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The Story Does Not End There

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The Story Does Not End There

He is mostly known for his vehement opposition to the decision of the church to choose the name “Seventh-day Adventists” rather than “Church of God” and to adopt a legal form of organization.



▲ Denis Kaiser

The way historians have written about him seems to suggest that this was the end of Thomas J. Butler’s (1828–1908) story, yet the remainder of his story is a wonderful illustration of God’s abundant grace and amazing patience.

Interestingly, Ellen White showed understanding for Thomas’ hard feelings. She noted that he had generally only represented Adventists from Ohio, especially from the Gilboa church. Unaware that he had trusted some people who had presented matters to him in an exaggerated manner, he was soon left alone and blamed by the church as if he acted independently. Further, he could not comprehend why many of those who had initially supported the *scriptural* name “Church of God,” which included even James White, switched so quickly to the *unscriptural* name “Seventh-day Adventists.”

He was naturally stubborn and when he was treated unjustly by church members and fellow ministers, he became bitter, withdrew from the church, and gave up the Sabbath. When Ellen White and her husband explained the background to him, he could finally understand why they had come to make that decision. She asked those who had injured him to confess their wrongs and to remove as far as possible the hindrances on their part. J.N. Loughborough and J.H. Waggoner followed suit and confessed their wrongs to him.

By May 1863, Thomas seemed to accept their confessions and returned to his ministerial work, yet soon his heart hardened again. He severed his connection with

the church for some eight years during which he did not keep the Sabbath, despite the fact that his wife and children did keep it. He attempted to live an honest life, yet he could not fathom why all his endeavors for success in temporal matters came to nothing as if some supernatural power thwarted all his attempts.

In early 1872, he finally acknowledged that he had been fighting God’s guidance and he resolved to return to the church. At that point, his hope in God returned and some measure of blessing. Not long after, he met George I. Butler (no relation), then president of the General Conference, who supported his desire to return to preaching. Until the turn of the century, the *Review and Herald* frequently printed reports about his work in Missouri, Kansas, Ohio and Texas. The obituaries of multiple church members referred to Thomas Butler as the minister who brought them to the Truth and into the church.

His story may comfort and encourage us that God does not give up on us, and that the struggles we may experience now do not have to be the end of the story but they may have the potential to draw us closer to Him. ■

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SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST[®]
CHURCH