

**A research paper on the history of the trinity doctrine within the early Christian Church and within Seventh-day Adventism**

**Section forty-two**

**The 1936 Sabbath School Lessons**

\*Please note

This section was once included in with the previous section [section forty-one (a)] as one complete section but because it grew too large as information was added the author has thought it best to make two sections of it. (20<sup>th</sup> January 2010)

We have seen in previous sections that during the ministry of Ellen White (1844-1915) and beyond, the preponderant faith of Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ was truly the Son of God. This was because He was said to be begotten of God (the Father). This theology did not portray Him to be a lesser divine being than the Father, neither did it make Him 'another god' or someone (or something) that was inferior to God but was God Himself in the person of His Son. For an understanding of this theology see the 'Begotten Series', in particular 'section nine'.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today denies the validity of this 'begotten' belief (the true Sonship of Christ). They say it is error. In fact they maintain that Christ is unbegotten therefore He is not truly the Son of God (in His pre-existence) but is one of three coequal and coeternal divine beings in one indivisible substance (essence). The latter is known as the 'one God'. This is the trinity God - the three-in-one God.

Needless to say, to be able to hold the trinity doctrine it must be said that the Holy Spirit is an individual like God and Christ. This is also something else that during the ministry of Ellen White was not believed by Seventh-day Adventists. How the Seventh-day Adventist belief concerning the Holy Spirit was changed we shall see in section forty-four.

In attempting to establish that God is 'a trinity', also to be regarded as a denomination that belongs to what is generally termed 'mainstream Christianity', our church today says that all three personalities have their being in the one indivisible substance of God. Without the latter belief they would not be trinitarian. In other words, simply making a profession of believing in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is not confessing the trinity doctrine. To be a trinitarian, the 'one substance' (unity) theory must be believed.

**The 4<sup>th</sup> quarter's lesson studies for 1936**

In the Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1936, the subject of the Godhead was discussed. As will be seen later, this particular quarter's studies were ***the first of seven consecutive quarters*** detailing what our church described as the '***essential doctrines***' of Seventh-day Adventists. This means that the lesson studies contained in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1936, right through to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1938, were all detailing these denominational beliefs. It can be said therefore that this was still the denominational faith during the 1940's - at least the early part of them. This is only reasonable to believe. We shall return to this thought later.

After reviewing these lesson studies, the author of the notes you are now reading would heartily recommend them to be read by all who claim to be God's remnant people. This is because they detail every aspect of the 'one-time faith' of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Sabbath School Lesson Study archives are here

<http://www.adventistarchives.org/documents.asp?CatID=166%20%20&SortBy=2&ShowDateOrder=True>

In the lesson study for October 17<sup>th</sup> 1936 (the title for this lesson was 'The Godhead') the word 'trinity' was used. In fact 'The Trinity' was one of the sub-headings. This was not to denote that all three personalities of the Godhead are of one substance (as in the trinity doctrine) but to indicate the unity of the three. In other words, the word 'trinity' was not used as in the trinity doctrine but as an alternative for 'Godhead'. In fact it said of the word 'trinity' that it was "A threefold name" (see lesson 3 for October 17 1936). Nowhere in the study was this elaborated upon to mean what is generally known as 'the doctrine of the trinity'.

The study itself can be found on the Seventh-day Adventist Church archives website. To read it, please [click here](#) and scroll down to Lesson 3 for October 17<sup>th</sup> (page 9).

Under the subtitle of 'The Trinity', the question was asked "How does the Father address the Son? As Hebrews 1:8 was cited, the answer has to be that the Father addressed the Son as 'God'.

The author of the lesson study also supplied this note (this was in response to the question "What is the Holy Spirit called in the Scriptures?")

"It will be noticed that in Acts 5:3, Peter says, "lie to the Holy Ghost," while in verse 4, he says, "thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God," ***thus using the two names interchangeably***. In the other references, the Holy Spirit is appropriately called "the Spirit of God."

Hence in the scriptures cited in questions 7 to 9, we learn that **the name God is used of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit** - a kind of heavenly family name. These three constitute the Godhead." (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1936, Lesson 3, October 17<sup>th</sup> 1936, page 10. 'The Godhead'*)

The study then asked (citing John 3:16, Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 2:18 as revealing the answer) "How do the three members of the Godhead, who wrought together in creation, also work together in making salvation possible?"

In answer to this question it was said

"Summing up these scriptures, we see that God **"gave His only-begotten Son,"** that Jesus **"gave Himself for our sins,"** that it was **"through the eternal Spirit"** (Hebrews 9:14) that Christ offered Himself to God. Thus the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are united in making salvation possible." (*Ibid*)

It then quoted Ellen White as saying

"The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and **the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit** gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption." - "Counsels on Health," p. 222." (*Ibid*)

### The unity of the Godhead

Under the subtitle 'The Unity of the Godhead', the study asks (citing John 8:28; 5:19 and 14:31)

"How is the work of the **Son related to that of the Father?**" (*Ibid*)

The study notes said

"Here it is twice stated that **the Son can do nothing of Himself,** but that He speaks what the Father gives Him to speak, does what the Father does, and obeys the Father's commands." (*Ibid*)

The question is then asked (citing John 15:26 and 16:13)

"How is the work of the **Spirit related to that of the Son?**" (*Ibid*)

The answer is supplied

**"The Son sends** the Spirit as His personal representative. The Spirit does not speak of Himself (that is, His own words), but what He is given to speak, **calling to remembrance whatever the Son has said.**" (*Ibid*)

The study then asks (citing John 14:26 and 15:26)

"How is the work of the **Spirit related to that of the Father?**" (*Ibid*)

The answer is returned

**"The Father sends the Spirit in the name of the Son,** that is, as the Son's representative. The Spirit "proceedeth from the Father," to do His work in the earth." (*Ibid page 11*)

It then adds as a summary explanation

"Hence the **Father sends the Spirit,** and **the Son sends the Spirit.** The **Son speaks what the Father gives Him to speak,** and the **Spirit speaks what the Son gives Him to speak.** The Spirit is **both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ.** How could there be more perfect accord, more complete unity?" (*Ibid*)

That the Holy Spirit is "both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ" was the long-time faith held by Seventh-day Adventists. We have seen this in the sections dealing with the pioneers' beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit (see [section thirty-one](#), [section thirty-two](#), [section thirty-three](#) and [section thirty-four](#)).

In this 1936 Sabbath School lesson study, the question is then posed

"How is the place of the Son **in** the Godhead emphasized? Col. 2:9"

As Colossians 2:9 is quoted, it is obvious that the answer must be that in Christ dwells "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily".

Note here the phrase "**in** the Godhead". This could make the word 'Godhead' to appear something very similar to the word 'trinity'. The truth of the matter is that these two words are not even similar.

The word 'Godhead' - as translated in the KJV (Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9) - pertains to 'divinity' but does not - as does the word 'trinity' - include the idea of 'three in one'. Interestingly, up to now, I have never found anywhere in the writings of Ellen White where she uses the phrase 'in the Godhead'. All that I can find is where she says 'of the Godhead' (of divinity). For a study of the word 'Godhead' see [section one](#) of the '[What think ye of Christ](#)' series.

The penultimate question in this sub-section was "How is the unity of the Godhead expressed? (John 10:30 and 14:11 cited)

The author(s) of the study noted

"The Father is **in the Son,** and the Son is **in the Father.** The Spirit is "the Spirit of God" **and** "the Spirit of Christ."

Hence all three dwell together, **and the three are one.**" (*Ibid*)

This was the faith of the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism. The 'oneness' was not elaborated upon here although if you remember, the writer did say that "These three constitute the Godhead" (see above) – not that they constituted the 'one God' as in the trinity doctrine. This is saying two different things.

### The deity of Christ - Christ a begotten Son

Under the sub-heading "Deity of Christ" (the main heading was 'Deity and Pre-existence of Christ') the following week's lesson (lesson 4 for October 24 1936) asked this question

"Of whom **was Christ begotten?** (*Ibid, Lesson 4, October 24<sup>th</sup> 1936, page 12*)

This question is of major significance. It is one that as far as our studies are concerned is really very important.

This question shows that in 1936, the 'begotten faith' held by early Seventh-day Adventists was still the accepted denominational faith of its members. We know this because this is exactly what was being taught in its Sabbath School lesson studies for that year (1936). This much is unmistakable and irrefutable.

The above question was asked of all who engaged in these lesson studies – meaning those participating as students and those who were teaching the studies (the Sabbath School teachers). It must also be remembered that these same studies went around the world to Seventh-day Adventists and non-Seventh-day Adventists alike – not only as teaching what was accepted as the truth concerning Christ but also as detailing what was then the denominational faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As we shall see later, these studies were endorsed by the General Conference. It can be assumed therefore, seeing that this was our denominational faith in the late 1930's, that this same faith was the accepted denominational faith in the early 1940's. This is because no denomination can change the preponderant belief of its membership overnight. It does take time - also death. We shall see this more clearly in section forty-five.

As containing the answer to this 'begotten' question, the lesson study then cites Psalms 2:7 and John 1:14, so the expected answer is that Christ was begotten of God (the Father). This is in direct contrast to what is believed by Seventh-day Adventists today - which is almost 72 years on from the date of this lesson study (October 1936).

Today our church is saying that this 'begotten faith' is false doctrine – meaning it is unscriptural. They also say

that it demeans Christ. For details see section ten of this history series, also section ten of the 'Begotten Series'. Such, during this time period (1936-2008), is the extent of the change in the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.

The lesson study then cites Ellen G. White as saying

"He who had been in the presence of the Father **from the beginning**, He who was the **express image of the invisible God**, was alone able to reveal the character of the Deity to mankind." - "Ministry of Healing," p. 422." (*Ibid*)

It further quotes Ellen White as saying

"Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is 'the **express image of the Father**, but man was formed in the **likeness** of God.'" (*Ibid*)

As we shall now see, the entire point of this section of the study was to show that Christ was literally begotten of God (the Father) therefore He was truly both the Son of God and God Himself.

The quarterly then notes (because the Son is begotten of the Father)

"Hebrews 1:4 tells us that the Son's name, God, was "a more excellent name" than the angels received, because He obtained it "**by inheritance**," that is, as "heir of all things." A son is the **natural heir, and when God made Christ His heir, He recognized His sonship.**" (*Ibid*)

Note that the study says "**when** God made Christ His heir". This is obviously with reference to Christ's pre-existence.

The study concludes

"This is why the Son bore the **same name as His Father.**" (*Ibid*)

Here again we see the past 'begotten faith' of Seventh-day Adventism. This is that Christ is truly (literally) the Son of God and is therefore God.

The author of the lesson is saying that because Christ is begotten of God, then "by inheritance" He is God and the Son of God. This is not a denigrating of Christ but an uplifting Him to His true position as God's one and only Son. As the notes say, "when God made Christ His heir, He [God the Father] recognized His [Christ's] sonship".

Interestingly, the above conclusion ("the same name as His Father") is exactly the same as was taught by E. J. Waggoner at the famous 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session (see section ten of this history series and section seventeen of 'The begotten Series') –

revealing that this had been the 'long-time' faith of Seventh-day Adventists.

With reference to Matthew 1:23, the lesson later said

"Here again the Son is called by the Father's name, "God." This is **because He "was God."** John 1:1." (*Ibid*)

After saying that the apostle Paul affirmed the deity of the Son the lesson says

"Paul's language is equivalent to John's when the latter says, "The Word was made flesh." John 1:14. He affirms that the Jesus who was "born of a woman" **was really God.**" (*Ibid*)

It was stressed over and over again throughout the study that the Son of God is God. This was no different than what had always been believed by Seventh-day Adventists.

The study then asks

"What public announcement of **His Son's deity** did the Father make on two different occasions?" (*Ibid* page 12)

Matthew 3:17 and 17:5 is cited as containing the answer therefore we can see from this that it is being said that the Father confirmed Christ's deity by calling Him 'His Son' ("this is my beloved son"). Again this is the very same 'begotten faith' that throughout the time of Ellen White's ministry was held by Seventh-day Adventists.

Concerning the 'origins' of Christ, the lesson quarterly then helps us to realise just what it was that Seventh-day Adventists believed and taught in 1936.

After asking "What testimony concerning His deity did Christ Himself give", also citing John 16:27, John 16:28 and 8:58 as containing the answer, the study notes said

"The direct statement of Jesus, "I came forth from the Father," **reads literally, "I came out of the Father."** Putting with this, His testimony in John 10:38, "The Father is in Me, and I in Him," we have His **personal witness that He truly was "begotten of the Father,"** as John says in 1:14." (*Ibid*)

This is another striking realisation. It reveals very clearly that through our Sabbath School lesson quarterlies in 1936, Seventh-day Adventists maintained - just as they had done so during Ellen White's ministry - that Christ literally "came out of the Father". This is what is meant by "begotten of the Father". Note the emphasis that the words of Jesus (as found in John 10:38) reveal that Christ "truly was begotten". How much clearer could this be to show what was being taught in 1936 within Seventh-day Adventism. This was then the

denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. We shall confirm this later.

On the next page of the study, the lesson asks (this was under the heading of 'Pre-existence of Christ')

"When does the prophet say **the life of the Son began?** Micah 5:2. margin." (*Ibid*, page 13)

Again this is very striking. It shows that in 1936, it was still the preponderant belief of Seventh-day Adventists that **the personality of the Son had a beginning** but this did not make Him a lesser divine being than God. The 'begotten Son', because He is begotten of God, is God Himself in the person of His Son.

This is best understood in contemplating these words from the spirit of prophecy

"The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, **is truly God in infinity, but not in personality.**" (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 116, Dec. 19, 1905, 'An Entire Consecration', see also The Upward Look, page 367*)

This can only be referring to the pre-existent Christ. It could not possibly be referring to the incarnate Christ. The man Christ Jesus was never "truly God in infinity".

The pre-existent Christ is God Himself in the person of the Son (John 1:1, 18). The incarnate Christ is God manifest in the flesh (John 1:14, 1 Timothy 3:16). As far as personalities are concerned, there cannot be two who are the 'one true God'. This is why Jesus, as did Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said that the one true God is the Father (see John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6)

The lesson study then says

"While we cannot comprehend eternity - without beginning and without ending - yet it is dearly affirmed here that the life which Christ possesses is **"from the days of eternity."**" (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1936, Lesson 3, October 17<sup>th</sup> 1936, page 13. 'The Godhead'*)

This is a reference to Micah 5:2 but not exactly as quoted in the KJV. Instead of the words "from everlasting" (as used in the KJV), the margin notes ("from the days of eternity") are employed. With regards to Micah 5:2, this was common practise within Seventh-day Adventism. It was also done by Ellen White.

As we have seen in previous sections, she wrote with reference to Jesus saying, "Before Abraham was I am" (John 8:58)

"Silence fell upon the vast assembly. **The name of God,** given to Moses to express the idea of the **eternal**

**presence**, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be **the self-existent One**, He who had been promised to Israel, "whose goings forth have been from of old, **from the days of eternity**." Micah 5:2, margin. (*Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, page 469, 'The light of Life'*)

Note the use of the "margin" reading.

In this same book she had also said previously

"She [Mary the mother of Jesus] is of the lineage of David, and the Son of David must be born in David's city. Out of Bethlehem, said the prophet, "shall He come forth . . . that is to be ruler in Israel; **whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity**." Micah 5:2, margin." (*Ellen G. White, 'The Desire of Ages, page 44, 'Unto you a Saviour', 1898*)

Ellen White also quoted the margin reading of Micah 5:2 in Patriarchs and Prophets (see page 697 - 'The Coming of a deliverer').

Quite obviously, rather than 'from everlasting' as in the KJV, the words "from the days of eternity" were better suited to what was then the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. The former could give the idea that Christ was not begotten of the Father. See [section sixteen](#) of this series. See also in particular [section seven \(part 4 of 'Begotten theology'\)](#) of the '[Begotten Series](#)'. The latter section gives a more detailed explanation of Micah 5:2.

The 1936 lesson study also said

"Cumulative evidence that the Son existed with the Father before creation is abundant in the Scriptures. In the few passages we have studied here, we find that Christ was with the Father "before the world was," "from, **the days of eternity**," "before the foundation of the world," "before all things." He was therefore no part of creation, **but was "begotten of the Father" in the days of eternity, and was very God Himself.**" (*Sabbath School Lesson Study, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1936, Lesson 3, October 17<sup>th</sup> 1936, page 13. 'The Godhead'*)

Over and over again this 1936 lesson study related the idea that Christ was truly begotten of the Father therefore He is "very God Himself".

The lesson concluded concerning what the Scriptures say regarding Christ and His deity

"The teaching of the scriptures in this lesson is little short of over whelming in its marvellous meaning to us in the personal life. The Lord Jesus Christ, **the Son of God, and God Himself**, who existed with the Father "from the days of eternity," who made the world and all things therein—even this Jesus "gave Himself for our sins," and by believing on the name of this Son of God, we obtain

the gift of eternal life, and may share it with Him throughout the eternal ages, world without end." (*Ibid*)

That Christ is truly the begotten Son of God was, according to this lesson study, the overwhelming evidence that He is none other than God Himself. As it was explained in our Sabbath School Lesson Quarterlies in 1936, this 'begotten faith' was undoubtedly a continuation of the faith of our pioneers.

### The Sabbath School Lessons – the truth

In the Review and Herald of December 17<sup>th</sup> 1936, there was reference to the set of lesson studies that were being studied that very quarter (the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1936). These were the lessons that we have just been quoting from above. The title of the series of lessons was "Bible Doctrines". This was the first of **7 separate consecutive quarters** of lesson studies designed to teach what was then the **doctrines held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church**. This was prior to the adopting of the trinity doctrine into our fundamental beliefs.

After making the appeal that the time had come when we should take what we learn from our Sabbath School lesson studies to a further audience than our Sabbath School classes and teachers etc, it was said

"Has not the time come when each Sabbath school student who studies the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath school lesson should recite or teach that Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath school lesson **to some one who is without its blessing of truth** - to a neighbor, to some friend, to a group in a cottage meeting, as a Sunday night sermon in a tent or hall, or in some other way to some other persons?" (*G. A. Roberts, Review and Herald, December 17<sup>th</sup> 1936, 'The Sabbath School Lesson'*)

There was obviously a very strong 'push' for Seventh-day Adventist to share their denominational faith with others.

Roberts then added

"Should not each Sabbath school pupil lift up his eyes and look on the field of his own neighbourhood or circle of acquaintances that is white to harvest, and carry to that **field the message contained in the present Sabbath school lessons?** Should not each thus become an open channel as well as a reservoir of truth?" (*Ibid*)

Then there came an appeal with reference to the studies of **that quarter**, also to the ones that were to follow **for the next six quarters**. As has been said, these were designed to cover **all** the essential doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism.

This appeal said

***“The opportunity of a lifetime*** is now before us to ***teach the truth*** to our neighbours and communities, for the ***Sabbath school lessons on Bible doctrines are well adapted to that very purpose.***” (Ibid)

The same author then made clear

“The outline at the close of each lesson will ***helpfully guide in the matter***, and as the ***present lessons on doctrines are fully authenticated by the lesson committee of the General Conference Sabbath School Department***, any one can know that what he teaches as he presents the lesson as a Bible reading or a sermon ***is correct.***” (Ibid)

Here we have the ultimate proof that the ‘officially approved faith’ of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1936 was still that Christ is truly begotten of God (the Father) and that because of this He is a true Son (as seen in the lesson studies we have reviewed above). As it says here, these lessons were “fully authenticated by the lesson committee of the General Conference Sabbath School Department”. Notice too that it says that because of this, if anyone teaches these doctrines - as in the lesson studies - they can know that what they are teaching “is correct”. This is probably quite a realisation to those who say that the ‘one time’ begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists was error – or that by this time it had disappeared from Seventh-day Adventism.

There then followed an appeal that every Sabbath School teacher should be an instructor of the truth to those seeking baptism.

It said

“With the instruction gained from week to week, when several quarters have passed the Sabbath school teachers should be ***competent instructors for baptismal classes***, and can easily take charge of such classes for the evangelists. If there is no evangelist or pastor, ***the Sabbath school teacher can prepare candidates for baptism from the membership of his Sabbath school class, and then request that a minister be sent to baptize them.***” (Ibid)

According to what is being said here, if the Sabbath School teacher instructed an individual in the teachings found in these 1936 lesson studies, this would be a preparation for baptism. These beliefs were obviously regarded as of prime importance – also that a belief in them was a prerequisite to church membership. It leaves one to wonder what would have been the result if a prospective baptismal candidate said that he (or she) did not believe that Christ was begotten of God (God’s true Son)?

Very interesting is that the following January (1937), also in the Review and Herald, there was an advert for a binder in which to keep these Sabbath School Lessons on “Bible Doctrines”. As we shall see very soon, this was because of a directive given at the previous 1936 General Conference held at San Francisco.

It said in the Review and Herald concerning this binder

“It will preserve all your lesson pamphlets, ***covering Bible Doctrines*** as outlined in the Sabbath school lessons ***for seven full quarters***. These lessons have been prepared under ***the careful supervision of the Sabbath School Department***, and you will want to keep them. ***They are invaluable for continuous reference.***” (Review and Herald, January 14<sup>th</sup> 1937, ‘Preserve your Lesson Quarterlies on Bible Doctrines’)

Again we can see that these sets of lesson studies were said to contain ***the truly authentic faith of Seventh-day Adventists***. This was as it was during the time period leading up to the 1940’s. Notice how much care was taken in the preparation of these studies. They were said to be “invaluable for continuous reference”.

Regarding the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, it was in the 1940’s that things began to change dramatically. We shall see this in later sections.

### **General Conference endorses the SS Lesson studies on “Bible Doctrines”**

At the General Conference Committee meeting on December 6, 1935, it was reported under the heading of “Sabbath School Lesson Manuscripts”

“The Sabbath School Department ***desiring special help in their Lessons Committee during the time when they will be considering the manuscripts for the lessons on Bible doctrines***, it was

VOTED, That I. H. Evans, W. H. Branson, O. Montgomery, M. E. Kern, F. M. Wilcox and W. E. Howell be appointed to ***read the manuscripts and sit with the Sabbath School Department Lessons Committee when consideration is given to the lessons on Bible doctrines,***” (General Conference Committee Minutes, December 6<sup>th</sup> 1935)

These were the lesson studies that were to commence from the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 1936. These leading figures of Seventh-day Adventism were voted to give “special help” to those compiling them (the Sabbath School Department). This reveals, at that time, how important these studies were to the General Conference. They obviously did not wish them to contain error. As we shall now see, they were intended to ‘tell the world’ what was believed by Seventh-day Adventists.

Note that F. M. Wilcox was appointed as one of the 'readers' of the manuscripts of the proposed Lesson Quarterlies. As we shall see in [section forty-five](#), he was responsible for writing a statement of faith that was the first to include the word 'trinity'. The latter was in 1931 – 5 years previous to these set of lesson studies we are now studying.

Prior to the above lesson studies being published (the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1936 through to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1938), they were also spoken of at the General Conference Session held previously that year (1936) in San Francisco. This discussion took place during the final day's proceedings.

In the morning session, a number of items were discussed, one of which dealt with the question of music in the church. A resolution was passed encouraging all Seventh-day Adventists to cultivate a taste for only the best. There were also resolutions encouraging the youth to use only our songbooks in their meetings (rather than those books not of our denomination), also to use "old and tried advent hymns". Apart from anything else, there was probably the worry that hymn books not published by our denomination could, in the songs it contained, include false doctrine. There was also passed a recommendation taking a strong stand against dancing - whilst it was also urged that the spirit of prophecy writings should be earnestly studied and obeyed. A committee was also appointed to "study the advisability of preparing a new denominational hymnal". The latter was approved and became the one we know as the 'New Advent Hymnal' (1941).

After discussing a number of other items, there followed recommendations concerning the Sabbath School work. This included the "urging greater efforts toward the reaching of Sabbath School goals and standards" also "greater care in the selecting of Sabbath School teachers and officers". There was obviously concern that our teachings should be presented correctly. Other recommendations were made including the encouraging of branch Sabbath Schools.

In the afternoon session, the future Sabbath School Lessons came up for discussion. These were for the 7 consecutive quarters on "Bible Doctrines" spoken of above.

In the Review and Herald report of the conference it said

"Beginning with the fourth quarter of 1936, the Sabbath school lessons for the denomination **for seven consecutive quarters** are to cover **the essential doctrines of this message**. It was recommended that our people everywhere be encouraged to use these lessons **as a basis for conducting Bible readings and cottage meetings** in the homes of neighbours and friends, and that Bible training classes be organized in every church for this purpose." (*Review and Herald*,

*June 18<sup>th</sup> 1936, Report of the final day's session at the 1936 General Conference held at San Francisco, 'The Sabbath School Lessons for 1936'*)

We can now see why these Sabbath School lesson studies were so high profile. It was said at the General Conference session in 1936 that they were to cover "the essential doctrines" of our message. These studies were also recommended as a basis for conducting Bible Studies and organised cottage meetings etc. They were in fact the 'officially taught doctrines' of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In the official report of the conference detailing the recommendations it said

"Beginning with the fourth quarter of 1936, the Sabbath school lessons for **seven quarters** will cover **the essential doctrines of our faith**; therefore, We recommend,

1. That in connection with the study of this important series of lessons, our people throughout the world be encouraged to use these lessons as **a basis for conducting Bible readings and cottage meetings in the homes of their neighbors and friends**.
2. That in preparation for this advance step, **Bible training classes be organized in all our churches**, as outlined by the General Conference Home Missionary Department.
3. That our publishing houses be requested to provide suitable loose-leaf folders for the use of those who desire to keep on file **the series of Sabbath school lessons on Bible doctrines**." (*Review and Herald, June 18<sup>th</sup> 1936, 'Proceedings of the General Conference, Thirty-second Meeting'*)

As can be seen from these few remarks, this set of studies on the "Bible Doctrines" of our church was indeed very high profile. This was not just another (an ordinary) set of Sabbath School lesson studies. Note too they were continued over 7 quarters, meaning from the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1936 to the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1938. This is a very long time period for one set of lessons.

Four weeks later in the Review and Herald - this time under the title of 'Home Missionary Department Meetings' - it spoke of the recent councils of the secretaries of the Home Missionary Department.

It said

"All these departmental meetings interspersed through the General Conference session **were marked by an earnest spirit of study** to solve perplexing problems, and by intense desire to improve every moment of the opportunity afforded for binding off the discussions and

plans developed in the pre-council, thus conserving and preserving the deliberations of the entire council for the **future guidance of leaders in the layman's missionary movement when they will be widely separated throughout the great world field.**" (Grace D. Mace, *Review and Herald*, July 16<sup>th</sup> 1936, 'Home Missionary Department Meetings')

The report then stated

"A great deal of time was required for the consideration of a topic of unusual interest,—how to make the most effective missionary use **of the Sabbath school lessons on Bible doctrines which the Sabbath School Department has provided to be used beginning with the fourth quarter of 1936 and covering a period of seven consecutive quarters.** The chairman explained that these lessons are prepared in a form which provides a simple outline for a Bible reading on each doctrinal subject." (*Ibid*)

The chairman was then reported as saying

"For years there has been a demand from many parts of the field **for a series of doctrinal Sabbath school lessons framed in such a way that our church members could use them as outlines for Bible studies in the homes of friends and neighbours.** Now that we have such a set of lessons, **we should thank God,** and improve the opportunity to lead all our people into the broad field of Bible evangelism. It is estimated that there are about **100,000 Sabbath school teachers** in our churches throughout the world, who will stand before their classes each week and give instruction on all doctrinal subjects. It would be wonderful if these hundred thousand Sabbath school teachers would spend a little time each week in **teaching the lesson to groups of people or to individuals upon whose pathway the light of truth has not yet dawned.**" (*Ibid*)

Quite obviously these lesson studies were regarded as a blessing from God, therefore having His approval. It was even said that "we should thank God" for them. These lesson studies were also very much in demand from "the field".

The chairman also added

**"But this is not all that we should aim to accomplish.** Every member of each Sabbath school class should be encouraged to make contact with some person who is seeking for a better understanding of God's word, and in an informal way give him a Bible study each week **on the lesson which he has already studied and received personal instruction upon in the Sabbath school class.** What can we do, brethren, to lead the entire 'church at study' into the place where it becomes the entire 'church at work'?" (*Ibid*)

After reading the above, it should go without saying that these sets of studies on "Bible Doctrines" were highly recommended by the General Conference. They were to be used as teaching 'the truth' to all those who had not yet received our message. According to the General Conference (this was as the 1940's approached), this set of studies contained the "essential doctrines" of the faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We can safely assume therefore that these were still the denomination faith in the early part of the 1940's. As has been said previously, it would be impossible to change the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists throughout the world overnight. To achieve this it would take time.

### An interesting observation

In passing and as a matter of interest, I will now share something else with you. To some it may not seem very significant but I regard it as saying something very important.

In the final set of studies on "Bible Doctrines" (this was in the Sabbath School lessons for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 1938) it had as a sub-title to one section

"CHURCH MEMBERS SHARE FELLOWSHIP OF FATHER AND SON" (*Sabbath School Lesson Studies, Bible Doctrines, Lesson 9 for May 28, 1938, page 26*)

Why do I regard this as significant?

Ask yourself this question, why did not the lesson study say "Church Members Share Fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit"?

The obvious answer is that just as it was during the time of the pioneers, the Holy Spirit was still not regarded as a person like God and Christ. To any thinking person, this statement will be very significant.

This same realisation also lends reality to the objections made to the trinity doctrine by Judson Washburn.

This is because he said in a letter to the General Conference in 1940 (two years after these studies) objecting to the trinity doctrine

"This monstrous doctrine [the trinity doctrine] transplanted from heathenism into the Roman Papal Church **is seeking to intrude** its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel's Message." (*Judson Washburn, The trinity, Letter to General Conference in 1940*)

Even though this may seem very surprising to some, the trinity doctrine in 1940 was not part of the fundamentals beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. As Washburn said, it was only then "**seeking** to intrude its evil presence into the teachings of the Third Angel's Message".



Judson Washburn was of the leading evangelists in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He had been baptised by James White and was a close friend of Ellen White. He kept her informed of the progress of the work wherever in the world it took him. He knew and understood perfectly the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. He would also have agreed with these 1936 studies on the Godhead. It was the 'faith' of Seventh-day Adventists that he had always taught.

### One final but very 'startling' realisation

What I am calling a 'startling realisation' is that if someone today teaches within Seventh-day Adventism what was then - in the 1930's/1940's - the "essential doctrines" of this denomination (also endorsed by the General Conference as the truth) meaning that Christ is begotten of God and is truly the Son of God - then it is quite possible that this person would be frowned upon by our church - probably be called 'a heretic' - also more than likely be subjected to some sort of church discipline. It may even be that they would be disfellowshipped from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even ministers could have their ministerial credentials withdrawn from them. Is not this a startling realisation? This shows how much, over the years, that the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists have changed.

### Wrong interpretations of Seventh-day Adventist history

Since the beginning of this trinity controversy within Seventh-day Adventism, the claim has been made that it was the writings of Ellen White (especially what she wrote in 'The Desire of Ages) that led our church to become trinitarian. We shall see a few of these claims now.

In 1969, in a term paper regarding the history of the trinity doctrine within Seventh-day Adventism, Russell Holt wrote with respect to the time period that we have been looking at in this section

"This period saw the death of most of those pioneers who had **championed and held the anti-trinitarian position**. Their places were being taken by men who **were changing their thinking, or had never opposed the doctrine**." (Russell Holt, "The doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination: Its rejection and acceptance" 1969)

Holt then said

"The trinity began to be published, **until by 1931 it had triumphed and become the standard denominational position**. Isolated stalwarts remained **who refused to yield**, but the outcome had been decided." (Ibid)

We can see from the above lesson studies, particularly those of 1936 (the set that detailed the essential, beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists) that Holt's interpretation of our 'trinity history' is not attested to by the facts. In 1936, we were still as non-trinitarian as we always had been. We still believed in the literal Sonship of Christ.

In a paper written in 1996, Merlin Burt wrote in opposition to Holt's conclusions

"The [Seventh-day Adventist] church **gradually shifted during from the 1930s to 1950s to the 'orthodox' Christian view** on the trinity and deity of Christ" (Merlin Burt, 'Demise of Semi-Arianism and anti-trinitarianism in Adventist theology, 1888-1957 page 47)

The latter is far more in keeping with the facts of history than that which was maintained by Russell Holt although I would not agree with Burt's remarks concerning the deity of Christ. This is because as we have seen in previous sections, also in the Sabbath School lessons and articles above, Seventh-day Adventists have always believed in His complete and full deity - albeit it was from a non-trinitarian standpoint.

In referring to the changed beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists over the years, William Johnsson, then editor of the Adventist Review said

"**Some Adventists today think**, that our beliefs have remained unchanged over the years, or they seek to turn back the clock to some point when we had everything just right. **But all attempts to recover such "historic Adventism" fail in view of the facts of our heritage.**" (William Johnsson, Adventist Review January 6<sup>th</sup> 1994 Article 'Present Truth - Walking in God's Light', 1994)

He then said

"Adventists beliefs **have changed over the years** under the impact of **present truth. Most startling** is the teaching regarding Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord." (Ibid)

This statement is most startling in itself. It is saying that over the years concerning Christ, the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists have changed.

William Johnsson further explained

"Many of the pioneers, including James White, J. N. Andrews, Uriah Smith and J. H. Waggoner held to **an Arian or semi-Arian view** - that is, the Son at some point in time, before the creation of our world, was generated by the Father." (Ibid)

This same author then said of this 'begotten' (literal Sonship) belief

**“Only gradually** did this **false doctrine** give way to **the Biblical truth**, and largely **under the impact of Ellen Whites writings** in statements such as “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. (Desire of ages p 530)” (*Ibid*)

It is very sad that our present leadership is calling what was believed by our pioneers as “false doctrine” but this is how it is today within Seventh-day Adventism – but then again, we do not need to go as far back as the pioneers. We can see that William Johnsson is actually denying the faith of Seventh-day Adventists - as it was taught going into the 1940’s. This really is startling. He is saying that this ‘begotten faith’ (Christ truly and literally the Son of God) was “false doctrine” - yet as we have seen above, the General Conference, during the late 1930’s, was calling it ‘the truth’ – also that it should be taught to “groups of people or to individuals upon whose pathway the light of truth has not yet dawned” (see above). What is this saying about William Johnsson’s statement? Is it not saying that he believed that during the 1930’s (also going on into the 1940’s) our General Conference was teaching and promoting that which was false doctrine? This is quite a realisation.

In 1999, after referring to certain statements Ellen White made in ‘The Desire of Ages’ (also other statements she made around the time that this book was published), Gerhard Pfandl, Associate Director of the Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Research Institute wrote

“These statements clearly describe Christ as God in the highest sense. **He is not derived from the Father as most Adventists up to that time believed**, nor has divinity been bestowed upon him.” (*Gerhard Pfandl, Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Institute, ‘The doctrine of the trinity among Adventists’ 1999*)

Pfandl is making reference to the ‘begotten Son’ concept. This was as it was held by Seventh-day Adventists during the time that Ellen White was alive, also as it was believed and taught decades after she died (see the 1930’s Sabbath School lessons above). His remark “up to that time” refers to when ‘The Desire of Ages’ was published (1898). As we have seen, this ‘begotten concept’ was denominationally taught even going into the 1940’s.

This means that Pfandl is saying \*as did William Johnsson) that what was being taught by Seventh-day Adventists in the late 1930’s/early 1940’s concerning Christ was error (false doctrine). These are very serious claims.

In the next paragraph he says

“In spite of these clear statements from the pen of Ellen White, it took **many years** before this truth was accepted by the church at large.” (*Ibid*)

The “truth” referred to here is the belief of the co-eternity of Christ with the Father as portrayed in the trinity doctrine (the version held today by Seventh-day Adventists). The term “many years” is quite ambiguous. It could mean any length of time. As we can see from the above, trinitarianism took decades after Ellen White had died to become established within Seventh-day Adventism. Certainly it was not denominationally accepted as the 1940’s approached.

Pfandl continued

“Not only did Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, believe until his death in 1903 that Christ had a beginning, **but during the first decades of this century there were many who held on to the view that in some way Christ came forth from the Father**, i.e., he had a beginning, and was therefore **inferior** to Him” (*Ibid*)

As can be clearly seen from what we have studied above, this “many” was the denomination as a whole – even the General Conference. Certainly it was not the minority.

Notice that Pfandl presents the idea that because the belief was that “Christ came forth from the Father”, this made Him “inferior” to the Father. As we have seen from the above Sabbath School studies, this was definitely not the case. With their begotten faith, Seventh-day Adventists regarded Christ as God Himself in the person of His Son. Ellen White spoke of Christ many times in this way (see section nine of the ‘Begotten Series’). We can see therefore that Pfandl was setting up a straw man and knocking it down.

Referring to certain discussions that took place at the 1919 Bible Conference, Pfandl also says

“This discussion indicates that twenty years after Ellen White’s clear statement on the eternal divinity of Christ and his absolute equality with the Father, **many in the church still held on to the idea that Christ, although divine, had a beginning.**” (*Ibid*)

As we can see from the above lesson studies, the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists continued long after the discussions of the 1919 Bible Conference. It went on into the 1940’s and beyond.

## In Summary

Obvious from what we have read in this and the previous section, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as the 1940’s approached, was still teaching that Christ was truly begotten of God - therefore truly a Son and therefore truly God – and this was over 40 years after the publication of ‘The Desire of Ages’. Certainly this

showed that God was not thought of as a trinity as purported in the trinity doctrine held by Seventh-day Adventists today (see No. 2 of their fundamental beliefs).

As we have seen from the above Sabbath School lesson studies for the 1920's and the 1930's - particularly the set for the final quarter of 1936 - statements of Ellen White regarding Christ - particularly those found in 'The Desire of Ages' – **had not changed the denominational thinking** of Seventh-day Adventists – even though it may have changed the thinking of some. As the 1940's approached, the denominational belief was still the same as it always had been. This was that in the days of eternity, Christ was begotten of God therefore He is truly the Son of God and in conclusion God Himself.

All that I can reason in this matter (particularly of Ellen White saying that Christ had within Himself “life, original, unborrowed, underived”) is that by some it was misunderstood what she meant - and this is why by some, particularly as seen in the previous section, the two concepts (begotten and coeternal) were attempted to be blended into one. I cannot see any other conclusion. It also seems that this was the forerunner of Seventh-day Adventists eventually adopting a trinity belief in which all three persons were unbegotten – meaning none of them having their source in the other.

### **The next section**

In the next section (forty-three) we shall be taking a look at what I call an amazing experience. I find it amazing because I cannot fathom it.

What we shall see is that when he was challenged concerning the begotten faith of Seventh-day Adventists (this was in 1937, the year following when the first quarters set of Sabbath School lessons on 'Bible Doctrines' was first published) a certain Seventh-day Adventist evangelist said that he was shocked that this had once been the faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This is truly an amazing testimony, particularly as it came from one of our evangelists.

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