

# **DON'T GIVE UP ON THE CHURCH**

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Some concerned people are saying that the church is becoming like Babylon, others insist that the church has already become Babylon. There are even those who tell you that it is a sin to continue sending your tithe to the organized church. We tell people, no, the troubles in the church are not a reason to leave it or to stop supporting it.

When a pastor or leader proclaims messages that deny “the third angel’s message in verity,” it is understandable that conscientious church members will want to stop going to church. However—

In Daniel and Revelation we see a map of mankind’s progress toward the climax of history. In Revelation 12 we see the history of the true church and the identification of the “remnant” church. Through the ages she is symbolized as a “woman.” After the horrors of 1260 years of papal persecution, she emerges as from a tunnel, now identified as “the remnant”: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (vs. 17). We see the 1260 years of papal supremacy in the Dark Ages finally come to an end in 1798, followed by the beginning of the time of the end.

Then the first angel’s message comes on stage, marked by the preaching of William Miller and the 1844 movement. We see the Great

Disappointment, when the majority turned their back on their faith and returned to the world. But a little remnant would not give up their faith until they discovered the answer to their perplexity in the Day-of-Atonement truth and the cleansing of the sanctuary. This little handful remained, not only because they were convinced of the mathematics of the 2300 year-day prophecy, but primarily because they had recognized what they knew was the true Holy Spirit working in that movement. The “present truth” of today which was not applicable in the days of Elijah and Jeremiah is the Day-of-Atonement ministry of Christ in the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary.

For a century and three-quarters that church has been identified by divine inspiration as the SDA denomination, which had its roots in the Great Disappointment of 1844 and the reformations that followed in succeeding decades until its formal organization in 1863. Throughout the years of Ellen White’s long lifetime, she constantly identified the SDA Church as the “remnant.” Yet even in her day there were unfaithful leaders and pastors who taught error and even apostasy, whom she rebuked, corrected, and sometimes even denounced.

The honor and vindication of Christ require that this church repent and triumph through reformation and revival. But “the dragon” is determined that this shall never take place. One of his most successful techniques is to persuade sincere, honest people to leave the church. This is just what he wants, for if this psychological pressure succeeds, then “the

dragon” hopes to claim the SDA Church as totally his. He knows that the success of the divine plan of salvation will depend upon its final hour and that the repentance of Laodicea, the seventh church of Revelation, is involved in this final divine success.

Since this special ministry is to prepare a people for translation at the coming of Christ, we can expect that the “dragon” will make every possible effort to defeat it, because he knows that the success of the entire plan of salvation depends upon its final hour. None of the dead can be resurrected until Jesus returns; and He cannot return until He has a people ready. The reason is that Christ is caught in a dilemma—on the one hand, if He never returns He can never take His people to Himself, because the popular doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul is false. People do not go to heaven when they die; they must await the resurrection.

On the other hand, if He returns before a living people are ready to be translated, they will be consumed by His holy presence (Heb. 12:29). Thus He cannot resurrect the dead until a living “remnant” are ready for His coming without seeing death. Satan knows that the stakes are high; therefore he is making a last-ditch stand on this issue of what is the true church and what is a preparation for the end. We can expect that he will exert massive efforts in two simultaneous movements: (a) to intimidate and confuse those who choose to be loyal to Christ, and (b) to deceive them with a cleverly designed counterfeit of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Seventh-day Adventist Church Was Founded Upon a Recognition of the True Holy Spirit**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded not upon the mathematics of the time prophecies, or even on the Sabbath truth, but upon something far deeper—a recognition of the true Holy Spirit in contrast to the counterfeit. Ever since that initial revelation in 1844, the Lord has led this church step-by-step. The practical results of the cleansing of the sanctuary became evident in the early years following 1844 as the people began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, to accept the principles of health and dress reform, and to take up the cross of loyalty to present truth. Spiritual victories were being won, and the agency of the Spirit of Prophecy was a contributing factor. People were beginning to get ready for the coming of the Lord. Progress was being made!

Then came the 1888 message, “showers” of the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. The message was also the beginning of the loud cry of the fourth angel’s message. God was leading the Seventh-day Adventist Church to prepare the people of that generation for translation. In fact, this church was never raised up to prepare people to die, but to prepare a people to meet the Lord without seeing death.

The same preponderance of leadership clout was evident in ancient Israel’s experience at Kadesh-Barnea when they refused to go in and take the Promised Land. Caleb and Joshua said that they were able to go up and take the land, but the

people refused their appeal. The Lord gave them opportunity to repent, but when their rejection was decisive, He sent the nation back to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. The Lord has had to send us back to wander so far at least 120 years.

But we must remember that the Lord at last did bring Israel into the Promised Land. In Deut. 9:26-28 Moses pleaded with Him. "O Lord God, . . . do not look on the stubbornness of this people, or on their wickedness or their sin, lest the land from which You brought us should say, 'Because the Lord was not able to bring them to the land which He promised them, and because He hated them, He has brought them out to kill them in the wilderness.'"

The lesson is for us. In this Day of Atonement, if the corporate, denominated Seventh-day Adventist Church should fail, the Lord Himself would be terribly embarrassed. The world and the universe would say that He was not able to bring these people out of Babylon and prepare them for the coming of the Lord. It is not our honor that is involved, it is the honor of the Lord Himself. That is why loyalty to Christ requires loyalty to His bride-to-be, the church.

### **Should Faithful Souls Abandon Ship or Do We See a Brighter Picture Emerging?**

Ellen White has repeatedly identified the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant church of Rev. 12:17 and 14:12, and furthermore, as the bride-to-be of Rev. 19:6-8. She likens the church to a ship. Is it doomed to sink like the Titanic, or to be taken over by a mutinous crew? Should "faithful

souls" abandon the ship and jump into the cold water on their own? Will every former passenger swim alone or cling to bits of wreckage?

Or do we see a brighter picture emerge in prophecy? Could it be that every passenger who overcomes will become a crew member, and under the leadership of the divine Captain sail a tight ship into the harbor?

The story is told of a wood-burning ship that was blown off course by tempest winds. The fuel gave out, so to keep the boiler going the captain ordered all the furniture, railings, and stairways to be thrown into the furnace. Finally the ship sailed into the harbor—an empty shell of its former glory. But it did get through. Could this be what will happen to this church? Much of what we see as trappings of human pride may disappear, but the identity of the church must remain intact for the honor and glory of Christ, who brought the church as modern Israel "out of Egypt" from its early days.

The Lord called Abraham to make of his descendents a people who would be a blessing to every family on earth. That promise to Abraham has been fulfilled in the Christian church. By studying the history of Abraham and Israel, we are encouraged to believe that all the failures, mistakes, and apostasies of ancient Israel and Judah must be overcome by the remnant church in these last days. Such overcoming will be possible only because of the work of the great High Priest in His closing atonement in the Most Holy apartment. "Then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" (Dan. 8:14). It is impossible for the books of record in heaven to be

cleansed of the record of the sins of God's people until first their hearts are cleansed. That cleansing of the heart is the repentance that Jesus calls for.

Even in the days of Jesus, when the Jewish clergy and the priesthood were undeniably apostate, the Lord commended the widow who put her two mites into the temple treasury of the organized "church" of that day. We read in Luke 4:16 that it was always His custom to attend worship services in the synagogue every Sabbath. What kind of sermons did He hear in the synagogue? They must have been terrible, but nevertheless He went Sabbath after Sabbath. He tried to build up and strengthen people in the only way available to Him then, by personal work. There are hurting people in all our churches today, and if Jesus were in your place, He would help them Sabbath after Sabbath by a hopeful word here and encouragement there. God has a plan for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In fact, we believe the church is the true spiritual Israel.

There is encouragement in remembering that. Frequently there was deep apostasy in ancient Israel, as in the days of Elijah, and again, in Jeremiah's day. But these prophets did not leave the "church" of their day and start new places of worship. Although their efforts to bring revival and reformation seldom succeeded so far as they could see, the Lord was with them in their patient ministry of loyalty. He is also with us today.

God's plan is not for His true people to give up in despair and leave the church to the ultimate control of apostates. It is true as Ellen White says, that

"many will stand in our pulpits with the torch of false prophecy in their hands, kindled from the hellish torch of Satan" (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 409, 410). God's plan is that His people defend the truth and confront such false shepherds and defeat the apostasy. Says the servant of the Lord, "God Himself will work for Israel. Angels' hands will overthrow the deceptive schemes that are being formed. The bulwarks of Satan will never triumph. . . . All opposing elements will be defeated" (p. 410).

If the Holy Spirit can be free to work, He will employ human agents in His work either to convert apostate leaders or pastors, or to replace them with faithful shepherds who will care for the flock and feed them with pure wheat. In Jeremiah 23, the Lord has promised to do exactly that: "Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! Saith the Lord. . . . I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord. . . . And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them" (vss. 1-4).

We must have confidence in the Lord's promises to save His church, for it is His body. Since He is the true Head of His church, we must learn how to cooperate more closely with Him in His cleansing, reformatory purposes. "All opposing elements will be defeated" through His faithful people remaining in the church and opposing to their faces those who bear "the hellish torch of Satan."

The easiest and most cowardly thing to do is for one to abandon the church to apostasy, gather one's "righteous robes" about him and leave it; but this will turn 160 years of sacred history on its head,

and defeat the prophet of Revelation. In order for the Lord to be able to effect reformation and revival, He must have faithful, disciplined, well-informed people through whom He can work. There must be thousands of “Elijahs” who are motivated by the true Holy Spirit to work for “Israel” as he did rather than abandon the nation.

The Lord has given many assurances that He will work to refine, purify, and cleanse the organized, denominated SDA Church. “The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. . . . The great issue so near at hand will weed out those whom God has not appointed, and He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry prepared for the latter rain (Letter B-88, 1886, quoted in 2SM 376ff).

Scripture is replete with the same encouragement. The prophets frequently rejoiced in the ultimate cleansing and triumph of the organized church as “Israel.” Isaiah glories in “Zion” and “Jerusalem, the holy city,” experiencing such revival and reformation that “henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and unclean” (52:1). Isaiah 60 describes the glory that will lighten the earth as the great fourth angel of Revelation 18 comes down to do his final work. “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isaiah 60:1-3). “The city of the Lord, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel,” is the organized remnant church of the last days, through which that glory will be revealed, which has established its identity before the world (vs. 14).

Jesus predicts the final cleansing of His church and ties it in with the prophecy of Isaiah 60 as a bright future to be fulfilled before the close of probation: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:41-43).

Revelation pictures Laodicea as successfully overcoming “even as” Christ “overcame,” so that “the marriage of the Lamb” can come when “His wife hath made herself ready” (Rev. 3:21; 19:6). The total triumph of Christ over Satan will be demonstrated in the remnant church. The central theme of both the Old and New Testaments is the grand success of the Day of Atonement.

The second coming of Jesus is wonderful good news, but there is good news that must come first: a light will blaze across the world. It will penetrate into the homes and the markets of both the poor and the rich. Since God is declared to be “love,” He cannot leave anyone out of seeing this light of the angel's message who “comes down from heaven, having great power; and the earth [must be] lightened with his glory” (Rev. 18:1).

Light is always something that comes from heaven. It causes the gospel to shine. This “light” will be a message in which “light” is shining. Therefore it will be truth, for “Thy word is a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). That final revelation of light will therefore be the truth of God's word more clearly spread out before the world than ever seen before.

The one spot in world history where the Light of heaven shone most brightly was the cross of Christ, for it was there that a heavenly love (known as *agape*) was most clearly demonstrated in its “breadth, and length, and depth, and height,” a love “that passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:18, 19).

But how can this ever happen in our modern materialistic, pleasure-loving, godless world? That “light,” which will at last shine brightly, will not be a message of terrorism (the terror will come after the light has been rejected finally); the message will be a “lifting up” of the crucified Savior of the world. God will not scare people into His kingdom like you gather cattle for the roundup; the world's moment of truth will finally dawn for all mankind. The love revealed at the cross will corral every honest-hearted soul who will sense the “constraint” that is implicit in that love. A totally new motivation will prevail—not fear for one's personal security, but a new concern newly realized—that which a bride can know for the man whom at last she loves (Rev. 19:7, 8).

Forget thinking about the Gospel as a static set of cold doctrines; it is an ever-growing, heart-moving experience of identity with the Son of God.