**NEWS**

The Theme of Pastor Ted Wilson's Sabbath Sermon
"Cross the Jordan, Don't Retreat" preached the denomination's president newly re-elected for another five-year term. Report here.
Include a link to the full transcript.

What was Changed in the Doctrines of the Denomination?
A number of revisions were voted in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and a full explanation is available here.

A Revised Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia Announced
The new edition will be published online.

**COMMENTARY**

Reflections on San Antonio: The First in a Series
By Caleb Rosado
FEATURE

Juniper: A Promise of Restoration
A story about music at the GC Session.

This is the final edition of the daily Email Updates that Adventist Today will send out during its coverage of the General Conference Session. The next Update will be the regular weekly one on Friday this week.
"Cross the Jordan, Don’t Retreat" Theme of Wilson’s Sabbath Sermon

By AT News Team, July 12, 2015: “We must go forward, not backward, because we are almost home! I am more convinced than ever that Jesus’ return is near, even at the door," Pastor Ted Wilson declared in his Sabbath sermon (July 11) at the close of the denomination’s General Conference (GC) Session. More than 60,000 Adventists gathered in the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas, to hear Wilson’s theme-setting sermon after being voted a second five-year term as the denomination’s president.

The focus of the sermon was moving forward to cross the Jordan River into the promised land. Wilson retold the story of Moses and Joshua during this pivotal transition in the history of God’s people in the Old Testament, drawing a parallel with the Adventist movement today. He urged Adventists around the world to unite in the mission of Christ.

Wilson asked why Adventists, who have believed fervently in the soon return of Jesus for 160 years are still here. “For some time, Jesus has longed to come back. We have no more time prophecies. Those ended in 1844 with the beginning of the investigative judgment. At this very moment, Christ is ministering for us in the most holy place of a real sanctuary in heaven. He wants to pour out the latter rain of the Holy Spirit upon His people to finish His work on this earth. He longs for us to humble ourselves before Him and lean completely upon His everlasting arms. He wants us to share His good news of salvation that we are saved by grace,” he said.

Mirroring the passing of the torch from Moses to Joshua in the Bible story, Wilson shared how his own father and grandfather—both leaders in the Adventist denomination—had influenced and encouraged him. To honor them, Wilson had their Bibles on the podium along with his own Bible. His grandfather served as president of the North American Division (NAD) and the Southern Asia Division, and his father as president of the Columbia Union Conference, the NAD and the GC.

Wilson stressed the importance of reading the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, often referred to as “the Spirit of Prophecy,” and emphasized interpreting the “plain reading” or “plain language” of Scripture. “If you haven’t read much from either one for a while, pick up the Bible and read it. Pick up Steps to Christ, The Desire of Ages, The Ministry of Healing, The Great Controversy, Patriarchs and Prophets, the Testimonies or any other Spirit of Prophecy book and read it. See what God will do for your heart and life.” He continued, “As Seventh-day Adventists, we fully accept the Bible as God’s inspired Word. We understand the Spirit of Prophecy to be the lesser light, inspired by that same heavenly inspiration that leads to the greater light, the Bible.”

Continuing to highlight the importance of the Bible, Wilson declared, “God’s Word is sure and foundational.” Echoing a topic delegates had debated earlier in the week—the doctrine of creation—Wilson stated, “Yes, God actually created this world recently in six, literal, consecutive days and rested on the seventh-day Sabbath and asks us to do the same as an eternal sign of our allegiance to Him.” He went on to list other stories from the Bible, stressing that “God’s Word is accurate and true and can be understood just as it reads.”

Repeatedly, Wilson exhorted listeners to not retreat but to press on. For courage to move ahead toward the “Jordan
"Cross the Jordan, Don’t Retreat" Theme of Wilson's Sabbath Sermon

River and the promised land," he said Christians need to remember how God has led in the past.

Wilson listed dangers that he hopes Adventists will not move to—legalism, mysticism, superficiality, meaningless emotionalism, worldly or unbiblical contemporary ideas about theology, carelessness in Christian living, skepticism, higher criticism, fanaticism, and formalism. The audience enthusiastically applauded this warning.

Instead, Adventists should focus on positive efforts, Wilson said, not only the mechanics of the church—the focus of the GC Session—but private and public witness. “Become involved in the greatest evangelistic and mission outreach possible—take time to read and pray about the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist strategic plan, Reach the World.” He continued, “I appeal to all our administrators, pastors and lay people everywhere, become involved in personal and especially public evangelism even if you think it won’t work where you live. Adapt your methods, but reach out. Evangelism is not dead! It is more alive than ever before!”

In addition to a verbal witness, Wilson also highlighted efforts to show practical compassion for people in need. “Thank God for the work of ADRA,” he declared. He also encouraged Adventists to "always show interest in groups with special needs. Take time for those in special situations with whom you can share Christ." Furthermore, Wilson instructed the audience to use “comprehensive health ministry in reaching people in … cities and in the rural areas.”

In summary, Wilson stressed that in order to reach the world with the message of Christ’s return, Adventists should read both the Bible and Ellen White, and participate in personal and public outreach which includes providing health care and community development. Wilson concluded his remarks with the exhortation, “Reach the world with the extraordinary good news of ultimate victory through the blood and grace of our Creator, Redeemer, High Priest, Coming King and Best Friend, Jesus Christ! Arise! Shine! Jesus is coming.”

It was a quite traditional Adventist sermon which warmed the hearts of many from around the world. Adventist ministers have been preaching that the Second Coming of Jesus is “at the door” from the very beginning of the denomination. Ellen White believed and wrote many times that “the end is near.” Seven generations of Adventists have been born, lived, and died. Ellen White passed to her rest 100 years ago this summer.

Adventist preachers are in good company in their proclamation of a “soon return.” They are simply concurring with the views of New Testament writers who believed Jesus would soon return—at least within their lifetimes. More than 2,000 years have and gone since those writers lived, and the “end” is still in the future. This reality is the basis of much of the anxiety and spiritual dissonance felt by Adventist believers.

Almost no one, particularly the president of the denomination, wants to look squarely at the problem of the delay, although it permeates the feelings of second and subsequent generations of Adventists. Perhaps it is too much to ask Wilson to rethink what “soon” means to 21st-century Adventist Christians. The question is not an easy one to ask, and it is even more difficult to conceive of good answers. So, the easy thing to do is to cling to the past. Which leads to the conflicts that were so clearly expressed all week during this 60th GC Session.

What was Changed in the Fundamental Beliefs Document?

From ANN, July 12, 2015: The official statement of the doctrines of the Adventist denomination is the Fundamental Beliefs document. It is seldom revised. So why were so many changes made at this year’s General Conference (GC) Session?

There are at least seven reasons why a denomination might consider a revision to its belief statements. It might wish to (1) Find smoother language and sentence structure. (2) Find language that is easier to translate into other languages. (3) Update terminology when the meaning or usage of language has changed. (4) Clarify language that may not clearly state where the church stands. (5) Address new situations that call for clarification. (6) Add an emphasis that was not mentioned in prior statements. (7) Change or add new statements that add to or change the meaning of the prior statements.

There were no changes in the revisions adopted last week that represent the last category. While there were no major additions (category 6), there were a few minor ones. For example, belief number 2, the doctrine of the Trinity, added the phrase, “God, who is love.” Belief number 11, entitled “Growing in Christ,” emphasizes the social dimension of biblical Christianity. Affirming the love of God and emphasizing community welfare has always been important to the Adventist denomination.

Many changes fell into the first two categories. For example, in number 17, the doctrine of spiritual gifts, a word changed from “which” to “that.” In number 25, the doctrine of the Second Coming, a phrase changed from “Christ’s coming is imminent” to “Christ’s coming is near.” This change not only has the advantage of using biblical language, but it makes for easier reading and is easier to translate.

There were also many changes under category 3, changes in the meaning of language. Belief number 7, which was labeled “The Nature of Man,” is now “The Nature of Humanity,” representing gender-inclusive language. In number 23, “Marriage and the Family,” the term “partners” was changed to “a man and a woman.” The meaning of the word “partners” with reference to marriage has changed in social usage to indicate a commitment to either same sex or opposite sex marriages. The current meaning was not prevalent in 1980 when the document was originally created. This editorial change signals that the church will remain true to the Biblical concept of marriage in spite of changes in contemporary culture.

Significant changes took place in category 4. In number 9, “The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ,” the term “bodily” was added in front of “resurrected.” We have now clarified that the resurrection of Jesus was not a continuing influence nor a spirit experience, but an actual resurrection of Christ in His total person, including His body. Although Scripture emphasizes this point, it is rejected by many theologians, who do not acknowledge the historicity of the biblical account. Thus, it was important to add the word “bodily.”

In number 18, “The Gift of Prophecy,” some felt that the prior version gave Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White authority comparable to that of the Bible. Changes were made to remove this potential ambiguity. White herself emphasizes that her authority is subject to the Scriptures. The new wording of this statement does not in any way diminish the church’s understanding of the authority of the Bible or the prophetic role of White.

In number 8, “The Great Controversy,” the previous version contained a phrase on the “worldwide” nature of the biblical flood. The intent of that statement was to represent the biblical teaching that the flood covered the entire world. It was not anticipated that “worldwide” would be reinterpreted by some who do not accept the historicity of Genesis 1-11 to mean “the then known world,” portraying a large regional flood. Thus, this GC session changed the
Paragraph 6 on the doctrine of Creation was the primary reason that the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs was reviewed at this GC session. There was a concern that the previous version might have been reinterpreted by some to mean almost anything they wished on the topic of origins, including theistic evolution. In 2004 the GC executive committee produced a statement that clarified that life on this Earth began just as stated in Genesis 1 and 2.

Those who chose to reinterpret Belief number 6 maintained that the 2004 statement was not authoritative since it was not voted at a GC session. Thus, the 2004 statement was affirmed at the 2010 GC session, with the request that the substance of the action be worked into the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. The revised statement voted by this session makes it clear that God created life in six actual days, and with the addition of the Sabbath, it was a week as we know it today.
By AT News Team, July 10, 2015: On July 9, 2015 the office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) at the General Conference (GC) announced to the delegates their plan to update the current *SDA Encyclopedia*, which was first produced in 1966 and last updated in 1996.

The task is scheduled to be completed within the next five years and is slated to be revealed in both an online version and a print edition at the next GC session in 2020.

ASTR is inviting every division, union, conference, and institution to join the research project for this endeavor. They have established six goals for the encyclopedia:

1. Supply reliable and authoritative information on Adventist history, crucial events and themes, organizations, entities, institutions, and people.

2. Strengthen identity in a fast-growing worldwide movement, heightening awareness of distinctive doctrinal and prophetic beliefs.

3. Provide a reference work for those new to our faith, mature in the faith, and not of our faith, to learn about all aspects of Adventism.

4. Bring out the role of the denominational organization in fulfilling the church’s mission.

5. Highlight the missional challenges still remaining in order to “reach the world” with the gospel and prophetic truth.

6. Reflect the nature of the world church today, both in subject matter and in those who write articles for the encyclopedia.
Reflections on San Antonio

By Caleb Rosado, July 12, 2015: The decision on the ordination of women voted at the 60th General Conference Session made it very clear that there is no “one” Seventh-day Adventist denomination but several. The church in North America is very different from the church in Latin America, which is different from the church in Europe, and this one in turn differs from the one in Australia. These various churches visibly manifested their differences when it came to the vote on theordination question.

The decision was not based on theology, or the leading of the Holy Spirit, or the will of God, no matter how many “Amens” were shouted; because God is not that confused, emotional, irrational, divisive and anthropomorphic. The decision was based on culture, pure and simple. By culture, I mean the socially organized way of life of a people. And what holds that culture together are the operational value systems of that given culture. Thus, the operational values of North America, Europe and Australia are far different from the operational value systems of Latin America and Africa. And while we praise God for the exponential growth taking place in Africa and in Latin America, these areas of the world also adhere to a more traditional and patriarchal form of societal structures. These cultural and social structures also impact their reading and interpretation of Scripture. Just like the more egalitarian expression of society and culture in North America, Europe and Australia also influences their reading and interpretation of Scripture.

None of us come to the Word with a tabula rasa mindset. If that were the case then the Four Gospels should be identical, but they are not. Ellen G. White made that very clear: “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.” What she is saying here is that culture and social dynamics played an influential part in the writing of Scripture, and thus, by extension, its interpretation. Melville J. Herskovits, cultural anthropologist, declares: “Judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his/her own enculturation.”

What all this means is that the largest body of members, with the largest number of delegates, with their traditional and patriarchal system of values, determined the outcome of the vote. People merely voted their way of life since their way of life influenced their view of God and interpretation of Scripture. And the method chosen to carry out the vote predeterminated the outcome. And as long as this method is used the outcome will always be the same, whether the vote was taken in 1995 at Utrecht or twenty years later in San Antonio, or twenty years from now who-knows where.

In a time period when the Supreme Court of the United States finally approved what the American people had already accepted, same-sex marriage in all 50 states, when the Confederate flag – a symbol of racism and slavery – has finally come down from state capitols, when the possibility of a woman finally being President of the United States becomes a reality, the church is still the last bastion of sexism in the world. To focus on evangelism now as a solution to the problem, comes across as a cruel joke. Who wants to join a sexist church? If the issue had been that only white males could be ordained to the Gospel ministry, the outcry would have echoed all the way from Paducah to Timbuktu (or as the Bible says, “from Dan to Beersheba”), since the church is now more sensitive to racism then to sexism.

In the days following San Antonio, I predict that the church will experience a mass exodus of its membership in North America, Europe and Australia, just like happened after Utrecht, but now on an even larger scale. And instead
of being the “lead institution” in society – the institution from which all the other institutions get their cues for standards – the church will become more and more irrelevant to members in the three areas supporting ordination. Growth will continue to take place exponentially in Latin America and Africa, and the browning of Adventism will continue to increase.

I foresee a split taking place in Adventism, and two factions will emerge: A progressive element arising out of North America, Europe and Australia; and a more traditional element fueled by the growth of the church in Africa and in Latin America. San Antonio will go down in Adventist history as the church’s Kadesh-Barnea or 1888 moment, when the majority rejected the minority report, and will continue to wander with a theology based on culture. But the Spirit will continue to pour out on sons and daughters as God raises a whole new generation that will enter the promise land.

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Juniper: A Promise of Restoration

By Suzanne Ocsai, July 11, 2015: As Jodelis Matos and Patrick Ranalla, of the duet Juniper, take the stage to perform at IMPACT San Antonio—the young adult programming during the 60th General Conference Session (GC)—their soft-spoken voices and gentle personalities welcome you as they introduce themselves and their first song. However, as soon as they begin to sing, the moment explodes like dynamite; they are, simply, powerful.

With intense emotion and passion, their voices carry throughout the hall, eyes closed and hands lifted high, you’re carried along with them on a river of commanding praise.

The kind of emotion and passion Juniper sings with is the kind that is earned only from knowing personally the suffering a soul endures through long dark nights while waiting desperately for morning’s first glimpses of restoring light. And theirs is just that—a story of restoration and redemption.

Before agreeing to co-found Juniper, Patrick spent several years struggling spiritually.

“For a long time I was really numb and in a melodramatic phase in my spirituality and not really sure what I wanted to do,” said Patrick.

Tiffany Ranalla, Patrick’s wife, wasn’t sure what to do during this time either. She sought out pastors and others she trusted to get their advice.

“Some people encouraged me to stay,” she said, “and some people that had talked to him knew what a dark place he was in and did not think he would recover. [They] told me that if I wanted a Christian husband that they didn’t think he would be that again. So I really handed my faith over at that point and said, I’m going to continue to raise my kids, continue to go to church, and he can follow me or he can not follow me.”

While she decided to stay, the hardest thing for Tiffany to reconcile was her husband’s loss of faith in God.

“I just continued to pray that he would come back around because it wasn’t as if he was a bad person or he changed who he was or he wasn’t a good man,” she said. “It was the aspect of him just not believing anymore and having no faith left. I wanted him to come with us to heaven. And that was hard to think about the fact that if something ever happened to him that we would not see him again.”

During this time Patrick was feeling God pulling him back even when he tried to ignore the tug. It seemed like every time he would pick up his guitar to play or write a song, it was Christian music and lyrics that came to mind. He couldn’t figure out why this was happening; all he knew was that he couldn’t escape those moments.
“I would forget about what I was doing at that time,” said Patrick, “and then I would eventually stop myself, cause I’m like, ‘wait a second, this is not what I want to do.’”

At the same time Jodelis was also struggling through her own valley of shadows. “There were dark and painful times,” said Jodelis, “particularly in the last few years when I would be so broken by what I was going through—circumstances that led to [my] divorce—but my God was right there. And many times in that brokenness He gave me a song and with that song He would give me exactly what I needed in that moment.”

She started writing down the songs as well as performing at church and various events. The music became her healing. After a performance one day, Tiffany walked up to her and said, “You need to sing with my husband.”

That was the beginning of Juniper.

Just as their own personal lives went through intense ups and downs, their music ministry did as well. Tiffany, who has since become Juniper’s manager, and Jodelis could sense Patrick’s resistance to the idea of committing to the group.

“There were many times in the beginning when I wanted to pull away from doing it,” said Patrick. “I didn’t think music was what was in store for me. I didn’t want to do that music. I didn’t want to put myself out there. I didn’t want to be vulnerable again to the possibilities.”

But little by little, Patrick began coming back. Tiffany saw the prayers for her husband being answered with every venue he performed. One day Tiffany drove over to Jodelis’s house and shared with her just how much Juniper meant to them.

“We’ve decided to put school to the side,” said Tiffany. “I can see that [Juniper] is good because it brought my husband back to me.”

For Juniper, being invited to perform at the GC was simply one more in a long stream of affirmations from God to the promise of restoration He’s bringing to their own lives and the lives of others through their music.

“For me, Juniper definitely restored my faith,” said Patrick. “Just because of where I came from . . . it had been a while [since] I had been truly faithful, truly open to the promises of God. Because I wasn’t looking to make a big difference and shoot here to today, San Antonio, Impact, 2015, it’s just like this is what we’ve been called to do. It is purposeful and my faith is stronger than ever.”