

# History of E. J. Waggoner's *The Everlasting Covenant*

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*For several years I have been trying to piece together the story behind Ellet J. Waggoner's The Everlasting Covenant. After several trips to half a dozen Adventist college libraries, I felt I had enough pieces of the puzzle to understand, to some degree, the history behind this book. Following is a short synopsis of the story.*

During the fall of 1882, at the age of 27, E. J. Waggoner had an experience that he would later describe as the turning point of his life. Sitting under a camp meeting tent one dismal rainy afternoon in Healdsburg, California, listening to the gospel presented by Ellen White, he suddenly saw a light shining about him, and the tent illumined as though the sun were shining. He had a distinct "revelation of Christ Crucified" for him. He later wrote that it was revealed for the first time in his life that God loved him, and that Christ gave Himself for him personally—that it was all for him. The light that shone on him that day from the cross of Christ became the guide in all his Bible study. He resolved that the rest of his life would be devoted to discovering the message of God's love for individual sinners found in the pages of Scripture, and making that message plain to others. (Waggoner to Ellen G. White, Oct. 22, 1900.)

In the spring of 1883 Waggoner was called to assist his father in editing the *Signs of the Times*, and soon took up teaching at Healdsburg College and pastoring the Oakland church. It was here, in 1894, that he met A. T. Jones, who also became assistant editor of the *Signs*, taught at the college, and pastored the San Francisco church. By September 1884, Waggoner had taken up the subjects found in the book of Galatians in a series of *Signs* articles. He not only covered the issue of the law in Galatians, but wrote about the two covenants, both subjects playing a central part in his understanding of righteousness by faith. As Waggoner continued to share these truths in his classes, sermons, and through articles in the *Signs*, a strong opposition arose. By 1886, G. I. Butler, General Conference President, and Uriah Smith, *Review and Herald* editor, were orchestrating as much as possible a united protest against Waggoner's teachings. Butler even sought the help of Ellen White to put a stop to what he considered grave heresy.

By the time the 1888 General Conference convened in Minneapolis, this opposition had well nigh spread through the entire leadership of the Church. It is no wonder that when Ellen White supported Waggoner's presentations on the subject of righteousness by faith at the conference, where he dealt with both the law in Galatians and the covenants, that many began to question her prophetic office. Years later she would emphatically state that it was the "Lord in His great mercy" who "sent a most precious message to His people through brothers Waggoner and Jones." She went on to say that "this is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure." (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 91.)

Somehow by divine providence, and amidst all the controversy, Waggoner was able to publish his views on the covenants in the 1889 edition of *Bible Readings for the Home*, and in the three quarters of the *Senior Sabbath School Quarterly* for 1889-1890. Hardly had the new year started, however, and U. Smith wrote a rebuttal to the Sabbath School lessons and published it in the *Review* (Jan. 28, 1890). Dan Jones, General Conference Secretary was so concerned over Waggoner's lessons that he resigned as one of the Sabbath School teachers at the Battle Creek Church. The main

contention with Waggoner was his teaching on the covenants, which according to Dan Jones was "similar to what he presented at Minneapolis." (Dan Jones to S. N. Haskell, [March], 1890.)

It was during the winter of 1889-1890, that Waggoner also participated in the first Ministerial Institute at Battle Creek. After teaching on the book of Isaiah, on the nature of Christ, Waggoner began to present the topic of the covenants. This was met immediately by opposition so strong that for a while Waggoner was forced to resign his position. Ellen G. White, who was also present, urged that Waggoner be allowed to give his views. Finally, ten meetings were held in which to present views on the covenants: Waggoner six times, and Uriah Smith and others with opposing views four times. One week after these presentations ended, Ellen White was urged of Heaven to not only take her stand, but to give Heaven's point of view on Waggoner's position. Both in a letter to U. Smith and in the Sabbath afternoon meeting, Ellen White made it clear who had the truth on the covenants:

"Night before last I was shown that evidences in regard to the covenants were clear and convincing. Yourself [U. Smith], Brother Dan Jones, Brother Porter and others are spending your investigative powers for naught to produce a position on the covenants to vary from the position that Brother Waggoner has presented. When had you received the true light which shineth, you would have not imitated or gone over the same manner of interpretation and misconstruing the Scriptures as did the Jews.... They deceived the people. They made false issues....

"The covenant question is a clear question and would be received by every candid, unprejudiced mind, but I was brought where the Lord gave me an insight into this matter. You have turned from plain light because you were afraid that the law question in Galatians would have to be accepted." (Letter 59, March 8, 1890; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 599-605; to U. Smith.)

Unfortunately, this did not stop the opposition to Waggoner's position on the covenants. If anything, the opposition got worse. Within two years Ellen White was "exiled" to Australia and Waggoner sent to England. One positive aspect came out of the experience at the Ministerial Institute. Waggoner had a burden to write on the covenants and produce a comprehensive book on the subject. Probably during the winter of 1890 (perhaps 1892) Waggoner produced forty pages of manuscript for *The Everlasting Covenant*. Soon after he arrived in England in the spring of 1892 he began to work more seriously on it, as he began to understand more clearly the far-reaching truths of the covenant subject.

### **A curse and not a blessing.**

At some point in time Waggoner submitted to the General Conference Book Committee the finished portion of his manuscript. This Committee had been formed in 1887 for the purpose of increasing the quality of Adventist literature and unifying the book publishing of all the publishing houses in North America. Unfortunately, this Committee became a curse and not a blessing. In 1895, after holding Waggoner's manuscript for some time, one of the Book Committee members gave his "thumbs down" to printing it:

"I am sorry that I have kept so long this manuscript of Elder Waggoner's on the Everlasting Covenant. I have some criticisms to offer.... I cannot give them in detail because what I have to criticise [sic] runs all through the articles. [The writer then takes up five pages to express his concerns.] ... There are many little criticisms which I have, but all these are minor as compared with the principal criticism which I have made, ... and still, I feel sure that there are serious objections to issuing this manuscript in a book in its present form. It is truthCprecious truth; it has many

excellent things that have never been written on the subject, but to my mind it has also what is erroneous." (M. C. Wilcox [assistant editor of the *Signs* and member of the Book Committee] to F. D. Starr [also on the Book Committee], Aug. 22, 1895.)

It is quite evident that the Book Committee as a whole turned down Waggoner's manuscript. Only a few weeks after the above letter was written, A. O. Tait, who lived in Battle Creek, responded to a letter from W. C. White. Tait was supportive of White's idea to have Jones, Waggoner, and Prescott produce more printed material for the church. However, Tait was very frank that the majority on the Book Committee were in total opposition to the three authors mentioned, and voted down material from them without even looking at it:

"You suggest that Elds Jones, Prescott, and Waggoner should be encouraged to set apart three or four months each year to working up some of these new tracts and pamphlets and booklets. I have thought of this same idea, and have suggested it a number of times, but you know, Bro. White, that there is quite a strong element on the Book Committee, that as soon as a manuscript is presented from one of these persons mentioned, they are ready to vote against it without giving it examination....

"I will tell you, Bro. White, frankly, that there are quite a number of men in Battle Creek yet, who do not see light in this blessed truth in regard to the righteousness of Christ that has been coming to us as a flood of blessing ever since the Minneapolis General Conference.... The experience of this truth is what is lacking on the part of so many, and they do not treat each other as brethren and as the purchase of the blood of Christ. So it seems to me that there is a barrier in our Book Committee to any very great progress in the lines of getting out these tracts and pamphlets that you refer to by these brethren. Why, it was only the day before yesterday, Bro. White, that the Chairman of the Book Committee in apologizing to me for the rejection of a manuscript from Bro. [A. T.] Jones, stated in just so many words, that there was such a prejudice against him on the part of the members of the Book Committee who are acting here in Battle Creek, that it was just about impossible to get one of his manuscripts passed through.

"Now the Book Committee, you know, is a creature of the General Conference.... I tell you, Bro. White, I am completely tired of having men hang back in the tracts, and retard the progress of this message, and my voice will ever be raised against it....

"It devolves upon our publishing houses to hunt around among our authors and get the manuscript that we think should be published, and then after we get this manuscript we place it in the hands of the Book Committee and it hangs along month after month, and finally will receive an adverse decision because of some little technical points of justification by faith or something of that kind ... " (A. O. Tait to W. C. White, Oct. 7, 1895.)

### **"Following in the tread of the paths of Rome."**

Much more background information could be shared about this Book Committee, but the above is probably sufficient to express the corruption at the heart of the work. Ellen White, who was in Australia, was well aware even before Tait's letter to W. C. White arrived what was going on in Battle Creek. Earlier she had warned C. H. Jones at the Pacific Press not to come under the control of Battle Creek. She would not trust even her work to the Book Committee and publishing house in Battle Creek. In the months following she wrote very pointedly about the Book Committee and the converting power of God that it needed (interestingly the Book Committee was disbanded in 1897):

"Dear Brother Jones, there is need for the Pacific Press to stand in God, subject to no human power of control in their action. You are not to hold yourself to seek permission of the authorities of Battle Creek whether you shall or shall not pursue a line of work that seems impressed upon you to do. The Lord is the one to whom you are to be amenable. All the light heretofore given me of God is that these institutions out of Battle Creek should not be absorbed by Battle Creek. It would be an injury to both parties." (Ellen G. White to C. H. Jones, Letter 35, July 8, 1895.)

"I could not entrust the light God has given me to the publishing house at Battle Creek. I would not dare to do this. As for your book committee, under the present administration, with the men who now preside, I would not entrust to them for publication in book the light given me of God, until that publishing house has men of consecrated ability and wisdom. As for the voice of the General Conference, there is no voice from God through that body that is reliable." (MS 57, Oct. 12, 1895.)

"Bro. Olsen, I have the tenderest feelings toward you; but I must lay before you plainly the danger of losing your spiritual eyesight. I speak decidedly because I must tell you the truth. I dare not forbear, for there is no longer safety in delay. I have not confidence in your book committee. I have written to you before in regard to their manner of dealing with the authors of books. They should treat them impartially, candidly, as a brother would treat a brother; but they have not done this. The principles and motives of the business dealing in this department are not such as God can sanction. They are not in accordance with strict integrity." (Ellen G. White to O. A. Olsen, Letter 83, May 22, 1896.)

"The book committee has been following in the tread of the paths of Rome. When Prof. Prescott's matter was condensed, and refused publication, I said to myself, This committee needs the converting power of God upon their own hearts, that they may comprehend their duty. They do not know themselves. Their ideas are not to control the ideas of another. From the light which the Lord has given for the managers of the book committee, they do not know what they should condemn or what approve. They know not the workings of God. It is not such men as these who are to work the minds of God's heritage. The Holy Spirit must do this work. It is because of their separation from God that men have misunderstood and failed to comprehend the fact that they are not to rule their fellow men. It is not for these men to condemn or control the productions of those whom God is using as His light-bearers to the world. By their course of action they have so narrowed their range of vision that they are far from being proper judges. They must fall on the Rock Christ Jesus and be broken." (MS 148, Oct. 26, 189[6].)

### **"The Lord would have me finish it at once."**

It is easy to see by the situation described above how Waggoner's manuscript was turned down by the Book Committee in Battle Creek. Not to be discouraged, however, Waggoner wrote to Ellen White in December of 1895 sharing his burden of finishing his work on *The Everlasting Covenant* manuscript. He felt the Lord would have him "finish it at once":

"I have had a book much on my mind ever since the first winter I taught in Battle Creek [1889-1890], and begun to write the manuscript three years ago [1892]. I have rewritten all that I first wrote, and have written more from time to time, but have been hindered much. This I do not regret, as the delay has resulted in making the

subject more clear to my own mind. I might say that I wrote forty pages of type manuscript that winter, but have thrown it away long since, as the subject has opened up more clearly. It is on The Everlasting Covenant, or God's Promises to Israel. I have lately been able to write more on it, and the light shines so clearly on it now that I feel that the Lord would have me finish it at once. I am hoping to be freed from routine work soon, long enough to enable me to finish it. When it is done I shall send a copy to Australia for examination." (Dec. 31, 1895.)

It appears that true to his word Waggoner finished the manuscript by May 1896. Rather than submit the book for publication in America, he ran the manuscript as weekly articles in *The Present Truth*, at which time he was sole Editor. (It is possible that a book of this size could not be printed in England under the poor conditions in which Waggoner was working.) These articles ran for one year, until May 1897, and are almost verbatim to *The Everlasting Covenant* published in 1900. In 1898 Ellen White wrote to Waggoner expressing her feelings about him and his work. There is no question that she still saw him as one who had a "most precious message" from the Lord:

"Dear Brother and Sister Waggoner. How much pleased I would be to see you and visit with you. I have so much desired that you would visit us in Australia; but it has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God, and therefore I feel no desire to write, although again and again I have come to the point of requesting you to make a visit to Australia. Cannot you do this? Please write us whether you can....

"I write to you now because I want you (and W. C. White is of the same mind) to visit us in Australia. We think Present Truth the best paper published by our people....

"I would be pleased to have you come here to Australia." (Letter 77, Aug 26, 1898.)

"Dear Brother Waggoner: W. C. White, Brother Daniells, and myself had some conversation in regard to you and your family coming to this country. We were all of one mind, that we need you here to teach the Bible in our school....

"We ask you to come to this country as soon as you feel that it is time to come." (Letter 29, Feb. 12, 1899, unpublished.)

### **"The best paper in all the world."**

Waggoner's *almost* going to Australia is another story, but it should be known that he did make plans to go there, and even J. S. Washburn was sure he was going. Unfortunately, his going was prevented by the same type of corruption in Battle Creek that kept his manuscript from being printed several years earlier, one of the reasons why Ellen White no longer considered the General Conference "as the voice of God." It is interesting to note, however, what Washburn thought of Waggoner and *The Present Truth* at the time:

"I am glad that you can have Bro. Waggoner in Australia for a time. I am sure he will do much good. It seems to me that he has been and is still used by the Lord more than any man among us to discover truths of living importance to our people for this time. My opinion is of Bro. Waggoner and his work have greatly changed since Minneapolis.... I am sure he will be a great blessing to the work in Australia while he is there. He works very hard indeed doing a good part of the time double work proclaiming as much or more than any other minister, and editing the Present Truth. I truly think that Present Truth is the best paper in all the world and have thought so

for a long time." (Letter to Ellen G. White, May 29, 1899.)

### **The 1900 version--one key difference!**

Finally, in 1900 Waggoner printed his manuscript, almost verbatim from his earlier *Present Truth* articles, through the International Tract Society in England. There is one key difference however. Although there is not a trace of pantheism in *The Present Truth* articles, some pantheistic statements found their way into his book. These statements are found primarily in the two new chapters added in the 1900 publication that are not in Waggoner's *Present Truth* series. It is clear that Waggoner introduced these pantheistic concepts after having been influenced by J. H. Kellogg, who himself was openly teaching pantheism. Even so, the book *The Everlasting Covenant* was seen by some as a valuable resource. A. G. Daniells, General Conference President, not only highly recommended the book for its teachings on the covenants, but hoped that it might break up the darkness caused by those who were still opposed to the light that came to Minneapolis in 1888:

"A great blessing would come to our people from reading the book. I do not know whether you have ever given this book a careful examination or not. Its name is, *The Everlasting Covenant*, suggests its scope. It leads us to the very heart of the great gospel of Christ. It opens up God's plan of saving the world by grace through faith in Christ. It strikes that great key-note of the Reformation; namely, justification by faith. It shows weakness and folly of the covenant of works. The book really deals with the great question that so agitated our people at Minneapolis, and so far as I know, is the only Masterpiece that has been written on this subject since the Minneapolis meeting. Much has been written on this subject for our papers by Sister White, Brother Waggoner, Brother Jones and Brother Wilcox, but *The Everlasting Covenant* is the only large work dealing with the great theme that has been produced. The book has been printed about two years, but it has never been circulated among our people outside of England. A few copies have been sent to the United States, but only a few. Those who have read the book agree in pronouncing it a most excellent production. This morning Brother Olsen told me that next to the Bible, and your mother's works, this book had done him more good than any other he had ever read.... I talked with Brother Prescott about this before leaving and he was pleased with the suggestion. I feel very anxious about this and want to earnestly request you give the plan serious consideration. Please talk it over with your mother [Ellen White] and also with Brethren A. T. Jones and W. T. Knox. I think Brother Jones has gone through the book.... Last evening I talked the matter over with Dr. Waggoner, and he, of course, would be delighted if this plan could be carried out. He feels a great burden to have this light go to the world....

[P.S.] "I failed to refer to the fact that there is more or less influence being exercised in the central and western states against the light that came to us in Minneapolis. I believe we are doing our people a positive injury by keeping light away from them. They are not reading on this subject, and ministers in whom they suppose they should have confidence are giving them error and darkness for truth and light. There is no question about this. Some of them are strongly arrayed on the side of those who opposed the light at Minneapolis. It is a fact that some of our younger ministers are not free to preach righteousness by faith as fully as they desire to. They have told me this. I am deeply convinced that something ought to be done to place a flood of light in the homes of our people. I know of no better book to do this,

outside of the Bible, than Brother Waggoner's book." (Letter to W. C. White, May 12, 1902.)

Waggoner's book was never printed in the United States, therefore it did not receive wide circulation, nor were his *Present Truth* articles ever reprinted. Instead, in 1907, the Church printed the Sabbath School lessons in which it took the view that Smith and Butler held of the covenants, opposing Ellen White's vision supporting Waggoner's view. In 1908 R. A. Underwood (who had opposed Jones and Waggoner at Minneapolis in 1888), presented the popular Smith and Butler view in his 72-page book, *The Law and the Covenants: An Exposition*. Here he also openly disagreed with the views of Jones and Waggoner: "Much confusion has existed over the promises of the old and new covenants. Some have held that the old covenant consisted mainly of the promises of the people. This is far from the truth" (p. 35).

In early 1910 Butler had no problem telling A. G. Daniells "how he felt about the message Jones and Waggoner brought to this denomination in 1888. He spoke especially of their position on the laws and covenants ... and told me with considerable emphasis, that he never could see light in their special messages, and that he had never taken his position." (A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, January 21, 1910.) Unfortunately, this attitude of opposition to the view of the covenants as taught by Jones and Waggoner has filtered down into the church's publications. Since that time the Church has never printed a book clearly presenting the covenants as Jones, and especially Waggoner, presented them.

Now for the first time in over a century readers once again have the privilege of holding in their hands all of Waggoner's original, untainted, and unedited *Present Truth* articles, but now in book form. I personally recommend this book to every Seventh-day Adventist, not only to read for themselves, but to share with their non-Adventist neighbors and friends.

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