Some noble proofreader has blushed to see that in this new publication, out of eight chapters listed in the “Contents” all but three have incorrect page numbers. But such mechanical mistakes are nothing when compared with historical inaccuracies. Chapter 5 in the section, “The 1888 General Conference Session,” pages 87 to 95, raises questions. History is serious truth because the future of the church depends on our correctly understanding how the Lord has led us in our past history.

Dr. George Knight is a personal friend whom we hold in high esteem. Our purpose in writing is not to pick flaws or to be critical. To speak up in defense of our denominational history is vitally important to the present and future prosperity of the church. This pamphlet is not in any way personal fault-finding but is another step in our common search for that objective
truth that the church needs to understand more clearly. Christ promised that the Holy Spirit “will guide you into all truth.”

Can We Change History?
To his credit Dr. George Knight recognizes that “the Minneapolis General Conference session was one of the most explosive and significant meetings the denomination has ever had” (pp. 87, 88). Yes! We need to understand about it. But the problem concerns his understanding of what made this meeting “significant.”

He does not consider that the message the Lord sent in the 1888 era is “something unique.” He is disturbed that “certain Adventist writers in the twentieth century have [mistakenly] claimed that the 1888 message of Jones and Waggoner was something uniquely Adventist” (p. 90).

“Certain Adventist Writers”
It is very true that “certain Adventist writers” have said that Jones and Waggoner brought to the denomination (and to the world) a message that was powerfully unique. They are named many times by the author in the text and in the citations of his 1989 book, Angry Saints. The same is evident in his 1998 work, A User-Friendly Guide to the 1888 Message, and in his 1987 From 1888 to Apostasy, the Case of A. T. Jones (all published by the Review and Herald).

The root of this charge seems to be the 1950 private document, 1888 Re-examined, later published in 1987 by these “certain Adventist writers” who author this tract. Their confidence and verification of the 1888 message and its history are based upon the Ellen White record which states to them clearly that it was “the Lord” Himself who sent this message to Seventh-day Adventists as being something very special (TM 91).

These “certain” authors have indeed declared that over the years this message that the Lord “sent” was endorsed by Ellen
White in more than 300 expressions, and that its uniqueness was validated by many of them. She identified that 1888-era message as “the third angel’s message in verity,” “the beginning” of the loud cry of Revelation 18, and initial “showers from heaven of the latter rain.” No other religions body in history has been given such a unique message to proclaim.

**Does “Repeatedly” Mean An Ambiguous “One”?**

However Dr. Knight proclaims: “The facts do not bear out their [these writers’] contention. To the contrary, two of the most influential 1888 participants repeatedly contradicted that assertion.” To support the “repeatedly” he quotes a single transposition of two short sentences that Waggoner wrote apologetically to George I. Butler, February 10, 1887, more than one and one-half years before the existence of “the Minneapolis message.” Knight understands Waggoner denies that there was anything unique about his message. Waggoner is defending himself against the charge of troubling the church with something novel that he has dangerously invented.

In his 71-page letter he explains to the General Conference president his “desire to vindicate the law of God, and to show its perpetuity, its binding claims upon all mankind, and the beautiful harmony between it and the gospel. The law of God is the groundwork of all our faith. It may be said to be the backbone of the Third Angel’s Message” (70). Butler judged that he was preaching an unorthodox “new” doctrine. But Waggoner says his message “is simply a step nearer the faith of the great Reformers from the days of Paul to the days of Luther and Wesley.”

In this letter (which came to be known as “The Gospel in the Book of Galatians”) Waggoner contends that he was not proposing any teaching in conflict with what Protestants had always taught is the gospel. To read his words in context raises the question as to whether Dr. Knight misreads the historical record.
Waggoner states on the same page (70) that what he is teaching is “fundamental principles of the gospel” in contrast to Butler’s view that the law in Galatians refers to the ceremonial system and cannot refer to the moral law.

**The Other Influential Participant**

Knight quotes only one reference from Waggoner although he says that “repeatedly” Waggoner denies that his message was “uniquely Adventist.” Knight then seeks support in Ellen White, but within the quotation which he cites she makes clear that she regarded Waggoner’s message of righteousness by faith as something different than that of Sunday-keeping churches, but not a new or dangerous invention. She says: “God is presenting to the minds of men divinely appointed [Jones and Waggoner] precious gems of truth, *appropriate for this time*” (91; 1888 Materials 139, 140, italics added). This can only mean an understanding in advance of the past. Clearly it was new to the Adventist conscience, and over the years this same thought was reiterated by Ellen White.

Knight then brings another quotation from her to support his word “repeatedly” (1888 Materials, p. 211):— “Elder E. J. Waggoner had the privilege granted him of speaking plainly and presenting his views upon justification by faith and the righteousness of Christ in relation to the law. This is no new light, but it was old light placed where it should be in the third angel's message.” These two sentences appear on the surface to clinch Knight’s argument. But problems arise when her overall testimony is examined.

The two sentences are taken from Ellen White’s 27-page appraisal of the General Conference session, “Looking Back at Minneapolis” (pp. 203-229). In this resume she makes clear that what Jones and Waggoner were preaching was not “new” in relation to the everlasting gospel but that it was “the message for this time,” “new” to our people.
She is concerned about a serious preparation for meeting the mark of the beast and the soon coming of Christ. She saw that no message with such a purpose had been proclaimed by any Sunday-keeping Evangelicals since the Midnight Cry of 1844.

She uplifts the 1888 message as “present truth for this time, . . . great light for us at this time” (274, 276), “the first clear [public] teaching of this subject from any human lips I had heard” (349).

She goes on to say: “Satan has been having things his own way; but the Lord has raised up men to prepare for battle, for the day of God’s preparation. This message Satan sought to make of none effect.... I stated that I had heard precious truths uttered that I could respond to with all my heart. . . . [She never said anything like that about the “righteousness by faith” teaching of any Sunday-keeping ministers]. When the Lord had given to my brethren the burden to proclaim this message I felt inexpressibly grateful to God, for I knew it was the message/or this time”(210, 217, italics added).

Why did she say that Waggoner’s message at Minneapolis was not “new”? She wrote in early 1889; but as she pondered the message for months and listened to Jones and Waggoner themselves becoming more mature in their understanding, her convictions grew that the message was more significant than she at first had discerned. Four years after Minneapolis she was ready to declare boldly that the message was indeed “new light,” the beginning of something the world had never heard before: “This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth” (R&H, Nov. 22, 1892, italics added).

Ellen White Repeatedly Confirms Unique Concepts
Her four-volume 1888 Materials give the church a wealth of biblical and historical insight that contradicts the premise that the message was imported Evangelicalism added to Adventist legalism. These volumes reveal that the message
the Lord sent in 1888 was actually gems of truth “old” from eternity but explained in a new and clearer way, not a mere re-emphasis of the teaching of the 16th century Reformers. Over a period of years she further developed this insight as follows:—

“Most assuredly” “the Lord has . . . new and increased light for us as a people. . . I do not only think so, but I can speak understandably. I know there is precious truth to be unfolded to us if we are the people that are to stand in the day of God’s preparation” (p. 219, emphasis supplied). What makes the message “significant” therefore is the cosmic Day of Atonement. Does Knight see it?

Later she said: “In Minneapolis God gave precious gems of truth to His people in new settings” (518, italics added [1889]).

Her convictions kept on growing: “I believe without a doubt that God has given precious truth at the right time to Brother Jones and Brother Waggoner .... I do say that God has sent light, and do be careful how you treat it. . . . We claim God has given us light in the right time” (565-567, italics added [1890]). What God “gives” is always fresh, never stale bread.

Later she recognized that the Lord “sent” Jones and Waggoner to carry a burden that He had not necessarily laid upon her: “The question is, has God sent the truth? Has God raised up men to proclaim the truth? I say yes, God has sent men to bring us the truth that we should not have had unless God sent somebody to bring it to us” (608, italics added [1890]).

“God has raised up his messengers to do his work for this time. . . . The light which will lighten the earth with its glory will be called a false light, by those who refuse to walk in its advancing glory. . . . Messages bearing the divine credentials have been sent to God’s people” (673, italics added [1890]).
“In this time light from the throne of God has been long resisted as an objectionable thing. It has been regarded as darkness and spoken of as fanaticism, as something dangerous. Thus men have become guide-posts pointing in the wrong direction. They have followed the example of the Jewish people” (915, 916, italics added [1891]).

“An unwillingness to yield up preconceived opinions, and to accept this truth, lay at the foundation of a large share of the opposition manifested at Minneapolis against the Lord’s message through Brethren Waggoner and Jones... . The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world” (1575, italics added; [1896]). (Early Writings p. 271 makes clear that the loud cry cannot come without the latter rain being simultaneous).

Did the Lord indeed send a message of light and truth that was “uniquely Adventist”? If it was to lighten the whole earth with the Revelation 18 message and prepare a people for translation, it must have been something very special.

What made it “special,” “appropriate for this time,” “new light”? Speaking of the 1888 message she said, “We are in the day of atonement, and we are to work in harmony with Christ’s work of cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people, . . . distinguished from all the religionists of the day” (RH, January 21, 1890, italics added). “The mediatorial work of Christ, the grand and holy mysteries of redemption, are not studied or comprehended by the people who claim to have light in advance of every other people on the face of the earth” (February 4). “How do you know but that the Lord is giving fresh evidence of his truth, placing it in a new setting, that the way of the Lord may be prepared? What plans have you been laying that new light may be infused through the ranks of God’s people?” (February 18, italics added). “We have been hearing
his voice more distinctly in the message that has been going for the last two years” (March 11).

**Adventist Truths: Not Shared With Other Christians**

Dr. Knight gives us a perplexing definition of the 1888 message: “The significance of Jones’ and Waggoner’s preaching at Minneapolis was that it reunited the distinctively Adventist truths with the all important message of salvation in Christ alone. . . . The significance of the 1888 meetings is that they baptized Adventism anew in Christianity” (92). In *Angry Saints* he calls it a “return to basic Christianity,” “the historic [Reformers’] doctrine of salvation,” (53), “the doctrine of faith that the holiness preachers had been uplifting” (57). Careful study reveals heights and depths of understanding in the 1888 message of justification by faith that were lacking in Sunday-keeping “holiness preachers” who never sensed “the third angel’s message in verity.”

This important issue in reality concerns the unique Adventist idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary. That is why these two current “Adventist writers” are concerned. The 1888 message joined justification by faith with that one truth that Seventh-day Adventists hold that is different from all other denominations — “adventist” in that it prepares a people to meet the final issue of the mark of the beast and to be ready for the literal return of Jesus. Recognizing this is what constrained Ellen White to exclaim that “every fiber of my heart said amen.”

As we near the end, modern “Babylon’s” apostate “Christianity” will become more akin to the Baal worship of Elijah’s day. The 1888 ideas of the gospel went far beyond so-called evangelical “basic Christianity” that increasingly aligns itself with Rome—truths that the Evangelical world of today are starving to understand in this hour of unprecedented crisis.
In this connection another point becomes strikingly apparent. Knight readily concedes that our dear elders of a century ago largely rejected the message of Jones and Waggoner. But logically, according to his thesis, we must then conclude that what our church leadership in general rejected was “basic Christianity.” That is a groundless historic admission, because it logically denies the reason for us to exist as a Christian church. Offshoots and current ex-pastor, anti-Adventist critics don’t need such an admission from our publishing house.

No, the truth is that our elders rejected an advanced understanding of the gospel parallel to and consistent with the unique Adventist idea of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. They did not become Babylon; they chose to be a retarded remnant church unwilling to “grow up” and follow the leading of the true Head of the church. As noted above, Ellen White said: “In Minneapolis God gave precious gems of truth to His people in new settings.” In context her counsel goes on to say:—

“This light from heaven by some* was rejected with all the stubbornness the Jews manifested in rejecting Christ, and there was much talk about standing by the old landmarks. But there was evidence they knew not what the old landmarks were. . . . The minds of men were fixed, sealed against the entrance of light, because they had decided it was a dangerous error removing the ‘old landmarks’ when it was not moving a peg of the old landmarks, but they had perverted ideas of what constituted the old landmarks.”

To make this very clear she lists the distinguishing truths (“old landmarks”) that called Adventists out of the popular

* The word “some” was later clarified by Ellen White as “many,” “our own brethren” (generic), and the acceptors as “few.” She stood at Minneapolis “almost alone.”
churches after 1844. None of these truths are found in nominal, popular “basic Christianity”:—(1) cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven; (2) its relation to God’s people on earth; (3) the first, second and third angel’s messages; (4) the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus; (5) the temple of God in heaven and the ark containing the law of God; (6) the Sabbath of the fourth commandment; (7) the non-immortality of the soul.

In harmony with these distinguishing truths she then proclaims: “Now at the present time God designs a new and fresh impetus shall be given His work. . . . The knowledge they [men in responsible positions] should receive of God that they might be a light and blessing to others, they refuse to accept, and thus become channels of darkness” (1888 Materials, 518, 519, emphasis supplied [1889]). Does Sunday-keeping “righteousness by faith,” limited as it was, injected into historic, legalistic “Adventism” qualify as the latter rain and the loud cry of the third angel’s message? Or did we then and do we now need a “fresh impetus” to transform our entire understanding of the third angel’s message?

If the 16th Century Reformers’ understanding of righteousness by faith was the same as that of “the third angel’s message in verity,” why didn’t God give them the message of Revelation 18?

There is a further possibility that Knight overlooks what keeping the commandments means. Prior to 1888, most SDA ministers failed to understood it. True justification by faith which is related to the Most Holy Apartment ministry of our great High Priest lifts commandment-keeping immeasurably above the pre-1888 idea. The 1888 message began to recover Paul’s original concept of justification by faith that the Sunday-keeping churches were sincerely unable to grasp: only “agape is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). By that standard, even good Luther fell short of its total realization. In Christ’s
Most Holy Place ministry, the High Priest ministers a greater heart-appreciation for what it cost the Lamb of God to save us which results in a total reconciliation with God that is implicit in Ellen White’s phrase, “the final atonement.” Luther’s “basic Christianity” is wonderful but it is not adequate to meet the test of the mark of the beast.

Here is where Seventh-day Adventists are called to tell the world of a “breadth and length and depth and height” in righteousness by faith that most Sunday-keeping Evangelicals could never dream of. They can’t see it, sincere as they may be, for their minds are constricted by their natural immortality of the soul prejudice.

What could they have given us in 1888?

**Does “Broad Exposure” Equal Acceptance?**

Dr. Knight correctly states that “some of the Adventist leadership accepted it, but most rejected both the men and their message,” and that “Ellen White emphasized that God had chosen Jones and Waggoner to bear a special message to the Adventist Church” (93). This is true. But did the post-Minneapolis church leadership under O. A. Olsen undo the unbelief that permeated the Minneapolis conference? Knight suggests the answer is yes because “Olsen responded positively.”

It was not long after Minneapolis that the General Conference exiled Ellen White to Australia and Waggoner to England. Thus the trio was dissolved which left the president to follow his own plans. Contrary to what Knight says, no evidence exists that Olsen had “responded positively” to the message. Neither do the preaching appointments of Jones and Waggoner, labeled by Knight as “broad exposure” and “prominence,” constitute acceptance of their message.

The chief officer of the church was deeply at odds with the message and the messengers, more so than he realized; and
although Ellen White was on the other side of the planet she spared no effort in writing to him about his failure to appreciate the light.

The 1888 Materials portray a sad picture of his leadership. A 15-page letter in September 1892 came to him from Australia. She asks: “Why do not brethren of like precious faith consider that in every age, when the Lord has sent a special message to the people, all the powers of the confederacy of evil have set at work to prevent the word of truth from coming to those who should receive it? . . . Now, although there has been a determined effort to make of no effect the message God has sent, its fruits have been proving that it was from the source of light and truth. . . . One matter burdens my soul . . . continued resistance of light and truth,. . . evidence piled upon evidence . . . to counteract the work of the message God has sent” (1022, 1024, 1025).

In September 1895 she continues in apparent agony of soul: “The General Conference is itself becoming corrupted with wrong sentiments and principles. . . . I have been shown that the Jewish nation were not brought suddenly into their condition of thought and practice. From generation to generation they were working on false theories, carrying out principles opposed to the truth, and combining with their religious thoughts and plans that were the product of human minds” (1425).

After several years in Australia she wrote to him in December 1896: “The Lord was not in our leaving America. . . . The Lord did not plan this. . . . Had your spiritual perception discerned the true position, you would never have consented to the movements made” (1622).

In August of the same year she wrote of his pathetic condition: “I feel sorry for Brother Olsen, . . . He has not acted upon the light given. The case is a mysterious one. . . . He has
ventured on, directly contrary to the light which the Lord has been giving him. All this confuses his spiritual discernment ... as an unfaithful watchman. . . . He is leading other minds to view matters in a perverted light. He has given unmistakeable evidence that he does not regard the testimonies which the Lord has seen fit to give His people as worthy of respect or as of sufficient weight to influence his course of action. I am distressed beyond any words my pen can trace. Unmistakably, Elder Olsen has acted as did Aaron in regard to these men who have been opposed to the work of God ever since the Minneapolis meeting” (1607, 1608).

Speaking directly of the ongoing resistance, she wrote Elder I. H. Evans that Olsen had “rejected” the trust given him to communicate to the General Conference brethren her messages of reproof (Letter E51, 1897; White Estate).

It would be wonderful if history could record that Olsen “responded positively to the young reformers.” We wish it could have been true. “Aaron” couldn’t accomplish much; the heart was divided. Circumstances beyond their control forced the General Conference to allow Jones and Waggoner to speak frequently. Ellen White specifies that the underground resistance continued practically unabated with the “tops cut down” but the “roots” left intact.

Positive Accountability vs. “Blank Checks”

The last problem in Knight’s segment on the 1888 history may be the most serious. “Some believers in the 1890s interpreted Ellen White’s enthusiastic support of Jones and Waggoner as a kind of theological blank check.” And so “she had to fight that mentality” (94, 95).

To do this—and then Knight quotes a phrase out of context—“she flatly asserted that ‘some interpretations of Scripture given by Dr. Waggoner I do not regard as correct.’” And then he adds a single word from a comment made over a
year later, “the two reformers were not ‘infallible’.”

The current “writers” whom Knight opposes have never intimated that Jones and Waggoner were “infallible,” or that Ellen White gave them any kind of theological “blank check.” They have said only that she supported them enthusiastically hundreds of times and said they had “heavenly credentials” which no other SDA minister in history is said to have had (all this short of infallibility).

What did she actually say in 1888 in context?

She was speaking to the session in the first flush of her new enthusiasm when she could hardly sleep at night for joy. Her thoughts are expressed clearly:—

“Dr. Waggoner has spoken to us in a straightforward manner. There is precious light in what he has said. Some things presented in reference to the law in Galatians, if I understand his position,** do not harmonize with the understanding I have had on this subject; but truth will lose nothing by investigation. . . . I would have humility of mind, and be willing to be instructed as a child.”

As she continues she says:

“Some interpretations of Scripture given by Dr. Waggoner I do not regard as correct.*** But I believe him to be perfectly honest in his views. . . . I know it would be dangerous to denounce Dr. Waggoner’s position as wholly erroneous. . . . I see the beauty of truth in the presentation of the righteousness of Christ in relation to the law as the doctor has placed it before us.”

Then she adds a detail which Dr. Knight leaves out:

** Later she did understand his position and supported it.
***If her “I” is emphasized (as it well might have been), this remark can be understood as a plea to the brethren to lay aside their prejudice. She says in effect, Even I am caught by surprise; but do let us study the matter!
“That which has been presented harmonizes perfectly with the light which God has been pleased to give me during all the years of my experience” (163, 164 [Nov. 1888]).

But the matter does not end there. She said later on:—

“I believe without a doubt that God has given precious truth at the right time to Brother Jones and Waggoner. Do I believe them as infallible? Do I say they will not make a statement or have an idea that cannot be questioned or that cannot be error? Do I say so? No, I do not say any such thing. Nor do I say that of any man in the world. But I do say God has sent light, and do be careful how you treat it” (566 [1890]).

Echoes of Previous Books

The philosophy portrayed in this small section of A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists is but the echo of the author’s previous books dealing with 1888. Once again the inference is put to the church that Ellen White’s post-1888 publications really provide all the message the church or the world needs. Did “the Lord in His great mercy” send a superfluous “message”? God’s people have been given Steps to Christ (1892), Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing (1896), The Desire of Ages (1898), Christ’s Object Lessons (1900)—but she never even hinted that these and anything else she has ever penned could take the place of the “most precious message” which “the Lord in His great mercy sent” through Jones and Waggoner.

She claimed that her writings were in harmony with their message but never intimated that they were to supplant it or make it superfluous. She would not dare to override a “message” she had declared the Lord had “sent” by others. As her writings as a “lesser light” direct us to a “greater Light,” so thousands of Adventists today are testifying that the 1888 message has anointed their eyes to appreciate more deeply her writings.
**Minneapolis Prejudices and Opinions Prevail**

Ellen White’s Holy Spirit-enlightened-insight allowed her to see the remnant church yet in the future beyond her day. In 1890 she outlined specifically the dangers facing the work of God. They are intimately connected with the tragedy of Minneapolis:

“The prejudices and opinions that prevailed at Minneapolis are not dead by any means; the seeds sown there in some hearts are ready to spring into life and bear a like harvest. The tops have been cut down, but the roots have never been eradicated, and they still bear their unholy fruit to poison the judgment, pervert the perceptions, and blind the understanding of those with whom you connect, in regard to the message and the messengers. When by thorough confession, you destroy the root of bitterness, you will see light in God’s light. Without this thorough work you will never clear your souls. You need to study the word of God with a purpose, not to confirm your own ideas, but to bring them to be trimmed, to be condemned or approved, as they are or are not in harmony with the word of God. The Bible should be your constant companion” (954, 955).

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After fifty years since 1888 *Re-examined* was presented to the General Conference Committee, the story of the 1888 history and message is still a thorn to any who would rationalize the truth of Adventist history. Ellen White’s portrayal of Baal worship has not lost its impact. The same prophetic insight that discloses roots that “have never been eradicated” goes on to sound a warning worthy of our attention:

“Infidelity has been making its inroads into our ranks; for it is the fashion to depart from Christ, and give place to skepticism. With many the cry of the heart has been, “We will
not have this man to reign over us.” Baal, Baal, is the choice. The religion of many among us will be the religion of apostate Israel, because they love their own way, and forsake the way of the Lord. The true religion, the only religion of the Bible, that teaches forgiveness only through the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour, that advocates righteousness by the faith of the Son of God, has been slighted, spoken against, ridiculed, and rejected. . . . What kind of a future is before us, if we shall fail to come into the unity of the faith?” (955).

What God initiated in the early 1890s must be recaptured and permitted to reach its desired end—the preparation of a people for the coming of Christ. Whether this generation faces the objective truth of our history or whether we must await one yet in the future, certainly probation cannot close until Adventist history is recognized, for in it is revealed the story of our heart-alienation from the Lamb of God. What our elders needed long ago and what we need is what Ellen White described as “the final atonement.”

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**Special Notice**

The 1950 private document mentioned on page 2 of this pamphlet was revised and published in 1987 and is available at this special price only from the authors listed on the back cover.

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