

Was Adam with Eve at the Scene of Temptation? A Short Note on “With Her” in Genesis 3:6

BY ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA

The Hebrew text of Genesis 3:6 appears to imply that Adam was with Eve¹ in the scene of temptation. The King James Version, offers this word-by-word rendering: “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband *with her*; and he did eat.” The New International Version goes further and translates: “She also gave some to her husband, *who was with her*, and he ate it.”²

At first glance, it appears that Adam and Eve were together when Eve interacted with the serpent and eventually ate from the forbidden fruit. Such a view, however, raises a problem: it implies that Adam would have watched everything without interfering to prevent Eve from being deceived by the serpent. If one considers that it was Adam who first received the instructions about the forbidden tree (Gen 2:16–17), it becomes even more puzzling to explain why he remained passive and left Eve alone in the face of temptation.

Two Views on the Issue

Adam was Absent from Scene of Temptation

John Calvin addressed this issue and admitted that although some people interpreted the passage to mean that Adam was with the woman, such interpretation “is by no means credible.” He then suggested “it might be that he [Adam] soon joined her, and that, even before the woman tasted the fruit of the tree, she related the conversation held with the serpent, and entangled him with the same fallacies by which she herself had been deceived.”³ John Wesley in turn asserted that “he [Adam] was not with her when she was tempted; surely if

he had, he would have interposed to prevent the sin; but he came to her when she had eaten, and was prevailed with by her to eat likewise.”⁴ C. Leupold conjectured, “when the temptation began, Adam was not with Eve but had only joined her at this time.”⁵ More recently, the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary insisted that the expression “with her does not imply that he had been with her all the time, standing mute at the scene of temptation. Instead, she gave him of the fruit upon rejoining him that he might eat it “with her” and thus share its presumed benefits.”⁶

Adam was Present in the Scene of Temptation

Recent commentators are more inclined to the view that Adam and Eve were together in the temptation scene. Some scholars point out Adam’s strange silence,⁷ glaring omission, and passivity as Eve interacts with the serpent and eventually succumbs to the temptation. R. Kent Hughes exclaims, “Here is a shocker: Adam was apparently privy to the conversation between Eve and the snake!”⁸ John Walton rhetorically inquires, “Where was Adam through all of this?” And he insists the “text tells us, but for some reason we have been reluctant to accept what the text says: Adam was there with Eve.”⁹ More recently Julie Faith Parker lambasted the Jewish Publication Society translation for failing to convey the view that Adam was present in the scene of temptation, which according to Parker reflects a trend “to blame only Eve for succumbing to temptation in the garden, even though Adam is present in Gen 3:1–6 and shares responsibility for disobedience.”¹⁰ However, as David E. Stein shows in a rejoinder, the matter is much more complicated than Parker may have presumed.¹¹ Admittedly, either view is fraught with difficulties. If Adam “was nearby his silence is inexplicable; if he was not near, his apparent immediate, unquestioning acquiescence to his wife’s suggestion is equally inexplicable.”¹²

Nonetheless, in spite of such evident difficulties, this essay undertakes an examination of the text in an attempt to determine which of the views mentioned above is more plausible from a narrative point of view. In this effort, two lines of investigation will be pursued.

First, this study gives attention to the syntax and meaning of the prepositional phrase “with her” (*im-mah*). Second, this investigation deals with the plural pronouns in Genesis 3:1–5 and the quotation formulas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Was Adam with Eve at the Scene of Temptation? A Short Note on “With Her” in Genesis 3:6.....	1
The Chief and the Church: Reflections from a Business Educator.....	3
Scripture Applied	
Lessons from Daniel 5	7
News	
New Books on the Gift of Prophecy and Ellen G. White	9
Latest Publication.....	10

in order to ascertain whether or not the serpent was addressing more than one individual.

Prepositional Phrase “with her” (*‘immah*)

As already noted, the Hebrew text literally reads: “She also gave to *her husband with her*, and he ate.”¹³ Some scholars, although assuming that Adam was not present, suggest that the phrase “with her” indicates the association between Eve and Adam in the act of eating the fruit. They also mention a few instances of similar expressions to support this interpretation. Nonetheless, examination of such occurrences in context fails to provide a syntactic parallel equivalent to Genesis 3:6 to be useful.¹⁴ So it appears that a more fruitful option is to search for a clue within the immediate context of Genesis 3.

At closer inspection, it turns out that an equivalent phrase appears in Genesis 3:12. Confronted by God, Adam retorted: “The woman whom you gave to be *with me* [*‘immadi*], she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (Gen 3:12). Adam does not say, “the woman you gave *me*,” which would appear more natural. He said instead: “the woman whom you gave to be *with me*.”¹⁵ This expression most probably alludes to the intimacy between man and woman¹⁶ as inferred from Genesis 2:22–24 (“one flesh”), which indicates that the man had received the woman to be with him as a helper and companion. Now it must be noted that the phrase “with me” (*‘immadi*) in Genesis 3:12 parallels “with her” (*‘immah*) in Genesis 3:6. By the same token, “with her” most likely alludes to Eve’s relationship with Adam, the man to be “with her” in partnership and mutuality.

Therefore it seems reasonable to suggest that “with her” (*‘immah*) in Genesis 3:6 hints at the intimacy between Adam and Eve in the Garden (cf., Gen 2:22–25). This is a tentative paraphrase: “She also gave to the man, who was in close relationship with her, and he ate it.” In other words, the phrase “with her” does not convey that Adam was with Eve during the encounter with the serpent. Instead, the phrase qualifies the man as one in communion with the woman. Consequently, the prepositional phrase “with her” in Genesis 3:6 functions syntactically as an adjectival subordinate clause to qualify the term “man,” not to indicate that Adam was at her side in the temptation scene. Moreover, as one author perceptively noted, “in the narrative Adam is held accountable not for failing to stop Eve but for eating the fruit (v. 17).”¹⁷

Plural Pronouns and Quotation Formula in Genesis 3:1-5

It has been argued that since the serpent addresses Eve by means of plural pronouns (vv. 1, 4–5) this must be an indication that Adam was with Eve.¹⁸ Indeed, the serpent always addresses the woman by means of the plural “you.” It must be pointed out, however, that the plural does not necessarily indicate that Adam was present in the scene of temptation. A single individual may be addressed by plural pronouns if associated with or representing others.

A case in point is found in the Jacob narrative, which reports a dialogue between Judah and Jacob concerning taking Benjamin to Egypt. It is worthy of notice that Jacob answers to Judah with a plural “you”: “And Israel said, ‘Why did you [pl.] deal so wrongfully with me as to tell the man whether you [pl.] had still another brother?’” (Gen 43:6). Thus, it seems that plural pronouns do not necessarily imply more than one addressee. It then becomes apparent that the

plural pronouns used by the serpent are not mandatory for the presence of Adam in the scene of temptation.

Finally, it should be noted that twice in the story, the narrator introduces the speech of the serpent with quotation formulas that portrays Eve as the sole audience: “And he [the serpent] said to the woman” (Gen 3:1) and “then the serpent said to the woman” (Gen 3:4). Nonetheless, the serpent’s speech implies that Eve was not alone. So a tension arises between the unequivocal statements of the narrator and the words of the serpent. An attempt to resolve this tension is to hypothesize that the serpent used plural pronouns in order to intention-



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ally implicate Adam in the fray, even if *in absentia* as he was. By this the serpent hints that the couple, not Eve alone, was the target.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis indicates that Adam was not present with Eve in the scene of temptation. As argued, the phrase “with her” appears to convey the intimacy experienced by the first couple in the Garden rather than the spatial location of Adam in the scene. This coheres with the grammatical data and the plot of the Genesis narrative. Finally, two implications may be noted. First, it is significant to observe that Ellen G. White, although following the King James Version in most cases, departs from that version in her interpretation of Genesis 3 and clearly indicates that Eve was alone in the scene of temptation.¹⁹ This may show that White did not follow the King James Version slavishly but was selective in her use of this version. Second, Adam and Eve were supposed to stay together in the Garden in order to mutually strengthen each other and resist temptation. The disruption of that togetherness paved the way for the entrance of sin into the world. Let husbands and wives be together, spatially whenever possible, but always emotionally, affectively, and spiritually.



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¹ Although it is anachronistic to refer to the woman as Eve prior to the Fall, for the sake of convenience this article uses Eve and Adam interchangeably along with woman and man, respectively.

² Emphasis supplied. So do *NKJV*, *NASB*, *NRSV*, and *HSCB*. Interestingly, *RSV*, *DRB*, *Tanakh* (JPS), and *The Message* omit “with her” altogether.

³ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 151–52.

⁴ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament* (Bristol: William Pine, 1765), 1:15.

⁵ C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1942), 152–53.

⁶ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Review and Herald, 1978), 1:231. For the same view, see also John Peter Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Genesis* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 230 (first published in English by C. Scribner in 1868).

⁷ Paul J. Kissling, *Genesis*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 194.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 70.

⁹ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 206.

¹⁰ Julie Faith Parker, “Blaming Eve Alone: Translation, Omission, and Implications of Genesis 3:6b,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 4 (2013): 729–747.

¹¹ David E. E. Stein, “A Rejoinder concerning Genesis 3:6 and the NJPS Translation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134, no. 1 (2015): 51–52.

¹² D. Stuart Briscoe and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Genesis*, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 1:50.

¹³ Emphasis supplied. All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁴ In regard to the prepositional phrase “with her,” Umberto Cassuto argues that expressions such as ‘*im* or ‘*eth* (“with”)” “with pronominal suffixes occur as a rule when a person is said to associate himself in a given action with someone who leads him. Examples are: you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you (6:18); and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him (7:7); So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb (30:1)” (U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, From Adam to Noah [Genesis I–VI 8]*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1998), 148). A similar view is also expressed by Gordon J. Wenham: “She ‘gave it to her husband with her’: this last phrase emphasizes he [sic.] man’s association with the woman in the eating (cf. 6:18; 7:7; 13:1). Indeed, his eating is the last and decisive act of disobedience, for immediately the consequences of their sin are described” (*Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 1998], 1:75–76).

¹⁵ Emphasis supplied in all three verses.

¹⁶ Joel Rosenberg, “The Garden Story Forward and Backward: The Non-Narrative Dimension of Gen. 2–3,” *Prooftexts* 1:1 (1981): 13.

¹⁷ Stein, 52.

¹⁸ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 1A: 238; Hughes, 70; David R. Helm and Jon M. Dennis, *The Genesis Factor: Probing Life’s Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 77–78.

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Pacific Press, 1890), 53–54.

The Chief and the Church: Reflections from a Business Educator

BY ANN GIBSON

In this article I distinguish between “Church” with “C” and “church” with small “c.” Recently, a committee composed of several Seventh-day Adventist church employees—some from the General Conference and some from academia—was reviewing various agenda items when the chair noted that the General Conference had hired an individual to serve as “CIO”—Chief Information Officer. Questions were immediately raised: Why is the Church using business titles such as “Chief Financial Officer”? Why the emphasis on “Chief”? Aren’t we becoming more like a business when we use business titles and terms?

The answer to the easiest part of the question—why treasurers are now called CFOs—is fairly straightforward. There was a desire to create an understanding of what the treasurer of a conference, union, or division really does. The word “treasurer” implies a role to care for money in an accounting manner, but a treasurer isn’t just an accountant. The actual function of this role is much larger than recording money transactions, and the name change was an attempt to better identify what that position requires.

However, this is not to imply that language doesn’t matter. Some authors have noted that

“the concept of making the secretary or treasurer vice presidents, and thus simply extensions of the president’s office, runs counter to the Adventist model of church government with its inbuilt distributed responsibility.”¹

The president is “first among equals” and all three officers have their own constituency mandate. All three are elected by the same constituency that elected the president.

“The authority of the officers as a group is the combined authority of the president, secretary, and treasurer. . . . The officers have a management function, supported by the department directors, and supervise executive implementation of the actions of the (executive) committee.”²

Thus, the secretary and the treasurer are not extensions of the president, not directly accountable to him or her—as the term “vice president” would suggest. Their roles are ones of cooperation, not subordination.

But the committee’s question remains. Does the use of the language “Chief Information Officer” and “Chief Financial Officer” imply that these individuals are rulers? Does it mean that the church is a business and not a spiritual organization?

I propose that in fact, the church is both.

The Church and the church

In the drawing at the end of this article, the large box represents the Church (capital “C”) that Ellen G. White was referring to when she said, “Nothing else in this world is so dear to God as His church.”³

Inside the large box is a smaller box. This represents the church (small “c”)—the Adventist church organization—comprising the General Conference, divisions, unions, and conferences, as well as the institutional entities such as the publishing houses, colleges and universities, hospitals, food factories, ADRA, ARM, and the organized portion of the local church, such as the pastor and his/her church board. This is the church that was

initially developed by James White when he realized that without organization, the Seventh-day Adventist message could not be taken to the entire world.

The smaller box is indeed a business—an organization handling millions of dollars and employing thousands of people. How might principles of business help the organizational structure of the church?

The Adventist Church Organization

Business can show any organization how to accomplish its chosen task. For example, business processes can inform the church organization how to practice stewardship of financial and production resources. It can model good internal control systems that enhance accountability and transparency while reducing the opportunity for fraud and misuse. It can provide understanding for how best to use production resources, recycling materials and reducing scrap where possible. It can assist in creating processes that result in good human-resource decisions, made with the needs of the mission and immediate goals in mind. It can provide insight into how to design jobs, develop an employee’s talent, create reward systems, and communicate information effectively to all employees so as to promote understanding and community. Wise management methods can be studied and adopted from various corporations or easily-available management literature. For example, in his book *Leadership is an Art*, Max De Pree, son of the founder of Herman Miller, an innovative furniture-making business located in Zeeland, Michigan, and himself a member of its management team for over 40 years, stated in his discussion of participative management:

Participative management arises out of the heart and out of a personal philosophy about people. It cannot be added to, or subtracted from, a corporate policy manual as though it were one more management tool. Everyone has the right and the duty to decision-making and to understand the results. Participative management guarantees that decisions will not be arbitrary, secret, or closed to questioning. Participative management is not democratic. Having a say differs from having a vote.⁴

This is good management counsel for the church, especially given the representative nature of our church organization.

But the committee was not interested in hearing about the good things business can bring to the church’s organizational structure. They feared a business-like atmosphere in the church. However, if they had been asked whether a good internal control system was important for financial transparency and accountability, they would have answered, “Certainly!” They would

have given the same response if asked whether they wanted the church to employ the best human resource procedures, the most refined strategic planning tools, and the most efficient production processes in its food factories and publishing houses.

Perhaps there is fear of unethical business practices becoming standard operating procedure in the church. There is no shortage of examples of businesses behaving badly: from environmental destruction, to financial fraud, or layoffs when there is an economic downturn, rather than attempts to maintain jobs.

The church organization should not copy any of these unethical business practices. It should avoid the authoritarian structures that are often exemplified in business; in the church, hierarchy is created for order, not for power. We do not want to hear church leaders speak like the president of a privately owned company when asked if his tactics would be different if he were running a public company (i.e., not being both the owner and the manager). He responded: “If I knew my compensation next year would be based on this year’s return on equity, (expletive deleted), I wouldn’t act the same. You’ve only got a few years at the top in a public company to make your killing. You want to put every penny on the bottom line to wind up with the juiciest retirement package you can get.”⁵

How can the church avoid being like “business” as defined above, and instead always act ethically?

Moral Accountability

Some experts believe that unethical actions occur in organizations because managers fail to discuss moral and ethical issues due to fear that such talk may lead to organizational disharmony, inefficiency, or cause the manager to appear to be weak or ineffective because of the perceived idealism of “moral talk.”⁶ They argue, however, that unless an organization creates a habit of moral reflection, it will suffer moral amnesia—and moral stress—and ultimately come to the place where moral actions cannot occur within the business culture.

The “institutionalization” of ethical talk is recommended to counter unethical action. To accomplish this, the organization should:

1. Allow for discussion of moral issues and permit legitimate dissent, assuring dissenters that they will not be personally blamed, criticized, ostracized, or punished for their views.
2. Focus discussions on what everyone agrees on (for example, shared long-term objectives and common ethical principles) so that these items appear basic, and factional differences temporary and relative.
3. Use moral talk to identify problems, consider issues, advocate and criticize policies, and justify and explain decisions. Avoid abusing moral talk

by refusing to use it to rationalize or express personal frustrations.

4. Engage one another in reflection and dialogue about personal experience with moral issues. Such conversations demonstrate that leadership is seriously seeking efficient and reflective problem-solving about moral issues.⁷

Three more points could be added to the list:

1. Remember that decisions are not morally neutral; unintended consequences can occur.
2. Require some level of business education for everyone going into church administration so that misunderstood terms do not stop the church from engaging in the best business practices to achieve organizational order.
3. Share positive stories of business, not just the unethical ones.

The Church, the Body of Christ

But what about the Church, the community of believers? This is NOT a business. This is the Church—the body of Christ! We cannot afford to confuse the two, for the Church cannot be run like a business. The members of the Church are not employees and they cannot be treated as such. Business policies regarding employees and other stakeholders do not apply to members of the Church. Perhaps the best term for the members of the Church are “God-empowered volunteers.” As one author states, “Volunteers do not need contracts, they need covenants.”⁸

What is the difference between a contract and a covenant? A contract is a business term—a transactional term. The evidence of a contract is generally contained in a legal document signed by the parties to the contract. A contract may be part of a relationship, but it is never the complete relationship. When considering an action in a contractual environment, the individual is likely to ask, “Is this action legal and in accordance with the contract?” Or, to put this in the context of the church organization, one might ask, “Is it in agreement with Working Policy?”

A complete relationship needs a covenant, and a complete relationship is needed when one is a member of God’s Church. A covenant is not a legal document; it is transformational rather than transactional. It requires an understanding of the nature of the parties’ relationship—such as a marriage covenant or a baptismal covenant. In a covenantal environment, the individual will ask, “What does the contemplated action do to the relationship?” In the context of God’s Church, one might ask: “Is the action in accordance with Scripture?”—thereby questioning the action’s effect on the relationship of the body of Christ, the Church, with Christ Himself. In a covenantal situation, it is insulting to use contractual words or business language. The relationship

is not legally defined; the questions asked before actions are contemplated are not the same.

An essay on intimacy states that covenantal relationships . . . induce freedom, not paralysis. (They rest) on shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to values, to goals . . . (They) are open to influence . . . (They) reflect unity and grace and poise . . . (They enable one) to be hospitable to the unusual person and unusual ideas. Covenantal relationships tolerate risk and forgive errors.⁹

Individuals are attracted to the Church because they have entered into a love relationship with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit and they believe His Church and the people in it share Christ's values, goals, and mission. In this environment, there must be trust, stewardship, and equity—qualitative rather than quantitative measurements are the ones used.

Trust is the father of openness.... Trust makes it possible to assemble the diverse abilities needed to achieve the potential... (When there is trust, one can recognize that) a diversity of gifts and opinions can be animated by the same spirit.¹⁰

Stewardship requires faithfulness. The Church has been blessed with individuals who carry the gifts of the Spirit, and their very presence results in a large stewardship obligation on the part of the Church and the church organization as it uses these resources to fulfill the Gospel Commission.

Equity means that everyone is granted “the right to be needed, the right to be involved, the right to be informed and thus to understand,”¹¹ and the right to justice. These qualities should be part of the covenant makeup of the Church.

But What If?

But what if the Adventist church organization should use its perceived power and authority to act as “the Gentiles do,” to lord it over the Church community of believers? The *Harvard Business Review*, calls for leaders to use “power to influence the thoughts and actions of other people.”¹² This understanding of power and authority often leads to abuse and oppression when the ones in authority use their offices to their own advantage and to the disadvantage of others. Jesus knows this temptation, and thus it is this interpretation of position that He forbids. In the context of the request of asking for a high position for her sons James and John, Jesus tells their mother that she does not know what she is asking for. He then goes further in Matthew 20:25–28 (NIV):

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. *Not so with you.* Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.¹³

Jesus calls for those who wish to become great, who might be infected with the “Gentile virus,”¹⁴ to be servants. What does this mean?

Duane Elmer suggests:

“Power, when grounded in biblical values, serves others by liberating them. It acknowledges that people bear the image of God and treats them in a way that will nurture the development of that image.”¹⁵

Maxie Dunnan says:

“The way most of us serve keeps us in control. We choose whom, when, where and how we will serve. We stay in charge. Jesus is calling for something else. He calls us to be servants. When we make this choice, we give up the right to be in charge.”¹⁶

Commenting on this passage, Elmer states:

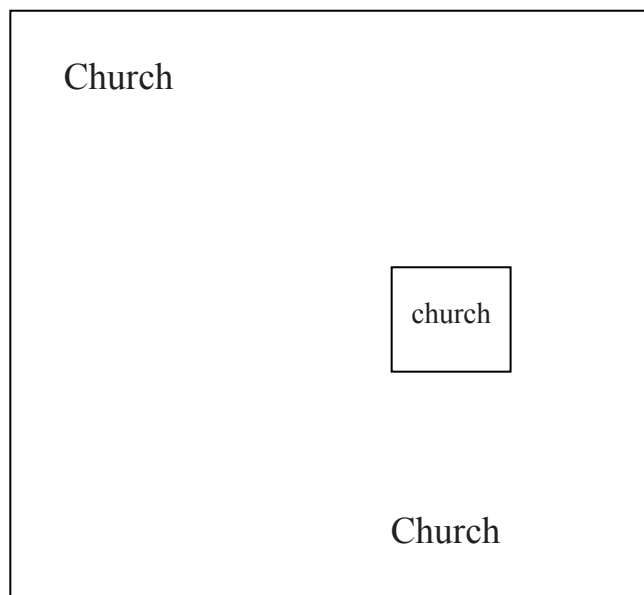
“By choosing to be a servant, we relinquish power, control and unilateral decision-making in favor of listening, learning and understanding, and emerge with a decision that reflects the wisdom of God and his people.”¹⁷

Historically, Gentiles' systems resulted in what we know as the “divine right of kings”—a strong temptation to act in the place of God when dealing with others. These results were noted by Micah in his complaint to the people of his day, that they “despise justice and distort all that is right” (Mic 3:9, NIV). Jesus overturns the value structure of this world and calls for leadership that serves “with a profound humility that reveals a proper respect for God, for oneself and for others.”¹⁸

Conclusion

In God's Church business procedures and policies are inappropriate, but in the Adventist church organization they are essential for clarity, coherence, and order. The Church empowers its leaders in the church to acquire, manage, and distribute the resources of the

Church community for mission, which requires careful administration and an organizational structure in order to be successful in advancing the gospel. This structure may use business practices and terminology to do its work. But there is an inherent danger that because we live in a fallen world, and we ourselves are fallen people, of misunderstanding the roles assigned to us by the Church. Jesus recognized this temptation, and He warned us well when He said in Matthew 20:27: “Whoever is chief among you, let him be your servant.” (KJV)



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¹ Walter Raymond Beach and Bert Beverly Beach, *Pattern for Progress* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), 68–69.

² Ibid., 69.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 42.

⁴ Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 22–23.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Frederick B. Bird and James A. Waters, “The Moral Muteness of Managers” in *On Moral Business*, eds. Max L. Stackhouse, Dennis P. McCann, and Shirley J. Roels with Preston N. Williams. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 1995), 890.

⁷ Ibid., 895–897

⁸ Max DePree, *Leadership*, 25

⁹ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰ Hugh DePree, *Business as Unusual* (Zeeland, MI: Herman Miller, 1986), 3.

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² Abraham Zaleznik, “Managers and Leaders,” *Harvard Business Review on Leadership*, edited by Henry Mintzberg, John P. Kotter

and Abraham Zaleznik (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998), 63.

¹³ Emphasis supplied.

¹⁴ Elmer, Duane, *Cross Cultural Servanthood* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 172.

¹⁵ Duane Elmer, *Cross Cultural Servanthood* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 171.

¹⁶ Maxie Dunnam, *The Workbook on Spiritual Disciplines* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1984), 101.

¹⁷ Ibid., 172.

¹⁸ Duane Elmer, *Cross Cultural Servanthood*, 178.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Lesson from Daniel 5

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

In this chapter the last Babylonian king appears: Belshazzar. In the past, critics had considered the book of Daniel to be historically unreliable. At that time not a single historian nor other material was known to mention Belshazzar. Then the cylinder of Cyrus and a number of clay tablets appeared and confirmed that Belshazzar had lived. He was co-regent with his father Nabonidus. While Nabonidus stayed outside the city of Babylon, Belshazzar was ruling in Babylon, and it is with Belshazzar that Daniel came in contact. So the book of Daniel is reliable. The Babylonian kings after Nebuchadnezzar were Amel-Marduk (Evil-Merodach), Nergal-Sharezer (Neriglissar), Labashi-Marduk, Nabonidus, and Belshazzar.

I. Discussion of the Chapter

1. The Banquet

vv. 1–4 *Although the Medes and Persians besieged the city, a huge banquet was held at the Babylonian court. What was the problem with the banquet?*

- The attendant guests and court officials got terribly drunk.
- They lost their sense of reality, and the group ignored the impending danger of the siege.
- The party desecrated the holy vessels of the Jerusalem temple (cf. 2 Chron 36:18–21). Nebuchadnezzar insisted on not blaspheming the God of the Hebrews (Dan 3:29).
- Idols were worshipped.

What are the effects of alcohol?

- It decreases inhibitions—for example, with regard to sexuality—and encourages

- foul speech and blasphemy.
- The capacity of reaction declines.
- Self-control diminishes.
- One's health suffers. In some cases, permanent damage is done.

Obviously Daniel himself abstained from consuming alcohol (Dan 1:8). The Bible warns us against drinking alcohol (see Prov 23:31–35). But even if people consume alcohol and are intoxicated, they are still responsible for their actions. So was Belshazzar.

“His father Nebuchadnezzar”—In Scripture the term “father” also refers to grandfather, ancestor, and even predecessor. Jesus is called “Son of David,” although many generations had passed between him and David. Nebuchadnezzar was quite likely Belshazzar's grandfather.

2. The Writing on the Wall

- v. 5 Praising the Babylonian gods meant at the same time to blaspheme the God of the Jews. God reacted immediately. Fingers wrote on the wall. However, God does not always react immediately. In some cases the judgment comes later—sometimes only at the final judgment. *Which examples come to mind?*

- Immediate judgments: Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), Achan (Josh 7), and the man collecting wood on the Sabbath (Num 15:32–36)
- Later judgments: David and the consequences of his adultery (2 Sam 12–18), Pilate's banishment, Moses' death outside the Promised Land (Deut 34:4)
- Final judgment: the murderers of Jesus (Rev 1:7; 20)

- v. 6 *What might Belshazzar have felt and thought when he saw the handwriting on the wall?*

- Horror and fear
- Guilt
- Impotence

He must have been almost paralyzed, and his legs trembled.

- vv. 7–8 Belshazzar turned to his astrologers and wise men for an explanation of the phenomenon. He promised the third position in the kingdom to the one able to interpret the writing. (While Pharaoh promised Joseph the second position in the kingdom, Belshazzar was only able to offer the third position. As co-regent with his father he himself was the second ruler.) Again the wise men and magicians proved their inability to interpret divine messages.

- v. 9 *Why did Belshazzar become more terrified when the wise men had no interpretation?*
- It may have dawned on him that this was a supernatural event.
 - Obviously, he expected some kind of disaster.
 - Possibly he feared a god that could harm him.
- The other dignitaries and guests were also affected.

3. Daniel is Introduced

- vv. 10–12 *The queen or queen mother encouraged Belshazzar and pointed him to Daniel. Why was Daniel not one of the wise men brought to the king earlier? According to Daniel 2:48 he was their chief administrator.*
- It is quite likely that he no longer held that position.
 - He may have no longer served at the royal court.
 - Nebuchadnezzar's successors pursued different political goals. They may have known about how God revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar but rejected God. So they most likely also rejected Daniel. This may have been a reason why under the Medes and Persians Daniel quickly reacquired a high position.

4. Belshazzar and Daniel

- v. 13 Again Daniel was being discriminated against. In spite of the high position under his grandfather, Belshazzar addressed him as a prisoner.
- vv. 14–16 The king admitted his helplessness and mentioned Daniel's wisdom. Again he promised a reward.

5. Daniel's Speech and Interpretation of the Handwriting

- v. 17 *Why did Daniel reject the reward?*
- As a prophet of God he did not work for pay (cf. Micah 3:11–12).
 - Belshazzar had blasphemed God.
 - Daniel knew about the fall of Babylon. A high office in the Babylonian kingdom could have been dangerous.
 - He did not want to become selfish.
- vv. 18–23 *Daniel was again very courageous and willing to speak his mind. Of what does he accuse Belshazzar?*
- That he did not learn from Nebuchadnezzar's experience

- That he opposed the true God and Lord who has everything in His hand (vv. 18–19, 21, 23; see also Dan 4)
- That he was proud as Nebuchadnezzar had been
- That he did not use his knowledge in a responsible way

Daniel's talk consisted of a review of Nebuchadnezzar's experience and a rebuke of Belshazzar.

vv. 24–28 *The writing was in Aramaic. Why then did the wise man not understand it?*

Possible answers:

- A few of the words made the meaning of the message unclear.
- The consumption of alcohol may have hindered the people from understanding the message.
- The writing was only readable and/or understandable by receiving divine illumination.

"Weighed and found deficient" is true also today. There is a judgment of God that affects all human beings. Where do I find myself?

6. Daniel's Reward and the Execution of the Judgment

v. 29 The king fulfilled his promise.

v. 30 Belshazzar died the very same night. Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians. Jeremiah's

prediction (Jer 51:31–32, 56–58) was beginning to be fulfilled with the events that took place in 539 BC. The Jews were able to return from exile.

One cannot play games with God.

II. Application

- Reasons for the judgment (vv. 20, 22):
 - (1) Humanity's pride. People are opposed to God and separate from Him (see humanism and materialism).
 - (2) The pleasure principle. People live only for pleasure.
 - (3) No willingness to learn. Knowledge that would be available is not being utilized. The Scriptures are accessible to almost all of us but we may ignore them. Jesus wants to live in us, and we may allow Him partial access only. This is unbelief.
- Effects of the judgment (Dan 5):
 - (1) Death of the sinners.
 - (2) Justification of God.
 - (3) Liberation of the people of God.
- How to escape the judgment: Committing one's life in faith to God (John 5:24).

Conclusion

We should not fear God in the negative sense. His goal is to save humanity. On the other hand, we should not feel free to disregard His will. It is unbelief and disobedience that bring about judgment.

NEWS

New Books on the Gift of Prophecy and Ellen G. White

BY CLINTON WAHLEN

Two new books have recently been published by Pacific Press in connection with the centennial celebration of Ellen G. White's life and ministry. The first one, *Understanding Ellen White*, edited by Merlin D. Burt, explores such fundamental issues as her understanding of revelation and inspiration, the authority of her writings, their relation to Scripture, and her role in the establishment of the doctrines of the Church. Other chapters examine criticisms by D. M. Canright, her handling of the "shut door," charges of plagiarism, some of her scientific claims, her teaching on vegetarianism, etc. This 253-page volume, with its seventeen chapters plus an introduction constitute, is an important contribution to the subject.

The second book, *Divinely Inspired: The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, edited by Alberto R. Timm and Dwain Esmond, has a wider scope and has been prepared in connection with symposia on the gift of prophecy being held this year at a number of Adventist universities worldwide. The first half of the book is comprised of chapters on how the prophetic voice is manifested in the Old and New Testaments, how Bible writers use Scripture, and references to the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 and the book of Revelation, among other topics. The second half contains contributions dealing with the various understandings of the gift of prophecy in Christian and early Adventist history, as well as chapters dealing with how Ellen G. White used Scripture, her use of extra-biblical sources, her relation to Adventist mission, and her relevance to third millenniums. There are also several appendices that contain statements and affirmations published through the years by the Seventh-day Adventist Church relative to the gift of prophecy. That help make this volume a standard reference for many years to come.

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