
The Untold Story of the Bible Commentary

by Raymond F. Cottrell

Seventh-day Adventist study of the Bible came of age with publication of the seven-volume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* in 1953 to 1957. The proof-text method of interpretation used for doctrinal apologetics began to give way to an objective investigation of Scripture using the historical-contextual-linguistic method.

Prior to the *Commentary*, Adventist books about the Bible usually assumed the dogmatic role of a teacher; the *Commentary* chose the more humble role of a student listening intently in order to hear what the Bible has to say. It eschewed a closed mind, naively content with the illusion of already being in possession of all truth, for an open mind in quest of an ever more complete and accurate understanding of Scripture. It recognized and respected alternative interpretations of moot passages of Scripture and, upon occasion, acknowledged the fact that we do not have all of the answers. Its objective was not to get in the last word on every point of interpretation but to encourage and assist readers in reaching their own conclusions. For the *Commentary*, Bible study became a continuing pilgrimage into truth.

The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* became the first publication of the church to deal with the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation in a systematic, expository way. It was the first to base its

comment consistently on the text of the Bible in the original languages instead of an English translation, and first to make consistent use of state-of-the-art archaeological information in an endeavor to recreate the historical circumstances within which each passage was written and to which it was addressed. It was first to make consistent use of variant readings in the ancient manuscripts wherever these clarify a statement or resolve a problem in the text.

Most of the 37 contributors were adequately trained, experienced, dedicated Bible scholars who had been serving the church as college Bible teachers over the preceding 20 years.

The index to Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words considered in the *Commentary* (see Vol. 7, pp. 996-1017) reflects the endeavor of the contributors and the editors to provide as accurate an understanding as possible of the meaning the inspired writers of the Bible intended their words to convey. The exhaustive subject index on pages 1022 to 1167 enables *Commentary* readers to readily locate information on every Bible topic considered in its 7,949 pages. The 34 introductory articles in the seven volumes, together with an introduction to each book of the Bible, were designed to provide a wealth of information on such subjects as historical, chronological and cultural background, and on the writing and interpretation of Scripture—all of vital importance in understanding the Bible. Finally, the *Commentary* gave every church member instant access to the best information Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholars could provide.

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The story begins with two remarkable men, J.D. Snider, who initiated the project, and F.D. Nichol, who carried it through to a successful conclusion. The story of the *Commentary* is basically the story of these two men, and the kind of people they were in large measure explains its success over the past 30 years.

J.D. Snider, Dreamer Extraordinary

The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* germinated in the fecund mind of J.D. Snider (1889-1976), Review and Herald book department manager from 1936 to 1967. "J.D.," as his friends affectionately knew him, was endowed with the rare gift of anticipating books designed to respond to a particular need, of finding the right people to write them, and of inspiring still other creative people to help him translate his dreams into reality. His success was legendary; if J.D. was for a project, it was certain to succeed.

J.D.'s consuming passion during his tenure as book department manager found ingenuous expression in the title of his classic *I Love Books* (1942), which sold a quarter of a million copies and was translated into several languages. His personal library of 25,000 volumes likewise mutely witnessed to the ardor of his lifelong love affair with books, and over his office door the theme of his life was embossed in wood: "Without a love for books, the richest man is poor."

The idea of a Seventh-day Adventist commentary on the Bible took root in J.D.'s thinking as the result of a persistent demand for classical commentaries such as those of Jamieson, Fausett and Brown; Adam Clarke; and Albert Barnes—all of 19th century vintage and not always in harmony with the Adventist understanding of the Bible. He foresaw the value of an up-to-date Adventist commentary to the church and believed it feasible to produce a major work of such

dimensions within a reasonable time and at a viable cost.

Enter Francis D. Nichol

As commander-in-chief of the *Commentary* project, Snider and the Review and Herald board selected Francis D. Nichol, who had served for the preceding 23 years as associate editor and then editor-in-chief of the *Review and Herald* (now the *Adventist Review*). With Nichol's 30 years of editorial experience and authorship of a score of books, several of them requiring painstaking research and accuracy, Snider and the board had good reason to believe that Nichol was the right man for the job and the person most likely to make the project a success. Nichol knew the Bible, was sensitive to the mood and needs of the church, had the sound judgment to make the product both useful and acceptable to a church sensitive on doctrinal matters, and he enjoyed the confidence of all whose participation would be necessary in order to transform the idea into reality.

Nichol accepted the challenge of the *Bible Commentary* in addition to his full-time job as editor of the *Review*, and gave both of them his formidable thought and drive at the rate of 12 to 15 hours a day, six days a week, for six years. He had the dubious reputation of running a marathon race at the pace of a hundred-yard dash. He was at his desk by four-thirty every morning and expected the same of his editorial associates on the *Commentary*. He usually worked evenings as well, and often Saturday nights.

With his consummate editorial skill Nichol was ever aware of the limits of his knowledge and relied heavily on the expertise of others in their respective fields of competence. He often referred to his editorial role as that of "a broker of other men's brains."

As editor of the *Review*—a post of responsibility and influence usually considered to be second only to the General Conference president—Nichol had a high sense of edi-

torial prerogative and responsibility, which he often reverently remarked he had learned from his illustrious predecessor, F.M. Wilcox. He listened intently to everyone, and when he recognized a valid point he incorporated it into his decision making. But on more than one occasion he said to me: "No one, not even the president of the General Conference, can tell me what goes into the *Review* or what does not. Of course, they can have me fired if I make an irresponsible decision."

The Commentary Team

In consultation with teachers at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and a few trusted friends, Elder Nichol assembled members of the *Commentary* team. The full-time team consisted of Don F. Neufeld and Raymond F. Cottrell, associate editors, and Julia Neuffer, assistant editor. There were, as well, six part-time editors—making a total of ten. The major prerequisite was expertise in Hebrew and Greek; as for editorial skills, Nichol would provide on-the-job training.

Julia Neuffer was already established as the *Review*'s research specialist. She had majored in archaeology and Near Eastern antiquity at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and since the late 1940s had worked in close association with Lynn H. Wood and later Siegfried H. Horn on an ad hoc committee of the General Conference on the chronology of Ezra 7. Upon the recommendation of Dr. Horn she was chosen by Elder Nichol to write the chronology articles for Volumes 1 to 3 and 5 of the *Commentary*. Her chief concern was matters of factual detail, for which she was often sent to the Library of Congress. Her penchant for accuracy was notorious.

At the time Nichol called me to join him at the *Review* and *Herald*, I was teaching biblical exegesis at Pacific Union College, where my wife, Elizabeth, and I had been

for 11 years. We arrived in Takoma Park late in September 1952, and began work on the *Commentary* the first day of October. During those five years I invested more than 15,000 hours in concentrated study of every verse of the Bible. At the conclusion of work on the *Commentary* and the retirement of Frederick Lee in 1957, Elder Nichol invited me to join the *Review* staff as an associate editor.

Early in 1953 Elder Nichol invited Don F. Neufeld, head of the Bible department at Canadian Union College, to join our team. He arrived with his wife Maxine and their family in June, at the close of the school year. Don was an expert in Hebrew and Greek, and over the years he made his own translation of several books of both the Old and New Testaments. He was painstakingly careful and accurate in his explication of the Bible, eminently logical in his reasoning

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Never having met each other before the *Commentary* brought us together, Don and I had independently formulated identical principles of exegesis, and from time to time each of us felt constrained to express happy surprise at finding the other following the same principles. This not only made our work together congenial, but resulted in a much more uniform product than would otherwise have been possible. Of course we

both followed the linguistic-contextual-historical method, but even more to our mutual surprise, identical principles in the interpretation of Bible prophecy.

Our auxiliary editorial team consisted of Leona Running, Earle Hilgert, Alger Johns, Herbert Douglass, Bernard Seton and James Cox, who participated variously from a few months to as much as two years. The first two were teachers at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary; the others were graduate students recommended by the Seminary faculty. Leona Running and Alger Johns were simultaneously studying with William Foxwell Albright at Johns Hopkins University in nearby Baltimore.

In any exposition of the Old Testament, an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of archaeology and ancient history is vital. Though not formally a member of the *Commentary* team, Dr. Siegfried H. Horn, recognized by his fellow archaeologists as unexcelled in his field, provided that expertise—both in the planning stage and throughout the editorial process. In addition, he wrote 929 pages of the *Commentary*—more than any other contributor.

The Writers and the Writing

For writers, Elder Nichol logically turned to the Bible teachers in our North American colleges and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. He visited each campus, interviewing candidates and exploring their areas of expertise, interest and willingness to participate. Later he made specific assignments, stipulated the number of pages for each and set up mutually agreeable target dates. Each writer received a formal contract that promised the munificent sum of one dollar per manuscript page—scarcely enough to pay for typing the manuscript! The privilege of participating in the project was, presumably, to be a writer's principal reward.

Elder Nichol's aspirations for the *Commen-*

tary are reflected in the ten pages of his "Instructions to Commentary Writers." "First and most importantly," he wrote, it is to be "exegetical"; where appropriate it could also be "homiletical." It was to provide Seventh-day Adventists with "a work

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free of . . . doctrinal errors" and with "emphasis and elaboration" in "those areas of Scripture that are the basis of distinctive Adventist belief." It was not "to crystallize once and for all a dogmatic interpretation" of the Bible, nor to "give sanctuary or support to the pet theories of any individual" or to be "speculative." By avoiding technical theological jargon it was to be "at once learned and simple": "It isn't necessary to use ten dollar words in order to express ten dollar thoughts." It was to take full advantage of the insight into the meaning Hebrew and Greek words provide, but without making a fetish of them. It was to be written for ministers, Bible instructors, Sabbath school teachers, local elders, missionary-minded lay persons and those who "have a special love for the Bible and who wish to study it with greater thoroughness."

The most often expressed criticism of the *Commentary* has been Nichol's listing of all authors without specifying what each wrote. The instructions contained an extended section on the "Anonymity of Writers" in which Nichol explained the reasons for this intentional omission. He felt that since the

manuscripts required fairly extensive revision to achieve the uniform style necessary for a Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary, they could not be used as vehicles for personal opinions. To protect individual writers from criticism, even on points where the writers and editors might agree, the editors assumed full responsibility for content, although names of the 37 contributors of all seven volumes appear in each volume. Thirty years later these fears no longer seem justified. The accompanying list of authors should be read with the reservation in mind that opinions expressed in the *Commentary* reflect the consensus of the editors and not necessarily always the opinions of the original writers.

The Editorial Process

The manuscripts varied considerably in quality, and thus in the time required to process them for typesetting. Some, such as those by Siegfried Horn and Graham Maxwell, required little or no editing. Others had to be revised or completely rewritten. In some instances the

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manuscript consisted essentially of the teacher's classroom notes—excellent for use in lectures but impossible as commentary material. In several instances the manuscripts consisted primarily of generalities and homily, with little or no exegesis. In some instances excellent scholars simply

proved to be poor writers. It was the task of the associate editors to remedy these and numerous other defects and to unify the style. Elder Nichol then evaluated the work and made the final decision regarding what the *Commentary* would say, verse by verse.

What should the editors do when they discover that one of the contributors had had his secretary type Albert Barnes' commentary for an entire book of the Bible, word for word from beginning to end, and submitted this as his contribution to the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*? Nichol's solution was to say nothing, pay the stipulated fee, file the document in his circular file, and secure a pinch-hit writer. Understandably, the name of the former writer does not appear among the contributors.

What should the editors do when comment on a major book of the the Bible is completely unusable? In this case the writer was suffering the later stages of a terminal disease, yet his high sense of loyalty and responsibility led him to do his best to fulfill his contract. He was paid, of course, but the three editors who wrote what appears in the *Commentary* were unable to use any of his material. In this instance there was not time to secure another writer.

What should the editors do when a major manuscript is three years late and the time is fast approaching when it must be processed in order to keep the project on schedule? Nichol asked his associates to suggest a substitute writer who might be persuaded to fulfill the assignment—almost overnight. The long-delayed document came in the mail a day or two later and proved to be one of the best-written contributions to the *Commentary*.

Inasmuch as this was to be a Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary, we considered it appropriate, always, to take note of historic Adventist interpretations of a passage. Where two or more interpretations have been held by a significant number of responsible persons within the church, it was our purpose to represent all of them fairly, but to favor an interpretation on

which an informed consensus had crystallized. As editors we did not consider it appropriate to use the *Commentary* as a vehicle in which to promote our personal opinions or those of anyone else. In instances where our collective judgment could not conscientiously support a particular traditionally held interpretation, we sought in an inoffensive way to present the evidence and give the reader an opportunity to make up his or her own mind. At times the expression "Seventh-day Adventists have taught that. . ." or its equivalent was our ironic way of expressing collective editorial judgment that the interpretation so characterized is not exegetically valid. Accurate exegesis was our primary concern.

A little more than halfway through, Nichol figured that the editorial process alone required 11,025 work-hours for each volume, or a total of 77,175 for all seven. For one person to do all of the writing and the editing, nearly 100 years would have been necessary. By enlisting the help of 37 writers, an editorial team consisting of three full-time

and six part-time editors, copy editors, and more than 100 non-editorial readers, Nichol was able to compress the work of a century into five or six years—with a high level of accuracy. In a letter to contributors in August 1955 he wrote:

It is becoming increasingly evident to us that the very nature of this work, which must make a cohesive whole of all that is written. . . demands a tremendous amount of work upon the original manuscripts. This is in no way a disparagement of the authors. . . . This heavy total of editorial hours explains, in part, why it is possible to bring out ponderous volumes at a rather rapid rate and still produce works of prime value.

But, for Elder Nichol, quality was even more important than time: The *Commentary* must be as nearly perfect in every respect as possible—biblically, theologically, factually, typographically and stylistically. Accuracy and speed are not usually altogether compatible, but operate in inverse proportion to each other. Nichol demanded both. In order to provide the *Commentary* with both, he set up an elaborate system designed to ferret out every possible type of

“A Day for Toil, an Hour for Sport”

Despite its harrowing pace, the *Commentary* project had its lighter moments. Goading himself beyond mercy and insisting that everyone who worked with him go and do likewise, Elder Nichol, a man of fabulous vitality, lived three lives during his 69 years. He was a man of compassion and great spirit who could always relate a humorous anecdote to get his point across. With his quick repartee, Elder Nichol was almost never caught speechless. Only twice during the 14 years I was associated with him did I ever see him in that uncomfortable state, and even then only for a fleeting moment.

The first such occasion took place in Tampa, Florida, where he and his wife, Rose, were sequestered, on doctor's orders, for eight weeks during the early months of 1955. He was virtually exhausted, and the prescription was complete rest with no phones ringing, no one knocking, no letters to answer, no galleys to read, and perhaps most important of all, no bothersome associate editors plying him with questions.

No one in Takoma Park knew his whereabouts, except that he was somewhere in sun-drenched Florida. He would call occasionally and crack his taskmaster's lash by long distance, but we could never call him. We were on our own.

After several weeks of relative solitude we (Don; Merwin Thurber, chief book editor; and I) plotted to locate and surprise Elder Nichol. As we departed one snowy Thursday at twilight and drove in shifts all night long, we knew nothing more than that they were somewhere in Florida. Arriving in Orlando, Winter Haven and Avon Park, erstwhile Nichol hideouts, we found no one who had seen him. Then word leaked out. A phone call to Takoma Park revealed that Nichol's secretary, who was in on our little plot, had received a post card from Mrs. Nichol with a picture of their Tampa motel. We headed for Tampa in hot pursuit, only to find the Nichols out for the day. But they were still registered at the little motel on the fringe of town. After a dip in the warm waters of the Gulf off Treasure Island, we returned to the motel where a familiar car with Maryland

error or shortcoming before the presses began to turn. By the time manuscript copy was made into plates for printing, 22 pairs of eyes had read every word of every line in the endeavor to make the resulting product as perfect as humanly possible.

Theological Booby Traps and Roadblocks

From beginning to end the editorial process seemed to be loaded with booby traps of various kinds which, if carelessly handled, could have been the source of real problems for the editors. The very first words of the Bible—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—held us up at an editorial roadblock for three weeks, and Elder Nichol began to wonder out loud when, if ever, we would reach our destination of Revelation 22:20. Comment was written and rewritten, edited and re-edited, typeset and reset.

license plates was parked. Armed with a camera, we knocked. As our victim opened the door we shot, point blank, and in the roseate rays of the setting sun, we caught the look of consternation we were looking for. In a sepulchral tone he exclaimed, "By the beard of the prophet! What are you fellows doing here?"

Invited in, we sat and visited with Mrs. Nichol while they finished their supper of fresh Florida strawberries. For at least 15 minutes Nichol himself remained speechless, trying by extrasensory perception to figure out how we had been able to follow him to his lair. Finally he blurted out in a mock self-defense, "I know how you found out. You ploughed my heifer." By process of elimination he concluded his wife must be guilty, however innocent her faux pas had been. We soon excused ourselves, mission accomplished, and set out for home through the night. Nichol was greatly distressed by the fact that we were all traveling together in one car, not so much for our sakes as that of the *Commentary*. What would happen to it if we were all killed in an accident?

Another practical joke we played on Elder Nichol was upon the occasion of his 60th birthday, a few months before completion of the project in the autumn of 1957. Scheming together and including

An entirely different exegetical ambush awaited us at Genesis 30:37 to 31:12, where Jacob informs Laban that God devised the procedure by which he had been able to acquire most of Laban's flocks and herds. As described, however, the strategy was based on two genetic impossibilities—prenatal influence of the kind here described and the transmission of acquired characteristics. The former qualifies as superstition, the latter as science fiction (see Genesis 30:37; cf. 31:4-12). Did God overrule the laws of genetics and let Jacob believe that the procedure produced the result he claimed for it, or was it a ploy Jacob invented to awe Laban into believing that God had directed him to perform? The result was clear, but it is obvious to us today that the conception of spotted and speckled cattle was not the result of the procedure to which Jacob attributed it. In addition to the genetic problems involved is the ethical question: Would God deceive Jacob into thinking that the procedure produced the result, and would He connive with Jacob to

most of the editorial staff, we plotted a surprise birthday party just before closing time. Don and I contrived a fake radio broadcast, ostensibly over one of the local radio stations, in honor of the occasion. I wrote the script in a broadcast format featuring famous Washingtonians, we had some unfamiliar voices make the recording, and Don arranged to play the tape through a small radio on his desk. To get Elder Nichol's foot firmly in the trap we inveigled Siegfried Horn, our authority on antiquities, to come over from the Seminary to help us resolve a hypothetical question on which we would summon Elder Nichol for counsel.

Arriving in the *Commentary* office Nichol found us editors hard at work and Dr. Horn awaiting his arrival. As Horn began to expound the problem, Neufeld surreptitiously turned on his radio in time for a prerecorded station identification, followed immediately by a sugary eulogy of Nichol as a great Washington celebrity to be honored on the occasion of his 60th birthday. It sounded fabulously genuine. Despite the fact that his intuition told him it couldn't be so, his senses told him that it was so, and Byron Logan's official camera captured both reactions on his face at the same moment. And as the band played on, a large birthday cake was cut and punch flowed freely.

the disadvantage of Laban as the Bible implies?

Another type of problem lurked in Leviticus 11. The identity of a third of the Hebrew names of animals listed as unclean is unknown today, and any attempt at identifying them with known animals is guesswork. How could we comment intelligently (see Leviticus 11:2)? Again, how was the *Commentary* to reconcile the instruction of Deuteronomy 14:22-26—about spending one's tithe for wine, strong drink and whatever a person might lust for—with the Bible admonition that the tithe is sacred and that intoxicating substances are evil?

The so-called "wisdom literature" presented a number of perplexing problems. The book of Ecclesiastes confronted us with the need to determine whether some statements should be considered as inspired or as a reflection of the cynical, perverted reasoning of the writer's wayward, apostate years (see Vol. 3, p. 1060). Also, how did the amorous, erotic Song of Solomon get into the sacred canon? Is it historical or allegorical? Made into a motion picture it would earn an "X" rating, and if offered for sale on 42nd Street in New York City we would consider it pornographic (see Vol. 3, pp. 1110, 1111).

The Old Testament prophets are loaded with booby traps for the inexperienced and unwary. While we were editing Volume 4, I suggested to Elder Nichol that a discussion of principles for interpreting Old Testament predictive prophecy would be desirable. With his blessing, I wrote the article, "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy" (Vol. 4, pp. 25-38), which affirms that the predictive prophecies of the Old Testament were originally addressed to literal Israel under the covenant and were to have been fulfilled to them had they remained faithful to their covenant obligations and accepted the Messiah when he came.

Prior to editing the comment on Daniel, both Don and I thought of the book of

Daniel as an exception to this otherwise universal rule, but editing the comment on Daniel convinced both of us—contrary to our previous opinion—that this principle applies to the book of Daniel as well. Elder Nichol's overriding pastoral concern, however, led him to insert the parenthetical caveat on page 38 exempting "the book of Daniel that the prophet was bidden to 'shut up' and 'seal,' or to other passages whose application Inspiration may have limited exclusively to our time." This was one of only two or three occasions when Elder Nichol exercised his prerogative as editor-in-chief to override our editorial judgment.

Aware of the problems associated with the traditional interpretation of passages in Daniel and the Revelation, and of the experience of the church in attempting to deal with them, Don and I repeatedly spoke to

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each other of being, like Daniel, "astounded by the space of half an hour" and like Paul of spending "a day and a night in the deep." But we did not think the *Commentary* was the right place to make an issue of matters not essential to salvation, and our own pastoral concern led us to do the best we could with the traditional interpretation. Upon one occasion when certain questions were addressed to Elder Nichol in a public meeting, he replied that the *Commentary* would not deal with these matters, and he did not expect to be around when the church was ready to tackle them.

The synoptic problem—the literary relationship of Matthew, Mark and Luke—has

never been resolved to everyone's complete satisfaction. If modern literary documents made use of each other as the synoptic Gospels do we would consider it a clear case of gross plagiarism and a valid basis for indicting two of them as infringements of copyright. Ninety percent of Mark is reproduced in Matthew and Luke, often word for word, and both Matthew and Luke make extensive use of still another, unknown source. A more practical aspect of the problem was whether to comment at length on the same incident wherever it occurs in all three, or in only one of them, and if so which one (see Vol. 5, p. 194)?

It is not possible to determine the precise sequence of events in the ministry of Jesus. What principles should we follow in constructing a harmony of the Gospels, which inevitably involves arranging the events of Christ's life on earth in particular sequence? Furthermore, there is no clear evidence in the Gospels to indicate the length of Christ's ministry; commentators vary all the way from three and a half years to one year (see Vol. 5, pp. 190-201). Despite all statements to the contrary, there is no unambiguous evidence for the date of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, nor has anyone been able to harmonize the information the four Gospels provide as to when the Last Supper took place. Lurking in the background of this dilemma is the fact that the date of the crucifixion is the anchor point that led to selection of 457 B.C. as the beginning date for 2300 days of Daniel 8:14, yet any suggested date for the crucifixion is arbitrary guesswork (see Vol. 5, pp. 247-266).

Often Don and I would spend an hour or two, or sometimes—on an important point—a day or more, exploring the problem together in order to arrive at a considered decision as to what the *Commentary* should say on a particular passage of Scripture. Upon one occasion we proposed to Elder Nichol that a weekend retreat for the *Commentary* editors should be devoted to the subject of prophetic fulfillment, the relation of Old Testament prophecy to the New Testament,

the "little apocalypse" of Matthew 24 (including "this generation"), and the imminence of the *parousia* ("presence" or "coming") of Christ clearly expressed throughout the New Testament. Meeting at the large Milesburn cabin beside the Appalachian Trail in Micheaux Forest about 30 miles west of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, we devoted several hours to a discussion of the various issues and found our way through to the position to be taken on these matters.

Aware of the periodic theological hurricanes that brew in Australia and eventually reach North America, I suggested to Elder Nichol that we might do well to give our Australian brethren an opportunity to read galley proofs on the book of Hebrews. I suspected that some of them would take vigorous exception to some of the comments we as editors had already agreed on, and that it would be preferable to obtain their responses before publication rather than after. He agreed, and a few days later we met with some of the Australian leaders who were in Washington for meetings.

Members of the editorial team were familiar with the principles of textual criticism, as it is called, and in writing and editing the New Testament commentaries we examined several thousand variant readings and selected those we considered deserving of attention. Periodically we would confer in the capacity of a textual criticism seminar and reach a consensus on the weight to be given each variant to be mentioned in the *Commentary*. (See Vol. 5, pp. 146, 147, for an explanation of the system we devised for expressing the weight of evidence for a particular reading. Interestingly, the system later adopted by the editors of the Bible Society *Greek New Testament* was very similar to ours. See their introduction, pp. x and xi.)

What should an editor do with "proof texts" that inherently do not prove what is traditionally attributed to them—as, for example, Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6; Revelation 12:17 and 19:10; Daniel 12:4;

Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:1, 2; and most of the texts usually cited with respect to “the law”? In most of these and a number of other passages, pastoral concern led us to conclude that the *Commentary* was not the place to make an issue of the Bible versus the traditional interpretation, much as this disappointed us as Bible scholars and would be a disappointment to our scholarly friends who know better.

Ellen G. White and the Bible

One of Elder Nichol's basic requirements was that the *Commentary* should at no point express any concept that could be construed as a contradiction of the writings of Ellen White. We were, of course, familiar with her published works, but nevertheless kept one editorial eye fixed on the Conflict of the Ages series, which parallels the Bible account. In addition, we asked the various readers of galleys and foundry proofs to call our attention to any items we as editors might have missed.

It was not long before we discovered that Ellen White sometimes construes a passage to mean something different from what the original context requires; we also discovered why she does so.

First and foremost we were to be faithful to the Bible, but in so doing we could avoid comment that might appear to contradict comment by Ellen White. Generally speaking, references to her writings in the body of the comment are inserted, not as authority for the statements made, but in confirmation or for comparison.

It was not long before we discovered that Ellen White sometimes construes a passage to mean something different from what the

original context requires; we also discovered why she does so. When dealing with a passage in its historical context—as throughout the Conflict series—she consistently deals with it contextually and her comment comports with the Bible. But when her primary objective is homiletical application of a passage to our time she often quotes the Bible out of context, applying the principle involved but in a way that seems to contradict the Bible. In such instances she uses the Bible to *illustrate* her point, not to exegete the Bible. New Testament writers often quote the Old Testament in the same way. Exegetical and homiletical uses of Scripture are both legitimate, but it is a gross misuse of Scripture to construe their—or her—homily as exegesis.

A prime illustration of Ellen White's homiletical use of Scripture is her comment on “the law” in the book of Galatians. In *Acts of the Apostles*, where she deals with the historical situation in Galatia, she consistently identifies “the law” as the ceremonial system—accurate exegesis. But when, as in *Selected Messages* (pp. 233, 234), she applies the principle of legalism to our day she identifies “the law” as the Decalogue—homily. In effect she is saying that we can no more be saved today by keeping the law than the Galatian believers could be saved by observing the ceremonial law; now, as then, salvation is by faith alone.

Something the same is true of Ellen White's application of Old Testament predictions that originally applied to Israel of old, and to the closing events of earth's history. According to Nahum 1:9 for instance, affliction would not arise again from Assyria. Ellen White applies the statement to the ultimate end of all evil in a universal sense (as in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 485, 612; and Exodus 12:37 cf. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 334). Sometimes she bases her comment on a wrong meaning of an English word (as in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 cf. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 686).

An Exhaustive Climax to an Exhaustive Project

The exhaustive index to the seven volumes of the *Bible Commentary* (Vol. 7, pp. 1022-1167) was the last of our 12 herculean labors. None of us had any formal training or experience in compiling an index of these proportions, but realizing the need for a good index and the fact that the compilation of one requires special expertise, Nichol sent Julia Neuffer, assistant editor of the *Commentary* and research specialist, for a course in indexing at nearby Catholic University of America. She thus became our authority for index content, style and clarity, as she had been our authority on so many other things essential to the project. Her favorite illustration of poor indexing was a series of "see" references which sent the hapless reader on a wild goose chase that eventually led him back to the original entry without locating the information he sought: (1) Wild goose chase. *See* Chase, wild goose. (2) Chase, wild goose. *See* Goose chase, wild. (3) Goose chase, wild. *See* Wild goose chase.

As I read page proofs for the seven volumes, I had been blue-penciling items to be indexed. Each entry was typed on a separate three-by-five card, and all of the cards were classified and alphabetized. Eventually our *Commentary* office was cluttered with boxes containing thousands upon thousands of cards. Inasmuch as the index had to include Volume 7 itself, in which it was to appear, final preparation of the index could not begin until we had read the last proof and filed the last entry card.

Climaxing his courtship with the *Commentary* for more than seven years, J.D. Snider insisted that Volume 7, and thus the complete *Commentary* set, be ready for the 1957 Christmas trade, and when page proofs for Volume 7 were finally in hand, read and indexed, the seven furies took control of the *Commentary* office and pandemonium prevailed. Fourteen of us (editors, copy edi-

tors and proofreaders) literally worked around the clock shift by shift, day after day, for ten days to complete the process of transforming the thousands of card entries into the index as it appears in Volume 7. Work halted about ten minutes before sundown Friday night and began again ten minutes after sundown Saturday night. By the close of those ten days we had produced an exhaustive index, and we ourselves were exhausted.

Why Did It Succeed?

The ultimate measure of the *Commentary's* success is the extent to which it illumines the Bible for those who aspire to a better understanding of Scripture. This cannot be measured directly, of course, but there are a number of indirect means including, chiefly, the response of the church in purchasing it and how often it is quoted in other church publications such as the Sabbath school *Lesson Quarterly*.

During the 1950s and 1960s the open theological climate in the church was favorable to the honest way in which the *Commentary* editors, in their dedication first to the Bible and then to the church, sought to deal with the Bible and with the teachings of the church in relation to the Bible.

From the publisher's point of view the best estimate of success is the sales report. It was originally hoped that 5,000 sets could be sold within three years of the time the last volume was off the press, and with that in view the original printing order for Volume

1 was 5,160. But even before Volume 7 was ready 23,000 sets had been purchased at the prepublication price of \$55.65 for the seven volumes. By the close of 1984 more than 83,000 complete sets had been sold, the current price being \$174.50. Were J.D. Snider alive he would have good reason to be jubilant.

Although the *Commentary* was not intended for reading like an ordinary book, a surprising number of people have told me of reading every word of it from beginning to end!

One of Elder Nichol's important goals was to make the *Commentary* acceptable to the church. Thirty years without complaint about its consensus understanding of the Bible is strong evidence that the church feels comfortable with the *Commentary*. This is not to suggest that everyone agrees with it at every point or that the *Commentary* is without flaw; even the editors did not personally approve of every concept it expresses. It does mean, however, that the church accepts it and identifies with it. The fact that the *Commentary* respects differences of opinion is doubtless an important factor in its acceptance. That Adventist Bible scholars, who realize that the traditional Adventist understanding of the Bible has not always been strictly biblical, also feel reasonably comfortable with the *Commentary* and find it useful, is another measure of its success. Six key factors were responsible for this success:

1. J.D. Snider's vision—his awareness of the need for an Adventist Bible commentary, together with his belief that the church was ready for it, that Adventist Bible scholars could and would write it, and that the Review and Herald could publish and market it at a price sufficient to cover the cost of production. "J.D." was the only person at the time who had that vision and was in a position to implement it, and his vision proved to be correct at every point.

2. F.D. Nichol's editorial expertise. He was probably one of a very few persons in the church at the time who combined all of the qualities essential to planning and executing the project: editorial experience, a concept of what the *Commentary* should be, sensitive awareness of the thinking and the mood of the church and its

leaders, open-mindedness and willingness to respect points of view with which he differed, appreciation of scholarship and a penetrating analysis of other people's reasoning, the high esteem in which he was held by the entire church, including its leaders and the contributors, an almost fanatical penchant for accuracy, and a passionate drive to carry the project through to completion within a relatively brief period of time.

3. The willingness of the publisher to venture a quarter of a million dollars, which eventually became half a million "initial expense" (the cost before the presses begin to turn), and the dedication of Review and Herald personnel to the project.

4. The content—the labors of the contributors and the editors to make the *Commentary* faithful to the Bible and to the Adventist understanding of Scripture.

5. The dedication of the church at large to the Bible and the value its members place on a better understanding of it.

6. The openness of the church at the time the *Commentary* was written and published. During the 1950s and 1960s the theological climate in the church was favorable to the honest way in which the *Commentary* editors, in their dedication first to the Bible and then to the church, sought to deal with the Bible and with the teachings of the church in relation to the Bible.

The *Commentary* was strictly a publishing-house project with the blessing of the General Conference. The Review and Herald Publishing Association accepted both financial and theological responsibility. In other words, the project was unofficial, with credit for success or blame for failure going to the publisher and not to the General Conference. This arrangement protected the General Conference from criticism in case the *Commentary* posed either a financial or theological problem. Had the project been sponsored and controlled by the General Conference, the *Commentary* would inevitably have taken a dogmatic, apologetic position on points of exegesis and interpretation where differences of opinion existed; this would have alienated the respect of many and limited the *Commentary's* value and usefulness. Without training and expertise in biblical and theological matters, administrators would have found themselves in the embarrassing position of having to make decisions they were not competent to make. The fact that the publisher, with its Bible-

scholar editors, made these decisions and accepted responsibility for them protected the General Conference in case errors of judgment were made, errors for which it could then disavow responsibility.

Long-term Influence

Though not by design on the part of those who convened it, the 1952 Bible Conference opened the door to a 15-year climate of openness and freedom to study the Bible objectively rather than apologetically, during which the church made rapid progress in its understanding of the Scripture. Elder Nichol often commented that except for the 1952 Bible Conference it would not have been possible to produce the *Commentary* because the editors could not have operated with sufficient freedom to make it objective and therefore worthwhile. In turn, the *Commentary* consolidated the openness and freedom that began in 1952 and continued for several years.

As a result of this climate of openness and freedom it was possible to build into the *Commentary* advanced principles of Bible study that set the *Commentary* free from the outmoded proof-text method of study. These advanced principles make the Scriptures in the original languages, the ancient manuscripts, the context in which a statement occurs, and the historical setting normative for its meaning. The purpose of this method of study is to ascertain what the inspired writers, guided by the Holy Spirit, intended their words to mean, and thus to give the Bible an opportunity to interpret itself. It avoids the common proof-text method of reading into the Bible whatever the would-be interpreter may imagine it means.

Inevitably, the editors found that certain passages of Scripture, taken in context, do not support the traditional proof-text con-

cepts usually attributed to them. As editors we would have been unfaithful to the Bible if we had not set forth what we conscientiously believed to be the true meaning of a passage. At the same time, with appropriate pastoral concern, we included the traditional interpretation, and were thus able in most instances to be faithful to the Bible and at the same time recognize a historic Adventist position. By offering more than one interpretation of a passage we made clear to *Commentary* readers that we were not freezing Adventist theology into a creed, despite fears in some quarters that we would attempt to do so. We realized also that some church members, used to the dogmatic, proof-text approach, would feel uncomfortable and threatened by the openness of the *Commentary*, but we believed that in time the church would come to appreciate the virtues of openness and that our endeavor to be faithful to the text of Scripture would have a corrective effect.

Publication of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* was an epochal event in the history of the church, one whose full import is yet to be perceived. With the clearer and more complete understanding of the Bible reflected in the *Commentary* as a basis, together with continuing study of the Bible by sound principles, competent Adventist Bible scholars of a future generation will be able to improve on what we were able to do.

Editors' note: Significant revisions of a few general articles in the first edition of the SDA Bible Commentary were completed in 1976. Begun by Ray Cottrell, the revisions were completed under Ray Woolsey's supervision. Geoscience Institute staff—primarily Ariel Roth—revised the articles in Volume 1 on Creation and the flood. (See W. W. Hughes' "Shifts in Adventist Creationism," in *Spectrum*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 47-50.) The section on lower criticism or editing of biblical manuscripts was rewritten for the article on "Lower and Higher Criticism" in Volume 5. Historical maps in Volume 7 were revised when Rand McNally acknowledged errors unnoticed for decades in their depiction of places in Egypt and the Niger Desert. Rand McNally thanked Julia Neuffer, assistant editor of the first edition, for bringing the needed corrections to their attention. Throughout the seven volumes, metric measurements were added to English measurements, and where necessary, values of coins were compared to wages of their day instead of to the fluctuating value of the dollar.

Appendix

Index to the Commentary

In the indexes that follow, contributors to the Commentary are listed with their works. Employing institutions, where noted, are shown in parentheses (see key). Number of pages shown in parentheses represent total number of pages contributed. This figure includes maps and charts not provided by the respective authors and the text of the Bible (KJV) for each chapter.

It is important to remember that all manuscripts were edited and that the editors accepted full responsibility for all contributions in their final form. The point of view set forth may or may not reflect the opinion of the author whose name is listed for a particular article or book of the Bible.

Key: AUC = Atlantic Union College; CME = College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University); CUC = Canadian Union College; EMC = Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University); FC = Florida Conference; GC = General Conference; HC = Helderberg College; LSC = La Sierra College (now Loma Linda University); PUC = Pacific Union College; R = Retired; R&H = Review and Herald Publishing Association; SMC = Southern Missionary College (now Southern College); TS = Theological Seminary (now Andrews University); WMC = Washington Missionary College (now Columbia Union College).

Author Index

Andreasen, M.L.¹ (TS)

Leviticus, Hebrews (221 pages)

Caviness, L.L. (PUC)

Esther, Song of Solomon

Christensen, O.H. (EMC)

Joshua (130 pages)

Cottrell, R.F.² (PUC)

Synoptic Gospels, John 1-4
4: The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy
5: The Fourfold Gospel Narrative; Major English Translations (712 pages)

Froom, L.E.³ (TS)

4: Interpretation of Daniel
7: Interpretation of the Apocalypse (69 pages)

Hammill, R. (SMC)

Judges (120 pages)

Hardinge, L. (WMC)

Colossians (37 pages)

Hartin, L.H. (PUC)

Galatians (60 pages)

Hartwell, R.H.⁴ (FC)

7: John and the Isle of Patmos (6 pages)

Heppenstall, E.E. (LSC)

2 Corinthians (107 pages)

Hilgert, E. (TS)

Jeremiah 46-52, Lamentations, Daniel 10-12, John 5-6, Revelation 1-11
5: "Lower" and "Higher" Biblical Criticism, Chronology of the Pauline Epistles (230 pages)

Horn, S.H. (TS)

Genesis, Exodus 1-18, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel 1, 3-6
1: Languages, Manuscripts, and Canon of the Old Testament; Archeology and the Recovery of Ancient History; Historical Background of the Patriarchal Period; Daily Life in the Patriarchal Age; Weights, Measures, and Money Values in the Old Testament
2: Ancient World From c. 1400 to 586 B.C.
3: Musical Instruments of the Ancient Hebrews; Ancient World From 586 to 400 B.C.; Tables of Elephantine and Jewish Papyri
4: Chronology of the Old Testament Prophets
5: Ancient Jewish Literature; "Lower" and "Higher" Biblical Criticism
6: Chronology of the Acts
7: The Seven Churches of Revelation (929 pages)

Hyde, W.T. (PUC)

Proverbs, 1-3 John, Jude (133 pages)

Jemison, T.H. (WMC)

Philippians (44 pages)

Johns, A.F.⁵ (LSC)

James (47 pages)

Loasby, R.E. (TS)

Numbers, Deuteronomy, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, 1-2 Peter, Revelation 17-22
1: Names of God in the Old Testament (451 pages)

Ludgate, T.K. (HC)

1 Corinthians (164 pages)

Marsh, F.L. (EMC)

1: Science and Creation (24 pages)

Maxwell, A.G. (PUC)
Romans (186 pages)

McMurphy, E.J. (SMC)
Titus, Philemon (28 pages)

Minchin, G.H. (AUC)
Ephesians (55 pages)

Murdoch, W.G.C. (TS)
Psalms 107-150, Daniel 2, 7-9 (121 pages)

Neufeld, D.F.⁶ (CUC)
Ezekiel, John 7-21 (272 pages)

Neuffer, J. (R&H)
1: Chronology of Early Bible History
2: Hebrew Calendar in Old Testament Times;
Chronology from the Exodus to the Exile
(a compilation)
3: Chronology of Exile and Restoration
5: A Basis for New Testament Chronology
(212 pages)

Pease, N.F. (CME)
Job (120 pages)

Price, G.M.⁷ (R)
Evidences of a Worldwide Flood (28 pages)

Read, W.E.⁸ (GC)
Revelation 12-16 (42 pages)

Smith, C.O. (AUC)
1-2 Thessalonians (58 pages)

Specht, W.F. (LSC)
Jeremiah 1-10 (61 pages)

Thiele, E.R. (EMC)
2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Isaiah
(845 pages)

Thurber, M.R.⁹ (R&H)
1: Outline of Sanctuary Service (13 pages)

Walther, D.¹⁰ (TS)
7: Reformation and Onward (39 pages)

Wearner, A.J.¹¹ (UC)
John (see note)

Weniger, C.E. (TS)
Psalms 1-106
3: Poetry of the Bible (269 pages)

Wirth, W.G. (CME)
Exodus 19-40, Jeremiah 11-45, Minor
Prophets, 1-2 Timothy (470 pages)

Wood, L.H.¹² (TS)
1 Samuel
1-7: All art maps
5: Between the Testaments (278 pages)

Yost, F.H.¹³ (TS)
Acts
5: Jews of the First Christian Century
6: Early Christian Church
7: Medieval Church (495 pages)

NOTES ON AUTHORS

1. Andreasen, a veteran teacher at the Seminary, had recently retired.

2. Cottrell was teaching biblical exegesis at Pacific Union College at the time assignments were made, and moved to Washington, D.C., to edit the *Commentary* in September 1952.

3. Froom was retired and on special assignment for the General Conference, writing *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, on which subject he lectured at the Seminary.

4. Hartwell was a pastor in the Florida Conference, selected because of his personal acquaintance with the Isle of Patmos.

5. Johns was teaching at La Sierra College at the time assignments were made but transferred to Washington, D.C., in 1955 to attend the Seminary. While in Washington he completed his doctoral degree under William F. Albright at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

6. Neufeld was head of the Bible department at Canadian Union College at the time assignments were made, and moved to Washington, D.C., in June 1953 to join the editorial team. In addition to his *Commentary* assignments, he edited the *SDA Bible Dictionary* and the *SDA Encyclopedia*, and, with Julia Neuffer, the *SDA Bible Students' Source Book* (which became volumes 8, 10 and 9,

respectively, of the Commentary Reference Series subsequently added to the seven volumes of the *Commentary* as a ten-volume set).

7. Price had been a teacher for many years in various colleges but had long since been retired at the time assignments were made.

8. Read was chairman of the General Conference Biblical Research Committee, and was selected for this assignment because of his major presentation on Armageddon at the 1952 Bible Conference.

9. Thurber was book editor for the Review and Herald Publishing Association. He was selected for this assignment because of special research he had done.

10. Walther's name is unaccountably missing from the list of contributors.

11. Wearner, veteran Bible teacher, was head of the Bible department at Union College but suffered a terminal illness before his assignment was completed. The editors greatly appreciated his heroic effort under the most difficult circumstances.

12. Wood drew all of the art maps for all seven volumes.

13. Yost's primary assignment at the time was as secretary of the Religious Liberty department. He had been teaching for many years at the Seminary and still taught an occasional class there.

General Articles Index

Volume I

- Languages, Manuscripts and Canon of the Old Testament: S.H. Horn.
- Science and Creation: F.L. Marsh (The article in the revised edition of the *Commentary*, "The Creationist Model of Origins," was prepared by the staff of the Geoscience Research Institute.)
- Evidences of a Worldwide Flood: G.M. Price (The article in this revised edition of the *Commentary*, "Genesis and Geology," was prepared by the staff of the Geoscience Research Institute.)
- Archeology and the Recovery of Ancient History: S.H. Horn.
- Historical Background of the Patriarchal Period: S.H. Horn.
- Daily Life in the Patriarchal Age: S.H. Horn.
- Weights, Measures, and Money Values in the Old Testament: S.H. Horn.
- Names of God in the Old Testament: R.E. Loasby.
- Chronology of Early Bible History: J. Neuffer.
- Outline of the Sanctuary Service: M.R. Thurber.
- Maps and line drawings (all volumes): L.H. Wood.
- Ellen G. White Comments (all volumes): Ellen G. White Estate.

Volume 2

- Ancient World from c. 1400 to 586 B.C.: S.H. Horn.
- Hebrew Calendar in Old Testament Times: J. Neuffer
- Chronology from Exodus to Exile: J. Neuffer (compiler)

Volume 3

- Poetry of the Bible: C.E. Weniger.
- Musical Instruments of the Ancient Hebrews: S.H. Horn.
- The Ancient World from 586 to 400 B.C.: S.H. Horn.
- Chronology of Exile and Restoration: J. Neuffer.

Volume 4

- Chronology of the Old Testament Prophets: S.H. Horn.
- Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy: R.F. Cottrell.
- Interpretation of Daniel: L.E. Froom.

Volume 5

- The Period Between the Testaments: L.H. Wood.
- Jews of the First Christian Century: F.H. Yost.
- Ancient Jewish Literature: S.H. Horn.
- Language, Manuscripts and Canon of the New Testament: S.H. Horn.
- "Lower" and "Higher" Biblical Criticism: S.H. Horn and E. Hilgert.
- The Fourfold Gospel Narrative: R.F. Cottrell.
- Maps and Diagrams on the Life of Christ: L.H. Wood.
- A Basis for New Testament Chronology: J. Neuffer.
- Major English Translations of the Bible: R.F. Cottrell.

Volume 6

- The Early Christian Church: F.H. Yost.
- Roman History in New Testament Times: F.H. Yost.
- Chronology of the Acts of the Apostles: S.H. Horn.
- Chronology of the Pauline Epistles: E. Hilgert.

Volume 7

- The Medieval Church: F.H. Yost.
- The Reformation and Onward: D. Walther.
- John and the Isle of Patmos: L.H. Hartwell.
- The Seven Churches of Revelation: S.H. Horn.
- Interpretation of the Apocalypse: L.E. Froom.

Subject Index

- Genesis:** S.H. Horn
Exodus 1-18: S.H. Horn
Exodus 19-40: W.G. Wirth
Leviticus: M.L. Andreasen
Numbers: R.E. Loasby
Deuteronomy: R.E. Loasby
Joshua: O.H. Christensen
Judges: R. Hammill
Ruth: R.E. Loasby
1 Samuel: L.H. Wood
2 Samuel: E.R. Thiele
1-2 Kings: E.R. Thiele
1-2 Chronicles: E.R. Thiele
Ezra: S.H. Horn
Nehemiah: S.H. Horn
Esther: L.L. Caviness
Job: N.F. Pease
Psalms 1-106: C.E. Weniger
Psalms 107-150: W.G.C. Murdoch
Proverbs: W.T. Hyde
Ecclesiastes: R.E. Loasby
Song of Solomon: L.L. Caviness
Isaiah: E.R. Thiele
Jeremiah 1-10: W.F. Specht
Jeremiah 11-45: W.G. Wirth
Jeremiah 46-52: E. Hilgert
Lamentations: E. Hilgert
Ezekiel: D.F. Neufeld
Daniel 1, 3-6: S.H. Horn
Daniel 2, 7-9: W.G.C. Murdoch
Daniel 10-12: E. Hilgert
Minor Prophets: W.G. Wirth
Synoptic Gospels: R.F. Cottrell
John 1-4: R.F. Cottrell
John 5, 6: Earle Hilgert
John 7-21: D.F. Neufeld
Acts: F.H. Yost
Romans: A.G. Maxwell
1 Corinthians: T.K. Ludgate
2 Corinthians: E.E. Heppenstall
Galatians: L.H. Hartin
Ephesians: G.H. Minchin
Philippians: T.H. Jemison
Colossians: L. Hardinge
1-2 Thessalonians: C.O. Smith
1-2 Timothy: W.G. Wirth
Titus: E.J. McMurphy
Philemon: E.J. McMurphy
Hebrews: M.L. Andreasen
James: A.F. Johns
1-2 Peter: R.E. Loasby
1-3 John: W.T. Hyde
Jude: W.T. Hyde
Revelation 1-11: E. Hilgert
Revelation 12-16: W.E. Read
Revelation 17-22: R.E. Loasby