

WHY THE DELAY?

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The reason why this church was built where we worship this morning is that the congregation are Seventh-day Adventists. That is, they believe that the literal and personal second coming of Christ is near. The pioneers thought it would take place in their lifetime. So has each succeeding generation of our people. When I was baptized I thought I would probably not finish college before Christ should return.

But here we are in 2010. The nearness of Christ's return is being thought about less now than at any time since 1844. Since he hasn't come, it has become obvious to everyone that there has been an apparent delay.

This obvious delay is causing real problems for us. For one example, many of our youth don't know how to understand or appreciate the "Adventist" part of our teachings. If Christ has delayed His return this long, how can we know He won't delay it indefinitely? Is our Adventism a theological antique to be placed in our denominational attic in the same way that the Wesleys' Methodism has been placed in the attic of the Methodist church? Precious few present-day Methodists live by their founders' "methodism" rules! And precious few of our youth share the pioneers' confidence that Christ will return in their generation.

The nagging questions that trouble present day Seventh-day Adventists (that is, thoughtful ones)

are: Why the long delay? If it is God's responsibility, then why did His messenger to the church keep telling us over and over again that Christ's return was very near? For example, in 1850 Ellen White said: "I saw that the time for Jesus to be in the most holy place was nearly finished and that time can last but a very little longer" (EW 58). In explaining why she said this, Ellen white in 1883 quoted the Bible (NT) passages that say "the time is short" "the day is at hand," "things which must shortly be done" (1 Cor. 7:29 30; Rom 13:12; Rev 22:6, 7). She said that many of the 1844 Adventists delayed the Lord's return because they gave up their faith after the Great Disappointment, and that "unbelief" and "worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord's professed people . . . have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years" (1 SM 66-69).

In 1856 she said that the angel told her concerning the Adventists attending the Conference of that year, "Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth, to be translated at the coming of Jesus" (1T 131, 132), All through her life she continued to say that the Lord's coming was near. In 1900 she said, "only a moment of time, as it were; yet remains." "The battle of Armageddon is soon to be fought" (6T 14, 406). There are sincere people who are tempted to think that these were "wolf, wolf" cries. If the Lord uses the word "near" when He doesn't really mean it, or if he uses the word with a definition that is foreign to all our human understanding—is this ethical of Him? If a

salesman uses a word that he intends to have a meaning quite different from anything you know, you blame him. The long delay in Christ's coming can cause spiritual discouragement to many people unless they understand clearly why it has happened. They are tempted to feel distrustful toward God, to be alienated from Him, to feel that His messenger may have been naive.

Another problem the long delay can cause is the tendency to doubt the very doctrine of the second coming. Have we misunderstood it? Is the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the real second coming of Christ? (One of our recent Sabbath School Quarterlies suggested this by implication. It suggested that the second coming has been going on all through the last 2000 years—and that this is a part of the second coming, although another will be a literal, personal return at last.

As time goes on and the delay continues, the literal, personal aspect of the second coming doctrine can easily be de-emphasized, and the spiritual second coming can be increasingly understood as the real second advent. If that should happen, we would be back to square one, joining with those who have been our theological opponents from our beginning, who said that there will be no literal, personal return of Christ because the coming of the Holy Spirit fulfils the second advent prophecies.)

A number of theories have attempted to explain the long delay: (1) There has been no delay; the popular Calvinist doctrine of the sovereignty of God implies that He has predetermined the time of the

second advent, that He has put a pin in the drum of His great time-clock, and when that pin activates the celestial mechanism, down comes the curtain, whether anyone is ready or not. This view is of necessity closely related to the popular Reformationist views of righteousness by faith, and may explain why the nearness of the second advent has been so widely de-emphasized. (2) A very popular view is that the Lord has delayed the second coming like NASA frequently delays launching space shuttles (and should have done for Challenger), because of circumstances apparently beyond His control—for example, His people are not ready, or too many people in the world haven't had a chance to hear the gospel. According to this view, the delay could go on and on for a long time, because world population increases more than a million a week. There are more people on earth who have not heard the gospel today than there were in 1844. The more we chew on this problem, the bigger it gets. Further, if the problem is that the Lord has delayed His coming, we are getting uncomfortably close to that servant in the parable who said, "My lord delayeth His coming," and thereby earned the title, "evil servant" (Matt. 24:48). (3) The "Harvest Principle" view says that the problem is due to the fact that we, not the Lord, have delayed His coming. This view is based on the Lord's parable in Mark 4:26-29 that says the farmer reaps his crop when it is ripe, in Rev 14:14, 15, we read that says that Christ's second coming is contingent on "the harvest of the earth," the good grain, becoming "ripe." So long as the grain does

not ripen, the farmer cannot put in his sickle. The reason why the grain has not ripened is the unbelief, murmuring, rebellion, worldliness, unconsecration, strife, and insubordination, cherished by God's professed people (MS 4, 1883; 1 SM 68, 9; Ev 696). This explanation of the long delay makes sense. But it leaves a very nagging question unanswered: if the long delay in the second advent is the fault of God's people, how and when are they going to correct the fault, so Christ can come? And what real hope is there that they ever will do so? If the reality of the second coming depends on the grain getting ripe for harvest, and God's people have failed to respond properly and effectively in 140 years, what will change the picture?

For years, our scholars and leaders have wrestled with these questions, and have attempted answers. If I say anything that is worth your while listening to today, it must be more than my own personal opinions. I hope I can say something that can commend itself to your inquiring minds, and that can endure the test of close examination.

(1) The Calvinist time-clock idea is not informed by enlightened Scriptural and Spirit of Prophecy study. It emphasizes the sovereignty of God at the expense of man's God-given freedom of choice. It produces a laissez-faire attitude of lukewarmness, and destroys the uniqueness of the SDA witness. While it is true that the Father knows the day and hour of Christ's return, the son does not know, nor do the angels know, (Mk 13:32). And God's foreknowledge is not predestination or determinism.

The close of the 2300 year prophecy in 1844 marks the beginning of the process of finishing the "mystery of God" when "time—*kronos*—(delay) shall be no longer" (Rev 10:6). In other words, God's predetermined time-clock stopped at the sounding of "the voice of the 7th angel, when he shall begin to sound" (vs 7). From 1844 on, there are no built-in impediments to the timing of the second coming. Further, the marriage of the Lamb is clearly said to be dependent on "his wife" making "herself ready" (Rev 19:7).

(2) The idea that the Lord continually delays His coming because of so many people who are not ready gives little hope for the coming of the Lord in any foreseeable future. It blends in with the Calvinist idea—Adventist despair is sure to set in.

(3) Therefore we turn to investigate the Harvest Principle idea more fully.

The illustration of a farmer's crop ripening for harvest implies that rain will fall making this possible. The idea of early and latter rain was well known in Bible times, the early rain coming to make possible the germination of the seed, the latter rain coming to make possible its maturing for harvest.

For the practical purposes of our study today in 2010, the real reason for the delayed second advent centers in the problem of the latter rain. Let me explain:

There are numerous statements from Christian leaders of the past 1900 years that express the hope of Christ's coming being near—Ignatius, Cyprian, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, Wycliffe, Christopher Columbus, Luther, Melancthon,

Wesley, and others (see Douglass, THE END, pp 168ff.) But those statements do not mean that SDAs are merely a me-too voice repeating what reformers have been saying for nearly 2000 years. There is a profound difference: they did not base their opinions on a systematic study of the Bible prophecies. Last-day Seventh-day Adventists have proclaimed their message of Christ's soon return as based on the historicist interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation.

Although EGW often said that the Lord could have come at any time between 1844 and 1883 (1 SM 68, 69), she made no statement remotely implying that the reception of the latter rain would have been unnecessary. Any statement she made prior to 1883 could have already come clearly implies that the latter rain would have come and prepared the church for the Lord's return. For example, when our people first understood the Laodicean message, EGW said that "nearly all believed that this message would end in the loud cry of the third angel" (1T 186), which of course required the reception of the latter rain. Ever since the 1850's, the church had been looking forward to the refreshing, or the latter rain. ("I saw that many were neglecting the preparation so needful and were looking to the time of 'refreshing' and the 'latter rain' to fit them to stand in the day of the Lord and to live in His sight." EW 71, "At that time the 'latter rain,' or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, will come, to give power to the loud voice of the third angel, and prepare the saints to stand in the period when the seven last plagues shall be poured out." p. 86, "I

asked what had made this great change. An angel answered, 'It is the latter rain, the refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the loud cry of the third angel.'" p. 271, "I was pointed down to the time when the third angel's message was closing. The power of God had rested upon His people; they had accomplished their work and were prepared for the trying hour before them. They had received the latter rain, or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and the living testimony had been revived" p. 279).

At no time prior to 1888 did EGW recognize or identify any movement or message as the beginning of the latter rain. But she gave abundant testimony that the 1888 message was its "beginning." As surely as 1844 marked the end of the 2300 year prophecy, so surely does 1888 mark the onset of the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The latter rain prepares the way for the loud cry. EGW says regarding its effect on God's believing people, "I asked what had made this great change. An angel answered, 'It is the latter rain, the refreshing from the presence of the Lord, the loud cry of the third angel' (EW 271). "The latter rain . . . will come, to . . . prepare the saints to stand in the period when the 7 last plagues shall be poured out" (p. 86).

Some of EGW's statements that positively identify that message with the latter rain are found in: "The time of test is just upon us, for the loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer. This is the beginning of the light of the

angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth” (R&H, Nov. 22, 1892). “I RECEIVED a letter a little while ago from Brother Starr in Australia, I will read two or three sentences because they come in well just at this place in our lessons:—

‘Sister White says that we have been in the time of the latter rain since the Minneapolis meeting.’” GCB 1893, p. 377; “An unwillingness to yield up preconceived opinions, and to accept this truth, lay at the foundation of a large share of the opposition manifested at Minneapolis against the Lord’s message through Brethren {E. J.} Waggoner and {A. T.} Jones. By exciting that opposition Satan succeeded in shutting away from our people, in a great measure, the special power of the Holy Spirit that God longed to impart to them. The enemy prevented them from obtaining that efficiency which might have been theirs in carrying the truth to the world, as the apostles proclaimed it after the day of Pentecost. The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world” (1 SM 234, 235). These statements make very clear that it is not correct to describe the 1888 message as merely a re-emphasis of righteousness by faith; it was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit complementary to the outpouring at Pentecost, an event completely unprecedented in all history since Pentecost. It meant the beginning of a spiritual Reformation that should have been greater than that of the 16th century, or that of the Wesleys, and certainly greater than the 1844 movement.

It follows that acceptance of the 1888 message would have prepared that generation to proclaim the loud cry to the world, and fitted them for translation at the coming of Christ. He would have eagerly come to receive His bride, if she had made herself ready.

And, it follows further, that the only possible explanation for the long delay of nearly 100 years, must be due to the fact that the 1888 message was largely rejected—not by the church at large, but by the responsible leadership of the church at that time. 1 SM 234, 235. The rejection was not complete, but sufficient to delay the Lord’s coming for at least 122 yrs.

But we don’t need EGW to tell us this. It is as simple as $2+2=4$. The facts of history are very obvious: (1) The latter rain was to come during the lifetime of the Adventists who were living in 1856. “I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus’” (1T 131). (2) The latter rain and loud cry began in the revelation of the 1888 message of Christ’s righteousness. (3) If accepted, the message would have prepared that generation for proclaiming the loud cry of the message to all the world as the apostles proclaimed the gospel after Pentecost—the message would have gone like fire in the stubble. (4) Yet today, the world hardly has heard our message. If the 1888 message had been accepted, EGW said, the world would never again have said that SDAs preach the

law, the law, but do not preach Christ; of all professing Christians, SDAs would be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. Every SDA church would be filled with the active love of Christ, and we wouldn't need a promotional program to change us into a caring church.

(5) And best of all, if the message of 1888 had been accepted, Christ would have returned before the horrors of either World War I or II. (6) The only possible conclusion is that EGW was right when she said over and over again that that message was rejected and kept away in a great degree from our own people and from the world.

If we wish to spend time listing all the long catalogue of our departures from the Lord's plan in all details of our educational, medical, publishing, evangelistic, and administrative work, we could spend many hours, even days. John the Baptist could have spent years cataloguing all of the Jews' many failures; but he preferred to lay the axe unto the root of the tree, and call them to repentance. If we wish to lay the axe unto the root of our present difficult question about why the long delay, that root is the rejection of the beginning of the latter rain and the loud cry, at and following the 1888 General Conference Session.

Dr. L. E. Froom's *Movement of Destiny*. While he insists that the leadership of the church accepted the 1888 message, he also repeatedly says that 1888 is the fundamental reason for the long delay. For example, "1888 marks the logical dividing line in our collation of EGW statements" regarding the long delay. "All messages may be appropriately

understood in relation to the 1888 . . . crisis—either . . . B.C. or A.D.," before or after 1888. (p. 563). Again: "That is both the secret of the delay, and the key to its wondrous termination. . . . Everything hinges upon and is wrapped up in this." (p. 571). Again: "It is the true explanation of the extended years." "The 1888 Minneapolis Conference the Dividing Line." (p. 578).

For many decades, we as a people have been praying for Heaven to pour out the H. S. in the latter rain. These prayers ascend at our workers' meetings, camp meetings, Sabbath services, prayer meetings. Yet the truth is that the Lord has already given the beginning of the latter rain, and it was largely rejected; in fact, EGW several times says that the Holy Spirit was insulted. She says a score of times that our forefathers reacted negatively to the message and messengers in the same way that the ancient Jews reacted negatively to Jesus Christ. To this day, Jews gather at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem to plead with the Lord God of Abraham to send them their Messiah. Their prayers would be more effective if they repented of rejecting the Messiah when the Lord God of Abraham sent Him 2000 years ago. Our prayers would be much more effective if we would repent of insulting the Holy Spirit and rejecting the gracious message He sent us nearly 100 years ago.

Our topic is—Why the Delay? If history and EGW as the Lord's messenger mean anything at all, the answer is clear: 1888. The Lord God of Abraham will never send the Jews another Messiah until they clearly understand and repent of rejecting the One

the Lord sent them. It is irreverent and unfair for us to demand that Heaven send us another latter rain until we clearly understand and repent of rejecting the one Heaven already sent us.

All that EGW and history have to say about the tap root reason for the long delay, the devil also knows very well. And here we have a real problem! He is determined that God's people will never receive the Holy Spirit in the latter rain, and never get ready for the Lord's return. He is determined that we shall not learn the lessons of history; he wants us to repeat indefinitely. He does not want the Lord ever to return. He wants to annihilate the Adventist aspect of our message; and certainly, he does not want to see God's people have an experience of repentance, reformation, revival, and reconciliation with Christ. The great controversy is not ended yet; and we must not be ignorant of Satan's devices in this last great contest.

One insurmountable difficulty that conscientious Jews face is the falsification of their history. If they knew the pure unadulterated truth of their history, many would (and will eventually) repent. If the devil can succeed in leading us to falsify our history, he knows he has us caught in the trap of lukewarmness forever. We will never as a people find escape from this all-enveloping lassitude and spiritual inertia except by learning and appreciating the full, honest truth of our history. This is precisely the import of our Lord's message to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and and I have been enriched" (Rev 3:17). When we vainly portray our history as a great enrichment,

do we not unwittingly fulfill these very words? when we say that we have been enriched by an acceptance of the beginning of the latter rain in and the loud cry, when EGW and our history plainly declare that "to a great degree" we lost that enrichment, is this not precisely what our Lord rebukes us for?

Our assumed enrichment is exposed as a fallacy when we compare the clear unique truths of the 1888 message with what we commonly assume is contemporary righteousness by faith. The essential motifs of the 1888 message are demonstrably lacking in most of our current proclamations of what we call the third angel's message. In fact, those essential, unique motifs are often openly denied and even ridiculed. This can easily be demonstrated by the well-known method of motif analysis. We expose ourselves as poor, blind, wretched, miserable.

We don't need to look further in search of the root reason for the long delay and for our present spiritual lukewarmness.

Three other dates stand out in our history and are commonly assumed to be times of great victory, when in fact they are not: 1901. It was a victory so far as reorganization was concerned; but the spiritual revival and reformation never took place. EGW's famous "What Might Have Been" testimony in Vol. 8, p. 104. The heart-humbling experience of contrition and brotherly love when all backbiting and suspicion and ambition should forever be rooted out of the hearts of all of us—this is what the 1888 Message was about; her poignant "What Might

Have Been” testimony says it didn’t happen at or after the 1901 Session. She wrote to Judge Jesse Arthur that the “results” of the 1901 Conference were the greatest, the most terrible sorrow of her life.

1926, the GC Session in Milwaukee. We have been told that the 1888 message there gained its true victory. That was a full 84 years ago, and there was no opposition to any of the messages presented in Milwaukee. If 1926 is the renewal of the latter rain and the Loud cry, and it was so beautifully accepted by everybody (which was notably not the case in 1888), why are we still here a full 84 years later? Fact is: 1926 message was not the 1888 message!

1952. The Bible Conference in Takoma Park was said to be a far greater and more successful presentation of the message than was the case in 1888. Again, there was no opposition. If the latter rain began again in 1952 and was so beautifully received, why are we still here 58 years later? Again, the essential motifs of the 1888 message are lacking in the 1952 messages.

All this is actually very good news. It is a positive, upbeat message, because it demonstrates that the Lord is not responsible for the long delay. And there is indeed something we can do: we can repent, precisely as our Lord calls upon us in the Laodicean message, to do. There is absolutely no need for the delay to roll on and on, decade after decade into the 21st century. We can repent of our unbelief. We can humble our hearts before the Lord and before one another. We can lay the axe at the root of this

tree of unbelief and insubordination. We can stop denying truth and begin confessing the full truth. This will not discourage any of our people. It will greatly encourage them. The truths of the 1888 message are present truth, warm, heart-inspiring, encouraging. They will rejuvenate any sabbath school class, any prayer meeting, any worship service, any children’s division, any church school, any academy, any college, yes, any university. Young people especially fall in love with the 1888 message if they are permitted to hear it undistorted, unopposed. It is pure NT good news, purer and more authentic even than what Luther preached 400 years ago. It is a message uniquely Adventist, because it is parallel to and consistent with the unique Adventist concept of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. It presents Christ as a Saviour nigh at hand, not afar off. Its concept of justification by faith is the clearest that has been taught in this world since the days of Paul himself, for it declares that NT justification by faith actually makes the repentant believer to become obedient to all the commandments of God. In other words, the clearest way to lead a person to accept the Sabbath and to keep it holy, is to present to him this justification by faith. The message provides motivation, heart-motivation, the kind that constrains you individually and the church “as a whole” henceforth to live not unto self but unto Him who died for us and rose again.

All the Lord needs is one given generation of people whose hearts feel the constraint of that *agape* love so that self is truly crucified with

Christ—then, we read, HE will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness.

Let no one underestimate his own importance. The humblest lay-member who has done his homework and who understands and believes the message, can be the agent to bring reformation and revival to his church, his school, his college, his institution. God's hand is not shortened that it cannot work effectively with such a humble instrument!