a point in the past - Babylon - into the future, Rome and beyond.

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In Canada, write - The Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Canada, P. O. Box 117, Thorne, ON POH 2J0.

Editor

Elder Wm. H. Grotheer

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