

# **What think ye of Christ?**

**By Terry Hill**

**Written to the glory of God the Father and His Son**

**“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16**

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# What think ye of Christ?

## Part one

### The mystery of Godliness

Since becoming established in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the Christian church has always upheld the belief that Christ, in His pre-existence, was God, but how to explain this in such a way that is comprehensible to the human mind has long been debated. This is mainly because included within the terminology *God* is also the Father and the Holy Spirit. All three are said to be of the Godhead.

In this study, we shall first be taking a look at the word *Godhead*. This is because some have attempted to make this word appear synonymous with the word *trinity* when in fact they have two very different meanings.

#### The word 'Godhead'

Within the King James Version of the Bible (from hereon KJV), the word *Godhead* appears just three times. It is found in Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20 and Colossians 2:9. It is akin to the old English word *Godhood* which various dictionaries render as the state of being God or the state of being divine. We shall see later that other translations of the Bible do not use the word *Godhead* but instead use other words to translate the Greek. Simply understood, *Godhood* is what makes God God. This is the same as it is *manhood* that makes a man a man or *childhood* that makes a child a child. This is the easiest way to understand it.

In Acts 17:29, the word *Godhead* is used to translate the Greek word *theios*. This is an adjective meaning *Godlike* and is exactly the same word as used in 2 Peter 1:3-4. Here it is twice translated *divine*.

In Romans 1:20 it is the Greek word *theiotes* (feminine noun) that is translated *Godhead*. This conveys the meaning of *divinity* or *divine nature* (that which is divine).

In Colossians 2:9 the word *Godhead* is used to translate *theotes*. The latter has the meaning of the state of being God or the state of being divine. All of these words are from the root *theos*, which in the New Testament is the word most commonly used that is rendered *God*. The words *divinity* and *deity* do not appear in the KJV.

In Acts 17:29, we are told that when speaking to the philosophers at Mars Hill, the apostle Paul said that the Godhead (that which is divine) should not be likened to the things of earth.

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.” Acts 17:29

Nature is not God, neither will the making of statues or pictures etc ever convey a true representation of Him. It must also be said that the use of illustrations – whether from nature or anywhere else - will never describe how God has His being (how He wills to exist). Objects, nature, illustrations, will always fall short of that objective.

Ellen White wrote against using illustrations from nature to describe God. This was when with reference to the types of illustrations used by trinitarians to depict God as three-in-one (a trinity or tri-unity of divine persons) she said

“I am instructed to say,” (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, page 62 ‘Come out and be separate’*)

Please note these words very carefully. The servant of the Lord made it very clear that in writing this testimony she was not voicing her own opinion but was writing that which God had “instructed” her to say. There was therefore a specific purpose for God telling Ellen White to write it.

This testimony was written concerning John Harvey Kellogg. He was then the leading physician in Seventh-day Adventism. Unfortunately, over the years, this famous doctor developed beliefs concerning God that were not in keeping with the principles of faith as held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. To make it even worse, Kellogg published his views in a book called *The Living Temple*, which, because of the views of God it contained, Ellen White condemned. In an attempt to justify himself for his beliefs - which was that God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, was in everything - Kellogg made a profession of coming to believe in the trinity. As the trinity doctrine was not then held as one of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (this was in 1903), Kellogg's profession of belief was heretical – at least to Seventh-day Adventists.

In writing this testimony, there can be no doubt that Ellen White had in mind the trinity doctrine.

“The sentiments of those who are searching for advanced scientific ideas are not to be trusted. Such representations as the following are made: "The Father is as the light invisible; the Son is as the light embodied; the Spirit is the light shed abroad." "The Father is like the dew, invisible vapor; the Son is like the dew gathered in beauteous form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life." Another representation: "The Father is like the invisible vapor; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power." (*Ibid*)

These “representations” spoken of here are the types of illustrations that are

used by trinitarians to explain their belief that God is a trinity – meaning explaining how God is three divine persons (or personalities) in one indivisible substance (one essence or one divine being). Note particularly that Ellen White said that these three-in-one ideas “are not to be trusted”. She further condemned these illustrations by saying

“All these spiritualistic representations are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and diminish the Majesty which no earthly likeness can be compared to. God can not be compared with the things His hands have made. These are mere earthly things, suffering under the curse of God because of the sins of man.” (*Ibid*)

This should be regarded as a very strong warning not to try to explain God by using three-in-one illustrations. She concluded

“The Father can not be described by the things of earth. The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight” (*Ibid*)

“The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be "the express image of His person." "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father.” (*Ibid*)

We shall return our thoughts to this latter statement later. She then said of the Holy Spirit

“The Comforter that Christ promised to send after He ascended to heaven, is the Spirit in all the fulness of the Godhead, making manifest the power of divine grace to all who receive and believe in Christ as a personal Saviour.” (*Ibid*)

All three persons are said to be “all the fulness of the Godhead” (all fully God or all fully divine) therefore the inevitable conclusion was that

“There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit -- those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ. . . .” (*Ibid*)

It can clearly be seen that Ellen White freely used the word *Godhead* but notice her avoidance of the word trinity (or any other three-in-one type of expression). Remember too she said that it was God Himself that had “instructed” her to say these things (see above). This means that her words must be regarded as very important. If we ignore them it will surely be at our own peril.

If God had wanted Ellen White to say that He was a trinity of divine beings as purported by the trinity doctrine (three persons in one indivisible substance/essence/being) then here was the place to say it but He gave her no such instruction. All that He did was to condemn the type of illustrations that portrayed Him to be three-in-one. We need to think seriously about these things.

### **Alternative renderings**

Returning our thoughts to Acts 17:29. Notice the way that other translations render this verse without using the word *Godhead*

#### New International Version

"Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill."

#### New American Standard Bible

"Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man."

#### Revised Standard Version

"Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man."

#### Weymouth New Testament

"Since then we are God's offspring, we ought not to imagine that His nature resembles gold or silver or marble, or anything sculptured by the art and inventive faculty of man."

#### The Darby Translation

"Being therefore [the] offspring of God, we ought not to think that which is divine to be like gold or silver or stone, [the] graven form of man's art and imagination."

#### The Bible in Basic English

"If then we are the offspring of God, it is not right for us to have the idea that God is like gold or silver or stone, formed by the art or design of man."

As can be seen, instead of using the word *Godhead*, the above translations (also others not listed) use words such as divinity, divine nature, divine, God and deity etc.

Unfortunately, there are those who attempt to make it appear that the word *trinity* is synonymous with the word *Godhead* - which it is not. The truth of the matter is that these two words bear no resemblance to each other. This is because the word *trinity* automatically conveys to the human mind the idea of three-in-one (tri-unity) whereas the word *Godhead* contains no such meaning. This is why it is

so misleading to use the phrase *Godhead* or *trinity*. It makes it look as though the two words are synonymous when they are not.

Another place where the word *Godhead* is used (in the KJV) is where the apostle Paul says that what we see around us speaks of unseen divine power. He wrote to the believers in Rome

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Romans 1:20

The point is being made here that what we see in the natural world around us, even though it is blighted by the curse of sin, is still a living testimony to God’s creative power and greatness. In other words, it reveals a supreme divine being that brought this world into existence and upholds it by divine power. Creation itself does not speak of the individual personalities of the Godhead.

Other translations do as they did with Acts 17:29 – meaning that instead of using the word *Godhead* they use *divinity* and *divine nature* etc. In an online article I found this explanation of the word *Godhead*.

“The fundamental meaning of "Godhead" is, nevertheless, no less than that of "Godhood," the state, dignity, condition, quality, of a god, or, as monotheists would say, of God. As manhood is that which makes a man a man, and childhood that which makes a child a child, so Godhead is that which makes God, God. When we ascribe Godhead to a being, therefore, we affirm that all that enters into the idea of God belongs to Him. "Godhead" is thus the Saxon equivalent of the Latin "Divinity," or, as it is now becoming more usual to say, "Deity."” (Benjamin B. Warfield, *NETbible online*, ‘Godhead’)

### **Christ, the fullness of the Godhead (fully divine – fully God)**

The third place where the word *Godhead* is used is in Colossians 2:9. This is where Paul says of Christ

“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead\_bodily”. Colossians 2:9

The word *Godhead* is used here to translate the Greek word *theotes* - which as we have seen above means the state of being God or being divine. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul is saying that in Christ dwells “all the fullness” of the state of being divine (being God) “bodily”. The Greek word used here (*pas*) that is transliterated “all” literally means *all, every and the whole*.

This concept of indwelling bodily is really very important. It means literally, corporeal. It opposes the idea that divinity was dwelling in Christ in any immaterial way - or in a way that was spiritualistic. This indwelling is not only real but physical. It is the indwelling of the very personage of God.

Note how other versions translate this verse.

#### Weymouth New Testament

“For it is in Christ that the fulness of God's nature dwells embodied, and in Him you are made complete,”

#### New International Version

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,”

#### Holman Christian Standard Bible

“For in Him the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily,”

#### The Bible in Basic English

“For in him all the wealth of God's being has a living form,”

For me, the most interesting translation is The Complete Jewish Bible. This one says

“For in him, bodily, lives the fullness of all that God is.”

This latter translation reminds me of what many consider to be one of the most debated texts of Scripture in the entire Bible. This is John 1:1 – particularly its final clause. We shall look at this now.

### **With God and was God**

At the latter end of the first century (this was after Christianity had become established), there were those who were circulating false teachings concerning the nature of Jesus. Was He truly human? Was He truly divine? These were the questions that were being debated. This is why John wrote his gospel. It is also why he began it by saying

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” John 1:1-3

John opens his gospel by saying that the Word “was God” and was “with God”. This shows us very clearly that there are two separate persons of divinity – each possessing the fullness of divinity. In other words, both are God – or to put it another way again – both would be included within the term *Godhead* (the state of being God). Generally speaking, these two personages are accepted as being the Father and the Son.

This verse also reveals that there is a sense in which the pre-existent Word can properly be termed God whilst in another sense He is not God. This I believe



was John's 'grammatical dilemma'. It was to say that the Word was God Himself and yet not say that as a personality He is God.

Allow me to explain.

Although some dispute this, my understanding of a literal translation of John's opening words would be something like

"In beginning was the Word, and the Word was with **the God** [Gr. ton qeon], and the Word **was God** [Gr. qeov].

Notice here that a literal reading would say that "**the** Word was with **the** God".

In using these words this way, John was conveying the thought that in the sense of *divine personages*, "**the** God" was separate from "**the** Word" yet the Word "**was God**". This is why I said (see above) that The Complete Jewish Bible translation of Colossians 2:9 ("[For in him, bodily, lives the fullness of all that God is.](#)") reminds me of John 1:1. This is because The New English Bible renders John 1:1 as

["When all things began, the word already was. The word dwelt with God and what God was, the word was." John 1:1 New English Bible](#)

By his usage of words, John is saying that the Word was God essentially (the Word is everything that God is) but is not God in personality (in personage). Look at it this way. If John had written: "the Word was with *ton qeon* (the God), and the Word was *ton qeon* (the God)", that would not make any sense. It would be saying that both the Word and the God are the same personages (individuals) - which they are not. This does not make the Word (the Son of God) any less divine than the God (the Father) because as we shall see over and over again in this study, the Scriptures reveal that He is God Himself in the person of the Son. He is simply not God in individual personality. The latter is the Father. This is why in His prayer to His Father (this was just before His arrest) Jesus said

["And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17:3](#)

It is also why under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the apostle Paul wrote

["But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."](#)  
1 Corinthians 8:6

This is not denying the full and complete divinity of Christ but is simply showing that Christ, as regards to individual personality, is not God but the Son of God. Elsewhere the Scriptures show that Christ is God essentially (see John 1:1, Philippians 2:6 etc). Ellen White put it this way

**“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 is with reference to Christ in His pre-existence because the man Jesus was never God in infinity. Note Ellen White’s remarks concerning Christ being “**the only begotten Son of the Father**”. Again this was with reference to Christ in His pre-existence. In the next two sections we shall return to this point in more detail.

We are being told here that in personality (individual personage), Christ is the “**Son of the Father**” whilst “**in infinity**” He is “**truly God**” (see also John 1:1 above). This is the begotten concept. Note that it is said specifically that in personality (personage), Christ is not “**truly God**” or, as we could say – not *the* God. This is in keeping with John 17:3 and 1 Corinthians 8:6 (see above). Repeatedly Ellen White referred to Christ, in personality, as the Son of the infinite God (the Father). In section three we shall speak more of how Christ can truly be a son and yet still be fully God although not God (the God) in personality (individual personage). John later said

**“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” John 1:14**

John was making it very clear that it was not the personage of the God (the Father) who had become flesh but the Word (the Son of God). He was making it clear also that the Word (the Son) had literally become flesh and was not, as some explain it, inside of the human body manipulating it like a puppeteer manipulating a puppet. Human nature had become an integral part of the personage of the Word.

In the opening chapter of *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote (note the title of the chapter)

**“To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature. This is the pledge that God will fulfill His word. “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder. God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 26, ‘God with us’)**

Notice it is says that “**God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son**”. It does not say in the person of the Father.

Whilst it is not the purpose of this article to explore the mysteries of the incarnation, a big issue in the latter part of the first century was over whether or

not Christ possessed a real human body. Those such as the Docetae taught that His humanity was just a phantom (an illusion). This is because it was believed by them that divinity would not ally itself with literal matter – which was said to be corrupt (sinful). J. W. C. Wand who was once Archbishop of Brisbane and Bishop of London put it this way

“A third widely prevalent type of heretical thought was that of Docetism (from the Greek verb *dokein*, to seem). The Docetics taught that while Jesus was truly God His appearance as man was merely phantasmal. It is against such a view that the Johannine gospel and epistles emphasise over and over again the flesh-and-blood reality of the incarnate Son of God.” (*J. W. C. Wand, A History of the Early Church to A. D. 500, page 21, ‘The Sub-Apostolic Church’*)

Returning our thoughts to the personage of the Son not being God in personality, note these words from the spirit of prophecy

“Since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 366, ‘The Law and the Covenants’*)

This is very clear and also very easy to understand but who then, if not God Himself, has been communicating with fallen humanity?

“The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man and vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God. All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ.” (*Ibid*)

Notice here that Ellen White makes it clear that since the time that Adam and Eve sinned, there has been “no direct communication between God and man” but that “All the communion ... has been through Christ”.

We can see here that in the sense of divine personalities (individual personages), Ellen White differentiates between God and Christ – even in Christ’s pre-existence. In other words, she does not refer to Christ as God – at least not as a personality (personage) separate from the Father.

If Christ is said to be God in personality, Ellen White’s statement would not make any sense. It would be making her say that there has been “no direct communication between God and man” but because Christ is God there has been direct communication between God and man. This statement would be nonsensical. There would be the same confusion as if John had said, “the Word was with *ton qeon* (the God), and the Word was *ton qeon* (the God)”. This would be making two separate individuals the same individual. How could that possibly be?

Here we must ask a question. Why was it that God, after the fall, could not directly communicate with man but Christ could and did? This is well worth pondering. To those who say that there is no difference between the Father and the Son this is a very difficult question to answer. In personality (individual personage), Christ was the Son of God – albeit He was God essentially (God Himself in the person of the Son). We shall see how this can be in section three. Ellen White then explains

“It was the Son of God that gave to our first parents the promise of redemption. It was He who revealed Himself to the patriarchs. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses understood the gospel. They looked for salvation through man's Substitute and Surety. These holy men of old held communion with the Saviour who was to come to our world in human flesh; and some of them talked with Christ and heavenly angels face to face.”  
(*Ibid*)

Here we are told that it was not God (the God – the Father) who has communed with fallen humanity but the Son of God. As regards to divine personages, Ellen White usually spoke of Christ as the Son of God - or the Son of the infinite God - or the Son of the Father - or some such similar expression albeit she made it very clear that He was God essentially (God Himself in the person of the Son).

### **Christ, the express image of the person of God**

In the opening section of his letter to the Colossians, Paul refers to Christ as being ***the image*** of the invisible God.

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” Colossians 1:15-17

Again this must be with reference to Christ in His pre-existence. Paul is saying that He is not the “invisible God” Himself but the “image of the invisible God”. This “invisible God” must be the divine personage we know as the Father (the God as in John 1:1). Any individual who is an image of someone else cannot be the same individual of whom he is an image therefore the invisible God and Christ the Son of the Father are two separate personages. This much is reasonably obvious.

In the above verse, the Greek word translated “image” is *eikon*. This is where we derive the English word *icon*, which we normally use with reference to an image representing the original. If it is said that someone is an exact image (exact copy) of someone else, then it is saying that the former must be everything that the latter is without actually being the latter. This is only the same as John is stating in the opening words of his gospel (John 1:1)

Regarding Christ being the exact image of God, Paul expresses this in the opening words of his epistle to the Hebrews

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”  
Hebrews 1:1-3

Notice here it says that the Son is the “**express image**” of God’s “**person**”. This is very important because it is not a reference to outward appearance but to that which is inward. Allow me to explain.

According to Strong’s concordance, the Greek word translated “**express image**” is *charakter*. This is said to be originally a tool that was used for engraving (marking) but later came to mean the engraving or mark itself. Strong’s also says that it means an exact impression or precise reproduction of persons or things that are original. Here then we can see that the expression “**express image of his person**” conveys the idea that the Son, in His pre-existence, was the exact engraving of the “**person**” of God, thus Paul is saying that the Son is the exact impression of the very substance of God - meaning who and everything that God is. Again this reminds us of John 1:1. It also reminds us that Paul said that Christ is “**the image of the invisible God**”. The Son therefore, according to the Holy Scriptures, is the ‘**person**’ of God (Yahweh) made manifest. We shall see this now as we look at the Greek word *hupostasis* which in Hebrew 1:3 is translated *person*. Later we shall see that Ellen White penned the very same thought.

### **The person of God**

In Hebrews 1:3, the Greek word translated *person* is the transliterated word *hupostasis*. This is completely different from the word *eikon* or *prosopon* that Paul could have used which is often used to mean the countenance or appearance (i.e. that which is visibly seen, the visage). As a matter of interest, this latter word *prosopon* is often translated in the KJV as face, faces, or countenance etc., thus depicting outward appearance or visage etc whilst *eikon* is translated *image*. It can be seen therefore that in His opening remarks to the Hebrew Christians, the writer avoided using either *eikon* or *prosopon*, both of which are normally used with reference to outward appearance.

By using the word *hupostasis*, Paul is not expressing the idea that the Son was the same as the Father in outward appearance (although Christ may have been) but that He was one and the same in inward being meaning in His “**person**”. As a matter of passing interest here, Ellen White clearly said that the Father and Son are not totally identical. At the time she was preparing *The Desire of Ages* she said to the youth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

“As the disciples comprehended it, as their perception took hold of God's divine compassion, they realized that there is a sense in which the sufferings of the Son were the sufferings of the Father. From eternity there was a complete unity between the Father and the Son. They were two, yet little short of being identical; two in individuality, yet one in spirit, and heart, and character.” (Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor* 16<sup>th</sup> December 1897 'The New Commandment part 1')

Throughout her writings, as she does here, Ellen White says that the Father and Son are two distinct individuals. She also says that they are “little short of being identical”. In other words, the Father and Son are not exactly the same. We shall discuss this difference more fully in section three.

Returning our thoughts to the book of Hebrews, three times the writer uses the word *hupostasis*. First in Hebrews 1:3 where it is translated *person*, secondly in Hebrews 3:14 where it is translated *confidence* and thirdly in Hebrews 11:3 where it is translated *substance*. All three instances are as in the KJV.

The word *hupostasis* is a compound of two other Greek words. These are *hupo* meaning literally under (for its usage see such as Matthew 5:15, Luke 13:34, Acts 2:5 and Romans 16:20 etc) and *histemi* (a primary verb) meaning to be stood (stand or standing) or be established. For its usage see Matthew 2:9 [stood], 6:5 [standing], 18:16 [established], Mark 9:36 [set], John 1:26 [standeth] and Acts 24:21 [standing] etc. From this it can be seen that the word *hupostasis* has a meaning of that which is the foundation or under-girding (sub-structure or substance) of cause of being. This is highlighted by the way the author of Hebrews used this same word in the following verse

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence (Gr. *hupostasis*) stedfast unto the end” Hebrews 3:14

This “confidence” is the substance of our hope (it is that of which our hope is made, the foundation or under-girding). As Paul explains as he uses this Greek word for the third time

“Now faith is the substance (Gr. *Hupostasis*) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1

The substance/confidence (Gr. *hupostasis*) is the stuff of which are hopes are made. It is our faith, the foundation or under-girding of our hopes.

Paul uses this very same Greek word when he said that the Son is the “express image [character] of His [God's] person [*hupostasis*” (see Hebrews 1:3). This does not necessarily mean to say that the Father and Son are part of (belonging to) one indivisible physical substance (something which God has not revealed) but rather that they share the same attributes. This stuff (substance/foundation/under-girding) then of which Paul says that Christ

consists, is God's inward "person" (or personality). It is the very essence of God (who God is).

It is very interesting to note that William Tyndale translated Hebrews 1:3 as saying (as did Miles Coverdale when he produced his translation of the complete Bible after Tyndale was martyred for his faith)

"Which sonne beyng the brightnes of his glory and very ymage of his substance bearinge vp all thinges with the worde of his power hath in his awne person poured oure synnes and is sitten on the right honde of the maiestie an hye" Hebrews 1:3 Tyndale's translation

This would say to us today in modern English

"Which son being the brightness of his glory and **very image of his** [God's] **substance** bearing up all things with the word of his power hath in **his own person** purged our sins and is sitting on the right hand of the majesty an high" Hebrews 1:3

Notice here that Tyndale says that the Son is the "very ymage of his [God's] substance" whereas the KJV says, "express image of his [God's] person". Notice also that Tyndale emphasises that the Son purged our sins in "his awne [own] person" thus ensuring that the Son is seen as a separate person (personage) from God. By using the words *substance* and *person*, Tyndale was attempting (and I believe succeeded), in showing that the Greek conveys that the Son, as a separate personality from God, was an exact manifestation of the very being of God (who and what God is). The translators of the KJV did not accomplish this (I believe) when they translated it as saying of the Son

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:" Hebrews 1:3.

The expression used here ("express image of His person"), could easily be taken to mean an exact copy of God in every way (like a clone), which, by his use of words, the author of Hebrews obviously did not mean to convey. If Christ were a clone there would be no difference between God and Christ at all. As it is, one is a Father whilst the other is a Son.

In Hebrews 1:3, Paul was setting out to convey (as we would say today) that the Son is the very "personality (substance) of God made manifest". Ellen White penned this very view when she wrote (after saying that "The Father is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and is invisible to mortal sight")

"The Son is all the fullness of the Godhead manifested. The Word of God declares Him to be "the express image of His person." "God so loved the

world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is shown the personality of the Father." (*Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62 1906 'Come out and be Separate'*)

This is totally in keeping with what was said by Paul in Hebrews 1:3 (see above).

John Wycliffe, in his translation of the Scriptures (this was the first complete English Bible) says

"Which whanne also he is the brytnesse of glorie, and figure of his substaunce, and berith alle thingis bi word of his vertu, he makith purgacioun of synnes, and syttith on the riythalf of the maieste in heuenes;" Hebrews 1:3 Wycliffe translation (1395 edition)

Even though it is in 14<sup>th</sup> century English, it can be seen that Wycliffe, as did Tyndale later, says that the Son is a "figure of his [God's] substaunce" thus showing - as did Tyndale - that the Son is a separate person from God yet an exact image of His substance (inner person/inner being/inner personality – all that God is). The Word English Bible says

"His [God's] Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself made purification for our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;" Hebrews 1:3 The Word English Bible

We can see that the word *hupostasis*, as used here in Hebrews 1:3, is intended to mean God's inner being. Note how the following version translate this verse

#### New Revised Standard Version

"He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," Hebrews 1:3

#### New Jerusalem Bible

"he is the reflection of God's glory and bears the impress of God's own being, sustaining all things by his powerful command; and now that he has purged sins away, he has taken his seat at the right hand of the divine Majesty on high" Hebrew 1:3

#### Weymouth New Testament

"He brightly reflects God's glory and is the exact representation of His being, and upholds the universe by His all-powerful word. After securing man's purification from sin He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty



on high,” Hebrews 1:3  
New English Bible

“The Son who is the effulgence of God’s splendour and the stamp of God’s very being, and sustains the universe by his word of power. When he had brought about the purgation of sins, he took his seat at the right hand of Majesty on high.” Hebrews 1:3

Even the New World Translation of the Scriptures, published by the Watchtower Society of the Jehovah’s Witnesses who do not even believe that the Son is God, says that He is an exact representation of God’s being. In this translation of Hebrews 1:3 it says

“He is the reflection of (his) glory and the exact representation of his very being, and he sustains all things by the word of his power; and after he had made a purification for our sins he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty in lofty places.” Hebrews 1:3 New World Translation

The Jehovah’s Witness translation of this verse is in perfect accord with the Greek (“His very being” or inner person), although it must be said that as a denomination they do not regard the Son as Yahweh but as a creature created by Yahweh.

There can be no compromise between these two completely contrasting beliefs. The author of these notes you are now reading accepts that the Son is the Creator of this world – meaning He is Yahweh Himself in the person of the Son - whilst Jehovah’s Witnesses say that Yahweh created the Son. This is saying two entirely different things. This is also the difference between being brought forth of God” (commonly said begotten of God) and having been created (like an angel) by God. We shall return to this thought in section three.

### **Christ the very impress of God’s substance**

It is very interesting to note that in his 18<sup>th</sup> century translation of the New Testament translated directly from the Greek, the Presbyterian minister Daniel Mace says of the Son in Hebrews 1:3

“Who being the radiation of his glory, and the impress image of his substance, and governing all things by his powerful command, after having himself made expiation for our sins, sat down on the right hand of the divine majesty in the highest heavens.” Hebrews 1:3 Mace translation (1729)

Notice here that Mace, although highly criticised by many scholars for his translation having a Unitarian bias, (Unitarians are non-trinitarians) says that the Son was the “impress image of his [God’s] substance”. The word *impress* is interesting. In its archaic sense it is a past tense and a past participle of the word *impress* which dictionary definitions include the meaning to press or stamp, or print something in or upon; to imprint (that which bears the impression), to stamp

an image upon etc. Here we can see then that Mace says that the Son was the “imprest image” (exact impression) of God’s substance (inner being).

Interesting also is the way that this is explained in The Abingdon Bible Commentary of 1929. Some 66 professors of biblical exegesis, biblical languages, theology, Christian doctrine and church history etc compiled this commentary. With reference to the words express image (KJV) it says

“The word translated ‘very image’ means, literally, the stamp cut by a die, and so the impress made upon a seal; thus the phrase signifies that the essence of the divine nature was stamped on the Person of Christ. He was the impress of God’s essence.” (*Professor H. T Andrews, D.D., ‘The Abingdon Bible Commentary’, 1929*)

We can see that this is in perfect accord with all that has been said above regarding Hebrews 1:3. Interesting again is the way that the Revised Standard Version translates this verse. It says

“He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”  
Hebrews 1:3 Revised Standard Version

Whilst the Moffatt translation says

“He, reflecting God’s bright glory and stamped with God’s own character, sustains the universe with his word of power; when he had secured our purification from sin, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”  
Hebrews 1:3 Moffatt Translation

We can see that in Hebrews 1:3, the word *hupostasis* is translated in a variety of ways. These are such as God’s person, being, very being, character, nature and substance.

Regarding substance, there is only one place in the writings of Ellen White where I have found that she said specifically that the Father and the Son were of the same substance. This was with reference to the time that Jesus said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). We are told

“With what firmness and power he uttered these words. The Jews had never before heard such words from human lips, and a convicting influence attended them; for it seemed that divinity flashed through humanity as Jesus said, “I and my Father are one. The words of Christ were full of deep meaning as he put forth the claim that he and the Father were of one substance, possessing the same attributes. The Jews understood his meaning, there was no reason why they should misunderstand, and they took up stones to stone him.” (*Ellen G. White Signs of the Times 20<sup>th</sup>*)

*November 1893, 'The True Sheep Respond to the Voice of the Shepherd')*

Notice here that Ellen White made it clear that when Jesus said that He and His Father were one, He was referring to being one in “attributes”, not physical substance. Again this is in keeping with all that has been said above regarding Christ being the express image of God’s person (character/personality/very being etc). We were also told in 1898 (which was the same year that *The Desire of Ages* was published)

“In Christ is gathered all the glory of the Father. In Him is all the fulness of the Godhead. He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. The glory of the attributes of God are expressed in His character.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times 24<sup>th</sup> November 1898 'The Great Salvation', see also Christ's Object Lessons page 115 'The Pearl' 1900*)

Here we can see again that in His divine nature that Christ was the “express image of His [God’s] person”. Note particularly the latter sentence from Ellen White.

### **More thoughts from the spirit of prophecy**

In 1887 Ellen White wrote (this was with reference to Philippians 2:5-8)

“The apostle would call our attention from ourselves to the Author of our salvation. He presents before us his two natures, divine and human. Here is the description of the divine: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." He was "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.

Now, of the human: "He was made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 5<sup>th</sup> July 1887 'Christ Man's Example, see also Review and Herald 4<sup>th</sup> September 1900'*)

Again we see two divine personages – God and Christ. Note that Philippians 2:6 says that Christ “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God”. This is obviously with reference to the pre-existent Christ.

Ellen White also said the year following the publication of *The Desire of Ages*

“As speech is to thought, so is Christ to the invisible God. He is the manifestation of the Father, and is called the Word of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 15<sup>th</sup> November 1899 'The Law Revealed in Christ'*)

Again this is with reference to Christ in His pre-existence because she says He “is called the Word of God”. This reminds us again of John 1:1. Ellen White also said that Christ is not the “invisible God” but is an expression of Him (“a manifestation of the Father”). Speech is an expression of that which is first

thought. In other words we think something before we speak it. Sometimes we use the expression - "he or she spoke without thinking" - but this cannot literally be true. The thought must exist before the word is spoken or - to put it another way - the word would not have an existence without first existing as thought. Thus we can see that speech cannot exist without thought. Concerning Christ, this is exactly what Ellen White said

"He [Christ] declared that he had no existence separate from the Father. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 1890, 'Christ Revealed the Father'*)

She also says in *The Desire of Ages*

"By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God, -- God's thought made audible." (*Ellen G. White, 'The Desire of Ages' page 19, 'God with us'*)

The Son is who God is. It is His thinking or His personality made manifest. In other words, that which God is - so is the Son. This is because He is God Himself in the person of the Son.

### **In summary**

In summary, it can only be said, as did the apostle Paul

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." 1 Timothy 3:16

In section two we shall be taking a look at the claims of Christ, also the reactions of those who did not believe Him. We shall see that He claimed to be the Son of God – meaning that God was His father.

# What think ye of Christ?

## Part two

### Claims of divinity

We noted in the previous section that the Bible describes Jesus as God manifest in the flesh. In this section, we shall take note of what Jesus Himself said concerning His relationship to God. In particular we shall be taking a look at where He identified Himself with the “I am” of Exodus 3:14.

#### Controversy and disputations

At the close of His Judean ministry in AD 29, the Sanhedrin (the Jewish leadership) rejected Jesus as both a blasphemer and a lawbreaker. This took place following the healing of the impotent man at the pool called Bethesda in Jerusalem. The healing itself was not the problem. It was because Jesus had performed this miracle on the Sabbath that the Jews vehemently objected. It was also because He had told the healed man to carry his bed on that day. In doing these things, Jesus was said to have broken God’s Sabbath.

“And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.” John 5:16

In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White made this comment regarding the Pharisees

“In their judgment He [Jesus] had not only broken the law in healing the sick man on the Sabbath, but had committed sacrilege in bidding him bear away his bed.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 203, ‘Bethesda and the Sanhedrin’*)

On the next page she wrote

“Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin to answer the charge of Sabbathbreaking.” (*Ibid, page 204*)

It was because of this so say ill-timed act of mercy that the Jews wanted to “slay” Jesus but in response to His accusers He said

“ ... My Father worketh hitherto, and I work”. John 5:17

Repeatedly Jesus spoke of God as His Father. John’s gospel shows this very clearly. This is why John wrote his gospel.

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” John 20:30-31

Returning our thoughts to the incident at the Pool of Bethesda John recorded

“Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” John 5:18

It was not simply concerning Sabbath-breaking that the Jews were so full of hatred towards Jesus. It was because He had called God “His Father”. For these reasons the Jewish leadership regarded Him as deserving of death. Notice here that John is not quoting the Jews. Rather he is explaining what they believed was being claimed by Jesus in saying that God was His Father. In other words, according to John, by claiming to be the Son of God, the Jews understood Jesus to be “making himself equal with God”. This is what Christ’s claim to Sonship meant to the Jews. It was that Christ claimed equality with God. To the Jews this was nothing short of blasphemy.

The Jews realised that Jesus was making this claim of Sonship in a special sense – meaning that He was claiming literally to be God’s Son. This claim - according to their reasoning - was deserving of death because not only was He making Himself equal to God but also was claiming to be God. If Jesus had been regarded as referring to God as His father in the normal sense that we Christians call God our father, it is transparent that no objections would have been made. The Jews spoke of God as their father. With reference to this same dispute, we find the following in *The Desire of Ages*

“Jesus claimed equal rights with God in doing a work equally sacred, and of the same character with that which engaged the Father in heaven. But the Pharisees were still more incensed. He had not only broken the law, according to their understanding, but in calling God “His own Father” had declared Himself equal with God. John 5:18, R. V. (*Ellen White, ‘The Desire of Ages’ page 207, ‘Bethesda and the Sanhedrin’*)

I would ask you to note something here that is very significant. To be specific and in keeping with her own comments, Ellen White did not quote from the KJV but used instead the Revised Version of the Scriptures - thus she quoted Jesus as calling God “His own Father”. She would not have been so specific if she had quoted the KJV, which simply says, “God was His Father”. She followed on by saying

“The whole nation of the Jews called God their Father, therefore they would not have been so enraged if Christ had represented Himself as standing in the same relation to God. But they accused Him of blasphemy, showing

that they understood Him as making this claim in the highest sense.” (*Ibid*)

This “highest sense” must mean that Christ was claiming a literal Sonship to the Father. These objectors knew exactly what Jesus was claiming. As we continue in our study, we will see this more and more clearly. Three years later when commenting on this same event, Ellen White phrased her words a little bit differently. This time she said

“The whole nation called God their Father, and if Jesus had done this in the same sense in which they did, the Pharisees would not have been so enraged. But they accused Jesus of blasphemy, showing that they understood that Christ claimed God as His Father in the very highest sense.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 5<sup>th</sup> March 1901, ‘Lessons from the Christ-Life’*)

In the latter statement, Ellen White adds more emphasis than she did previously. In *The Desire of Ages* she says that Christ claimed God as His Father in “the highest sense” whilst in the *Review and Herald* she says in “the very highest sense”. Obviously she meant that He was the literal Son of God. What else could “the very highest sense” mean? By her choice of wording, Ellen White is denying that in any way this Sonship is metaphorical (figurative or allegorical).

Returning our thoughts to John 5:18, there are a number of versions that say “own father”. These include such as Greens Literal Translation, The Complete Jewish Bible, Wesley’s New Testament, The New International Version, The New Revised Standard Version, The New American Version and many others. Very interestingly, the Weymouth New Testament translates this verse this way

“On this account then the Jews were all the more eager to put Him to death -- because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also spoke of God as being in a special sense His Father, thus putting Himself on a level with God.”  
John 5:18 Weymouth translation

Another translation that is interesting is the Daniel Mace New Testament.

“therefore the Jews were the more eager to kill him, because he had not only violated the sabbath, but likewise, because he had said that God was his proper father, making himself equal with God.” John 5:18 Daniel Mace translation

As can be seen, Ellen White’s remarks are in harmony with Scripture. There was no metaphorical meaning in the claims of Jesus to be the Son of God. She said He claimed that God was literally His father. This was also perfectly understood by the Jewish leaders. John said that because Jesus was claiming that God was His father, they knew He was making Himself equal to God - which they regarded as blasphemy. This is why these leaders wanted to stone Him (kill Him). As they themselves openly confessed to Pilate (this was following the

arrest of Jesus)

“... We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.” John 19:7

It was the claim of Jesus to be God’s Son that led these Jews (mainly the priests and leaders) to despise Him. Even Pilate – a Roman governor - realised that Jesus was no ordinary man (see John 19:8). In one very real sense, this hatred as never changed. By some who claim to be Christians, an understanding of Christ being truly the Son of God is still despised and rejected.

### Further confrontations

In the autumn of AD 30, which was something like eighteen months after the previously mentioned dispute, Jesus again found Himself in a heated clash with certain Jews. Again this was because He claimed that God was His father. This dispute took place within the temple. John the gospel writer records

“And he [Jesus] said unto them [those who disputed His identity], *Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins.*” John 8:23-24

Notice here in this KJV rendering of this verse that the word *he* is in italics. This is to denote that this is a supplied word. This very same expression is found a few verses later. This is when Jesus said

“ ... When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am *he*, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.” John 8:28

The Greek word translated *I AM* is transliterated *eimi* (verb) meaning (according to Strong’s concordance) the first person singular present indicative. It is used in such verses as Matthew 3:11 (I am not worthy), Matthew 8:9 (For I am a man), John 3:28 (I am not the Christ), John 5:7 (while I am coming) and Acts 21:33 (I am ready) etc. Interesting is the way that the NIV puts this verse. It says (note the wording in the square brackets)

“So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” John 8:28 New International Version

The Complete Jewish Bible says something very similar (again note the wording in the square brackets)

“So Yeshua said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM [who I say I am], and that of myself I do nothing, but say only what the



Father has taught me.” John 8:28 *Complete Jewish Bible, copyright © 1998 by David H. Stern. Published by Jewish New Testament Publications Inc. Distributed by Messianic Jewish Resources. [www.messianicjewish.net](http://www.messianicjewish.net) All rights reserved. Used by permission*

The Mace translation puts it differently again

“Jesus said therefore to them, when ye have lift up the son of man, then shall ye know what I am, and that I do nothing of my self, but speak as my father hath instructed me.” John 8:28 The Mace translation

Still claiming that God was His father, Jesus said to the Jews

“I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father” John 8:38

The Jews then claimed that God was also their father. To this Jesus replied

“ ... If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.” John 8:42

Following these remarks there was an exchange of words in which Jesus said that the devil was the father of those who were disputing His identity. He also said that these disbelieving Jews did not know God but that He, the Son of God knew Him. Whilst the Jews were still smarting over what was to them must have been scathing words of rebuke, Jesus then said something that made them even angrier.

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.” John 8:56

By this time, the Jews were in total disbelief as to what Jesus was saying. They responded

“ ... Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?” John 8:57

The reply of Jesus stunned these disputing Jews. John records

“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” John 8:58

Reading far more into this statement than just a claim to pre-existence, the disputing Jews realised that Jesus was identifying Himself with the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14-15. This is the One whom they regarded as Yahweh (Jehovah) – their father.

The event referred to here (Exodus chapter 3) is when God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai (Mount Horeb). This was when Moses was tending his father-in-laws sheep. God told Moses that he was to deliver his people from their bondage in Egypt. Moses then asked God - when the Israelites asked who had sent him - what name should he say. The reply that God gave can be found in Exodus 3:14-15.

“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.” Exodus 3:14-15

We shall be taking a closer look at these words later, suffice to note for now that God said to Moses that he should say that the name of the one that had sent him was “I AM” - “the LORD God”, also that this was His name “forever”.

In response to what Jesus had said, the Jews again attempted to stone Him (see John 8:59). This was the penalty for blasphemy. Stephen was probably regarded as having committed blasphemy. He was stoned to death (Acts 7:54-60 – see especially verses 55-57)

### **What’s in a name?**

To the Hebrews of Bible times, the name of a person (or place) often had great significance. Rather than to just identify by outward appearance, this name meant more in relation to a persons (or an objects/places) character, or origins etc. Take for example the following

“And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.” Genesis 3:20 (Strong’s:Eve means life giver)

“And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. Genesis 4:25 (Strong’s:Seth means substitute)

“And the angel of the LORD said unto her (Sarah), Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.” Genesis 16:11 (Strong’s:Ishmael means God shall hear)

“Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.” Genesis 11:9 (Strong’s:Babel means confusion)

We can see from this that to the Hebrew mind, a name was very significant. This

is why when Moses asked God what name he should give (when he was asked who had sent him) he was asking for God's personal identity. The children of Israel, whilst they were in Egypt, were surrounded by many 'gods'.

### **The Old Testament I AM (Yahweh/Jehovah)**

We shall now turn our attention to the expression "I AM" as found in Exodus 3:14-15.

When Moses turned aside to take a look at the burning bush (because it was burning but not consumed), God introduced Himself as "the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (see Exodus 3:6). We can see from this that God assured Moses that He was the same God that from the beginning had communed with - and had led - the patriarchs (the early fathers) This must have reminded Moses of the promises of God that had been handed down by those who had gone before him. God then told Moses that he had been chosen to lead the children of Israel out from their Egyptian bondage. This is when Moses asked God what name he should say when the children of Israel asked who had sent him. The Scriptures then record

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. Exodus 3:14

According to Strong's concordance, this expression "I AM" (Heb. hayah) means "to be or to come to be (come to pass or become)". In the latter sense, it is used extensively. For examples of its usage see Genesis 2:7 (became), 3:22 (become), 4:14 (come, as in come to pass), Genesis 11:3 (had), Genesis 13:3 (been) and Genesis 15:1 (came) etc.

Very interesting and very significant is that instead of the words "I AM THAT I AM", some Bibles have "I will be what I will be", either that or they say that the latter interpretation is a valid alternative. Take for example the Complete Jewish Bible. It says in its translation of Exodus 3:14

"God said to Moshe, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh [I am/will be what I am/will be]," and added, "Here is what to say to the people of Isra'el: 'Ehyeh [I Am or I Will Be] has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14 Complete Jewish Bible, copyright © 1998 by David H. Stern. Published by Jewish New Testament Publications Inc. Distributed by Messianic Jewish Resources. [www.messianicjewish.net](http://www.messianicjewish.net) All rights reserved. Used by permission

This translation of the Scriptures uses in this verse the Hebrew term Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh and includes the alternative reading "I am/will be what I am/will be". Note particularly here the consonants HYH. This recent Jewish translation is very interesting because in the Miles Coverdale translation (the very first printed English translation of the complete Bible) it says in 16<sup>th</sup> century English language

"God saide vnto Moses: I wyl be what I wyll be. And he sayde: Thus shalt

thou say vnto ye children of Israel: I wyl he hath sent me vnto you.”  
Exodus 3:14 Miles Coverdale translation.

In a 21<sup>st</sup> century English rendering of this verse we would say

“God said unto Moses: **I will be what I will be**. And he said: thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: **I will** he hath sent me unto you.”

Another interesting point is that whilst the New International Version (which is purported to have used the best manuscripts) has in Exodus 3:14 “I AM WHO I AM”, the footnote for that verse says

“or I will be what I will be” (footnote, Exodus 3:14 New International Version)

A similar footnote to this same verse is also found in the New English Bible. This says

“I am ... I am or I will be what I will be” Footnote to Exodus 3:14 New English Bible”

I have found that as an alternative to “I AM THAT I AM”, there are many commentaries and lexicons that give the rendering “I will be what I will be”. One such commentary is the 1919 Peake’s commentary. This had over 60 contributors. These comprised of professors of Bible languages and professors of Biblical exegesis etc. This commentary says with reference to Exodus 3:14

“I will be that I will be” is supported by Robertson Smith, David’son, Driver, M’Neile, and others (the meaning will be more clearly conveyed to the English reader by the translation, “I will be what I will be.” – A.S.P.) It brings out the implications both of the root and tense of the verb *hayah*. The root denotes rather becoming than being, and the tense (imperfect) marks uncompleted process or activity.” (Rev George Harford, M.A. Hon. Canon of Liverpool, *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, 1919 page 172)

Note again here the consonants HYH - also that the commentary says that the root of *hayah* denotes “becoming” more so than “being” and the imperfect tense denotes “uncompleted process or activity”.

Very interesting and in harmony with this reasoning is that in 1898, in total accordance with that which was then believed by Seventh-day Adventists, Uriah Smith wrote in his much acclaimed book *Looking unto Jesus*

“With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought.” (Uriah Smith, *Looking unto Jesus*, page 10, chapter 2, ‘Christ as Creator’ 1898)

This is what was then believed and taught, in 1898, by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was that Christ is God Himself in the person of the Son. The latter is why it brought no objection - either from Ellen White or anyone else. As Jerry Moon says in the recent Seventh-day Adventist publication *The Trinity*

*“Uriah Smith’s *Looking Unto Jesus* was the most comprehensive and carefully nuanced exposition of the non-trinitarian view among Adventists.” (Jerry Moon, ‘*The Trinity*’, chapter 13 ‘*Trinity and anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist history*’ page 196, 2002)*

Note that Smith’s book was initially published the very same year as *The Desire of Ages* was first published. No conflict was seen between these two books. They were advertised alongside each other in such as the *Review and Herald* etc. To see how Smith’s book was regarded by the Seventh-day Adventist Church please see section 39 of the Detailed History Series here

### [A Detailed History of the Trinity Doctrine](#)

That Christ was brought forth of the Father (commonly said begotten of the Father) was then, in 1898, the denominational belief of Seventh-day Adventists. It is this bringing forth that makes Christ to be literally the Son of God (we shall return to this thought in section three). As some have expressed it – Christ is God from God, true God from true God – or as Uriah Smith put it – the “[evolution of deity, as deity](#)”. This evolving is why Christ is God in the person of the Son. This was in contrast to deity becoming flesh (the incarnation) which again was deity evolving but this time as humanity and not as deity (John 1:1, 14). The latter is God manifest in the flesh (see 1 Timothy 3:16). This is why Smith said

*“With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased.”(Uriah Smith, *Looking unto Jesus*, page 10, chapter 2, ‘*Christ as Creator*’ 1898)*

The evolving of deity did not cease with the bringing forth of the Son (not if Christ becoming flesh is taken into consideration) but it did cease “[as deity](#)”. This was the point that was being made by Smith.

In another book on Old Testament theology, I found a statement that I also believe is very interesting.

*“First let us examine the words that follow from Moses' request for the name of the God who has spoken to him. The Hebrew for those capitalised words is 'EHYEH 'ASHER 'EHYEH. The verbal form of 'EYEH' is the third person singular masculine imperfect of the verb 'HAYAH'. This verb 'HAYAH' does not mean 'to be'. It is more nearly understood by the verb 'to become' in English ... though we cannot totally exclude the idea of 'being'.” (George A. F. Knight, ‘*A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*’ pages 40-41, ‘*God known in His Self-Revelation*’)*

This same author later says

“The word 'EHYEH' is in this 'imperfect' form of the verb. 'EHYEH' is just as rightly translated by our future tense as by our present tense. Therefore it is just as correct to translate it by 'I shall become what I shall become', as by the phrase 'I am becoming what I am becoming'." (*Ibid*)

Notice here that this name of God is spoken of in connection with His self-revelation through His divine presence. This is what made the bush burn without being consumed. It was the eternal presence of deity. It can also be seen that in both of these previous statements the writers said that the words spoken by God (“I am that I am” or “I will be what I will be”) is in the imperfect tense (imperfect form of the verb).

The Hebrew language is very much verb orientated. Much importance is placed on the understanding of their usages. Unlike Greek or English though, Hebrew verbs are not considered as past, present or future but rather perfect or imperfect, a complete or an incomplete action. The imperfect tense as in - “I am that I am” or “I will be what I will be” - denotes that which is not yet complete but is still ongoing. Thus it can be said that God is saying to Moses, “I am becoming what I am becoming” meaning that through the dynamism of His own divine presence, God is revealing Himself (self-revelation).

Very interesting to note here is that in the New World Translation of the Scriptures, Exodus 3:14 is translated as saying

“At this God said to Moses: “I SHALL PROVE TO BE WHAT I SHALL PROVE TO BE” And He added: This is what you are to say to the sons of Israel, I SHALL PROVE TO BE has sent me to you.”” Exodus 3:14 New World Translation

By saying to Moses “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (see Exodus 3:6), in one sense God had already identified Himself to Moses. Therefore, when Moses asked God for the “name” of the one who had sent him it seems that he was asking God for His identity of personage. Moses actually asked God “Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? (see Exodus 3:13) Moses asked God what name (when he was asked) should he say was the God of their fathers? The Hebrew word used here is transliterated *shem* and is the common word for *name* (see Genesis 2:11, 20, 3:20, 11:20 etc).

### **The name of God**

Remembering it has been said that to a Hebrew mind the name of a person (or object/place etc) denoted character or characteristics etc, we can now look at the name that God actually gave to Moses to tell the Israelites who had sent him (in other words these are the very words that God gave Moses to speak).

“And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.” Exodus 3:15

Moses was told by God to say that it was “the LORD God” that had sent him. Note here the capitalization of the word “LORD”. When in capital letters in the KJV, each occurrence of this word denotes that it is translated from the word *Yahweh* (commonly Jehovah). Strong’s concordance says that this word is from *hayah*. This is the same word that is found in the previous verse when God said, “I am (hayah) that I am (hayah). Note again the consonants HYH. This was the same name as God identified Himself to Abraham (see Genesis 15:7).

A comment that was made regarding this in the 1929 Abingdon Bible commentary (with 66 contributors similar to Peakes commentary) said

“The words *I am that I am* are evidently intended as an interpretation of the name “Jehovah” which was pronounced in Hebrew *Yahweh*. According to the popular etymology of this passage, the Hebrew word was understood to be the third person singular masculine of the imperfect tense of the verb “to be” in its older form (found in a few instances in the Hebrew text and common in Aramaic), meaning “He is”, “ or “He will be”; or, if regarded as derived from the causative stem of the verb, “He causes to be.” (*J. F. McLaughlin, B.D. D.D. Dean and Professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Literature, Faculty of Theology, Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Victoria University, Toronto. The Abingdon Bible Commentary 1929 page 256*)

This is interesting because we read in the spirit of prophecy

“It was Christ who from the bush on Mount Horeb spoke to Moses saying, “I Am That I Am. . . . Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you.” Ex. 3:14. This was the pledge of Israel's deliverance. So when He came “in the likeness of men,” He declared Himself the I Am. The Child of Bethlehem, the meek and lowly Saviour, is God “manifest in the flesh.” 1 Tim. 3:16” (*Ellen G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages p. 24 ‘God with us’*)

This is complimentary to that which she wrote in *Patriarchs and Prophets* – which was that

“Since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man. The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man and vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God. All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 366 ‘The Law and the Covenants’ 1890*)

The “I AM” or “I will be” therefore is the eternally present God manifesting Himself in and through the person of His Son. This is because as we have seen in the previous section, He is the personality of the invisible God made manifest (see Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies Series B No.7, page 62, 1906) – or as the Scriptures say - the express image of God’s person (see Hebrews 1:3). Thus in the person of the Son of God we have Yahweh becoming what He will become in a dynamic revelation of His self (His very being).

We have also been told through the spirit of prophecy (note that this was one year after *The Desire of Ages* was published)

“God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. In the person of his only begotten Son, the God of heaven has condescended to stoop to our human nature. The Father in heaven has a voice and a person which Christ expressed.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin 6<sup>th</sup> March 1899*)

Notice particularly that apart from saying the Father has a voice which Christ expressed she said He (the Father) has “a person which Christ expressed”. This is in keeping with what has been said regarding the person of Hebrews 1:3 (see previous section). Note here also - as she did constantly - that Ellen White says it was **before** He came to earth that Christ was the begotten Son of God. He is the One through whom God has chosen to speak to fallen humanity. He is also the One who said to Moses “I AM THAT I AM”. Note too that Ellen White says that it was the “God of Heaven” that “condescended to stoop to our human nature”. We can see why Smith said that the Son of God was the evolution of deity (see above).

All of this is in keeping with the statement concerning the identification of Jesus with the “I am” (John 8:58) written by Ellen White in *The Desire of Ages*.

“With solemn dignity Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I Am.

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 G. White, ‘The Desire of Ages’ page 469, chapter ‘The Light of Life’*)

The personage of the divine Son of God is non-other than Yahweh Himself. Here then again is the mystery of Godliness, the eternal presence of God the self-existent one - manifest in the flesh.

Although I will refrain from commenting in detail, I would point out that when



quoting Micah 5:2 here, Ellen White did not use the verse as it is in the KJV but instead used the margin notes. This I believe is highly significant.

### **The self-existent one**

Concerning the self-existent one, here is another interesting statement from the pen of Ellen White.

“Upon the throne with the eternal, self-existent One is He who "hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows," who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," that He might be "able to succor them that are tempted.” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* page 416 ‘What is the Sanctuary?’ 1911 edition)

Notice we are told here that Christ is upon the throne “**with** the eternal, self-existent One” whilst in *The Desire of Ages* (when commentating on Jesus claiming the name “I am”) she said “He had announced Himself **to be** the self-existent One” (see above). This is not contradictory. In the first quote we see Ellen White expressing who Christ is in infinity (time without end) whilst in the second we see her referring to Christ in personality (in personage as the Son). As has been said so many times before, Christ is God Himself in the person of the Son. Again we can see what Smith meant by evolution of deity (see above).

**If you remember, in section one we did see these words from the pen of Ellen White**

“**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*)

In the person of God’s Son, Christ is the “self-existent One”. He is the express image of God’s person (see Hebrews 1:3). As the Son, He is a separate personality from God (who is His Father) but He is still Yahweh (Jehovah). In other words, the Father is the source of being of the Son or to put it another way again, separate from the Father, the Son of God has no existence.

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Christ came to the world to reveal the character of the Father, and to redeem the fallen race. The world’s Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that he had no existence separate from the Father. The authority by which he spoke, and wrought miracles, was expressly his own, yet he assures us that he and the Father are one.” (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 1890, ‘Christ Revealed the Father’*)

The Son of God is the “I am”, the “I will (be)”, the one who is becoming what He will become. He is the eternal presence.

## Further claims of Jesus

We have seen that the “I am” claim of Jesus enraged the Jews so much that they wanted to stone Him. This they would have done if He had not immediately left the temple precincts (see John 8:59). A few months later, the unbelieving Jews thought again to stone Him. This again was because He claimed that God was His Father. The Jews had asked Jesus to tell them plainly whether or not He was the Christ. Jesus replied that not only had He already told them but also that His own works had borne witness of Him. He then said that the reason that they did not believe was simply because they were not of His sheep but that to His followers He would give eternal life (see John 10:24-28). After saying that His Father had given these followers to Him Jesus said

“My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.” John 10:29-30

The Scriptures record that in response to what Jesus claimed, the Jews took up stones to stone Him. They realised what Jesus was claiming. In return, Jesus asked them for which of His works were they going to carry out their intentions. His would-be assailants replied

“ ... For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” John 10:33

Although unbelieving, these Jews knew exactly what Jesus was claiming. By claiming God as His Father, they said that He was also claiming to be God Himself (Yahweh) (see also John 5:18).

In reference to this particular dispute, also as we noted in the previous section, we are told through the Spirit of Prophecy

“Why did not the stones fly to the mark? -- It was because divinity flashed through humanity, and they [the Jews] received a revelation, and were convicted that his were no common claims. Their hands relax and the stones fall to the ground. His words had asserted his divinity, but now his personal presence, the light of his eye, the majesty of his attitude, bore witness to the fact that he was the beloved Son of God.” (*Ellen G. White Signs of the Times 20<sup>th</sup> November 1893, ‘The True Sheep Respond to the Voice of the Shepherd’*)

The Jews knew that Christ was claiming to be “the beloved Son of God”. We are told here that they even “received a revelation” and “were convicted” that His were “no common claims” (meaning like all who are God’s people are called the Sons of God. See for example, Genesis 6:2, 4, Job 1:6. 2:1, 38:7, Luke 20:36,

John 1:12, Romans 8:14 and 1 John 3:1 etc.) Again Ellen White commentated on this same confrontation

“The strong denunciation of the Pharisees against Jesus was, "Thou, being a man, makest thyself God;" and for this reason they sought to stone him. Christ did not apologize for this supposed assumption on his part.

He did not say to his accusers, "You misunderstand me; I am not God." He was manifesting God in humanity.” (*Ellen G. White, The Youth’s Instructor 16<sup>th</sup> September 1897 ‘What think ye of Christ’*)

We need to recognise here that the man Jesus Christ was not the God Almighty. As Ellen White put it

“There is no one who can explain the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. Yet we know that He came to this earth and lived as a man among men. The man Christ Jesus was not the Lord God Almighty, yet Christ and the Father are one. The Deity did not sink under the agonizing torture of Calvary, yet it is nonetheless true that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (*Ellen G. White, Manuscript 140, 1903, see also Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary Volume 5 page 1129*)

### **The controversy**

From the beginning of his ministry on earth, Jesus was plagued by those who disputed His true identity. This began with the very same one that had disputed His supremacy in Heaven - namely Satan (once Lucifer). This was when he said to Jesus in the wilderness “If thou be the Son of God” (see Matthew 4:3 and 4:6). This same “if” was continued right through His ministry, even up to and including the crucifixion (we shall be taking a look at who Satan believed Christ to be in section five)

“And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Matthew 27:39-40

The chief priests, scribes and elders in mocking Him said much the same thing. Matthew records they said

“He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” Matthew 27:42-43

In the dispute that we previously looked at (John chapter 10), the final words of Jesus to the Jews were as recorded by John

“Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.” John 10:36-38

Jesus here claimed that the Father was not only in Him but also that He (Jesus) was in the Father. We find this same claim of Jesus in John chapter 14. Phillip had asked Jesus to show the Father to him and the other disciples.

“Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” John 14:9-10

This request that Jesus refused was not a request to see a representation of the Father but to see Him in bodily form (physically)

“Philip said to Christ, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." He wished Christ to reveal the Father in bodily form; but God had already revealed himself in Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald 19<sup>th</sup> October 1897. 'Words of Comfort'*)

We noted in the previous section that the Scriptures say that the Son of God is the express image of the person of God (see Hebrews 1:3). He is not someone else other than God although He is, in His own right, a separate personality from God. In brief, so that God can be beheld by humanity, the Son is the person of God made manifest - God Himself manifest in the flesh.

“Christ emphatically impressed on the disciples the fact that they could see the Father by faith only. God cannot be seen in external form by any human being. Christ alone can represent the Father to humanity; and this representation the disciples had been privileged to behold for over three years.” (*Ibid*)

This is how it has been since the fall of man. No sinful human being has ever seen the Almighty God but through the Son, God has revealed Himself. This is because the Son is the personality of God made manifest.

## **Conclusion**

From the pen of Ellen White came many quotations to the effect that Christ, in His pre-existence and in the flesh of humanity, was God manifest but they are far too many to quote here. Suffice though to quote just a few that will enable us to see just what Ellen White said – also what the Seventh-day Adventist Church once taught about Christ being God and the Son of God. In 1887 (the year

before the famous Minneapolis conference), Ellen White penned of the Son

“It was his own act, and by his own consent. He clothed his divinity with humanity. He was all the while as God, but he did not appear as God. He veiled the demonstrations of Deity which had commanded the homage, and called forth the admiration, of the universe of God. He was God while upon earth, but he divested himself of the form of God, and in its stead took the form and fashion of a man. He walked the earth as a man. For our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. He laid aside his glory and his majesty. He was God, but the glories of the form of God he for a while relinquished” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 5<sup>th</sup> July 1887 ‘Christ Man’s Example’*)

She concluded in the same article

“What humility was this! It amazed angels. The tongue can never describe it; the imagination cannot take it in. The eternal Word consented to be made flesh! God became man! It was a wonderful humility!” (*Ibid*)

Ellen White also made these two comments in later years

“We are to behold the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. In the person of his only begotten Son, the God of heaven has condescended to stoop to our human nature. The Father in heaven has a voice and a person which Christ expressed.” (*Ellen G. White, General Conference Daily Bulletin 6<sup>th</sup> March 1899 ‘Special Testimonies’*)

“The world was made by him, "and without him was not anything made that was made." If Christ made all things, he existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forevermore.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 5<sup>th</sup> April 1906 ‘The Word made Flesh’*)

Notice in this quote that as she said so many times in harmony with Scripture that Christ was God essentially and in the “highest sense” whilst at the same time she said that Christ was “with God from all eternity”. This is where, by the church, theology was deemed necessary. It was to explain how Christ could **be God** and at the same time be **with God**.

That the begotten Son of God is rightfully termed God and that He is God essentially in infinity has always been the historical position of the Christian Church. Whilst this is in keeping with the Word of God, we must take note also that Jesus said

“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and

Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent". John 17:3

Jesus speaks of His Father as being the "only true God". He also speaks of Himself as a separate personality from the Father although the Scriptures are clear that He regarded it not robbery to be equal with God (see Philippians 2:6). This is in harmony with Hebrews 1:3 where we have already seen that the Son is the express image of God, a separate personality from the Almighty. In summary, perhaps we can leave the final word to Ellen White

"In Christ Jesus is a revelation of the glory of the Godhead. All that the human agent can know of God to the saving of the soul, is the measure of the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, to which he can attain; for Christ is he who represents the Father." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1895, 'Character of the Law Revealed in Christ's Life', see also Signs of the Times, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1907*)

She then added this unforgettable observation

"The most wonderful truth to be grasped by men is the truth, "Immanuel, God with us." Christ is the wisdom of God. He is the great "I Am" to the world. As we contemplate the glory of the divine character as revealed in Christ, we are led to exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" This wisdom is displayed in the love that reaches out for the recovery of lost and ruined man." (*Ibid*)

Unfortunately, the Seventh-day Adventist Church today, by the profession of its leadership through our publications, no longer believe and teach, as once did the pioneers, that Christ is truly the Son of God. Instead they say that He is one of three unbegotten beings that make up one God, a trinity of beings in one single substance (one trinitarian being). It is even said by some that He can only be called a son because of the incarnation. This is very much an adoptionist view of His Sonship. Certainly it is not one that is literal.

In the third section in this series we shall be taking a look at why Christ can truly be called the Son of God.

# What think ye of Christ?

## Part three

### Whose son is he?

In the previous section we took note that the major dispute that the Jews had with Jesus was that He claimed to be the Son of God. It was realised by them that His claim was not made in any metaphorical sense but one that was literal. In this and the following sections we shall explore this divine Sonship more fully. In doing so, not only shall we see what Jesus had to say concerning His divine Sonship but also what His Father had to say about it.

#### More disputes

Nearing the close of His ministry, the Jews once again tried to entrap Jesus in His words. This time it was through the combined effort of the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the Herodians. Whilst normally opposed to each other, these three factions had joined together in coming against Jesus.

The Pharisees had earlier sent their disciples (along with the Herodians) to entangle Jesus in the things He spoke (see Matthew 22:15-16) but by His replies to their questions the Saviour had completely silenced them (22:22). He then did the same with the Sadducees (verses 33-34). Now the Pharisees again tried to catch-out Jesus. A scribe came to Jesus asking Him which was “the great commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:36); or as Mark phrased the scribes question - “Which is the first commandment of all? (Mark 12:28). Jesus replied

“... The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:29-31

Seemingly commending Jesus for His answer, the scribe replied

“... Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Mark 12:32-33

Please note that this was the setting for the conversation that followed. Note too that this was at the latter end of the ministry of Jesus. This means that this scribe must have been very aware of the previous disputes that Christ had with the Jews. This was when saying that God was His father, the Jews had said that He was “making himself equal with God” (see John 5:18) also that He was actually making Himself God (see John 10:33). As has been said above, this shows that Jesus was understood as making this claim in its most literal sense. If this weren't so, then none of these so-called accusations would make any sense. For a discussion of these dialogues with the Jews see section two of this series. Mark then records

“And when Jesus saw that he [the scribe] answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God... ” Mark 12:34

The Greek word here translated “discreetly” means intelligently, wisely or prudently (giving it some thought). Remember – this was in response to what the scribe had previously said (see above) Jesus then used the scribe's answer to have those gathered around Him to reason concerning His true identity (meaning His divinity or divine Sonship). As Matthews records

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he ...?” Matthew 22:42

The term “Christ” (Gr. Christos) was not a personal name but a title. It is equivalent to the Hebrew for Messiah (Mashiac) meaning the anointed one. Jesus was therefore asking the Pharisees, “**Whose son** is the Messiah?” There was no hesitation or ambiguity in the reply of the Jewish leaders. They said

“... The son of David.” (*Ibid*)

Amongst the Jews (by reason of prophecy), the term “The son of David” had become a popular title for the promised Messiah. This was accepted not only by the rulers (see the Pharisees confession above) but also by the common people (see Matthew 9:27, 12:22-23, 15:22, 21:9, Mark 10:47 etc). In accordance with the prophecies of what we term the Old Testament Scriptures, the Jews believed that the Messiah would be of human descent - in particular through the line of David. This was noticeably revealed when concerning Jesus there was division amongst them. John recorded the Jews as saying

“Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” John 7:42

In these words there is a reference to the prophecy of Micah 5:2 – meaning that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem. The words “where David was” is referring to the fact that Bethlehem was not only David's birthplace but also his boyhood home. This is also speaking of the continuation of the very first promise



of a Saviour to come. This was in the words of God addressed to Satan after the fall (see Genesis 3:15). In its different phases, this promise was repeated through Abraham, Isaac and their descendants. For the reference to David's throne enduring forever – which was understood as the Messianic reign - see 2 Samuel 7:12-13 Psalm 89:34-37, 132:11, Isaiah 9:7 and Jeremiah 33:17-18 etc. In response to the Jewish leaders saying that the Messiah is the “son of David” (see above), Jesus asked a most intriguing and tantalising question - at least it must have been tantalising to those who did not believe that Christ was the divine Son of God

“ ... How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?” Matthew 22:43-44

The words “in spirit” are equivalent to us saying today under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This was with reference to Psalm 110:1 that says

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Psalms 110:1

Jesus was saying to the Pharisees that if Christ is really David's son, then why did David call Him “Lord”? A father does not normally call his son (who is younger than himself) Lord. It is usually the other way around.

In reasoning with the Jews this way, Jesus was leading them to believe that He was before David. This was exactly the same as He did with the Jews when He said to them “... Before Abraham was, I am” (see John 8:58). This was in reply to the response of the Jews when Jesus implied that He knew their father Abraham (see John 8:56-57). Abraham had died over 1700 years previously. The only way that Christ could have known Abraham is if He (Christ) had pre-existed.

Remember here that these words of Jesus (“How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord”) was following directly on from when He had said to the scribe that “The Lord our God is one Lord:”, also that people should “love the Lord thy God” with all their heart etc. Remember too that the scribe had said to Jesus “thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he”. Appealing to reason, Jesus then enquired of the Jews

“If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?” Matthew 22:45

Jesus was not only appealing to reason but also prompting enquiry. He was asking that - if the long expected Messiah was coming through the seed of David, also that under inspiration David had called Him “Lord” (implying that He had existed prior to David), - then “how is he his [David's] son?” Matthew then records

“And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.” Matthew 22:46

In *The Desire of Ages* in the chapter called *Controversy*, Ellen White wrote of this encounter that Jesus had with the Pharisees in the temple

“The Pharisees had gathered close about Jesus as He answered the question of the scribe. Now turning He put a question to them: "What think ye of Christ? whose son is He? This question was designed to test their [the Pharisees] belief concerning the Messiah, -- to show whether they regarded Him simply as a man or as the Son of God. A chorus of voices answered, "The Son of David." This was the title which prophecy had given to the Messiah. When Jesus revealed His divinity by His mighty miracles, when He healed the sick and raised the dead, the people had inquired among themselves, "Is not this the Son of David?"” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 608, 'Controversy'*)

After saying that the Syrophenician woman, blind Bartimaeus and many others who had cried to Him for help had said called Him the “Son of David”, also that when riding into Jerusalem He had been hailed with the words "Hosanna to the Son of David", Ellen White continued

“But many who called Jesus the Son of David did not recognize His divinity. They did not understand that the Son of David was also the Son of God.” (*Ibid*)

This is very plain speaking. If Jesus was not truly God’s Son then none of the above would make any sense.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter applied Psalm 110:1 to the resurrection of Jesus. Luke wrote in the Book of Acts (the words of Peter)

“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:32-36

This reminds us of when Ellen White wrote

“The more we think about Christ's becoming a babe here on earth, the more wonderful it appears. How can it be that the helpless babe in Bethlehem's manger is still the divine Son of God?” (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's*

*Instructor, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1895, 'Child life of Jesus No. 1)*

Christ was as much the Son of God **in His incarnation** as He was **in His pre-existence**. It is the self-same person. She did explain though

“BEFORE the foundations of the world were laid, Christ, the only-begotten of God, pledged Himself to become the Redeemer of the human race, should Adam sin. Adam fell, and He who was partaker of the Father's glory before the world was, laid aside His royal robe and kingly crown, and stepped down from His high authority to become a Babe in Bethlehem, that by passing over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell, He might redeem fallen human beings.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1905, 'Christ our only hope'*)

Later she wrote of Christ

“In His incarnation He gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God. Said the angel to Mary, "The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense. Thus He stood in our world -- the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race.” (*Ibid*)

If in the incarnation Christ was “still the divine Son of God”, also that He “gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God”, then it must follow that in His pre-existence Christ was the Son of God. How else can we reason these things? As we are told here, Christ was “the only-begotten of God”. Today the leaders of Seventh-day Adventism say that the term Son of God was only given to Christ because in the plan of redemption He role-played (pretended to be) a son. They deny that He is truly (literally) God's Son.

### **The witness of the Father**

We have seen in the previous two sections that the Jews believed that Jesus was claiming literally to be the Son of God. We also saw that this was what Jesus was claiming. They had not made a mistake. We shall now see that the Father said quite clearly that Jesus was His son. What other witness do we need?

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:16-17

Anyone hearing these words would accept that God was saying that Jesus really was His “beloved Son”. It is like when we introduce our offspring to someone and say “this is my son”. What would we expect people to believe? It would be that

the person we were introducing was our son. How else can anyone reason? In describing the baptism, Ellen White commented on what God had said (“Thou art my beloved Son”)

“This was an assurance to John that Christ was the Son of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1894, ‘Christ’s mission of love’*)

There is no ambiguity here. Either Christ was God’s Son or He was not. She then asked

“And what do these words say to us, to every member of the human family, whatever our country or position?” (*Ibid*)

This is a question that we would all do well to ponder. What do God’s words (“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”) really mean to us? Concerning the baptism of Christ, Ellen White had previously said in 1873

“Never before had angels listened to such a prayer as Christ offered at his baptism, and they were solicitous to be the bearers of the message from the Father to his Son. But, no! direct from the Father issues the light of his glory.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1873, ‘Life and mission of John’*)

Notice the words “His [the Fathers] Son”. Repeatedly when speaking of God the Father and Christ Ellen White used this phrase.

In the Review and Herald in 1874, Ellen White wrote concerning Christ’s baptism (this was after saying that Satan was “on the ground” and had heard the voice of the Father saying “this is my beloved Son”)

“He [Satan] saw the brightness of the Father's glory overshadowing the form of Jesus, thus, with unmistakable assurance, pointing out the One in that crowd whom he acknowledged as his Son.” (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1874, ‘Redemption, No. 2’*)

In the next paragraph came this comment

“As Satan had led man to sin, he had hoped that God's abhorrence of sin would forever separate him from man, and break the connecting link between Heaven and earth. But the opening heavens in connection with the voice of God addressing his Son was like a death-knell to Satan. He feared that God was now to unite man more fully to himself, and give him power to overcome his devices. And for this purpose, Christ had come from the royal courts to the earth. Satan was well acquainted with the position of honor Christ had held in Heaven as the Son of God, the beloved of the Father. And that he should leave Heaven and come to this world as a man filled him with apprehension for his own safety.” (*Ibid*)

We shall see in section five that the fallen angels acknowledged Christ as the Son of God. Here we are told that Satan Himself realised it. This is in Christ's pre-existence. When speaking of the sufferings of Christ, Ellen White penned these words

“Even doubts assailed the dying Son of God. He could not see through the portals of the tomb. Bright hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the tomb a conqueror and His Father's acceptance of His sacrifice. The sin of the world, with all its terribleness, was felt to the utmost by the Son of God. The displeasure of the Father for sin, and its penalty, which is death, were all that He could realize through this amazing darkness. He was tempted to fear that sin was so offensive in the sight of His Father that He could not be reconciled to His Son.” (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 2 page 209, 'The Sufferings of Christ'*)

In the same testimony she wrote

“But bodily pain was but a small part of the agony of God's dear Son. The sins of the world were upon Him, also the sense of His Father's wrath as He suffered the penalty of the law transgressed. It was these that crushed His divine soul. It was the hiding of His Father's face -- a sense that His own dear Father had forsaken Him -- which brought despair. The separation that sin makes between God and man was fully realized and keenly felt by the innocent, suffering Man of Calvary. He was oppressed by the powers of darkness. He had not one ray of light to brighten the future. And He was struggling with the power of Satan, who was declaring that he had Christ in his power, that he was superior in strength to the Son of God, that the Father had disowned His Son, and that He was no longer in the favor of God any more than himself.” (*Ibid page 214*)

There can be no mistaking here that Ellen White was speaking of Christ as truly God's Son. She concluded in the final paragraph

“Here is love that no language can express. It passes knowledge. Great is the mystery of godliness. Our souls should be enlivened, elevated, and enraptured with the theme of the love of the Father and the Son to man.” (*Ibid page 215*)

Note here there is no reference to the Holy Spirit.

Returning our thoughts to the previous Ellen White quotation – she added later in the paragraph (after describing the scene of the baptism and quoting the words of God - “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”)

“The words of confirmation that Christ is the Son of God were given to inspire faith in those who witnessed the scene, and to sustain the Son of

God in his arduous work. Notwithstanding the Son of God was clothed with humanity, yet Jehovah, with his own voice, assures him of his sonship with the Eternal.” (*Ibid*)

Again we need to ask - what would anyone hearing these words believe that God meant – especially what did Christ understand them to mean?

It is very difficult to read this quote as though Ellen White was saying that Christ was not really God’s son. Note she says that these words of God were not only given to confirm to those who heard them that Christ is the Son of God but also to assure Christ Himself of “his sonship with the Eternal”. We are talking here in terms of divine Sonship. It would not make sense to say that the incarnate Son of God was clothed with humanity. It only makes sense to say that divine Son of God was clothed with humanity. She also penned these words

“In this manifestation to his Son, God accepts humanity as exalted through the excellence of his beloved Son.” (*Ibid*)

Over and over again Ellen White referred to Jesus as “His [God’s] Son”; also God’s “beloved Son” or God’s “dear Son”. In *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote (this was again with reference to the words of God at Christ’s baptism)

“These words of confirmation were given to inspire faith in those who witnessed the scene, and to strengthen the Saviour for His mission. Notwithstanding that the sins of a guilty world were laid upon Christ, notwithstanding the humiliation of taking upon Himself our fallen nature, the voice from heaven declared Him to be the Son of the Eternal.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 112, ‘The Baptism’*)

There can be no mistaking that what we are being told here through the spirit of prophecy. This is that Christ really is God’s son. He is “the Son of the Eternal”.

### **God speaks again**

At the transfiguration, the voice of the Father was once again heard. Again He confirmed that Jesus truly was His Son.

“While he [Peter] yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” Matthew 17:5

The next verse tells us that the disciples heard these words very clearly. What were they to think? Peter who was there on the mount wrote in one of his epistles

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour

and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.” 2 Peter 1:16-18

This divine Sonship Jesus brought over into the parable of the vineyard. After the husbandman of the vineyard had beaten the servants whom the owner of the vineyard had sent to him, Jesus said

“Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.” Luke 20:13

The servants in the parable are the prophets whom God had sent to the Jewish nation. These were rejected over and over again. Eventually, by their rejection of the Son of God, the Jews rejected the One who had sent the prophets (see John 1:11).

In the Review and Herald in 1900 Ellen White wrote (note this was 2 years following the publication of *The Desire of Ages*)

“The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth. But "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "I will send my beloved Son," he said. "It may be they will reverence him." Amazing grace! Christ came not to condemn the world, but to save the world. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1900, 'The Lord's Vineyard (concluded)'*)

As we have seen so far in this study (including in the previous two sections), the Father did say that Jesus was His son; also we saw that Christ claimed God as His divine father. We have also seen that the Jews accepted this as a literal Sonship. This is why they said He deserved to die (for a detailed account see section two). Jesus never said to the Jews that they had taken His words the wrong way – meaning that they had misunderstood Him. He claimed that His Sonship with the Father was literal (real not metaphorical).

### **God sent His Son**

When writing to the believers in Rome, the apostle Paul penned these words

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:” Romans 8:3

There can be no mistaking these words. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul calls Christ God’s “own Son”. This can only be in the literal sense. To say it

was in a metaphorical sense makes no sense at all. Ellen White had no problems in believing that Christ's Sonship with the Father was one that was real (literal). As she said in a letter to J. H. Kellogg (in 1903 he claimed to have come to believe in the trinity)

“When Christ first announced to the heavenly host His mission and work in the world, He declared that He was to leave His position of dignity and disguise His holy mission by assuming the likeness of a man when in reality He was the Son of the infinite God.” (*Ellen G. White, letter to J. H. Kellogg, August 29<sup>th</sup> 1903*)

It is very difficult to read these words and draw the conclusion that Ellen White meant that Christ was not in reality the Son of God – which is what is being said today by the Seventh-day Adventist Church – meaning according to them He was only role-playing (pretending) the part of a son. Yet this is the profession of belief of many Seventh-day Adventists today, especially the trinitarian leaders..

We know that Ellen White was speaking of Christ really being a son (in His pre-existence and not from the incarnation or resurrection) because in the same letter she wrote

“Never will the human family – redeemed by the example of the Sent of God, the only begotten of the Father – understand and fully comprehend the terrible conflict waged with deceptive, alluring power and concealed, deadly hatred by Satan against our Lord when He lived among men.” (*Ibid*)

I would ask you to note here that once again Ellen White spoke of Christ as “the only begotten of the Father”. Here she is not using this phrase as a title (like “the Son of God”) but as explaining that Christ is the only one (the only divine being) who has been brought forth (“only begotten”) of the Father. This is why she said that “in reality He was the Son of the infinite God” (the infinite God being the Father).

Before moving on I would also ask you to notice that as far as divine personages are concerned, Ellen White does not describe Christ as “the infinite God” (Christ's father) but describes Him as the “Son of God”. In other words, “the infinite God” and “the Son of God” are two separate divine personages. Ellen White took great care when differentiating between these two divine beings. In the same letter she wrote

“Born in poverty in a stable, reared and trained in seclusion in the humbler walks of life, the Saviour of mankind was not recognised as a superior being, but He who was the majesty of heaven, only begotten Son of God, the King of glory, uttered no complaint in regard to His humble station in life. He was reproached even by His own brethren, because He would not take part with them in their sins. He conformed His will to the will of His Father, as all the human family should do, to evidence humanity united with the purest divinity would be uncontaminated with sin.” (*Ibid*)



In manner of a conclusion she later added (this was after quoting John 3:16)

“Ought not the human family consider what the Father and His Son have done to save the human family?”

It can be seen from this letter that in 1903, Ellen White was in complete harmony with her Seventh-day Adventists brothers and sisters – meaning that along with them she believed that Christ was literally the Son of God. Note too that this was 5 years after the publication of *The Desire of Ages*. This is the book that many leading brethren of Seventh-day Adventism have used in attempting to say that Ellen White spoke of God as a trinity, also that Christ is spoken of in it as not really begotten of the Father (not really God’s Son). As we have seen, the latter could not possibly be true. Note in the above quote that no mention is made of the Holy Spirit - only the Father and the Son are mentioned.

We need to remember that throughout the time of Ellen White’s ministry, this literal Sonship of Christ was the denominational belief of Seventh-day Adventists – also that never once through His ordained messenger did God seek to change this belief - in fact as we have seen above, her words endorsed this belief. In other words, Ellen White’s words led Seventh-day Adventists to believe that their belief in the literal Sonship of Christ was endorsed by God.

For decades after the death of Ellen White, this Sonship of Christ was still the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This can be seen in the set of Sabbath School Lesson Studies that were published by our church in 1936. Seeing that the faith of any denomination cannot be changed overnight, it can be truly said that this same faith was their denominational faith even into the early 1940s. For a study of these Sabbath School Quarterlies, please go here

[The 1936 official beliefs of SDA’s](#)

In section four we shall concentrate on the visit for the first time of Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem.

# What think ye of Christ?

## Part four

### About my Father's business

When Jesus reached twelve years of age, Joseph and Mary, in keeping with Jewish tradition, took Him to the Passover feast in Jerusalem. This was the first time the boy Jesus had seen the temple. On their way home from the feast (a day into their journey), they realised that Jesus was not with them. Upon returning to Jerusalem they found Him in the temple. When they did find Him He was "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (see Luke 2:46). Luke further records

"And when they saw him [Jesus], they [Mary and Joseph] were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." Luke 2:48

Notice Mary told Jesus that His "father" had been looking for Him. Jesus replied

"... How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? Luke 2:49

I would now ask you to note particularly what Luke wrote next. He said

"And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them." Luke 2:50

In her book *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White commented on when Joseph and Mary found Jesus in the temple. She wrote

"How is it that ye sought Me?" answered Jesus. "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" And as they seemed not to understand His words, He pointed upward." (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 81, 'The Passover Visit', see also Special Testimonies, Series B No. 9 page 10*)

By pointing upward, Jesus made it clear that He was not referring to Joseph (whom Mary said was His father) but to His Father in Heaven. He was also referring to His divine mission. Ellen White also wrote

"Jesus was engaged in the work that He had come into the world to do; but Joseph and Mary had neglected theirs. God had shown them high honor in

committing to them His Son.” *(Ibid)*

On the same page we find these words

“It was natural for the parents of Jesus to look upon Him as their own child. He was daily with them, His life in many respects was like that of other children, and it was difficult for them to realize that He was the Son of God.” *(Ibid)*

Here I am going to do some reasoning with you. Both Joseph and Mary knew and understood that the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary was not by what we might term natural means. In other words, they both realised that Jesus did not have an earthly father. They knew that the miracle in the womb of Mary had been by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 1:18-20, also Luke 1:35).

The reason why I am saying this is because when Ellen White says that “it was difficult” for Joseph and Mary to realize that Jesus was the Son of God, this could not be referring to the miracle of the conception of Christ (the incarnation). This is because they understood that perfectly – at least as far as knowing that He had no earthly Father. Ellen White could only be referring here to the **divine Sonship** of Christ – meaning His relation to God the Father **in His pre-existence**. God’s servant also penned these words

“In the answer to His mother, Jesus showed for the first time that He understood His relation to God.” *(Ibid)*

Remember, this was when Jesus was twelve years of age. She then said

“Before His birth the angel had said to Mary, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever.” Luke 1:32, 33. These words Mary had pondered in her heart; yet while she believed that her child was to be Israel’s Messiah, she did not comprehend His mission. Now she did not understand His words; but she knew that He had disclaimed kinship to Joseph, and had declared His Sonship to God.” *(Ibid)*

Note particularly the final sentence. On the next page Ellen White wrote

“For eighteen years after He had recognized that He was the Son of God, He acknowledged the tie that bound Him to the home at Nazareth, and performed the duties of a son, a brother, a friend, and a citizen.” *(Ibid page 82)*

This was no different than what she had said 25 years previous

“And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto

them." Jesus claimed his sonship to the Eternal. He informed Mary that he must be about his Father's business, and that his obligation to his Heavenly Father was above every other claim." (*Ellen G. White, 'The Youth's Instructor' 1<sup>st</sup> September 1873 'The Life of Christ No. 9'*)

This time take particular note of the second sentence. Regarding the words of Jesus ("Wist ye not that I must be about my Fathers business?"), Ellen White made this comment

"Jesus was engaged in the work of his Father. Mary knew that Christ did not refer to his earthly father, Joseph, but to Jehovah. She laid these things to heart, and profited by them." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1872, 'The Life of Christ'*)

She also wrote later

"As Christ was daily with them, his life in many respects as other children, it was difficult to keep before them his sacred mission, and the daily blessing of having committed to their charge and parental care, for awhile, the Son of God, whose divinity was veiled with humanity." (*Ibid*)

Notice here that Ellen White is referring to the **divine** Son of God.

In 1896 she wrote regarding Jesus saying "wist ye not that I must be about my Fathers business?"

"He [Jesus] revealed that he had a knowledge of his work as the Son of God, and yet he did not exalt his divine character. He did not offer as a reason why he should not bear the burden of temporal care, that he was of divine origin; but he was subject to his parents. He was the Lord of the commandments, yet he was obedient to all their requirements, thus leaving an example of obedience to childhood, youth, and manhood." (*Ellen G. White, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1896, 'Higher Education'*)

Regarding this same event, the youth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were told in 1873

"We here have evidence that Jesus was not ignorant of his mission from Heaven to the earth, even in his childhood. Jesus virtually says to his mother, Mary, do you not understand my work and the nature of my mission? He here made known his peculiar relation to God for the first time. Mary well knew that Jesus did not refer to Joseph when he spoke of doing his Father's business. He here claimed that the sense of his obligation to God was above every earthly tie or relationship.

The first visit of Jesus to the temple aroused new impulses, and he was so deeply impressed with his relationship with God that all earthly bonds were forgotten. And, impelled by the high sense of his work and mission, he

recognized and acknowledged himself as the Son of God, obedient to his will and engaged in his work.

And they understood not the saying that he spake unto them." As there had been nothing remarkable in the twelve years of the life of Christ, to give outward indications of his sonship with God, his own relatives did not discern the marks of his divine character." (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1873, 'The Life of Christ No. 8'*)

Here she refers to "divine character". This is with reference to Christ's "sonship with God" (divine Sonship). She also wrote 20 years later to the youth

"Mary knew that Christ did not refer to Joseph. In this assertion, he made it manifest that he did not recognize Joseph as his father, but claimed God as his Father; and for the first time he spoke to them of the mission which he came on earth to fulfil.

For twelve years of his life he had walked the streets of Nazareth, and worked with Joseph at his trade, carefully performing the duties that devolved upon a son. Hitherto he had not given indications of his peculiar character, or made manifest the nature of his mission to earth as the Son of God. But upon this occasion he made known to his parents the fact that he had a higher, holier mission to perform than they thought, for he had a work to do which had been committed to him by his heavenly Father. Mary knew that Jesus had disclaimed relationship to Joseph, and claimed his sonship to the Eternal. She was perplexed; she did not fully comprehend the meaning of the words herself when he referred to his mission. She questioned in her mind as to whether any one had told Jesus that Joseph was not his true father, but that God was his Father. Mary pondered these things in her heart." (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1893, 'Words to the Young'*)

Again Ellen White wrote with reference to the words of Jesus to His mother

"Notwithstanding the mysterious words spoken by Jesus concerning his doing the will of God, and being about his father's business, he went down with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth; and although he was the only begotten Son of the Infinite God, he was subject unto his parents, and thus gave to children and youth a perfect example for them to copy. A much higher standard is revealed in the life of Christ for children and youth than they comprehend or imitate. Though Christ was the Son of God, he was obedient to his earthly parents, and the history of his life is on record, that it may testify to children and youth for all time, that they are to be obedient to their parents in the Lord" (*Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor, 30<sup>th</sup> August 1894, 'Childhood of Jesus'*)

Again referring to the words of Jesus to His mother Ellen White wrote

“As He spoke these words, Jesus pointed upward. On His face was a light at which they wondered. Jesus knew that He was the Son of God, and He had been doing the work for which His Father had sent Him into the world.”  
(*Ellen G. White, Story of Jesus, page 33, 1896, ‘Child Life of Jesus’*)

In *The Desire of Ages*, we are told of the fierce conflicts that Jesus met from those around Him because He would not surrender Himself (be obedient to) the traditions of the elders. He even came under pressure from His earthly brothers to heed the rites of the rabbis.

### **Days of conflict**

In *The Desire of Ages* in the chapter *Days of Conflict* Ellen White wrote

“They [the brothers of Jesus] charged Him with thinking Himself superior to them, and reprov'd Him for setting Himself above their teachers and the priests and rulers of the people. Often they threatened and tried to intimidate Him; but He passed on, making the Scriptures His guide. Jesus loved His brothers, and treated them with unfailing kindness; but they were jealous of Him, and manifested the most decided unbelief and contempt. They could not understand His conduct. Great contradictions presented themselves in Jesus. He was the divine Son of God, and yet a helpless child.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 87, ‘Days of Conflict’*)

We can see here that Ellen White compared the divinity of Christ with His surrender to His human nature. Even in the incarnation He was still the pre-existent “divine Son of God”. A few pages later she wrote

“Mary believed in her heart that the holy child born of her was the long-promised Messiah, yet she dared not express her faith.” (*Ibid page 90*)

She added two paragraphs later

“At times she wavered between Jesus and His brothers, who did not believe that He was the Sent of God; but evidence was abundant that His was a divine character.” (*Ibid*)

All the above statements, as well as countless others not quoted here, show that Ellen White believed that Christ, in His pre-existence, is truly the pre-existent Son of God. Certainly they cannot be referring simply to the incarnation or the resurrection, neither can they be said to be metaphorical (figurative).

### **How is He a Son?**

We have seen that Jesus claimed to be the only begotten Son of God but how can this be? In other words, how can God have a Son? Within the Holy Scriptures, there is very little explanation as to how this came about but what we

have been told we shall relate here.

It has always been the historical position of the Christian church that Proverbs chapter 8 verses 22-31 speak of Christ. These verses say

“The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.” Proverbs 8:22-31

That these verses refer to Christ is spoken of through the spirit of prophecy. This is when Ellen White wrote

“And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: "The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." Proverbs 8:22-30.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 34, 'Why was sin permitted?'*)

Some have made a big issue of the fact that Ellen White here omitted the words brought forth - which is regarded by many as when Christ was begotten of the Father - but on other occasions she included them. This was such as 8 years after the publication of *The Desire of Ages* when she wrote

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpassing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by him as his right. This was no robbery of God. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way," he declares, "before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1906, 'The Word made Flesh'*)

Notice here also that as in numerous other places, Ellen White refers to Christ as “the divine Son of God”. This is “from eternity” not from the incarnation.

The year after the publication of *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White penned these words

"The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old," Christ says. "When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." But the only-begotten Son of God humbled Himself to come to this earth. He took the sinner's place; the guiltless suffered for the guilty. This was the hiding of His glory. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death." (*Ellen White, Signs of the Times, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1899 'The Measure of God's Love'*)

The next year she wrote

"In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1900, 'Resistance to Light No. 3'*)

There are many who like to use this statement to show (as they say) that Christ was not brought forth of God but they often fail to point out that in the previous paragraph Ellen White wrote

"Through Solomon Christ declared: "The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. . . . When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." (*Ibid*)

This was much the same as she wrote in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (see above). Note though that this time - in quoting these verses from Proverbs chapter 8 - she includes the words “brought forth”. For those who would like to read a more detailed discussion on these verses from Proverbs chapter 8, I would direct you to 'The Begotten Series' - in particular to Section eight (Christ the wisdom of God “brought forth”).



## **Did Ellen White really believe that Christ was begotten of God?**

Unless it is believed that Christ is really begotten of God it cannot be said that it is believed that Christ is truly the divine Son of God. As we have seen from above, Ellen White did believe that Christ was truly God's Son. We shall now see that she believed that He really was begotten of God. She wrote in 1895

"A complete offering has been made; for "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,"-- not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but a Son begotten in the express image of the Father's person, and in all the brightness of his majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection. In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1895, 'Christ our complete salvation'*)

In the Scriptures, heavenly beings are called sons of God (see Job 38:7). These are sons of God by creation. So too those who have genuinely accepted Christ as their Saviour are the sons of God (see John 1:12, Romans 8:14, 1 John 3:1-2). These are sons of God by adoption. Christ though was not in any of these categories. He is the Son of God because He was begotten of God. This is what Ellen White is saying here. He is the unique One. He is the only-begotten of God. Notice these were three acts of God (creation, adoption, begetting) The latter was then the denominational faith of Seventh-day Adventists. It was also much the same as was said by E. J. Waggoner when in his book *Christ and His Righteousness* (which is said to be representative of his message at the famous Minneapolis General Conference Session of 1888) he wrote

"It is true that there are many sons of God, but Christ is the "only begotten Son of God," and therefore the Son of God in a sense in which no other being ever was or ever can be. The angels are sons of God, as was Adam (Job 38:7; Luke 3:38), by creation; Christians are the sons of God by adoption (Rom. 8:14, 15), but Christ is the Son of God by birth. The writer to the Hebrews further shows that the position of the Son of God is not one to which Christ has been elevated but that it is one which He has by right." (*E. J. Waggoner, 'Christ and His Righteousness', page 12, 1890*)

It does appear that Ellen White based her statement (see above) on Waggoner's words but with certain modifications. She also wrote just 6 weeks after her previously quoted statement

"The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind." (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9<sup>th</sup> July 1895 'The Duty of the Minister and the People'*)

Here we can see that instead of using the word begotten to explain Christ's source of being as a separate personality from God (the Father), Ellen White

says that He was “made in the express image” of his Father’s person. Her previous statement had said “begotten in the express image of the Father’s person”. In her mind, the word “begotten” was synonymous with “made” (but not created). Notice too her words “tore from his [the Father’s] bosom”.

In 1888, the year of the famous General Conference Session, Ellen White wrote

“Christ, by clothing his divinity with humanity, elevates humanity in the scale of moral value to an infinite worth. But what a condescension on the part of God, and on the part of his only begotten Son, who was equal with the Father! All this had to be done because God’s law had been transgressed.”  
*(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1888, ‘How do we stand?’)*

There can be no doubt that Ellen White believed that Christ was begotten of God in eternity. It was the pre-existent Son of God who was equal with the Father. In the same article as quoted from above (*The Word made Flesh*), Ellen White wrote

“There are light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundation of the world was laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.”  
*(Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1906, ‘The Word made flesh’)*

Here Ellen White speaks of a oneness that Christ had with His Father “before the foundation of the world was laid”. She says that this oneness is beyond our comprehension yet in itself it explains “truths” that are otherwise unexplainable.

Ellen White never explained in detail any further so we are left to conjecture but could she be referring to how Christ can be the Son of God and yet at the very same time be God? It is very likely! In the very next paragraph she said of Christ “from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (see Psalms 90:2). She also said that He was “the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (see 1 Corinthians 1:24).

In the next section, which is the final section in this series, we shall be giving consideration to more spirit of prophecy statements concerning Christ being the Son of God.

# What think ye of Christ?

## Part five

### The Great Controversy

In this final section of the series, we shall be taking a look at what God has revealed through the Scriptures, also through the spirit of prophecy, about how Satan and the angels regarded Christ. We shall begin by taking a look at the temptation of Christ.

#### The Temptation of Christ

After His baptism, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Here He fasted for forty days. When the forty days were over, Satan came to Him saying

“... If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”  
Matthew 4:3

Satan also said to Jesus

“... If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Matthew 4: 6

We shall see later that this was not the beginning of the dispute that the devil had with the Son of God but was in fact a continuation of the controversy that had begun in heaven.

So what was this dispute concerning? In *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White wrote very simply

“It was in seeking to exalt himself above the Son of God that Satan had sinned in heaven.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 129, ‘The Victory’, see also the Review and Herald, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1908, ‘The Need for watchfulness’*)

Notice here that Ellen White does not say that Satan had sinned by trying to exalt himself above the Father. It was with the authority of the Son that Satan had a dispute. Ellen White commented in *Early Writings* (this was with reference to the events of the baptism)

“Satan was seeking a dispute with Jesus concerning His being the Son of God. He referred to His weak, suffering condition and boastfully affirmed that he was stronger than Jesus. But the word spoken from heaven, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased," was sufficient to sustain Jesus through all His sufferings. I saw that Christ had nothing to do in convincing Satan of His power or of His being the Saviour of the world. Satan had sufficient evidence of the exalted station and authority of the Son of God.” (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, ‘Spiritual gifts’ page 155*)

Now notice her next words

“His unwillingness to yield to Christ's authority had shut him out of heaven.”  
(*Ibid*)

Here again we see that the problem Satan had in Heaven was with the authority of the Son. Again there is no reference to the authority of the Father – although as we shall see, Satan did dispute the Father's wisdom.

In *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White also penned these words (this was with reference to the temptation of Christ in the wilderness)

“Though he [Satan] appears as an angel of light, these first words betray his character. If Thou be the Son of God.” Here is the insinuation of distrust. Should Jesus do what Satan suggests, it would be an acceptance of the doubt.” (*Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, page 118, ‘The Temptation’*)

The “doubt” of course was that Jesus was not really the Son of God. Then, after saying that Satan applied the same method in attempting to deceive Christ (in the temptation) as he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden she says

“So now the tempter seeks to inspire Christ with his own sentiments. "If Thou be the Son of God." The words rankle with bitterness in his mind. In the tones of his voice is an expression of utter incredulity. Would God treat His own Son thus? Would He leave Him in the desert with wild beasts, without food, without companions, without comfort? He insinuates that God never meant His Son to be in such a state as this. "If Thou be the Son of God," show Thy power by relieving Thyself of this pressing hunger. Command that this stone be made bread.” (*Ibid*)

Note the continuing emphasis on Christ being God's “own Son”.

In the Bible Echo in 1892, Ellen White wrote of how Satan had attempted to deceive Jesus after His fasting for forty days. After saying that Satan had come to the Saviour clothed as an “angel of light”, also that Satan had attempted to deceive Jesus by saying that he (Satan) had come to deliver Jesus from “the long fast by which He was to overcome the power of appetite in man's behalf”, she said (also note the title of the article)

“This specious reasoning was a temptation to Christ. His humanity made it a temptation to Him, and it was only by trusting his Father's word that He could resist the power of the enemy. He walked by faith, as we must walk by faith, and turned from the artful deceiver, who feigned to doubt his divinity.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1892, ‘Tempted in all points like as we are’*)

Notice here what is said to be in dispute. It is whether Christ is divine or not. In other words, is Christ really the Son of God or not? This is the age-old question. God’s servant continued

“Satan declared that a powerful angel of heaven had been banished to the earth, and that Christ's appearance indicated that instead of being the King of heaven, He was this fallen angel, forsaken of God and deserted by man. If He were the Son of God, He was equal with God, and could make this evident by working a miracle.” (*Ibid*)

It was by faith that Christ believed that He was the Son of God.

Here Jesus was tempted to believe that He Himself was a “fallen angel”. The words “If He were the Son of God, He was equal with God” can only have application to Christ in His pre-existence. In other words, it is being said here, that if Christ was the pre-existent Son of God, then He must be equal with God. After making reference to the further temptations of Satan in trying to make Jesus prove that He was the Son of God, Ellen White wrote

“It was not for the Son of God to descend from his lofty mission to prove his divinity to a fallen foe, or to condescend to explain his humiliation as man's Redeemer. If the children of men would follow the example of Christ, and hold no converse with the enemy, they would be spared many a defeat at his hands.” (*Ibid*)

When Satan said “Son of God” he was not referring to Christ in His incarnation. He was referring to Christ’s divine status - as the Son of God. This is what Ellen White is saying here.

In 1887 Ellen White penned these words (again this was with reference to the baptism of Jesus)

“When Satan led man to sin, he hoped that God's abhorrence of sin would forever separate him from man, and break the connecting link between Heaven and earth. When from the opening heavens he heard the voice of God addressing his Son, it was to him as the sound of a death-knell. It told him that now God was about to unite man more closely to himself, and give moral power to overcome temptation, and to escape from the entanglements of Satanic devices.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 4<sup>th</sup>*)

*August 1887, 'Christ's Triumph in our Behalf')*

Notice particularly the next words of God's messenger. She wrote

"Satan well knew the position which Christ had held in Heaven as the Son of God, the Beloved of the Father; and that Christ should leave the joy and honor of Heaven, and come to this world as a man, filled him with apprehension. He knew that this condescension on the part of the Son of God boded no good to him." (*Ibid*)

There is no ambiguity here. These words cannot be taken two ways: neither can they be misunderstood. We are told very clearly here that Christ, in His pre-existence, was the Son of God – also that "Satan well knew" it. How else can these words be understood? This is no different than what was written by Ellen White here (again this was with reference to Christ in His pre-existence)

"Satan, who was once an honored angel in Heaven, had been ambitious for the more exalted honors which God had bestowed upon his Son. He became envious of Christ, and represented to the angels who honored him as covering cherub that he had not the honor conferred upon him which his position demanded. He asserted that he should be exalted equal in honor with God." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1874, 'Redemption No. 1'*)

Note the reference to God bestowing honours upon "his Son". We shall return to this thought later. Note also Satan's desire for exaltation. We shall see that this self-seeking eventually became his foremost characteristic, also the cause of his downfall. In the next paragraph we find these words

"God, in counsel with his Son, formed the plan of creating man in their own image. He [man] was placed upon probation." (*Ibid*)

In regard to the rebellion in Heaven, also Satan's plan to tempt Adam and Eve to be disobedient to God's commands, Ellen White wrote 5 years later

"His [Satan's] angels were seeking him, their leader, to acquaint him with their decision. They will unite with him in his plans, and with him bear the responsibility, and share the consequences. Satan cast off his feelings of despair and weakness, and, as their leader, fortified himself to brave out the matter, and do all in his power to defy the authority of God and his Son." (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1879, 'The Great Controversy: The Creation; The Temptation and the Fall', see also The Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 1, page 32, 'The Temptation and the Fall'*)

Take particular note of what she said next

"He [Satan] acquainted them [Satan's followers] with his plans. If he should come boldly upon Adam and Eve and make complaints of God's

own Son, they would not listen to him for a moment, but would be prepared for such an attack. Should he seek to intimidate them because of his power, so recently an angel in high authority, he could accomplish nothing. He decided that cunning and deceit would do what might or force could not.” (*Ibid*)

Again this is speaking of Christ in His pre-existence. There can be no mistaking that Ellen White was speaking of Christ as “God’s own Son” – and, as she says – Satan knew it. As we shall see now, even the demons knew it.

### **Demons acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God**

During His ministry on earth, there were also a number of occasions when demons acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. This was such as when He confronted the two men in the tombs who were “possessed with devils”. The demons (not the man possessed with the demons) said to Jesus

“What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” Matthew 8:29

...or as Mark quotes one of the demons as saying

“What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.” Mark 5:7

The Scriptures also tell us that

“... unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God.” Mark 3:11

They also said of Jesus

“Thou art Christ the Son of God.” Luke 4:41

Some will say that these fallen angels had only addressed Jesus this way because of the events of the incarnation (obviously it could not be because of the resurrection of Jesus) but as we have seen above (and will see again later) this is not what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy. We shall see that Satan, also his followers, knew that prior to the incarnation, Christ was the Son of God. We shall now turn our thoughts to the origins of this controversy.

### **Controversy in Heaven**

Concerning how sin first entered our universe, the Scriptures reveal very little detailed information but enough is given to show that it began in Heaven with an angel. This angel we know as Lucifer - whose name in Hebrew (*helel*) means shining or brilliant one. We will now look at two passages of old Testament Scripture that refer to Lucifer. If it were not for these passages we would have

very little information at all – either about Lucifer or the first sin.

The context of the first passage is what can be described as the future fall of Babylon, also a prophecy concerning its king – who lifted himself up and stood in opposition to God. This is obviously paralleled with Lucifers downfall. As the Scriptures tell us, pride goes before a fall (see Proverbs 16:18, 1 Timothy 3:6). The prophet Isaiah wrote

“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.” Isaiah 14:12-14

We can see in this an attitude of self-exaltation – a lifting up of oneself not appropriate for a created being. In the very same way, Ezekiel prophesied against the King of Tyrus (Tyre) – although from reading what he says, it obviously must have application other than him (it is clear that it is referring to someone who was in the Garden of Eden). The prophet of God wrote

“Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.” Ezekiel 28:12-15

Many Christians accept that this is referring to Lucifer. Here again we are told that it was self-aggrandizement that caused this angels fall. This should be a warning for us not to consider ourselves better than what we ought. Ezekiel continued (prophesising of the final outcome of Lucifer)

“By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.” Ezekiel 28:16

This is a parallel to what God said to Lucifer (Satan) - after the latter had succeeded in tempting Adam and Eve to sin. God said to him

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed



and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”  
Genesis 3:15

To bruise someone’s heel would cause discomfort but to bruise the head speaks of the possibility of destruction (death). Satan knew that from this time onwards, he was not going to have things all his own way. He would meet decided opposition from God – in particular as God worked through His Son. As Ellen White commented (this was with reference to Christ after His 40 days of fasting

“Satan knew that if Christ was indeed the Son of God, the world's Redeemer, it was for no good to himself, that the Lord had left the royal courts of Heaven to come to a fallen world. He feared that his own power was henceforth to be limited, and that his deceptive wiles would be discerned and exposed, which would lessen his influence over man. He feared that his dominion and his control of the kingdoms of the world was to be contested.” (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1874, 'Redemption No. 1'*)

She then added after quoting the words of God found in Genesis 3:15

“But these words at the time they were spoken were not fully understood by Satan. He knew that they contained a curse for him, because he had seduced the holy pair. And when Christ was manifested on the earth, Satan feared that he was indeed the One promised which should limit his power and finally destroy him

Satan had peculiar interest to watch the development of events immediately after the fall of Adam to learn how his work had affected the kingdom of God, and what the Lord would do with Adam because of his disobedience. The Son of God, undertaking to become the Redeemer of the race, placed Adam in a new relation to his Creator.” (*Ibid*)

Ezekiel continued (very much the same as spoken of by Isaiah)

“Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.” Ezekiel 28:17-19

All of God’s created beings were initially created perfect. This does not mean that they were like automatons (being unable to develop further) but were endowed with freedom of choice. This gift allowed them to develop their own

particular characters. This freedom also allows a person to love God (in return to His love) because without choice, love is not possible. To put this in another way, God's creatures, if they chose to do so, could rebel against their Creator. This is what happened to Lucifer in heaven – also to all those who chose to follow the way of Lucifer.

### **The Great Controversy (Comments from Ellen G. White)**

In 1879 Ellen White wrote of the great controversy in Heaven. She began by saying

“Satan in heaven, before his rebellion, was a high and exalted angel, next in honor to God's dear Son. His countenance, like those of the other angels, was mild and expressive of happiness. His forehead was high and broad, showing a powerful intellect. His form was perfect; his bearing noble and majestic. A special light beamed in his countenance, and shone around him brighter and more beautiful than around the other angels; yet Jesus, God's dear Son, had the pre-eminence over all the angelic host. He was one with the Father before the angels were created.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1879, 'The Great Controversy: The Fall of Satan; The Creation'*)

Note very importantly that Ellen White wrote that “God's dear Son” was “one with the Father before the angels were created”. We shall return to this point later.

“Satan was envious of Christ, and in his ambition assumed command which devolved on Christ alone.” (*Ibid*)

Satan was jealous of Christ's position with God.

We shall now see that God called a meeting of all the angels. This was to set forth the Son's true position. We shall also see that Satan had gone amongst the angels causing doubt about the Son's position and authority. In the next paragraph she explained

“The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the presence of all the angels confer special honor upon his Son. The Son was seated on the throne with the Father, and the heavenly throng of holy angels was gathered around them. The Father then made known that it was ordained by himself that Christ should be equal with himself; so that wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his own presence.” (*Ibid*)

It is quite possible that at the time spoken of here, the angels did not understand what we have been told through the Scriptures – meaning that Christ was God Himself in the person of His Son. More than likely this is the underlying reason why the “great creator” told the angels that “wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his own presence”. There is also a strong implication here that the Son of God had taken the form of an angel – therefore He would have looked no

different than the other angels.

It is this aspect of begotten theology that seems very much misunderstood by many trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists. The latter seem to think that to believe Christ is begotten of the Father (therefore making Christ God's own Son) is making Him another god but this is as far from the truth as it could possibly be. This begotten theology, as expressed in this author's notes, makes the Son God Himself yet a separate personage from the Father. This is as expressed in John 1:1. Ellen White wrote next

"His [the Son's] word was to be obeyed as readily as the word of the Father. His Son he had invested with authority to command the heavenly host. Especially was he to work in union with himself in the anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon it. His Son would carry out his will and his purposes, but would do nothing of himself alone. The Father's will would be fulfilled in him." (*Ibid*)

Note that we are told the Father had "invested" the Son with authority. This shows that this authority originated from the Father. Ellen White continued

"Satan was jealous and envious of Jesus Christ. Yet when all the angels bowed to Jesus to acknowledge his supremacy and high authority and rightful rule, Satan bowed with them; but his heart was filled with envy and hatred. Christ had been taken into counsel with the Father in regard to his plans, while Satan was unacquainted with them. He did not understand, neither was he permitted to know, the purposes of God. But Christ was acknowledged sovereign of heaven, his power and authority to be the same as that of God himself." (*Ibid*)

Notice the differentiating of Ellen White between Christ the Son of God and "God Himself". After saying that Satan had "been highly exalted", also that this "did not call forth from him gratitude and praise to his Creator", Ellen White wrote

"He [Satan] aspired to the height of God himself. He gloried in his loftiness. He knew that he was honored by the angels. He had a special mission to execute. He had been near the great Creator, and the ceaseless beams of glorious light enshrouding the eternal God, had shone especially upon him. Satan thought how angels had obeyed his command with pleasurable alacrity. Were not his garments light and beautiful? Why should Christ thus be honored before himself? (*Ibid*)

After speaking of this discontentment of Satan, also of his efforts to cause the same unhappiness amongst his followers (after he had left the presence of the Father), Ellen White wrote

"They were discontented and unhappy because they could not look into his unsearchable wisdom and ascertain his [the Father's] purposes in exalting

his Son Jesus, and endowing him with such unlimited power and command. They rebelled against the authority of the Son.” (*Ibid*)

Notice here that it is not said that they rebelled against the authority of the Father. It was the authority of “the Son” with which they had a dispute – although having said that – at the same time it was disputing the wisdom of God to invest His Son as such. This rebellion therefore was an attack on both the Father and the Son. It is no wonder that the Scriptures say that Lucifer said of himself “I will be like the most High” (see Isaiah 14:14). Ellen White continued

“Angels that were loyal and true sought to reconcile this first great rebel to the will of his Creator. They justified the act of God in conferring honor upon Jesus Christ, and with forcible reasons sought to convince Satan that no less honor was his now than before the Father had proclaimed the honor which he had conferred upon his Son.” (*Ibid*)

Those who are “loyal and true” will always seek to show that God is correct in all of His dealings with His created beings. Very interesting are the next remarks of Ellen White. She wrote

“They [the loyal angels] clearly set forth that Jesus was the Son of God, existing with him before the angels were created; and that he had ever stood at the right hand of God, and his mild, loving authority had not heretofore been questioned; and that he had given no commands but what it was joy for the heavenly host to execute. They had urged that Christ's receiving special honor from the Father, in the presence of the angels, did not detract from the honor that he had heretofore received.” (*Ibid*)

According to what we have been told through the spirit of prophecy, both loyal and rebellious angels had once acknowledged Christ as the Son of God. It is no wonder therefore that in the incarnation the fallen ones addressed Jesus as such. Notice particularly of what it was that the loyal angels attempted to persuade the rebellious angels. It was that “Jesus was the Son of God”. This was the dispute in heaven that through Satan has been transferred to this earth. This great controversy is still going on today.

Notice too we are told that the loyal angels also tried to convince the rebellious ones that the Son of God had “ever stood at the right hand of God”. We shall come back to this point later. Very interesting is that Ellen White later wrote

“Many of Satan's sympathizers were inclined to heed the counsel of the loyal angels, and repent of their dissatisfaction, and be again received to the confidence of the Father and his dear Son.” (*Ibid*)

Repeatedly throughout this series of great controversy articles, Ellen White wrote of Christ being God's dear Son – particularly prior to the creation of this world.

## Following the outbreak of the rebellion

In relating the events that followed this rebellion in Heaven, Ellen White later wrote

“The loyal angels hasten speedily to the Son of God, and acquaint him with what is taking place among the angels. They find the Father in conference with his beloved Son, to determine the means by which, for the best good of the loyal angels, the assumed authority of Satan could be forever put down.” (*Ibid*)

After saying that the “great God could at once have hurled this arch deceiver from heaven; but this was not his purpose” she explained

“He [the great God] would give the rebellious an equal chance to measure strength and might with his own Son and his loyal angels. In this battle every angel would choose his own side, and his character and purposes would be manifested to all.” (*Ibid*)

In consequence of this rebellion we have been told

“All the heavenly host were summoned to appear before the Father, to have each case determined. Satan unblushingly made known his dissatisfaction that Christ should be preferred before him. He stood up proudly and urged that he should be equal with God, and should be taken into conference with the Father and understand his purposes. God informed Satan that to his Son alone he would reveal his secret purposes, and he required all the family in heaven, even Satan, to yield him implicit, unquestioned obedience; but that he (Satan) had proved himself unworthy a place in heaven.” (*Ibid*)

The end result was (as Ellen White explains)

“Then there was war in heaven. The Son of God, the Prince of heaven, and his loyal angels, engaged in conflict with the arch rebel and those who united with him. The Son of God and true, loyal angels prevailed; and Satan and his sympathizers were expelled from heaven. All the heavenly host acknowledged and adored the God of justice. Not a taint of rebellion was left. All was again peaceful and harmonious as before.” (*Ibid*)

This is explained in Scripture where it says

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” Revelation 12:7-9

This exalting of Christ in the presence of the angels was not a change in

authority. This was the same as it had been from the beginning (remember above that the loyal angels had said that Son of God had “ever stood at the right hand of God”).

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, in the opening chapter (*Why was sin permitted*) we find these words (this was with reference to God calling an assembly of all the angels as spoken of above)

“There had been no change in the position or authority of Christ.” (*Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, page 38, ‘Why was Sin Permitted?’*)

So why then did God call the angels together so that in their presence He could bestow honour upon His Son? Ellen White explains

“Lucifer's envy and misrepresentation and his claims to equality with Christ had made necessary a statement of the true position of the Son of God; but this had been the same from the beginning. Many of the angels were, however, blinded by Lucifer's deceptions.” (*Ibid*)

Christ had always been one with the Father. He had always been equal with God. He had always been God's Son. In fact, Christ was God's one and only Son - begotten in the days of eternity in the express image of God's own person. She had written two pages previously

“To dispute the supremacy of the Son of God, thus impeaching the wisdom and love of the Creator, had become the purpose of this prince of angels. To this object he was about to bend the energies of that master mind, which, next to Christ's, was first among the hosts of God.” (*Ibid page 36*)

In a later chapter that dealt with the death of Moses, Ellen White wrote (this was when Satan disputed with Christ with regards to the body of Moses – see Jude verse 9)

“Christ did not stoop to enter into controversy with Satan. He might have brought against him the cruel work which his deceptions had wrought in heaven, causing the ruin of a vast number of its inhabitants. He might have pointed to the falsehoods told in Eden, that had led to Adam's sin and brought death upon the human race. He might have reminded Satan that it was his own work in tempting Israel to murmuring and rebellion, which had wearied the long-suffering patience of their leader, and in an unguarded moment had surprised him into the sin for which he had fallen under the power of death.” (*Ibid page 478, ‘The Death of Moses’*)

She then added

“But Christ referred all to His Father, saying, “The Lord rebuke thee.” Jude 9.” (*Ibid*)

When Jude 9 is read, it is often thought that it was Christ Himself that was rebuking Satan but as we can see here, it was not. Like a submissive and dutiful loving son, Christ referred him to His Father.

### **A struggle for God**

Many do give very much thought to how God felt when He gave up His only begotten Son to humanity but in Early Writings Ellen White makes this comment

“Said the angel, "Think ye that the Father yielded up His dearly beloved Son without a struggle? No, no." It was even a struggle with the God of heaven, whether to let guilty man perish, or to give His darling Son to die for them. Angels were so interested for man's salvation that there could be found among them those who would yield their glory and give their life for perishing man. "But," said my accompanying angel, "that would avail nothing." The transgression was so great that an angel's life would not pay the debt. Nothing but the death and intercession of God's Son would pay the debt and save lost man from hopeless sorrow and misery.” (*Ellen G. White, Early Writings, page 127, 'God's Gift to Man'*)

She followed this by saying

“But the work which was assigned the angels was to ascend and descend with strengthening balm from glory to soothe the Son of God in His life of suffering. They administered unto Jesus. Also, their work was to guard and keep the subjects of grace from the evil angels and from the darkness which was constantly thrown around them by Satan. I saw that it was impossible for God to change His law in order to save lost, perishing man; therefore He suffered His darling Son to die for man's transgressions.” (*Ibid*)

In the Bible Echo in 1892 Ellen White wrote (this was after saying that the Bible, although of infinite importance to the souls of men, it is “not exalted to its rightful place among the books of the world”)

“In searching its pages the imagination beholds scenes majestic and eternal. We behold Jesus, the Son of God, coming to our world, and engaging in the mysterious conflict that discomfited the powers of darkness. O how wonderful, how almost incredible it is, that the infinite God would consent to the humiliation of his own Son that we might be elevated to a place with Him upon his throne! Let every student of the Scriptures contemplate this great fact, and he will not come from a study of the Bible without being purified, elevated, and ennobled.” (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1892, 'The Bible our Guide'*)

We also find these statements. They are all very interesting and very relevant to this study

“Such is the value of men for whom Christ died that the Father is satisfied with the infinite price which He pays for the salvation of man in yielding up

His own Son to die for their redemption. What wisdom, mercy, and love in its fullness are here manifested! The worth of man is known only by going to Calvary. In the mystery of the cross of Christ we can place an estimate upon man." (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 2, 'The Cause in Vermont', see also Review and Herald, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1886, 'Christ's Representatives'*)

"Our Heavenly Father surrendered his beloved Son to the agonies of the crucifixion. Legions of angels witnessed the humiliation and soul-anguish of the Son of God, but were not permitted to interpose as in the case of Isaac. No voice was heard to stay the sacrifice. God's dear Son, the world's Redeemer, was insulted, mocked at, derided, and tortured, until he bowed his head in death. What greater proof can the Infinite One give us of his divine love and pity. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1875, 'The Faith of Abraham'*)

"God allowed his own Son to be put to death in order to answer the penalty of the transgression of the law; then how will he deal with those who, in the face of all this evidence, dare venture upon the path of disobedience, having received the light of truth?" (*Ellen G. White, Testimonies Volume 4, 'Sacredness of God's Commandments', See also Review and Herald, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1876*)

## **Conclusion and warnings**

It can only be concluded that when Ellen White spoke of Christ being the divine Son of God, she was totally in harmony with Scripture. Christ was indeed, as He said Himself, God's one and only Son (see John 3:16).

As the first century of the Christian era drew to a close, there was much conjecture regarding Christ. There were also many wrong beliefs being circulated. This was the time when John wrote his gospel, also his epistles. I would ask you here to consider some of the warnings that John wrote in his letters. At the opening of his first epistle he wrote

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." 1 John 1:3-4

Note here that there is no mention of fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

John also wrote (after saying that there were many antiChrist's – see 1 John 2:18)

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same



hath not the Father ..." 1 John 2:23

John also wrote

"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." 1 John 2:24

This is very plain speaking. Notice again John does not mention the Holy Spirit. Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches that Christ is not really the Son of God but that the Son and the Father only role played these parts. Perhaps it is here that we need to recall to our minds the words written by Ellen White. This is when she said (this was after quoting the words spoken by the Father of Christ at His baptism – "Thou art my beloved Son")

"This was an assurance to John that Christ was the Son of God. And what do these words say to us, to every member of the human family, whatever our country or position?" (*Ellen G. White, Bible Echo, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1894, 'Christ's mission of love'*)

Can we say with Peter when Jesus asked him "whom say ye that I am" (Matthew 16:15) "... Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)?

After reading this study, I would certainly hope so!

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