

From the G.C. President

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O DATELINE ISRAEL: Thirty-seven Bible teachers, administrators, and other church leaders traveled to Jerusalem from many of the world divisions to take part in an eleven day Biblical Field Conference organized by the Biblical Research Institute. The General Conference Message and Mission Committee selected several major topics which they felt urgently needed to be addressed during the current quinquennium. The Joy of Salvation, the first of this series, was launched during the '96 Annual Council in Costa Rica. Subsequently, materials were provided to the world divisions for distribution to pastors and elders.

The 1997 Annual Council will begin a year focusing on the authority and relevancy of the Holy Scriptures. It will come as a surprise to some, but the Bible is under attack by many who consider themselves Christians—including a few who claim to be Seventh-day Adventists. This Biblical Field Conference was designed in part to open the eyes of participants regarding both the overt and the more subtle forms of assault launched against God's Word.

During these days we will listen to and discuss presentations by Adventist scholars and visit historic or Biblical sites. I'd like to invite you to join us on this Field Conference by dropping in each day at our Internet home page (<http://www.adventist.org/GC/presidential>) not only see a few of the places we've visited, but also to read about some of the issues we've discussed. Since the pictorial highlights can be uploaded rather easily you should be able to see a few pictures of Monday morning's activities in Jerusalem. It was during Monday's presentations I concluded the best way for you to participate in the heart of the trip was by making available to you the papers that were presented and discussed. Some suggested new and invigorating ideas while others helped us understand a little more clearly the challenges we face.

However, I need to request your patience. Since the idea of providing you copies of these papers via our home page only "struck me" today, it will take a little while for the presenters to send me the electronic version of their papers. As soon as these become available, they will be posted on the web page mentioned above. Meanwhile, take a look at some of the other highlights of our visit to Jerusalem.

ODIALOGUE WITH LUTHERANS: Representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Lutheran World Federation met recently in Jogny, Switzerland for four days of dialogue. This is the third round of discussions, which aim at exploring areas of agreement and disagreement, as well as breaking down false stereotypes. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not a member of the World Council of Churches and does not intend to join; however, we are always ready to discuss with others the basis of our beliefs to help correct misunderstandings. In Europe and elsewhere Adventists are often stigmatized as a sect or cult, so official discussions like this have the potential to bring much benefit.

The Lutheran World Federation represents some 110 Lutheran churches with a total membership of 55 million. This year's dialogue focused on the church and authority. Among others, papers from the Adventist side were given by Dr. George Reid and Dr. Angel Rodriguez, both of the Biblical Research Institute. These papers covered the role and

authority of Ellen G. White's writings, the Adventist view of "the remnant" and other topics related to our understanding of the church. A fourth and final round of dialogue is scheduled for May, 1998, with the expectation that the results of the discussions will be published shortly thereafter, and later all the papers presented during the four years will also be published.

Off the Back Burner

Segment #77: We have been thinking through what it means to reason with God in relating to the Bible and to the writings of Ellen G. White. While it is true that Adventists have been known as "the people of the Book," it is likely this image was based on the church's emphasis during our first one hundred years. It is interesting that, as the Institute of Church Ministry (Andrews University) reported, Adventists today who habitually read Ellen G. White are also the Bible students of the church compared with those who do not read her regularly. It is evident that Ellen G. White's writings promote faithful Bible study.

It is also true that Ellen G. White has made theology accessible to the average church member. How else can it be explained that a large percentage of Adventists through the years (both college trained and those with less formal education) have been actively involved in daily Bible study and conversant about theological subjects normally reserved for professional theologians?

Contrary to all modern "prophets" who give their "ten best predictions" every January, or the perennial Nostradamuses who state their predictions so vaguely that they can be reinterpreted and "made to fit" as time passes, Ellen G. White's preview of closing events has never been contradicted by events. Today's economic insecurity, political strife, social unrest, decline in moral values, New Age revival of spiritualism, and the worldwide interest in religious unity—all are an astonishing fulfillment of her predictions. For many years, some faulted Ellen G. White for overlooking Communism. They declared her eschatology outmoded. But it is apparent that in following the Biblical outline, she was true to fact.

The weight of evidence that leads millions to trust the Bible in spite of its apparent discrepancies and its less than perfect writers, is the same kind of evidence that has led millions to trust Ellen G. White. Some choose to reject both the Bible and the writing of Ellen G. White by imposing as tests their own presuppositions that supernaturalism is unreasonable, or that literary borrowing tests prophetic legitimacy. Nevertheless, in spite of these objections, the Bible has survived, as has Ellen G. White's ministry. Those who have been blessed by the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White recognize the voice of God speaking to them. Human discrepancies are nonessential concerns when the purpose of Spirit of Prophecy writings in any age, from Moses to Ellen G. White, are understood and realized in the life of believers.