

# WHAT IS THE ELIJAH MESSAGE? HOW OUR HIGH PRIEST RECONCILES ALIENATED HEARTS?

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What is the Elijah message? Like a golden thread the turning of hearts to God runs through the work of Elijah during the days of apostasy in ancient Israel's Baal-worship, through John the Baptist's work of preaching a baptism of repentance at the Jordan River, to Jesus' counsel to the last-day church of Laodicea to repent of her self-satisfied condition. The last-day Elijah message is Jesus' appeal to His church. It is a message of God's love in the setting of the Day of Atonement. Rightly heeded, it will bring the blessings of genuine revival and reformation so much needed. The 144,000 will compose those who repent and a charismatic movement will proclaim prophetically to the world the Loud Cry of the Third Angels' Message blessed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Latter Rain proportions.

We do not make pretentious claims to possess that Elijah message. But we are earnestly studying the beginnings of it and desire more. We believe the Lord is most willing to show it to us as the Teacher of His people.

You desire to be reconciled wholly and completely to God. And you see the devastating effects of division and strife within your family and others so that you are praying for unity and healing. Then you should have a strong motivation to understand

Jesus Elijah message that makes that a reality. Hence we shall study His sanctuary ministry. This is not a "yawner." Stay awake!

The question keeps popping up: "What does 1844 mean other than a mathematical puzzle?"

Unless this finds an answer, devotion to our Sanctuary message dries up. And if that happens, say goodbye to any meaningful Seventh-day Adventist message beyond that of the Seventh Day Baptists.

The challenge is constantly thrown at us: can you prove the SDA "Sanctuary message" (including 1844 and the "Investigative Judgment") from the Bible alone, without using Ellen White as a crutch?

She said: "The correct understanding of the ministrations in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith," "our faith" being the unique teachings of Seventh-day Adventists that make us different from the Roman Catholic or Evangelical Protestant churches (*Evangelism*, p. 221).

"[It's] the central pillar that sustains the structure of our position" (Letter 126, 1897).

She was right! If "the sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ's work in behalf of men,"<sup>1</sup> then what Christ is ministering there (to those who will receive it) is the experience of justification by faith. That's the business He is doing in His "office." Our concern is—how does the Sanctuary message relate to that special truth?

Baptized into Christ in this church, I have often pondered this problem. With no internal misgivings

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<sup>1</sup> *Evangelism*, p. 222.

or doubts, I have used the naked Bible to present the Sanctuary message to non-SDAs as I have prepared people for baptism. I see it taught in the Bible (without calling Ellen White to bolster it up) as clearly as I see the Sabbath truth there. In fact, the Sanctuary doctrine came to us as a people before the Sabbath truth did.

Some may say, “You are naive, brainwashed.” Well, at least I like baptizing people who remain lifelong committed Seventh-day Adventists, rejoicing in the truths that made us a people distinct from the Sunday-keeping Evangelicals—and yes, our friends, the Seventh Day Baptists. (The seventh-day Sabbath is no longer a unique doctrine which we hold; numerous other churches also keep it.)

Why are so many SDAs giving up the sanctuary message? Why, for example, does the associate editor of our very fine *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* now repudiate it en toto? He says it’s a “liability,” and claims that many of our pastors and church leaders also inwardly doubt it, even though they stay in the closet as church employees. (He implies they like salaries and perks.)

What they have understood as the Sanctuary message has always been only a cold theological doctrine. It never became a heart-gripping, heart-melting truth. They never learned to love the message. It left them cold, and probably in many cases, worse than that—it left them dominated by nightmarish fear.

They saw Christ’s ministry in the Most Holy Apartment as a court trial where our very existence

is jeopardized. A rejection slip in the Investigative Judgment was a consignment to hell. So this distorted view of the doctrine was not mere theological trivia; its side effect to them was spiritual terror.

But the issue could not be more important to understand. The most disturbing statement Ellen White ever made makes simple common sense. It is a brief passage<sup>2</sup> where she says that if we reject a change in Christ’s sanctuary ministry in 1844, we lay ourselves open to a deception of the false christ posing in place of the True One, putting on a show that is complete with miracles. By now, the counterfeit has become extremely sophisticated.

Yet we face the influence of former prominent Seventh-day Adventist thought leaders who repudiate these insights about a difference in Christ’s high priestly ministry. It may not be their fault that they feel this way. Ministers and leaders in our past generally have taught them the Sanctuary message divorced from the special enlightenment of the Elijah [1888] message. The most precious message was hijacked when the Lord “sent” it.

Ellen White told us in 1896 that “by the action of our own brethren [the light] has been in a great degree kept away from the world” and “from our own people.” So let’s be charitable to these current Sanctuary message rejectors, and “consider others lest we also be tempted.” *These people among us who today are rejecting the Sanctuary message very likely never grasped the 1888 message.* They

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<sup>2</sup> *Early Writings*, pp. 55, 56. It is developed further on pages 260, 261.

grew up and went through academy, college, and university without anyone teaching them either the message or its history. To this day none of our schools offers a course in the Elijah [1888] message. Anyone who gets it does so by accident.

The message lifts the unique Seventh-day Adventist Sanctuary message out of confusion and perplexity and clothes it in the bright garments of Christ's righteousness, that is, the gospel seen as very Good News.

I see justification by faith as far more than a cold theological formula. It's Good News far beyond pastors and leaders who don't see the Sabbath truth, nor the Sanctuary doctrine, nor the truth about sleeping saints awaiting the resurrection "in Christ." God has many people in the Sunday-keeping churches living up to all the light they have (I came out of one such church). They simply don't see the 1888 idea of justification by faith because they don't see that in death man sleeps until the resurrection, and they don't know to follow Christ in His closing work of atonement in the Most Holy Apartment. Both ideas are essential to justification by faith as it is "present truth" today.

The heavenly sanctuary can never be "cleansed" until first of all the hearts of God's people are cleansed. That's simple! And it's far more than a legalistic accounting trick whereby God looks the other way while we continue sinning. The missing factor is supplied by a new and clearer grasp of justification by faith, which Ellen White saw makes

the 1888 message become "the third angel's message in verity."<sup>3</sup>

"Faith" believes when some women tell you on Sunday morning that Jesus is risen from the dead, and you haven't seen Him. Faith doesn't wait to put your fingers in the holes in His hands or in His side, as Thomas insisted. According to 1 John 4:16, truth requires a greater commitment than mere intellectual conviction: "We have known *and* believed." That's how we follow the true Christ in His ministry in the Most Holy Apartment—convincing objective evidence plus a heart appreciation of it.

How does the Elijah message lead us to fall in love with the SDA sanctuary message? Let's note a few items:

(1) Please look at #191 in the hymnal, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." John and Charles Wesley sensed the need for something not yet clearly understood in 1747. Look at stanza 4: "Finish, then, Thy new creation;/pure and spotless let us be;/let us see Thy great salvation/perfectly restored in Thee." There's how the sanctuary is to be "cleansed"!

The Wesleys were trying to get their fingertips on the special truth that informed the 1888 message—that message of Christ's righteousness. It will yet lighten the earth with glory. In the 1888 message the Wesleys could have realized what they were looking for, but they were too early.

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<sup>3</sup> *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.

(2) The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary makes a difference in practical day-by-day living. If it's impossible for the sanctuary in heaven to be "cleansed" or "justified" or "made right" (different meanings of the Hebrew verb translated "cleansed" in Daniel 8:14) until the hearts of God's people on earth first are cleansed, then that has an important conclusion: Christ as our High Priest is specializing now in convicting His people of previously unknown sin. As each is seen and forsaken for His sake day by day, the special work of cleansing goes on. The High Priest plans for it to become complete. And He wants it to be soon. He'll do it if His people don't resist Him.

(3) This is not merely a legal "assumption" on God's part, something He knows well is not yet reality. When Revelation 14:12 declares, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God"—it has to be true. These people have "overcome, even as [Christ] overcame" (Rev. 3:21). They have not merely been legally accounted so, contrary to reality. The objective gospel has at last become totally subjectively demonstrated. Don't ridicule this solemn truth as so many do, for if you do you'll be like "the lord on whose hand the king leaned" who ridiculed Elisha's prophecy of a miracle "tomorrow about this time." He got to see it, but never participated in the blessing.<sup>4,5</sup>

When Ellen White speaks of the "eighteen hundred years" of Christ's ministry in the First Apartment, at no time did He have *a corporate body*

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 6:32-7:20.

<sup>5</sup> See Luke 20:35.

of believers on earth whose faith had thus matured. No one was translated during those long centuries. But now comes a change in His ministry; He's in the Second Apartment. It's the cosmic Day of Atonement. The heavenly sanctuary is at last "cleansed" in that now He has a body of people whose hearts have been healed of every root of alienation from God. The "atonement" becomes a reconciliation with Himself, complete on the antitypical Day of Atonement.

When John and Charles Wesley were trying to get a grip on this, they were bitterly opposed, even by Augustus Toplady, author of our lovely hymn, "Rock of Ages." The very idea of overcoming fully "even as [Christ] overcame" was considered fanatical, and labeled "perfectionism." Even today there are devout people (even as Toplady) who see the 1888 idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary as an impossible "perfectionism," discouraging to think of. The reason is that there's a missing link in their understanding.

(4) The Elijah message [1888] idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary is not that God's people do the work. The High Priest does it; and His people stop resisting Him "in His office work" (to borrow Ellen White's expression). They *let* Him do it. They take away the roadblocks in His way. Never does the Bible say that the ancient Israelites had to cleanse the sanctuary. Their high priest always did it.

Prominent in the Elijah [1888] message is this idea of ceasing to resist our Lord. Not until after the 1888 Conference did Ellen White state it so clearly: "The

sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus . . . in repentance for his sins.”<sup>6</sup> To stop resisting Jesus—that’s the essence of this cleansing of the sanctuary idea. [Apparently Ellen White picked up the idea from Jones and Waggoner.]

It’s Good News better than most Adventists have ever thought it is. In early 1890 Ellen White was moved to write a series of articles for the *Review* that linked together this idea with the work of Christ in the Most Holy Apartment. And she directly linked it all to the 1888 message (January 21 through April 8):

“We are in the day of atonement, and we are work in harmony with Christ’s work of cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. Let no man who desires to be found with the wedding garment on, resist our Lord in His office work” (January 21).

“Christ . . . is cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. What is our work? . . . To be in harmony with the work of Christ. . . . A people is to be prepared for the great day of God” (January 28).

“The mediatorial work of Christ, the grand and holy mysteries of redemption, are not studied or comprehended by the people who claim to have light in advance of every other people on the face of the earth” (February 4).

“Christ is cleansing the temple in heaven from the sins of the people, and we must work in harmony

with Him upon the earth, cleansing the soul temple from its moral defilement” (February 11).

“There are many among us who are prejudiced against the doctrines that are now being discussed. They will not come to hear” (February 18).

“The slumbering Church must be aroused. . . . The people have not entered into the [most] holy place . . . There is spiritual drought in the churches. . . . They oppose they know not what” (February 25).

“We shall have to meet unbelief in every form in the world, but it is when we meet unbelief in those who should be leaders of the people, that our souls are wounded” (March 4).

“For nearly two years we have been urging the people to come up and accept the light and the truth concerning the righteousness of Christ, and they do not know whether to come and take hold of this precious truth or not” (March 11).

“You have been having light from heaven for the past year and a half. . . . These men who refuse to receive truth, interpose themselves between the people and the light. . . . How long will those at the head of the work keep themselves aloof from the message of God?” (March 18).

“Our churches are dying for the want of teaching on the subject of the righteousness of Christ” (March 25).

It seems that no one in Battle Creek grasped what she was saying. Guess what her reward was for these articles in the *Review*? “Exile” to Australia the next year (Waggoner shortly thereafter was sent to England).

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<sup>6</sup> *Steps to Christ*, p. 27 (1892).

(5) To answer our initial question in very simple terms: the difference between Christ's ministry in the First Apartment and in the Second is what He does in His believers. Up until 1844, it was totally in preparing believers to die, so they could be "accounted worthy" to come up in the first resurrection. And that is a great work for our High Priest to do. If any of us are called to die, may we be prepared!

But when looked at in context, His ministry in the *Second* Apartment is intended especially to prepare a people to be translated without tasting death. While they are still in the flesh, they must see Jesus, must meet Him face to face, which only "the pure in heart" can endure. These must be "alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord. . . . and shall be caught up together with [the resurrected saints of all ages] to meet the Lord in the air."<sup>7</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Sanctuary message makes special sense in the light of Christ's Matthew 24 sermon. It was Heaven's purpose that the second coming be within the "generation" of those who saw the last of the celestial "signs" of His near return—the falling of the stars. That's how the pioneers understood it, and that's what the words of Jesus actually say. The otherwise inexplicable delay is the result of "resisting our Lord in His office work." The gospel commission in the light of Revelation 18:1-4 could have been accomplished within a few years of 1888.<sup>8</sup> The delay in finishing

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Thess. 4:15-18.

<sup>8</sup> *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 419; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1130.

the work-of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary is not due to computer backlogs in the heavenly offices, or to any angelic inefficiency. The problem lies with "us."

(6) The Elijah message [1888] idea also relieves minds of perplexity about what Christ is doing now. Is He vacationing? Or absorbed in some other corner of His great universe? What He does is obviously "work," for the great controversy with Satan is still going on, and the great enemy is working very hard. There is no time for Jesus to take a vacation. Battles more real than any fought with weapons are going on. It's only right that God's people sympathize with Christ in these contests. That's what Ellen White means about following Christ into the Most Holy Apartment.<sup>9</sup>

(7) The Elijah message [1888] idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary also imparts to those who understand it a new motivation for following Christ. Fear of the Investigative Judgment is "cast out." This again is part of the cosmic Day of Atonement—a time for at-last-realized oneness with Christ. It delivers from fear as much as He Himself was delivered from fear in His life on earth. Our natural self-centered concerns for salvation are sublimated in a higher concern for the triumph of Christ. This again is a result of the Day of Atonement oneness with Him.

(8) The Sanctuary truth leads directly to the Bride of Christ making herself ready. That "oneness" is something that has never happened in all past

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<sup>9</sup> See *Review and Herald*, Feb. 25, 1890.

history—“the marriage of the Lamb is come, for His wife hath made herself ready.” Something special is ready for those who are invited to “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:6-9). As individuals, all (including those of the last days) are “guests at the wedding.” But as a corporate body, the church of the great Day of Atonement becomes the Bride of Christ.

Our first natural reaction is, “it’s too good to be true.” Anticipating our temptation to doubt, the angel told John, “Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Rev. 21:5).

(9) The message of the True Witness to the “angel of the church of the Laodiceans” turns out to be the Sanctuary truth itself. This message has not become a museum piece in our denominational attic; it grips hearts worldwide today wherever it is presented. The Holy Spirit impresses souls who seek to follow Christ of His much more abounding grace for overcoming.

The Sanctuary message that “the Lord in His great mercy sent” to us must yet lighten the earth with glory. Thank God, it will. And that, soon.