

December/69.



"Watchman, what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

WHAT HAPPENED?

Human evaluation of what happened at the 1888 General Conference Session and why it happened is varied and conflicting. One writer states that at this session, "the Lord gave His people a marvelous victory. It was the beginning of a great spiritual awakening among Adventists."¹ Another describes the session as marked by "muddled thinking, confused issues, personal prejudices."² Yet another author writes that "in spite of the tensions, conflicts, and disappointments, the Minneapolis meeting was a victory in many respects."³ This same author, however, admits that the session ended on "a note of discord."⁴

Heaven had no confused evaluation of what took place. Sister White penned plainly the Divine appraisal - "I have been instructed that the terrible experience at the Minneapolis Conference is one of the saddest chapters in the history of the believers in present truth."⁵

Just what did happen at the General Conference Session of 1888? The session itself took place from October 17 to November 4. Prior to this business meeting, a ministerial institute was held starting on October 10th. According to an editorial in the Review, several subjects were on the agenda for study; namely, the ten horns of Daniel 7, the divinity of Christ, the healing of the deadly wound, and justification by faith.⁶

It is not hard to understand what took place from a human standpoint as a result of the discussion of the horns of Daniel 7. Elder Uriah Smith, Secretary of the General Conference, and Editor of the Review, was challenged by

Elder A. T. Jones, co-editor of the Signs, as to whether the Alemanni rather than the Huns should be listed among the Ten Horns. After all, Elder Smith was the author of *the* book, Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. Up to this point, Jones had written no book of note, nor had he held an administrative position in the church. At the time of the 1888 Session of the General Conference, Jones was 38 years of age, and had been a member of the church for only 14 years. Elder Smith was 56 and a pioneer worker in the Advent Movement, having become editor of the Review when only 23 years of age. Highly respected, Elder Smith had a large personal following among the ministry and laity. It is not hard to understand the reaction of human nature in such a situation.

During the session itself, in connection with the presentation of the subject of Righteousness by Faith, Elder E. J. Waggoner stated decidedly that "the law" in the book of Galatians was the moral law. Prior to the session, the Review editor had published an article by O. A. Johnson which indicated that "the law" of Galatians had ceremonial overtones. Again the position of Elder Smith was challenged, though indirectly. Thus the stage was set, not for a candid evaluation of truth and light, but for a judgment of personalities by the delegates and visitors present at the General Conference Session. And this is what did occur. According to Elder Taylor G. Bunch's sources, "fully two thirds of those present either opposed the message of righteousness by faith or were afraid of it."⁷

What reaction did this party spirit and loyalty to Elder Smith take toward Elders Jones and Waggoner, and the message which Heaven was sending to the church through them? Observe the Divine judgment as penned by the servant of the Lord:

I shall never again, I think, be called to stand under the direction of the Holy Spirit as I stood at Minneapolis. The presence of Jesus was with me. All assembled at that meeting had an opportunity to

place themselves on the side of truth by receiving the Holy Spirit, which was sent by God in such a rich current of love and mercy. But in some of the rooms occupied by some of our people were heard ridicule, criticism, jeering, laughter. The manifestations of the Holy Spirit were attributed to fanaticism. . . The scenes which took place at that meeting made the God of heaven ashamed to call those who took part in them His brethren. All this the heavenly Watcher noticed, and it was written in the book of God's remembrance.⁸

A few years later in a letter to Elder O. A. Olsen, then president of the General Conference, Sister White wrote:

I have deep sorrow of heart because I have seen how readily a word or action of Elder Jones or Elder Waggoner is criticized. How readily minds overlook all the good that has been done by them in the few years past, and see no evidence that God is working through these instrumentalities. They hunt for something to condemn, and their attitude toward these brethren who are zealously engaged in doing a good work, shows that the feelings of enmity and bitterness are in the heart.⁹

In all fairness to Elder Smith, it must be stated that no evidence has thus far been produced to indicate that he took part in the "jeering" that marked the conduct of some. Yet it is clear that he did not rebuke, nor seek to restrain this reaction towards Elders Jones and Waggoner; but openly placed himself in opposition to the message sent by God to the church at that Session. And this opposition continued for a considerable time following the General Conference of 1888.

Now let us turn our attention to the men through whom God chose to send a special message in 1888 - Elder A. T. Jones, and Dr E. J. Waggoner. It must be kept in mind that these messengers were "only men"¹⁰ and not angels from heaven. When arraigned before the judgment bar of human evaluation they could be criticized. A. T. Jones had singular mannerisms, and no doubt modern psychologists would infer personality problems. Spaulding indicates that Jones was not only "naturally abrupt, but he cultivated singularity of speech and manner, . . ."¹¹ It is true that while Jones was not a polished man according to the cultural

standards of the times, nevertheless he possessed a disciplined mind and a consecrated heart. He was well informed. While serving in the United States army, prior to his acceptance of the Truth, he had spent his spare time studying works on history and the Bible. He was vitally interested in truth and truth alone. This singleness of purpose caused difficulties. When a man catches a vision of truth, all else is subjugated and becomes secondary, even the feelings of human nature. The exponent of truth realizes that for truth to accomplish its intended purpose, self and all that pertains to self must be crucified. However, those to whom God sends truth by delegated messengers do not always perceive this necessity, and are not willing to crucify their selfish interests. The result - conflict ensues with many unpleasant overtones!

Elder or Doctor Waggoner - he was a medical doctor as well as a minister - was smooth and polished, but nevertheless "straightforward"¹² and positive in his manner of presentation. This attribute is not considered a virtue in many religious circles even to this day. So while Elder Jones appeared to have the most of the personal flaws that mark humanity, Dr Waggoner was not exempt from his share of the criticism and enmity.

We might ask a question as to why God chose these two men with whom the people could find so much to fault. To find the answer, we must understand just what this message was, and what it was intended to accomplish. The message by Jones and Waggoner was "the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth."¹³ "This angel comes bearing no soft, smooth message, but words that are calculated to stir the hearts of men to their very depths."¹⁴ To prepare a people to give this message, required men who were willing to speak in such a way that God's people would be aroused and moved to the very depths of their being. God saw in Elders Jones and Waggoner just such men.

To those who opposed the message and the messengers, Sister White wrote:

Will you dare to turn from, or make light of, the warnings, because God did not consult you as to what would be preferred? God calls men who will speak, who will cry aloud and spare not. God has raised up His messengers to do His work for this time. Some have turned from the message of the righteousness of Christ to criticize the men and their imperfections. ¹⁰

In fact at the very session itself in 1888, Sister White clearly enunciated the work in principle that God called His messengers to do, disagreeable though it might be. Here are her words in a sermon preached at the Conference meeting on November 1, 1888:

When God would have a special work done for the advancement of truth, He will impress men to work in the mines of truth with prayerful earnestness to discover the precious ore. These men will have Christ-like perseverance. They will not fail nor be discouraged. They will sink self out of sight in Jesus. Men will go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is their work to make crooked things straight. *Some things must be torn down, some things must be built up.* The old treasures must be reset in a framework of truth. They are to preach God's Word; *their testimony must not be moulded by the opinions and ideas that have been regarded as sound,* but by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever. ¹²

And again in 1897 the following counsel was given:

Ministers, do not dishonor your God and grieve His Holy Spirit, by casting reflections on the ways and manners of the men He would choose. God knows the character. He sees the temperament of the men He has chosen. He knows that none but earnest, firm, determined, strong-feeling men will view this work in its vital importance, and will put such firmness and decision into their testimonies that they will make a break against the barriers of Satan. ¹⁵

To accept such a responsibility and to carry forward such a work was no easy assignment. But to this work Elder A. T. Jones and Dr. E. J. Waggoner were called. Their way was hedged up, and made difficult, not by the world, but by their own brethren. Why? The answer is a study in itself, and must await the next thought paper.

In the meantime would it not be well to ponder long this divine counsel:

Why do not brethren of like precious faith consider that in every age, when the Lord has sent a special message to His people, all the powers of the confederacy of evil are set at work to prevent the word of truth from coming to those who should receive it.. If Satan can impress the mind and stir up the passions of those who claim to believe the truth, and thus lead them to unite with the forces of evil, he is well pleased. If once he can get them to commit themselves to the wrong side, he has laid his plans to lead them on a long journey: through his disceptive wiles he will cause them to act upon the same principle he adopted in his disaffection in heaven. They take step after step in the false way, until their seems to be no other course than for them to go on, believing they are right in their bitterness of feeling against their brethren. Will the Lord's messenger bear the pressure brought against him? If so, it is because God bids him stand in His strength, and vindicate the truth that he is sent of God. ⁹

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- ¹L. H. Christian, The Fruitage of Spiritual Gifts, p. 233
 - ²Norval F. Pease, By Faith Alone, p. 144
 - ³A. V. Olson, From Crisis to Victory, p. 40
 - ⁴Ibid., p. 43
 - ⁵Ellen. G. White, Letter 179, 1902
 - ⁶See Review and Herald, October 16, 1888, editorial, "The General Conference Institute"
 - ⁷Taylor G. Bunch, The Exodus and Advent Movement in Type and Antitype, p. 90
 - ⁸Ellen G. White, Special Testimony to the Review and Herald Office, pp. 16-17
 - ⁹Ellen G. White, Letter to O. A. Olsen dated Sept 1, 1892
 - ¹⁰Ellen G. White, "Living Channels of Light", Review and Herald, May 27, 1890
 - ¹¹A. W. Spalding, Captains of the Host, p. 591
 - ¹²Ellen G. White, Ms 15, 1888. See Appendix A, Through Crisis to Victory
 - ¹³Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, bk. i, p. 363
 - ¹⁴Ellen G. White, Letter S-256, 1892
 - ¹⁵Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 412-413

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Note: - In recent weeks there has come to my desk a tract written by a Veteran Minister of the church entitled - "A Word to Laodicea". This is worth reading and re-reading. It may be secured from Hope Publications, Hope, Idaho 83836. Why not write today for a copy.

Have you read - "Is There Any Word from the Lord?" in the Review and Herald of October 23, 1969. It is without a parallel among articles appearing in our church publications. Read it carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully.

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