

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? WHAT IS THIS "1888 MESSAGE"?

And What on Earth Happened to It
When the Lord "Sent" It?

By Paul Penno Jr.
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Part 1: The Latter Rain and the 1888 Message

We start with the most simple beginning truth: the message was the initial fulfillment of the following Bible prophecy: "After these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. . . . And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:1-4).

For thousands of years, even from the time of the ancient prophets, God's people have dreamed of that glorious vision. And here it was, at last played out before the eyes of assembled delegates to a Seventh-day Adventist Church world conference in 1888.

Your most natural reaction is probably this: how could this 1888 message be this cataclysmic event that everybody who has Bibles can read about? A "mighty angel"? "great power"? "earth . . . lightened with glory"? "strong voice from heaven" penetrating every honest heart in Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism "the world"?

Someone must be kidding! The "1888 message" was a mere whimper in the world of that day (and ours now). It made its contribution in a little wooden church with scarcely 100 delegates.

Quite true. Remember, however, the great long-awaited Messiah who was born in a humble cowshed, and we are warned not to despise "the day of small things" (Zech. 4:10).

A keen listener and perceptive observer was present at that humble gathering. She saw something happen that apparently none of her contemporaries recognized. The 1888 "event" was indeed the beginning of that eschatological wonder (well, it took Ellen White about four years of contemplation to come to that astounding conclusion, enough to say it publicly).

Furthermore, she seems to declare as a positive statement, through use of a double negative, that it was "showers from heaven of the latter rain." Her closest contemporaries say they had evidence in Australia that this was her conviction.

And it makes sense, for Early Writings seems to say that there's no way the "loud cry" of Revelation 18 can make its long-awaited world debut unless that latter rain is "sent" first. The evidence that the 1888 message is Revelation 18 fulfilled is far more than merely Ellen White's subjective evaluation; it's the internal objective evidence in the message itself. Its unique elements of built-in biblical truth demonstrate a comprehensive evangel that can meet the specifications of a world-enlightening message.

If Ellen White was wrong in her perception here, her life testimony gets pretty well discredited en toto, for never was she so enthusiastic about anything in her long career than she was about this identification of “1888” significance.

What was the initial, rock-bottom, foundational idea that permeates “1888”? What makes the message so unique in its claim for the attention of Seventh-day Adventists today?

Simply put, it is something that never crossed the minds of Luther, Calvin, or the Wesleys long ago, or Sunday-keeping Evangelicals of the 1888 era, or, it seems, has yet to penetrate the consciousness of our Sunday-keeping brethren and sisters of today. Maybe we haven’t told it in a way that grips their interest. It’s the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, the ministry of our great High Priest in the second or Most Holy Apartment. The context of “1888” is the cosmic Day of Atonement. We’ve been living in it since 1844.

Let’s try to sort this out and make sense of it.

The problem in 1888 was that although that cosmic Day of Atonement began 44 years earlier according to Daniel 8:14, our own people (and church leaders) had not embraced the idea of following Christ by faith in His closing work. The issue was clear cut:

1. What brought the Seventh-day Adventist Church into being was this idea that explained the mystery of the Great Disappointment of 1844. At the conclusion of the 2300-year prophecy (“then shall the sanctuary be cleaned”), Christ left the First Apartment, closed its “door” figuratively speaking,

and opened a new phase of His “sanctuary” ministry. He began His final work of atonement in the second or Most Holy Apartment.

2. His sacrifice on the cross had been ample and complete; but now He must lead His people into a complete heart-reconciliation with Himself. The Holy Spirit must speak creatively to a corporate body of the church, “Be ye reconciled to God.” Every buried root of alienation must be “cleansed.”

3. From 1844 on, Christ’s main work was no longer to prepare believing people to die and go in the grave to await the first resurrection (a preparation wonderful enough if you have to die!). But now in this great Day of Atonement He must prepare a people to be ready for translation without tasting death. This required their learning a “new song.”

It about takes people’s breath away today, but this was precisely “the blessed hope” that sustained the believers who went through the Great Disappointment or 1844. And it fired the enthusiasm of the ‘little flock’ that would not give up their faith that the Holy Spirit was in that movement. The early Seventh-day Adventists expected to see Jesus come in their lifetime, and they would have been so privileged many at least if the “leading brethren” had not intercepted the Lord’s initial gift of the latter rain.

Disturbing as this maybe, large numbers of thoughtful and loyal Seventh-day Adventists worldwide are constrained by conscience to acknowledge this reality. Immense suffering in the world has had to go on and on for many decades;

it's been unnecessary for the completion of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

In the early years after 1844, the little group of "Advent believers" gladly accepted every ray of light that Heaven sent them:

- (a) the sanctuary message as we understand it was first; then
- (b) came the seventh-day Sabbath truth; and
- (c) the time to begin the Sabbath (sunset); then
- (d) the basic principle of health reform, which was Day of Atonement practical godliness; then
- (e) the nature of man (mortal, not immortal); and
- (f) even a dress reform that expressed the principle of modest living and appropriate self-denial.

By 1856, a finite angel (whose knowledge incidentally was not omniscient) was happy with the obvious progress of developing faith in the hearts of these people. He predicted with angelic (but finite) judgment that some believers then living would be translated without seeing death at the coming of Jesus. The promise of the Lord descending "from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God . . . [when] the dead in Christ shall rise first," and "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air,"—this was to be fulfilled in their lifetime! Now, if only this people will accept the gift of the beginning of the latter rain, the angel's prophecy will be fulfilled. But the "leading brethren" did not, and "shut it away" from the people.

In 1890, nearly two years after the beginning of the "most precious message," Ellen White said that there was a problem. Speaking in the capacity of "the testimony of Jesus" as the Spirit of Prophecy, she wrote a series of appeals in the Review pleading with our people, and especially our leading brethren, to realize what period of world history they were living in. She declared the message of Jones and Waggoner to be the Holy Spirit's practical application of Christ's Most Holy Apartment ministry:

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

Next week, again: "Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary, and He is there to make an atonement for the people. . . . He is cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. What is our work? It is our work to be in harmony with the work of Christ. By faith we are to work with Him, to be in union with Him. . . . A people is to be prepared for the great day of God" (January 28).

Next week, again: "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).

Next week: "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).

She is burdened with this idea: “The people have not entered into the holy place [most holy], where Jesus has gone to make an atonement for His children. . . . But there is spiritual drought in the churches” (February 25).

Next week again: “Light is flashing from the throne of God, and what is this for? It is that a people may be prepared to stand in the day of God” (March 4).

Finally, the next week she says what’s on her heart: “We have been hearing His voice more distinctly in the message that has been going for the last two years. . . . We have only just begun to get a little glimmering of what faith is” (March 11).

“You have been having light from heaven for the past year and a half, that the Lord would have you bring into your character and weave into your experience. . . . If our brethren were all laborers together with God they would not doubt but that the message He has sent us during these last two years is from heaven, . . . special light for the people” (March 18).

What does all this mean?

How is this 1888 idea of justification by faith related to a special Day of Atonement ministry of Christ as High Priest which began only after 1844? In what way does the 1888 idea of justification by faith go beyond that of the 16th century Reformers and of our Sunday-keeping Evangelicals (and yes, the view that is popular among us today)?

Or does it go beyond?

1. The 1888 idea lifted the cross of Christ higher than it had been displayed since Pentecost. It was a partial fulfillment of a later prophecy Ellen White made: “Great truths that have lain unheeded and unseen since the day of Pentecost, are to shine from God’s word in their native purity.” This is astounding, but think it through.

2. The 1888 message of justification by faith proclaimed that Christ had successfully accomplished the mission the Father had sent Him to do—He had actually redeemed the world, saved the world, won for “all men” an adoption into the family of His Father, and thus granted to them all a legal justification. By virtue of the cross the world itself now stood in a different relationship to God. Christ had now become the “last” or second Adam; He had reversed the legal condemnation that had come on the world because of the first Adam’s sin.

3. In other words, now the Father, because of Christ’s sacrifice, could “make His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and send rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). God was now free to treat “every man” as though he had not sinned. Now the truth of the Lord’s Supper could make heartfelt sense: Christ Himself is the “bread of God . . . which . . . giveth life unto the world.” “The bread that I will give,” says Jesus, “is My flesh which I will give for the life of the world. . . . Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you true of all men,” believers and unbelievers alike.

4. But this truth that is articulated in the 1888 message does not mean that everyone will go to

heaven. It is not the heresy of Universalism. By His sacrifice, Christ has given to every one of us the freedom to resist and reject what He has done for us. And many do. The lost ask for their own final destruction. But those who are saved are those who gladly receive the gift.

5. Once Seventh-day Adventists were to learn to proclaim this astounding truth the objective gospel in its fullness—what Christ has done for the human race, then honest hearts would experience what the Bible calls “justification by faith.” That’s the subjective gospel. Hearts and lives are changed forever. By proclaiming what Christ accomplished on His cross, the heart is won. Salvation is not merely an “offer” made to the world, it’s the “gift” He has “given” to the world. John 12:32, 33 comes into its own: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die.” The Lord has given this unworthy people a unique grasp of the significance of Christ’s cross—yet to lighten the earth with glory.

“Christ’s death proves God’s great love for man. It is our pledge of salvation. To remove the cross from the Christian would be like blotting the sun from the sky. The cross brings us near to God, reconciling us to Him. With the relenting compassion of a father’s love, Jehovah looks upon the suffering that His Son endured in order to save the race from eternal death, and accepts us in the Beloved.” Focus sharply the picture of that up-lifted cross, and multitudes will respond.

By revealing the extent of Christ's accomplishment on His cross, people are brought to see themselves

as “Esau;” they have been given the birthright; not only offered it. Yes, it is an offer, but far more than merely an offer, it is given “in Christ.” In startling reality, the sinner sees that Christ has personally, individually, died his second death. It’s far more than a stirring of the emotions. Now hearts are confronted with a meaningful alternative either “despise” and “sell” what was placed in their hands (as did Esau), or treasure the gift by the same faith that Abraham exercised. As one example, the self-sacrifice needed to accept the Sabbath truth becomes a joy. The Holy Spirit will do a “quick work” in all the world.

6. Genuine justification by faith in this Day of Atonement is infinitely more than a legal declaration (as is commonly supposed); it accomplishes within itself all the heart-changing miracles that we assign to “sanctification.” In summarizing the 1888 message of justification by faith, Ellen White declared that it makes the believer “obedient to all the commandments of God,” which of course includes the fourth—the Sabbath commandment. And therein is revealed the truth that prepares a people for translation. It’s a more mature presentation of the grace of God that effectively “teaches” the joy of self-denial. The Sabbath “proclaimed more fully” is what Early Writings says must come with the Loud Cry.

No one can proclaim justification by faith in its end-time setting who does not render heart-felt obedience to all the commandments of God. There can be no unconscious subservience to the “man of sin” (who created the spurious sabbath) where

justification by faith is clearly understood in the light of the cleansing of the sanctuary. There is in justification by faith today the heart-changing power that effects both the blotting out of sin and the final atonement. It is truth which is “the power of God unto salvation.” When proclaimed and received by the corporate body of God’s people, it will make possible the heavenly announcement, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.”