
Beyond Fundamentalism: A Short History of Adventist Old Testament Scholarship

by Lawrence T. Geraty

“Why don’t Adventist Bible teachers meet regularly with the Evangelical Theological Society?” That question was raised recently during a meeting of the Andrews Society for Religious Studies, the professional organization for Seventh-day Adventist Bible teachers.¹ (Annually, Adventist religion scholars gather just prior to the annual joint meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion, the largest North American gathering of scholars in religion.)

The question was answered from the floor without a moment’s hesitation by veteran SDA archaeologist and biblical scholar, Siegfried Horn: “To join the Evangelical Theological Society, one must sign an un-Adventist creedal statement that declares, ‘The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs.’ Secondly, the scholarship exhibited at the Evangelical Theological Society’s meetings is often shallow. However, we don’t always agree with the presuppositions or methods of scholars presenting papers at the Society

of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion meetings either.” One could tell from the reaction to Horn’s response that it met with general acceptance among the 100 or so Adventist Bible teachers present.

Horn could have mentioned also that at the Evangelical Theological Society meetings one meets only a small segment of the teachers in biblical studies and theology, while during the annual Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion meetings one rubs shoulders with all kinds of scholars in those fields of interest, including many scholars of conservative persuasion. Thus Adventist scholars have a much greater visibility by attending the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion meetings than in confining themselves to the Evangelical Theological Society gatherings, where they are not really welcome anyway.

But the question remains a good one. Since Adventists are generally conservative, why don’t their teachers attend fundamentalist professional meetings in greater numbers? After all, the *purpose* of Evangelical Theological Society is “to foster conservative biblical scholarship by providing a medium for the oral exchange and written expression of thought and research in the general field of the theological disciplines as

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centered in the Scriptures.” In fact, knowledgeable conservative Adventists belong to a tradition that eschews extremes to the fundamentalist right (a Bible in no way influenced by its cultural context and without errors of any kind) and to the liberal left (a Bible that is faulty and untrustworthy in most matters and entirely explainable by its cultural context without the intervention of God in any sense).

Any understanding of the eternal significance of the Bible as attaining meaning in the context of culture is feared by many fundamentalists because it undermines their faith-understanding of the Bible as having a validity outside of human circumstances. This latter belief stands in ultimate contradiction to the fact that God chose to send his eternal Word to be conditioned and defined by the specific culture of first-century Judea. This being so, how did Adventism manage to steer clear of the extremes? How did its centrist approach to the Bible come about?

There were theological reasons, of course. After all, Adventism inherited a centrist position from its roots in the Protestant Reformation. And numerous statements by Ellen White² protected Adventist scholars from taking extremist positions in either direction. But there is the further crucial fact that since the very first Adventist scholar received a doctorate in biblical studies, at least four generations of Adventists have been trained in a centrist tradition of biblical scholarship, which in the United States has been dominated, until recently, by the figure of William Foxwell Albright.³

Born in 1891, Albright was known long before his death as the “dean of biblical archaeologists.” In his own career he had swung from a fundamentalist upbringing (by American missionary parents) to a liberal skepticism (under the influence of Paul Haupt, a German “higher critic,” in his

graduate training). In 1919—the very year when 20,000 people attended the fundamentalist World Bible Conference in Philadelphia and left ready to join the “battle for the Bible” by going home and throwing the liberals out—Albright left the United States for an extended stay in Jerusalem. He developed a middle position when his own archaeological fieldwork and research in Palestine gave him renewed respect for the historical accuracy and validity of the biblical narrative.⁴

In Albright’s early days, there seemed to be two main options in the study of the Bible: a fundamentalist method, frequently uncritical, which often used texts out of context and which saw the Bible as inerrant in matters of history and science,⁵ and a liberal, “higher critical” method. This approach built on the evolutionary views of such Germans as Wellhausen (who thought the Old Testament sources could reflect only the standpoint of the times in which they were written down), Gunkel (who emphasized the oral, pre-literate forms of the Old Testament such as legends, hymns and laments) and Alt, Noth, and von Rad (who developed an approach that analyzed the history of transmission of biblical traditions and their varied settings in the life of the community).⁶ Some of their views so atomized biblical literature that it failed to speak with any authority to current concerns. Both of these methods (fundamentalist and liberal) dealt with “the Bible and the Bible alone”—that is they were “inner” methods detached from the advance of archaeological knowledge regarding the place of Israel among its neighbors, and thus they were without any external controls as to their validity. What Albright did was discover that disciplines uncovering the historical Near Eastern context for the Bible provided crucial controls unavailable to the other more subjective approaches.

He claimed that his own position was as far removed from the extreme liberalism of Wellhausenism as it was from obscurantist fundamentalism.⁷

Albright was wary of all interpretations and syntheses based on internal biblical data alone. One manuscript, one papyrus, one significant archaeological find he regarded as worth a thousand theories. This approach brought him a recognition of the Bible's substantial historicity. This meant he accepted the Genesis portrayal of the faith of the patriarchs, the existence of a historical Moses responsible for contributions to religion and law, the reality of the exodus and conquest, the evolution of Old Testament institutions during the time of the judges and kings of Israel, and the biblical view of the exile and restoration. To quote his own words:

To sum up, we can now again treat the Bible from beginning to end as an authentic document of religious history. Innumerable clarifications of the text greatly improve our understanding, especially of the poetic books. No translation which has yet appeared gives an adequate idea of the increase in our knowledge of Hebrew grammar, vocabulary and poetic style. It must be emphasized, however, that vindication of the historicity of the Bible and clarification of its meaning do not involve a return to uncritical belief in verbal inspiration and do not support an orthodoxy which insulates the Bible from the real world of today. The Bible must be judged as literature and history by exactly the same canons as we use in studying similar nonbiblical literature, but not by arbitrary standards imposed on it by dogmatic liberals or conservatives. Extreme views are alike unsatisfactory; the truth lies in the middle.⁸

Because of Albright's brilliance and ability and the convincing nature of his method, he quickly developed a loyal following. His approach to Old Testament studies, making use of the data being recovered from the Near East to interpret the Bible in its original ancient Near Eastern context, gave academic substance to a centrist approach to the Bible that already

characterized Adventism. So it is no wonder that a whole generation of Adventist scholars sought to receive their training in the "Albright School" of Old Testament scholarship.

Ironically, Lynn H. Wood, the very first Seventh-day Adventist to earn a doctorate in Old Testament (in 1937, from the University of Chicago), was influenced by Albright initially through the latter's Jewish student Nelson Glueck. For many years Glueck served as the director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, then later as the president of Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio. Wood spent a year in Palestine visiting sites of Biblical interest and working for Glueck's archaeological excavations as a draftsman. After his return to the United States, and completion of his doctoral studies, Wood became known in scholarly circles for establishing the earliest fixed date in history—1991 B.C. for the commencement of Egypt's Middle Kingdom. As chairman of the Department of Archaeology and History of Antiquity at the SDA Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., Wood taught Siegfried H. Horn, the major link between "the Albright School" and the next two generations of Adventist Old Testament scholars.⁹

Born in Germany in 1908, Horn attended local schools including a Jewish high school and the Adventist training school in Friedensau until he went to Stanborough College in England to complete his ministerial training. He had hoped for a missionary call to the Middle East, but after he served as a minister in Holland (his wife's home country), the denomination instead sent him to the Dutch East Indies. There, because he was a German citizen, the Dutch interned him during the Second World War (1940–1946), then transferred him to a British concentration camp in India. There he followed a strict regimen of studying and

teaching biblical languages a specified number of hours each day. Upon his release, he came to the United States determined to follow up his self-education during imprisonment with formal studies. Horn first completed a bachelor of arts at Walla Walla College. While earning a master of arts under Lynn H. Wood at the SDA Theological Seminary, he simultaneously studied at Johns Hopkins University with Albright. However, Albright felt Horn already knew most of what he could get at Hopkins, so he suggested that Horn branch into a new area while working on his doctorate. That is how Horn came to complete a doctorate in Egyptology at the University of Chicago in 1951, before the joining the teaching staff of the SDA Theological Seminary as Lynn Wood's successor—a position he held until his retirement in 1976. (From 1973 to 1976 he

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served also as Dean of the Seminary, successfully keeping a steady hand on the helm during the beginning of a turbulent period for the denomination.)

During his tenure at the SDA Theological Seminary, Horn influenced the post-World War II development of Adventist theological scholarship in numerous ways. First of all, in his teaching he had access to hundreds of the denomination's best minds. In such courses as Introduction to the Old Testament, Old Testament Backgrounds, and Archaeology and the Bible, he took well-reasoned informed positions on many sensitive issues. On the age of the earth Horn suggested a relatively short period for life on earth, but not so short as Ussher's chronology suggests. He made a very important

distinction between genealogies of the sort found in Genesis, inadequate for exact dating, and specific chronological statements such as are found in Kings and Chronicles. Horn argued in favor of the historicity of the Bible, citing archaeological evidence for the authenticity of the patriarchs, while recognizing linguistic and textual problems, such as in the number of Israelites. He also argued for the early dating of Daniel, though he recognized the unsolved problem of the identity of Darius the Mede. Horn frankly admitted problems, but in his teaching concentrated on archaeological discoveries that supported the Bible's essential historicity and accuracy.

Second, Horn wrote what he taught. In 30 years he provided the church and the world with nearly 800 articles and several books. In fact, half the articles on biblical archaeology to appear in denominational journals during these years were authored by Horn. His employment of archaeological evidence had three major goals: to show how a knowledge of the ancient world makes the Bible more meaningful; to substantiate faith in the Bible by demonstrating the veracity of its historical statements; to demonstrate the faithful transmission of the biblical text, so no one need doubt what the biblical author intended to say.¹⁰

From the beginning, Horn was involved in the production of the multi-volume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. In addition to reading it all in manuscript and galley form, he himself authored 963 pages of articles and exegesis in the printed work. As a first attempt by Adventists to deal with an exegesis of the entire Bible, it was a remarkable achievement. Although produced in a very conservative climate, it nevertheless often gave the reader more than one interpretive option. Perhaps Horn's single most influential book is his *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, a part of the Review and Herald's commentary reference set, and now in a newly revised edition. Among one-volume Bible dictionaries on the market, it has been characterized as the most reliable

and best informed on archaeology. As an example of his readiness to assist the denomination with his expertise, he did the basic research for and co-authored *The Chronology of Ezra 7*, thus for all practical purposes settling the problem of the date of the decree of Artaxerxes I to 457 B.C. Not only did Horn himself write, he encouraged others to do the same. In 1963 he founded *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, the denomination's first scholarly periodical whose articles are now indexed, abstracted, or listed in at least 15 scholarly sources. Shortly thereafter he inaugurated *Andrews University Monographs: Studies in Religion* for book-length manuscripts.

Third, by conducting numerous study trips and tours to the Near East, Horn encouraged scores of denominational teachers, pastors, evangelists, and editors to incorporate into their ministries first-hand knowledge of the historical and geographical context of the biblical drama.¹¹

Fourth, Horn was not satisfied in merely utilizing the results of others' archaeological fieldwork. He wanted to make his own contribution; so in the early 1960s he joined the staff of the Shechem expedition. That experience only whetted his appetite for his own "dig" which he carefully planned and subsequently fielded at Heshbon in 1968, 1971, and 1973.¹² These excavations became the largest in the country of Jordan and the training ground for numerous national and foreign archaeologists. Heshbon soon became noted for its superb organization, its quality methods, and the prompt preliminary publication of its results. Though these results did not provide the date to confirm Horn's conservative and early dating of the Israelite conquest, they challenged him and his staff with the difficulties faced when attempting to relate archaeological evidence and biblical interpretations. They brought Adventist scholarship face to face with issues that had exercised biblical scholars for years. Horn consciously differed from his mentor, Albright, in such matters as the interpretation of Genesis

1–11 and the validity of the Bible's chronological information.¹³

Fifth, never one to work in isolation, Horn long belonged to a score of professional societies. Regular receipt of their publications and attendance at their meetings kept him in touch with the world of biblical and archaeological scholarship. When he began to frequent the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical literature during his graduate studies, he was sometimes the only Adventist to do so.¹⁴

Other Adventists who studied under Albright and completed their doctorates at Johns Hopkins, such as Alger Johns (formerly at Andrews University, now deceased), Leona Running (Andrews University), Siegfried Schwantes (French Adventist Seminary), and Wilson Bishai (Harvard University), followed Horn into the Society of Biblical Literature. They and others gather 100 strong each year for the Andrews Society of Religious Studies meetings immediately preceding the Society of Biblical Literature's annual meeting.

Horn continued to influence the direction of Adventist biblical scholarship because of the legacy he created. He inspired numerous "successors."¹⁵ Three of his students (Lawrence Geraty and William Shea, now at Andrews; and Larry Herr, SDA Seminary, Far East) went on to Harvard University to study with Albright's students, G. Ernest Wright, Frank M. Cross, and Thomas O. Lambdin. Shea, who has become a prolific writer for scholarly Old Testament journals, plus three more of Horn's students (Kenneth Vine, now at Loma Linda University; Douglas Waterhouse, Andrews University; and Alberto Green, Rutgers) went on to the University of Michigan to study with other Albright students, George E. Mendenhall and David Noel Freedman.

As the first director of the doctoral program at the SDA Theological Seminary, he insured that one strong concentration

would be archaeology and history of antiquity. Now his students who have since joined the Seminary faculty have guided several candidates through dissertations for their doctorates and into denominational teaching posts.¹⁶

Another major influence in Adventist Old Testament scholarship, one which recognizes the importance of archaeology and history, but focuses primarily on Old Testament literature and theology, can be traced to Adventists who have studied at Yale, Union Theological Seminary in New York and Vanderbilt University. Their emphasis on theology can be seen in the writing of Vanderbilt graduates Gerhard Hasel (Andrews University), Niels-Erik Andreasen (Loma Linda University), Jerry Gladson (Southern College), and Doug Clark (Southwestern Adventist College).

As we review the scholarly influence of Siegfried Horn, we must describe it as that of an informed conservative who sees the Bible as God's word to His children everywhere and at all times, but best and most correctly understood when it is seen in its ancient Near Eastern context. This

means that when a detailed and serious examination of the text of Scripture yields more than one possible interpretation (which it frequently does), then all the relevant data from archaeology, history, geography, and the pertinent languages must be taken very seriously. These external data constitute a significant force in influencing and making choices among possible interpretations. In other words, students of the Bible are not free to interpret it—at least with any authority—without the external controls provided by research in the Near East. Approaching the Bible in this contextual manner acknowledges its humanity and integral relationship to the world, while also eliciting respect for its historicity and divine message.

Even though extremists often question the centrist approach, as they did most recently at "Consultation II" in Washington, D.C.,¹⁷ most Adventist Old Testament scholars have remained true to it. Today, thanks to Siegfried Horn and his colleagues, there is academic underpinning for the centrist position on the inspiration of the Bible that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination took a century ago under the prodding of Ellen White.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Membership in Andrews Society for Religious Studies is open to all who pay the fee (U.S. - \$7, overseas - \$9, students - \$5) which entitles one to a newsletter and copies of papers presented at the annual meeting. For more information contact Larry Mitchel, ASRS Secretary/Treasurer, Pacific Union College, Angwin, CA 94508

2. Especially those now found in *1 Selected Messages* 15-23.

3. Adventist Seminary teacher Leona Glidden Running authored (along with D. N. Freedman) the definitive biography of her teacher: (*William Foxwell Albright: A Twentieth-Century Genius* New York: Two Continents Publishing Group, 1975).

4. Pivotal in this transition from the high water mark of literary criticism to a more centrist approach was Albright's *From the Stone Age to*

Christianity, now in a second edition (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957).

5. For more recent advocates of this approach, see L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), or N.B. Stonehouse and Paul Wooley, eds., *The Infallible Word* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Guardian Publishing Corporation, 1946).

6. These German critics were not all bad, of course. For example, Gunkel's form criticism was taken up by Muilenberg and pushed into rhetorical criticism, not unrelated to structural analysis (being used to advantage by Adventists in Genesis and Daniel). And Alt's studies of Israelite law and covenant and of patriarchal religion find echoes in Mendenhall's and Cross' studies of the same topics, again appealed to with profit by Adventists. For

those interested in reading about schools or Old Testament interpretation, see H. F. Hahn, *The Old Testament in Modern Research* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966); H. H. Rowley, *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); R. E. Clements, *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

7. *American Scholar*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring 1938), p. 179.

8. *Christian Century*, Nov. 19, 1958, pp. 1329–1330.

9. Another Adventist Old Testament chronologist with a national reputation is Edwin R. Thiele, longtime Bible teacher at Emmanuel Missionary College and Andrews University, who also received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago (in 1948), his dissertation being published as *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. The chronological system he developed for the Israelite monarchy is still authoritative today; it is often compared and contrasted with that of Albright with whom Thiele had extensive interaction. S. H. Horn points to the importance of both Thiele's and Wood's work for Biblical scholarship in *Ministry*, March 1951, p. 23. Other Adventists who have made important contributions to the elucidating of biblical chronology include Grace Amadon and Julia Neuffer, the latter contributing all of the chronology articles to appear in the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.

10. See Horn's statements in *These Times*, Sept. 1, 1961, p. 26, and March 1972, p. 25.

11. It was on one of his trips to Mesopotamia that Horn discovered a cuneiform tablet (now known officially as the SDA Seminary King List) that became crucial in helping to establish the chronology of the 1st millennium B.C.

12. A spin-off from the Heshbon excavations was Horn's founding of the Archaeological Museum at Andrews University in 1970, to help house the artifacts brought home from the dig. After his retirement in 1976, it was renamed the Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, and its holdings and programs continue to grow.

13. *Ministry*, February 1973, pp. 6–8; *These Times*, July 1959, pp. 4–6.

14. But soon other Adventist students of Albright

joined him. Chief among these were Don F. Neufeld and his *Review and Herald* colleague Raymond F. Cottrell. Both of them left their methodological impact on the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* and on the formation and development of what later came to be called the Biblical Research Institute. For 33 years Cottrell attended every meeting of its predecessors, the Bible Research Fellowship and the Bible Research Committee, endorsing a centrist approach to Scripture interpretation. Through his writings, Neufeld made a major impact on the careful and consistent use of biblical languages in the study of the Bible and on the use of sound hermeneutical principles. Cottrell endorsed Albright's middle-of-the-road stance in a *Review and Herald* editorial, Feb. 28, 1963, p. 14.

15. It is always dangerous to list people by name, for fear of leaving someone out. Nevertheless, many contemporary Adventist Old Testament scholars are mentioned here and later. The criteria are that they have completed doctoral studies in Old Testament and been published.

16. In addition to three students who have finished in this area (Larry Mitchel at Pacific Union College; Lloyd Willis at Spicer Memorial College in India; and Bjornar Storfjell at Andrews University), the program continues to provide many other teacher-scholars in the fields of Biblical and theological studies for the SDA church. Old Testament graduates of the program include Richard Davidson at Andrews University, Jacques Doukhan at Phoenix Adventist College in Mauritius, Arthur Ferch at Avondale College, Angel Rodriguez at Antillian College and Margit Syring at Toivonlinna in Finland.

17. For a convenient discussion of the conference and the issues, see J. R. Spangler, "Why Consultation II?" *Ministry*, February 1982, pp. 26–29. For an example of an extremist Adventist view, see the work of Donovan Courville, *The Exodus Problem*, privately published in 1971, or his more recent proposals in the *Adventist Review*, Aug. 10, 1978, pp. 6–8; Aug. 17, 1978, pp. 7–8.

For an extensive and revealing report on Theological Consultation II, see Alden Thompson's "Theological Consultation II," *SPECTRUM* (December 1981), Vol. 12, No. 2 pp. 40–52.