

# On Trial for Heresy The A.F. Ballenger Story

Dirk Anderson

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## Who was A.F. Ballenger?

Albion Fox Ballenger was born in 1861, the son of a Seventh-day Adventist minister. He received his ministerial license from the SDA Church in 1885 and began to gain prominence in the late 1880s as a religious liberty advocate. In 1897, seeking a deeper spiritual experience for himself and for the church, Ballenger started the "Receive Ye the Holy Ghost" movement. For the next several years Ballenger preached the message of the baptism of the Holy Ghost at churches and camp meetings throughout North America.

In 1901 Ballenger was sent as a missionary to work in England, Wales, and Ireland. He held evangelistic meetings and his work met with success. However, it was during this time that Ballenger was to discover something that would radically change his life.

## What did Ballenger discover?

A fellow minister shared a turning point in Ballenger's life:

- "One night while laboring with me in London, it came his [Ballenger's] turn to preach on the subject of the sanctuary. He did so, but he was very much discouraged over his effort on the subject of the sanctuary that night. And then he said, 'If the Lord will help me, I will never preach again until I know what I am preaching. I am not going to get it from our books. If our brethren could obtain it from the original sources, why can't I? . . . I will go to the books or commentaries and all these various sources from which Elder Uriah Smith obtained light on the subject of the sanctuary, and I will get it from the same sources that he did. I will not know it because Elder Uriah Smith knew it, but I will know it because God is teaching it to me directly'." <sup>1</sup>

Albion's brother Edward shares what his brother discovered while studying:

- "When he was called to definite evangelistic work he began an intensive study of the Word, not with the purpose of discovering mistakes, but that he might make the old position more clear and forcible. He determined to fortify his position from the Bible and the Bible only, not that he questioned in the least degree the reliability of the [Ellen White] Testimonies, but he was working for the salvation of sinners to whom the writings of Mrs. White would not appeal. In his search for evidence from the Word of God, he ran across perplexing questions. He not only found that certain positions were not supported by Bible evidence, but were positively out of harmony with the Scriptures. For years he wrestled with this question before he was fully convinced that certain positions which he had inherited and taught with confidence, would have to be abandoned. The results of his study at first brought him into great perplexity. It drove him to his knees as nothing ever had before He met the issue fearlessly. He decided to follow the Word of God regardless of consequences. This decision brought peace and persecution."<sup>2</sup>

By 1904 Ballenger had concluded that the atonement occurred at Christ's crucifixion and that He had entered "within the veil" of the Most Holy Place at His ascension.<sup>3</sup> This was contrary to the SDA doctrine which teaches the atonement was not completed on the cross and that Christ did not enter the Most Holy Place until October 22, 1844. The

church's prophetess, Ellen G. White, taught that the atonement was not complete on the cross: "Instead of ... Daniel 8:14 referring to the purifying of the earth, it was now plain that it pointed to the closing work of our High Priest in heaven, the finishing of the atonement, and the preparing of the people to abide the day of His coming."<sup>4</sup>

"Jesus entered the most holy of the heavenly (sanctuary), at the end of the 2300 days of Daniel 8, in 1844, to make a final atonement for all who could be benefited by His mediation."<sup>5</sup>

### **On Trial for the Truth**

Ballenger began sharing the newly discovered truth, and before long he was brought to trial in London. In 1905 Ballenger received a letter...

"...from the President of the British Union Conference, citing him to appear before the Conference soon to convene, and answer to the charge of entertaining error regarding the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Three secret sessions were held in the early morning, of one hour each, at which time the Executive Committee listened to the writer's defense of his position. No one was chosen to reply; no one attempted to share from the Scriptures that the positions were incorrect."<sup>6</sup>

Ballenger was subsequently removed from his post as superintendent of Irish Missions. Church leaders were alarmed as they realized Ballenger's teachings undermined the testimonies and one of the pillar doctrines of the sect. Following the meeting in London, E.W. Farnsworth wrote to A.G. Daniells, then president of the General Conference, expressing his concern:

"He [Ballenger] sees clearly that his view cannot be made to harmonize with the testimonies [of Ellen White], at least he admits freely that he is totally unable to do so, and even in his own mind, so far as he is able to see at present, there is an irreconcilable difference. This of course involves the authenticity of the testimonies and practically upsets them, I mean in his mind. It also upsets our views concerning the sanctuary and its work, though he does not really think that way. It also involves to a greater or less extent our views of the two covenants, and how much more I was unable to ascertain."<sup>7</sup>

Because his views challenged traditional Adventist doctrines, Ballenger could not be allowed to continue teaching. He was called before the General Conference to answer charges of heresy.

### **Ellen White Influences the Trial**

The trial began on May 21, 1905, during the General Conference session. Ballenger was permitted to present his views on the Sanctuary to the leading brethren of the SDA Church. Ballenger arrived at the trial ready to make a defence from the Bible for his teachings. In his own words he describes what happened next:

- "Immediately I had begun reading scriptures in proof of my position that the term 'within the veil' of Heb. 6:19 referred to the holy of holies of the true sanctuary, the committee began to bombard me with quotations from the writings of E.G. White.

"I begged them to show me my error from the Word alone, as I could not offer the writings of Mrs. White to the general public as authority in support of any position. It was finally agreed to use the scriptures only in dealing with the matter. But notwithstanding this solemn agreement, the first man to reply, Eld. S.N. Haskell, commenced, and continued unrebuked, to quote the writings of Mrs. White against me."<sup>8</sup>

One day before the trial was to end, Mrs. White sent a letter to those in attendance at the trial. In this letter, instead of asking the brethren to carefully evaluate Ballenger's theories against the Bible, she instead appeals to their fears:

- "In clear, plain language I am to say to those in attendance at this conference that Brother Ballenger has been allowing his mind to receive and believe specious error. He has been misinterpreting and misapplying the Scriptures upon which he has fastened his mind. He is building up theories that are not founded in truth. A warning is now to come to him and to the people, for God has not indited the message that he is bearing. This message, if accepted, would undermine the pillars of our faith."<sup>9</sup>

Mrs. White is clearly alarmed that this message could undermine the foundation of the entire movement. She adds:

- "Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the pillars of our faith concerning the sanctuary or concerning the personality of God or of Christ, are working as blind men."<sup>10</sup>

These warnings must have raised alarm among the brethren present. If this doctrine were to be accepted, it could undermine and destroy the very denomination that was paying their salaries. Mrs. White further warns that "many" would leave the church if these doctrines were accepted:

- "If the theories that Brother Ballenger presents were received, they would lead many to depart from the faith. They would counterwork the truths upon which the people of God have stood for the past fifty years. I am bidden to say in the name of the Lord that Elder Ballenger is following a false light. The Lord has not given him the message that he is bearing regarding the sanctuary service."<sup>11</sup>

If "many" were to leave the church, then the leaders' jobs, their influence, and their position would all be in jeopardy. Finally, Mrs. White claims the "Instructor" had spoken to Ballenger about the situation:

- "Our Instructor spoke words to Brother Ballenger: 'You are bringing in confusion and perplexity by your interpretation of the Scriptures. You think that you have been given new light, but your light will become darkness to those who receive it.'"<sup>12</sup>

Faced with these dire predictions, what could the brethren do other than rule against Ballenger? Even if Ballenger's arguments held some merit, how could they allow him to continue when it might lead to the destruction of their denomination? If Mrs. White was correct, Ballenger's teachings threatened to destroy everything they had spent their whole lives building up. Ballenger had to be stopped! SDA minister M.L. Andreasen, an eyewitness to the hearing, acknowledges Ellen White's leading role in the defrocking. He wrote that the decision to defrock Ballenger was based on...

- "the Spirit of Prophecy and their [the ministers meeting with Ballenger] own convictions."<sup>13</sup>

In the end, it was Mrs. White's testimony that turned the tide against Ballenger and ensured his dismissal. What was the final reason given for his dismissal? M.L. Andreasen shares the following:

- "He was dismissed from the church because of theological differences...[for] teaching that the atonement was made on the cross!"<sup>14</sup>

## **Back to the Farm**

After his dismissal, Ballenger retired to a farm in Virginia. He worked hard to earn enough money to barely meet the needs of his growing family. Eventually, the Ballengers were dropped from membership in the SDA church. For several years, Ballenger did not actively promote his views on the Sanctuary, but Mrs. White was actively sending out testimonies warning Adventists of the danger of any theory which questioned long-held Adventist doctrines:

- "In the future, deception of every kind is to arise, and we want solid ground for our feet. We want solid pillars for the building. Not one pin is to be removed from that which the Lord has established."<sup>15</sup>

In another testimony she implies that Satan is directing the work against the Sanctuary:

- "Satan is striving continually to bring in fanciful suppositions in regard to the sanctuary, degrading the wonderful representations of God and the ministry of Christ for our salvation into something that suits the carnal mind. He removes its presiding power from the hearts of believers, and supplies its place with fantastic theories invented to make void the truths of the atonement, and destroy our confidence in the doctrines which we have held sacred since the third angel's message was first given. Thus he would rob us of our faith in the very message that has made us a separate people, and has given character and power to our work."<sup>16</sup>

## **Cast Out for the Cross**

In 1909, Ballenger moved his family to California and began to promote his theories more actively. He published his study of the Sanctuary doctrine, *Cast Out for the Cross of Christ*. In this book Ballenger shares a letter he wrote to Ellen White, explaining what he had discovered in the Bible:

### **Dear Sr. White:**

For some time I have been constrained to write to you regarding my convictions on the sanctuary. Many of my friends have urged me to do this, while others have thought it useless inasmuch as, in their opinion, the letter would never reach you.

Nevertheless I have decided to write, and state my difficulty frankly. My first difficulty is with the interpretation which you give to the following scripture found in Heb. 6: 19-20, 'Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus made an high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.'

I cannot help believing that this term 'within the veil' refers to the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary and the scriptures which convinced me, are given below.

On one side I have placed the interpretation given this scripture by the Word of God and on the other side the interpretation which you have given it. You will note that you merely assert that this term applies to the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary, but you do not refer to any scripture which uses the term and applies it to the first apartment. What I am pleading for in this letter, is, that if there be a 'thus saith the Lord' to support your statement, that, out of compassion for my soul you furnish it.

<b>'Within the veil' As the Bible Interprets it</b>	<b>'Within the veil' As you Interpret it</b>
<p>'And thou shalt hang up the veil under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the veil the ark of the testimony: and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy.' Ex. 26:33.</p> <p>'And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.' Lev. 16:2.</p> <p>'And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil.' Lev. 16:12.</p> <p>'And he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with his blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat.' Lev. 16:15.</p> <p>'Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for everything of the altar, and within the veil.' Num. 18:7.</p>	<p>"The ministration of the priest throughout the year in the first apartment of the sanctuary, 'within the veil' which formed the door and separated the holy place from the outer court, represents the work of ministration upon which Christ entered at His ascension. It was the work of the priest in the daily ministration to present before God the blood of the sin offering, also the incense which ascended with the prayers of Israel. So did Christ plead his blood before the Father in behalf of sinners and present before him also, with the fragrance of his own righteousness, the prayers of penitent believers. Such was the work of ministration in the first apartment of the sanctuary in Heaven.</p> <p>"Thither the faith of Christ's disciples followed him as he ascended from their sight. Here (in the first apartment) their hopes centered, 'which hope we have,' said Paul, 'as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever.'" G.C. pp. 420,421.</p>

Sr. White, you refer the terms "within the veil" to the first apartment, while the Lord applies the terms "without the veil" and "before the veil" to the first apartment, as appears from the following scriptures.

'And thou shalt set the table (of shew bread) without the veil.' Ex. 26:35.

'And thou shalt command the children of Israel that they bring thee pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always in the tabernacle of the congregation, without the veil, which is before the testimony.' Ex. 27:20,21.

'And he put the table in the tent of the congregation, upon the side of the tabernacle northward without the veil.' Ex. 40:22.

'And he put the golden altar in the tent of the congregation before the veil.' Ex. 40:26.

'And the priest that is anointed shall take of the bullock's blood, and bring it to the tabernacle of the congregation: and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the veil of the Sanctuary.' Lev. 4:5-6.

'And the priest that is anointed shall bring of the bullock's blood to the tabernacle of the congregation, and the priest shall dip his finger in some of the blood, and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord, even before the veil.' Lev. 4:17.

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel that they bring thee pure olive oil beaten for light, to cause the lamps to burn continually without the veil of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation.' Lev. 24:1-3.

Five times the Lord uses the term 'within the veil' and in every case it is applied to the second apartment of the sanctuary, and not to the first. Seven times the Lord uses the terms 'without the veil,' and 'before the veil,' and in every instance he applies it to the first apartment or tabernacle of the congregation, and never to the court outside of the door of the tabernacle. But if 'within the veil' applies to the first apartment as you teach in your interpretation of Heb. 6:19-20, then the term 'without the veil' must apply to the space in the court outside the tabernacle door. Every one of these seven scriptures which plainly state that "without the veil" and "before the veil" is in the first apartment, is a divine witness to the truth that "within the veil" in Heb. 6:19-20, must apply to the second apartment.

There are therefore twelve witnesses, a twelve-fold 'thus saith the Lord' testifying that the term 'within the veil' refers to the holy of holies, and not to the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary as you assert. ...

And now Sister White, what can I do? If I accept the testimony of the Scriptures, if I follow my conscientious convictions, I find myself under your condemnation; and you call me a wolf in sheep's clothing, and warn my brethren and the members of my family against me. But when I turn in my sorrow to the Word of the Lord, that Word reads the same, and I fear to reject God's interpretation and accept yours. Oh that I might accept both. But if I must accept but one, hadn't I better accept the Lord's? If I reject his word and accept yours, can you save me in the judgment? When side by side we stand before the great white throne; if the Master should ask me why I taught that 'within the veil' was in the first apartment of the sanctuary, what shall I answer? Shall I say, 'Because Sister White, who claimed to be commissioned to interpret the Scriptures for me, told me that this was the true interpretation, and that if I did not accept it and teach it I would rest under your condemnation?'<sup>17</sup>

When Mrs. White first learned of Ballenger's discovery, she lamented that "Ballenger has mystified minds by his large array of texts."<sup>18</sup> However, rather than respond to the substantial Biblical evidence he presented, she appealed to her own authority as the "Spirit of Prophecy" and to the established doctrines and teachings of the SDA church. She wrote a lengthy letter ([see below](#)) to Ballenger, instructing him to trust "demonstrations of the Spirit" rather than relying solely on the Word of God.<sup>19</sup>

Ballenger rejected Mrs. White's reasoning. If this reasoning were to be accepted, Ballenger warned it would...

- "place the thousands upon thousands of pages of your writings in books and periodicals between the child of God and God's Book. If this position be true, no noble Berean dare believe any truth, however clearly it may seem to be taught in the Scriptures, until he first consults your writings to see whether it harmonizes with your interpretation."<sup>20</sup>

### **Why was Ballenger Cast Out?**

While there seems to be no Biblical reason to cast Ballenger out of the church, there were other reasons. Ballenger's theories regarding the sanctuary overthrew the entire reason for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As noted by Ellen White in her epic Great Controversy, the sanctuary teaching provided the key that explained the existence of the sect:

"The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and

harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people."<sup>21</sup>

If Christ made no special move into the Most Holy Place in 1844, then not only would Ellen White's visions be in doubt, but the whole movement would be cast in doubt. If nothing happened in 1844, then God did not direct Miller's movement and it was not the first and second angels' messages of Revelation 14. If Ballenger was right, there was no need for an investigative judgment.

Ellen White could not permit this teaching to gain ground. Despite the apparent lack of Biblical proof for SDA positions, Ellen White insisted they should cling to them because of her "visions":

"The truths given us after the passing of the time in 1844 are just as certain and unchangeable as when the Lord gave them to us in answer to our urgent prayers. The visions that the Lord has given me are so remarkable that we know that what we have accepted is the truth. This was demonstrated by the Holy Spirit."<sup>22</sup>

Instead of pointing to the Bible for support for the doctrines, she instructs people to look for the "truth" in her books:

"I am thankful that the instruction contained in my books establishes present truth for this time. These books were written under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit."<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Like the great reformer Martin Luther, Albion Ballenger was cast out from his church for taking his stand upon the Bible and the Bible alone. After Ballenger's death on August 19, 1921, A.T. Jones, a long-time friend and associate of Ballenger, wrote thus of him:

"I can truly say that never have I known a man of a kinder heart or more tender spirit than he, nor one who more genuinely and devoutly feared the Lord, or was more deeply devoted to His service and His worship."<sup>24</sup>

### **Mrs. White's letter to A.F. Ballenger**

When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No after suppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained. Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. The truth for this time God has given us as a foundation for our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth. One will arise, and still another, with new light, which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit. A few are still alive who passed through the experience gained in the establishment of this truth. God has graciously spared their lives to repeat, and repeat till the close of their lives, the experience through which they passed even as did John the apostle till the very close of his life. And the standard bearers who have fallen in death are to speak through the reprinting of their writings. I am instructed that thus their voices are to be heard. They are to bear their testimony as to what constitutes the truth for this time.

We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture, and pile it as proof around their asserted theories. This has been done over and over again during the past fifty years. And while the Scriptures are God's word, and are to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that

God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake. He who makes such an application knows not the wonderful demonstration of the Holy Spirit that gave power and force to the past messages that have come to the people of God.

Elder G's proofs are not reliable. If received, they would destroy the faith of God's people in the truth that has made us what we are.

We must be decided on this subject; for the points that he is trying to prove by Scripture, are not sound. They do not prove that the past experience of God's people was a fallacy. We had the truth; we were directed by the angels of God. It was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that the presentation of the sanctuary question was given. It is eloquence for every one to keep silent in regard to the features of our faith in which they acted no part. God never contradicts Himself. Scripture proofs are misapplied if forced to testify to that which is not true. Another and still another will arise and bring in supposedly great light, and make their assertions. But we stand by the old landmarks.

I am instructed to say that these words we may use as appropriate for this time, for the time has come when sin must be called by its right name. We are hindered in our work by men who are not converted, who seek their own glory. They wish to be thought originators of new theories, which they present claiming that they are truth. But if these theories are received, they will lead to a denial of the truth that for the past fifty years God has been giving to His people, substantiating it by the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. – Letter 329, 1905 (*Selected Messages Book 1*, pp. 161-162)

## NOTES

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- 5 Ellen White, Early Writings, p. 253.
- 6 A.F. Ballenger, Forty Errors, p. 1.
- 7 Farnsworth letter to A.G. Daniells, Feb. 22, 1905.
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- 17 A.F. Ballenger, Cast Out for the Cross of Christ (1909), chap. XII, emphasis supplied.
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