

10. FIRST THINGS FIRST (HAGGAI)

Major Lessons from Minor Prophets

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The generation that returned from the Babylonian exile put the responsibility of building the new temple upon their rulers rather than finance it themselves. The reason why God wanted them to take responsibility for the construction of the temple was that it might be an educational tool in helping them to understanding their need of a heart-appreciation for the sanctuary gospel. Their priorities of building homes and businesses indicated that they did not understand that God wished to dwell in their soul-temple. "In the building of the second temple, God was not so anxious to see the completion of an erection of wood and stone, as to see in the hearts of His people that preparation for a pure and spiritual worship which would make it possible for Him to bless them."

There is a parallel to this in modern Israel. Christ initiated the beginning of a deeper appreciation of the motivational truths of the gospel in 1888 which is the beginning of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. That efficiency of the Spirit working a change of life and the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts is our deepest need.

God raised up the prophet Haggai with a message to the people. "Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD" (Haggai 1:13). They had neglected to build a house for the

Lord. "This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built" (Haggai 1:2). They had made building their own homes the priority. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:4). They were selfish in thinking only of themselves.

The Lord sent a message by Haggai to all the people of the land bidding them work and be of good courage. The most splendid temple that men could have built would have fallen far short of God's grand purpose. This was that men themselves should be His temple. "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest?" (Isa. 66:1).

God's chosen dwelling place is not in temples made with hands. He Himself has constructed a temple, a living one, in which He may reveal His glory. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." "The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). We cannot make ourselves holy; God has done that already; but we can defile the temple of God by enthroning idols in the holy place where God has chosen to dwell. The sacredness of the human body can only be measured by the holiness of Him who dwells there. "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a humble and contrite spirit" (Isa. 57:15). Think how much is brought into God's temple. There is the loftiness and height of God, as well as His eternity. So we read that we are to comprehend the length and

depth and breadth and height of the love of Christ, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:18, 19). God will infinitely enlarge the life that is submitted to Him, so that it shall be a fit temple for Himself in every respect.

The relation between God and His people, in their perfect union, is typified by the relation of the bridegroom and the bride. These are one flesh, yet each can see the other as a separate person. In a perfect marriage there is perfect union so that both lives are merged in one, yet the happiness is wonderfully increased by reason of the separate existence of the loved one. Thus not only do the heart and will and judgment find enjoyment, but also the senses that convey impressions from the inner life.

This was the truth which God spake to the Jews through Haggai, if they had had ears for it. "I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you" (Haggai 2:5).

Because God has formed every man for His own dwelling place, and implanted in every soul desires that can only be satisfied by the fullness of God dwelling within, Christ is truly "the Desire of all nations."

Jesus Christ is "the Desire of all nations" (Haggai 2:7). There are comparatively few of the people in the world who know Him, and who recognize Him as the object of their desire; but it is a fact that all the very longings of the human heart can be satisfied in Christ, and in Him alone. God has

implanted desires in every soul, which can be satisfied only by the possession of Christ, in order that when He is lifted up before them, they may see in Him the object of their desires, and be drawn to Him. The devil's work is to deceive people with the thought that their desires may be satisfied in some other way than by the possession of Christ.

"And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts" (Haggai 2:7). When the Holy Spirit outpouring of the latter rain comes, will it sweep like a tidal wave throughout the church? Let history speak and tell us something:

An example is the birth of Jesus. The coming of Jesus of Nazareth did not do that for the scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem. The great Messiah, the "Desire of all nations," anticipated throughout the world, came in that humble birth of a Baby in a cowshed.

A handful of "wise men from the East" responded to the call of the Holy Spirit; in Jerusalem here was Anna, a very old woman, who came to see Him (Luke 2:32), and there was old Simeon who was ecstatic with joy at His birth (vss. 25ff.); but beyond them, no one that gets a mention in the Bible.

Apparently the lesson is clear: when the latter rain comes, no one will get a morsel of bread except the hungry ones who are famished for it, and no one will get a drink of water except the desperately thirsty ones. The latter rain may be falling in copious showers of grace all around us and we slip through the grand experience untouched, only to embrace a counterfeit cleverly done up by the

“father of lies.” And then we would collide with the “mark of the beast” test—unprepared. Some fearing and trembling is appropriate now.

All around the world He is doing that today. Things are happening, beneath the surface. Are you within His little circle?

It was our proud boastful spirit that flaunted in the face of God the idle promise, heard at Sinai, “All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.” There at Sinai, it was we who forged upon ourselves the unbearable fetters of the old covenant. To terrify and humble us, and thus to fasten us in conviction of our sinfulness and utter weakness, the Ten Awful Words were spoken amidst the lightnings and thunders of Sinai. It was ourselves who were concluded under sin, shut up under the law, prisoners and servants, until they persisted “going about” stupidly, from age to age, in the darkness of our evil hearts, our way any way illuminated only by the occasional sparks of our own kindling, vainly endeavoring to establish our own righteousness, not submitting unto the righteousness of Christ. And when at last the blessed Gift was sent, the “Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” the Desire of all Nations, it was we who in our blindness and enmity spat upon His loving face, and pressed the thorns which the earth brought forth to *us* upon His undeserving brow. It was we who hid our faces from Him, we who esteemed Him not, we who despised Him. It was we who cried out “crucify Him”, and the nails that pierced His quivering hands and feet were driven with our hands, with the implements of our own devising.

“Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” Verily, if He died for us, it was we who crucified Him. “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. . . The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

“His Wondrous Cross, The Story of Our Redemption.” It came from Isaac Watts! His hymn has been said to be the most profoundly beautiful one in the English language:

“When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.”

The Holy Spirit gave Watts a glimpse into what the cross means, a foretaste of what must be the heart of the message that will yet lighten the earth with glory when the fourth angel of Revelation 18:1-4 is at last given freedom to proclaim what he wants to proclaim.

An undistorted, unconfused vision of what happened on the cross will be the heart of a message that delivers every believing heart from the captivity of self-love—which is our greatest problem worldwide. It’s possible for devotion to self to flourish in the heart and not be recognized either by the subject himself or by others around him. It’s possible even in clergymen and teachers. As a consequence of “our” resistance to the message of that fourth angel in the 1888 era, Ellen White said that “the religion of many among us will be the

religion of apostate Israel [Baal worship as in the days of Elijah],” for Baal worship is the worship of self disguised as the worship of Christ. Here’s what she said:

“The prejudices and opinions that prevailed at Minneapolis [1888] are not dead by any means . . . The tops have been cut down, but the roots have never been eradicated, and they still bear their unholy fruit to poison the judgment, pervert the perceptions, and blind the understanding of those with whom you connect, in regard to the [1888] message and the messengers. . . .

“With many the cry of the heart has been, ‘We will not have this man [Jesus] to reign over us.’ Baal, Baal, is the choice. . . . What kind of future is before us if we shall fail to come into the unity of the [1888] message?” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 467, 468; 1890).

The answer to her question is (simply put) where we are today.

Israelites by the many thousands thronged the slopes of Mt. Carmel when Elijah summoned them; their “membership” was huge. The devotee-priests of Baal and Ashtoreth numbered nearly a thousand. The Lord told Elijah that “7000 had not bowed the knee to Baal,” but not one of them dared step out of the closet and identify boldly with Elijah. Ellen White has often said that in our brief denominational history we have repeated the history of ancient Israel; thoughtful people have often prayed, “O Lord, when will Mt. Carmel come again?” There has to be an answer: only when “Elijah” comes again.

“Mt. Carmel” will not come until the cross of Christ again becomes the central message of our pastoral and evangelistic ministry. In sending to “us” the “most precious message” of 1888, the Lord intended that every Seventh-day Adventist church in the world should become the place where people would want to go to hear the sacrifice of Christ proclaimed in His love:

“The theme that attracts the heart of the sinner is Christ and Him crucified. On the cross of Calvary Jesus stands revealed to the world in unparalleled love. Present Him thus to the hungering multitudes, and the light of His love will win men from darkness to light, from transgression to obedience and true holiness. Beholding Jesus upon the cross of Calvary arouses the conscience to the heinous character of sin as nothing else can do” (Review and Herald, Nov. 22, 1892, the same article where the author identified the 1888 message as the “beginning” of the message of that fourth angel of Revelation 18).

With her word “beholding,” Ellen White explained Isaac Watts’ word, “When I survey the wondrous cross . . .” Like a surveyor carefully measuring a tract of land, it was God’s intention that the Seventh-day Adventist Church should, in a way no corporate body of God’s people had ever yet done, proclaim the measurements of the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of the *agape* displayed openly at Calvary. This finally totally honest appraisal of what it cost the Son of God to save the world will motivate the hearts of honest people worldwide to prepare for the final scenes of

earth's history and the personal return of Jesus in that same generation. She later declared that the world gospel commission could have been completed by 1893 if that fourth angel had been permitted to proclaim his message unresisted and unfrustrated (*General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 419).

But what was so special about the 1888 proclamation of the cross that was not also proclaimed by the Sunday-keeping Evangelical Protestant (and even Roman Catholic) churches? Surely, the Protestant churches of the 1890s were proclaiming Luther's understanding of the cross! Doesn't that fulfill Ellen White's criteria? Seriously: is there a unique Seventh-day Adventist grasp of the truth of the cross of Christ? Are we arrogant to say so?

Yes, there is a unique understanding of the cross God has given us!

And it's not sinful for us to say so clearly. The two unworthy "messengers" to whom God entrusted the 1888 message discovered the light by the simple process of joining together the corporate justification by faith idea that Paul taught in Romans and Galatians together with the unique Seventh-day Adventist idea of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary (that began in 1844). Voila! There was the beginning of the light of the latter rain message. The two had stumbled on the discovery of the ages. New spiritual surveyance wonders were seen in "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the love [*agape*] of Christ revealed in His atoning sacrifice.

But after all these decades, the world has yet to understand even where Jesus is—in the Most Holy Apartment. The whole Christian world must understand what happened at the end of the 2300 years. They may reject but they must see. No one else but Seventh-day Adventists can proclaim that message, and our combined "loud voice" is still but a whisper.

The world also must understand what Jesus is doing in that final work of atonement. We have been having difficulty understanding the dynamics of the final message that must yet go to all the world, just as the Jews of Christ's day couldn't comprehend what He wanted them to understand. "The beginning" of that wondrous ministry came in the message of 1888 as humbly as the Birth came in Bethlehem.

And the message when it comes in its fullness is not to be legalistic, theologically boring theory; it's to be a heart-gripping truth that even Muslims and Hindus can grasp when it is rightly presented. And our youth!

The 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 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.”¹ 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 to 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).

¹ *Steps to Christ*, p. 27 (1892)

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

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.