

Whatever Happened to Jim?

How the New Theology hurts people

His real name was Steve. Fourteen years ago, I typed out a conversation I had with him. We published it under the name, *Hebrews Nine and the Sanctuary [FF-1]*. But what happened after that conversation was finished?

The conversation itself was so dramatic that, immediately following it, I returned home and wrote it out. Then the next day I typeset it. I called him "Jim," but his real name was Steve.

Whatever happened to Steve?

Now, fourteen years later, I can now tell you the story. Only Jim's real name is given below.

When Steve discovered the Adventist message, he was thrilled and took hold of it with all his heart. Both he and his wife were deeply devoted to the Third Angel's Message and sought to faithfully live and share it. Steve, in his late twenties, became a colporteur. Since he was blessed with an unusual degree of health and stamina, he did an outstanding job of helping others.

Eventually he learned about Ken, a believer in his mid-thirties who owned a sizeable plot of land in the middle of the Shawnee National Forest in Southern Illinois. So Steve and his wife moved out there. At the time, my family and I lived in a country home on the edge of that same forest. Because we already knew Ken, we came to know Steve and his wife, Peggy. Peggy's sister, Janet was also a faithful Adventist. Learning about this secluded place in the forest, she also moved there.

One day, while working in Ken's large garden, Janet was bitten by a copperhead. Because the only way out of the property was by walking several miles, everyone was concerned. But the kind of simple, natural remedies recommended in the Spirit of Prophecy (such as charcoal, simple herbs, and water therapy) were used, and she recovered. It was an experience intended to draw Janet closer to the Lord. She would need it in view of the crisis soon to strike.

It was the summer of 1980, and Steve discovered Desmond Ford's teachings. As you probably know, those teachings have in the years since then been generally accepted by many pastors and administrators in our denomination. The terrible effects of those beliefs are gradually traveling through our ranks, bringing with them increased worldliness and gradual apostasy from the faith.

Those teachings include the idea that obedience to God and His law is not necessary, since we were

saved at Calvary. Christ did our obeying for us, and we do not really have to. If some obedience does follow this "salvation," that is nice, but it is not necessary. In fact, if, in the strength of Christ, we do too much of it, we might become legalists and be lost! Sounds like a strange teaching, but Ford got it from the teachers at Manchester University (England), a Plymouth Brethren college, where he received a doctorate in theology. Most modern Protestant denominations teach that it is not necessary to obey God's laws.

Any teaching that offers to save people in their sins, will always be accepted by the great mass of mankind.

Reading such materials, some of which came directly from Ford supporters and some from Brinsmead (*Evangelica*, *Verdict*, etc.), Steve liked what he saw—and shared it with everyone else on the farm in the deep woods of the Shawnee Forest. By this time, George, another Adventist, had arrived at the deep-in-the-woods farm, and was listening carefully to Steve.

Ken and his family rejected these liberal notions, but Steve, Peggy, George, and Janet were intrigued by the ideas presented. Steve was the leader in studying the New Theology papers and indoctrinating the others.

When the Illinois Conference campmeeting convened at Little Grassy, near Carbondale, Steve asked for and received permission to hand out Brinsmeadite and Fordite publications.

One Sabbath afternoon our family walked the several miles out to Ken's farm. Sitting on the rough-hewn porch of the little cabin that Steve and his family was living in, the two of us got into a conversation. Steve brought out his Bible and started in. I replied, and, as we neared the close of the conversation, Steve was visibly shaken. With a prayer for guidance in my heart, I had been able to answer every point he raised. But, after we prayed together, Steve said that he wanted to study more for himself into the matter.

That evening, after walking back out, I prayed and then wrote out the entire conversation. It had been so wide-ranging, and I had felt the presence of the Lord as I sought to answer the objections to our historic beliefs which Steve had imbibed from his Brinsmead and Ford publications. Surely, this material ought to be shared with others.

Later, I typeset it and placed it as the first tract in our *Firm Foundation Series*. Because it prima-

rily focused on erroneous interpretations of Hebrews Nine, I named it, *Hebrews Nine and the Sanctuary [FF-1]*.

But, just before printing it, I heard from a mutual friend that Steve said he was not sure yet, and still wanted to study further into “the blood of bulls and goats.” That was part of Desmond Ford’s erroneous interpretation of Hebrews Nine. Our conversation had included a section on that point, but, to cinch it down better, I added more to it. The tract was then prepared for publication and printed. A copy was sent to Steve, and thousands more copies were distributed widely to interested people we were able to make contact with. We did not see much more of him that summer.

Well, that is the story of Steve. But there is more. What happened after that? Here it is:

Steve spent the winters planting trees. He must have had a magnificent physical structure, for he was the only person I ever met or heard of who could plant 10,000 (yes, 10,000) trees a day, day after day. Each evening, when he came back to camp, his faithful wife, Peggy, would rub his back for an hour or so. They were very close.

Then two fine young Christians, Janet and George were married. But the New Theology took its toll. Later that summer, walking the many miles out from Ken’s place, George and Janet stopped by our home one Sabbath afternoon and asked if they could use our phone. To our surprise, in front of us they called the Greyhound station in the closest town (Harrisburg), asked prices, and then discussed between themselves several non-Sabbath business matters.

A little later, they stopped by the home of a mutual friend and, seeing Spirit of Prophecy books on his shelf, George (who had previously loved those books) said abruptly, “Those books are little soldiers, and their guns are pointed at me. I don’t like them.”

Not long afterward, George and Janet moved away.

As for Steve and Peggy, Steve had once been a fervent believer in the Advent Message and an earnest colporteur. But, as their faith weakened, the once-peaceful home became the scene of repeated bickering and arguments. They also left southern Illinois. Later we heard that they had divorced.

The New Theology was rapidly taking, what had once been two happy families, in the wrong direction.

Then, earlier this present summer (1994; fourteen years later), Janet phoned and spoke with my

daughter, Linda.

We learned that, fortunately, in later years George and Janet had forsaken Fordism and returned to the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. They were attending church. After the birth of their first child, they got rid of their television set. Janet was teaching their children in a home school, and George was taking the children canvassing every Sunday afternoon. Success!

But neither Steve nor his wife Peggy had been able to throw off the blighting effects of Fordism. After their divorce, both Steve and Peggy remarried. Peggy now attends a Sundaykeeping church, says she is a Christian, and uses an Ouija board. (Those devices, pronounced “wee-jee boards,” bring those using them under a more direct control of devils; make sure you do not permit them in your home.) What a fall! Peggy, who once had consulted the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy for guidance, was now consulting spirits!

As for Steve, he had three children by his second wife, but no longer professed any Christianity. A couple years ago, he died of cancer.

It is believed that he contracted it as a result of defoliating the ground with poison, preparatory to planting trees.

So, as best as I can learn, this is the story of Steve. It is a sad story, but there are lessons we should learn from it.

There is such a deep, abiding happiness to be found in remaining with the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, and—through the enabling grace of Jesus Christ our Lord and only Saviour—obeying what we read in God’s Inspired Books.

Whenever we choose something else, we choose something far inferior. We enter upon a path which will diverge, as we journey, farther and farther from the pathway to heaven.

Surely, those men who have so vigorously advocated salvation in sin will have to answer for it in the judgment.

Please, my friend, please be faithful to the Inspired Writings. Forsake them not. The grace of Jesus Christ our Lord was given to forgive and empower. As we plead with Him for help, His grace forgives our past, and enables us to obey right now and, step by step, as we walk hand in hand with Jesus, on into the future. *For it is Jesus who died and lives again to keep us from falling and delivers us into that wonderful kingdom we will share with Him at His return.*

— Vance Ferrell