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Blessings of the Disappointment

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A couple of years ago a conference-sponsored seminary student approached me after my lecture on the meaning of the great disappointment of October 22, 1844. "How is it possible," he asked, "that someone like you can conscientiously defend such an unbiblical doctrine as Christ's entering His ministry in heaven's most holy place on October 22, 1844?"

Unfortunately, this student is not the only Seventh-day Adventist to have expressed such doubts. Beginning with D. M. Canright, a leading evangelist who left the church in 1887, down through Desmond Ford and on to today, a number of church members have expressed reservations about the pioneer Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14.

Many critics applaud the Adventist belief that Christ has a most-holy-place ministry, but they say that we are 1800 years behind the times. Christ, they insist, began His ministry in the most holy place at His ascension. Accordingly, they regard the Adventist interpretation of October 22, 1844, as a "face-saving device" and as representing a misunderstanding of the gospel and a misinterpretation of the Bible. The only value October 22 provides, they say, is that it shows how wrong Adventists are in calculating the time prophecies. Instead of calling October 22, 1844 the day of the great disappointment, they prefer to call it the great disillusion and complain that the Millerite emphasis on time setting did great harm to Christianity and created suspicion about anything having to do with the second advent.

Response of Adventist Pioneers.

If they were alive today, what would be the response of the Adventist pioneers to the skeptical ferment today regarding the

great disappointment?

I believe the pioneer response would be simple and straightforward: “There is nothing new under the sun. We have faced all this and more before!”

Sometimes we forget that our pioneers were deep Bible students, experienced in defending truth, for they lived amid bitter criticism from all sides. In knowledge and familiarity with the Bible most of us would pale beside the pioneer Bible students who researched the pillars of our faith. They believed that thorough study of the prophecies was an essential key for understanding the nature of Christ's ministry in preparation for the second advent.

If they were alive today, I believe the pioneers would point out that they experienced the great disappointment precisely because they did believe that Christ's ministry in the most holy place began at His ascension. The disappointment itself led them to the surprising discovery that this understanding was incorrect and was out of harmony with the broader context of the whole Bible.

During 1843 and 1844, attention of the Adventists became more and more directed to Christ's heavenly ministry and its connection to the cleansing of the sanctuary at the end of the 2300 prophetic years. In the summer of 1844, S. S. Snow, a Millerite preacher, summed up their expectations in the light of Christ's ministry in the most holy place. Building on Miller's views of the antitypical significance of the Day of Atonement, Snow observed that on the typical Day of Atonement, “the high priest went into the most holy place of the tabernacle, presenting the blood of the victim before the mercy-seat, after which on the same day he came out and blessed the waiting congregation of Israel. See Lev. ix. 7, 22, 23, 24, and Lev. 16th chap; Heb. v. 1-6, and ix. 1-12, 27, 28. Now the important point in this type is the completion of the reconciliation at the coming of the high priest out of the holy place. The high priest was a type of Jesus our High Priest; the most holy place a type of heaven itself; and the coming out of the high priest a type of the coming of Jesus the second time to bless his waiting people. As this was on the tenth day of the 7th month, so on that day

[October 22, 1844] Jesus will certainly come, because not a single point of the law is to fail. All must be fulfilled.”¹

When this expectation that Christ would “come out of” the most holy place on October 22 was not fulfilled, the disappointed ones went back to search the Scriptures on this specific point. As a result, they discovered the blessing of the promise that in the time of the end the book of Daniel was to be unsealed. A flood of light on Christ's heavenly ministry prepared them for their unique mission. Contrary to the expectations of their enemies, the disappointment did not mark the end of a group of deceived enthusiasts; it became instead the theological touchstone and rallying point of a dynamic new movement with a mission to prepare the whole world for Christ's return.

New Light After Disappointment.

Intensive study of Daniel and Revelation in the light of Christ's heavenly ministry brought new hope and joy to the believers. It solved the question as to why Christ did not return in 1844 and also provided a blueprint for mission.

Daniel 8:14--The Heavenly Sanctuary.

The use of a Christ-centered approach to time prophecies brought a dramatic breakthrough in the study of Daniel 8. It centered around the principle that Old Testament prophetic symbols pertaining to events after Christ's crucifixion ought to be interpreted in a new-covenant sense.

Applying this principle to the interpretation of Daniel 8:14 made it clear that the sanctuary scheduled to be cleansed at the end of 2300 years could not be the earth (to be destroyed by fire as they had believed) but of necessity was the new-covenant sanctuary in heaven, as the Bible clearly teaches in Hebrews 8:2; 9:22, 23, and in other places. This discovery led to a wealth of insights into Christ's final ministry for our salvation.

Two-Apartment Sanctuary.

From a study of the Old Testament sanctuary services and the book of Hebrews, pioneer Adventists came to realize that Christ is

the antitype of the priesthoods of both Melchizedek (Hebrews 7) and Aaron (Hebrews 8-10). His Melchizedek priesthood provides Him the legal right to be priest, and the Aaronic priesthood sets the pattern of His priestly ministry. As the earthly sanctuary had two apartments and was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary, we are to conclude that Christ's heavenly ministry occupies a real sanctuary with two apartments--which, doubtless, are immensely large and glorious. (See Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 357.)

Christ's Ministry Foreshadowed.

The two-apartment Aaronic ministry in the earthly sanctuary consisted of two phases. The first phase, called the “continual” or “daily” ministry, occurred in the holy place throughout the year and focused on forgiveness. Symbolically, the priest transferred confessed sins into the sanctuary. The second phase, the “yearly” ministry, occurred in the most holy place once a year, on the Day of Atonement. This atoning ministry involved the cleansing of the sanctuary through the blotting out of the confessed sins that had been brought into it; it resulted in a cleansed people.

Using the biblical principle of typology, the Adventist pioneers concluded that Christ's ministry must reflect these symbolic features. The first phase of His heavenly ministry, the antitype of Aaron's continual or daily ministry, started at His ascension, when He began making continual intercession as High Priest for the forgiveness of sins (see Hebrews 7:25). But what about His Day of Atonement ministry?

As they further probed the relationship between sanctuary typology (Leviticus 16 and 23) and the sanctuary prophecy of Daniel 8, it dawned on the pioneers that the true meaning of Daniel 8:14 was that at the end of the 2300 years Christ was to embark on the final phase of His atoning ministry. Thus instead of being the date when He would leave the most holy place for the second advent, October 22, 1844 taught Adventists that having completed His work in the holy place, Christ then began the second phase of His heavenly ministry by entering into the most holy place.

The mistake in the interpretation of the prophecy did not

involve the calculation of the chronology of the 2300 years but only the nature of the event to take place at the end of the prophetic period. Christ entered upon His antitypical Day of Atonement ministry in 1844, not at His ascension as Christians had traditionally believed.

The study of Daniel 7 and the disappointment resulted in a further unsealing of Daniel. Adventists discovered a closer, complementary relationship between Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 than they had observed before. The new light gave them increased assurance of God's love and fairness in dealing with sinners and the eradication of sin.

Among the new insights was the realization that the Bible views the Day of Atonement as a day of judgment as well as of reconciliation and the blotting out of sin. On the Day of Atonement people were commanded to afflict their souls as part of a total surrender to the Lord. Those who failed to do this were judged unfit to continue among God's people and were sentenced to expulsion from the community of the faithful (Lev 23:26-29).

Since 1840 Josiah Litch had spoken of a judgment that would precede the second coming, but he had seen it as preceding rather than following 1844. With their enhanced understanding of Christ's post-1844 ministry, the early Adventists perceived new connections between the heavenly judgment in Daniel 7 and the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8. They saw that Christ's cleansing of the sanctuary was intimately associated with a post-1844 heavenly judgment just prior to His return. The judgment of Daniel 7 revealed the precise nature of the judgment during the cleansing of the antitypical Day of Atonement.

Ever since the first centuries after Christ, church commentators had interpreted the coming of the Son of man on the clouds in Daniel 7 as the second advent. Now it dawned on the Advent believers that this was not a biblical notion. In Daniel 7 Christ is portrayed as coming to the Ancient of Days, the Father, not to the earth! It is not until after this judgment is over that Christ is to receive the kingdom (Dan 7:14). Then He will return to earth on

the clouds (Rev 1:7) to bestow the kingdom on the saints (Luke 12:35-37; Dan 7:27). All who have accepted the invitation to the marriage supper (Rev 19:9; Luke 22:30) He takes back to heaven with Him (John 14:1-3).

Judgment Began Oct. 22, 1844.

The association of the cleansing of the sanctuary with the judgment of Daniel 7 led to the conclusion that the beginning of the antitypical Day of Atonement was also the commencement of the final judgment. This was a very sobering insight which led the believers to a close self investigation of whether their beliefs and lifestyle were fully in harmony with the Bible.

It also brought a sense of joy and comfort. Christ had given the believers another sign of assurance. The disappointment was not the crushing defeat of their imaginary hopes but a landmark in the plan of salvation! It was a sign that the advent movement was still on track. It was the most important sign of the times and provided the divine confirmation that the second advent was indeed very near. The prophetic message confirmed their hopes: Christ's return is near because He has entered upon the final judgment as our Advocate and Savior.

Judgment in Phases.

Adventists discovered that the Bible makes a distinction between the judgment of the worshipers of God and the judgment of those who do not worship God. The judgment begins with God's people (1 Pet 4:17). When this phase is completed, the judgment will proceed to the unrighteous.

The judgment, therefore, must begin with everyone who has ever professed to be a worshiper of God. It is logical to assume that it started with Abel, the first to die, and proceeds to those who will be living when Christ returns. Those worshipers whose cases upon investigation are counted worthy will receive immortality at the second advent (Luke 20:35, 36). Thus the proclamation of the hour of God's judgment (Rev 14:7) just before the second advent must refer to a judgment dealing with God's people.

When Christ returns, the judgment of God's people will be over

and the judgment will be ready to proceed to the unrighteous. This other phase of judgment will take place during the millennium and will involve the redeemed not as subjects but as judges (1 Cor 6:2, 3; Rev 20:4). At the end of the millennium the avowed enemies of God will be executed; they will experience the second death (Rev 20:11-14).

Dual Work of Cleansing.

William Miller and many Adventists had interpreted the “cleansing of the sanctuary” in Daniel 8:14 as a simultaneous cleansing of the earth and of the church. The pioneers also maintained a dual perspective. They perceived that even within their recognition that the sanctuary was in heaven, not on earth, Christ's Day of Atonement ministry was to have far-reaching implications for the church on earth and for the lifestyle of its members.

O. R. L. Crosier wrote in 1846: “There is a literal and a spiritual temple--the literal being the Sanctuary in New Jerusalem (literal city), and the spiritual the church--the literal occupied by Jesus Christ, our King and Priest, John 14:2, Heb. 8:2, 9:11; the spiritual by the Holy Ghost. 1 Cor. 3:17; 6:19, Eph. 2:20-22. Between these two there is a perfect concert of action, as Christ 'prepares the place' the Spirit does the people. When he came to his temple, the sanctuary, to cleanse it, the Spirit commenced the special cleansing of the people. Mal. 3:1-3.”²

The practical implications of the cleansing of God's people led each one to a close self-examination. The believers saw that each one must be engaged in a work of thorough personal preparation. Accepting the Bible as the norm for daily life and as the standard in the judgment, Adventists studied it thoroughly to be sure that all their beliefs and practices were in full compliance with its teachings. Doing so brought about a number of changes, dramatically purifying them from non-biblical doctrines and worldly behavior. It also revealed that sanctification is a lifelong process of purifying the life in preparation for the second advent, in contrast to some theories, popular at the time, of an instant

sanctification occurring at or soon after conversion.

Lifelong sanctification was fully endorsed by the Spirit of Prophecy. Effective preparation for the second coming involves, through the grace and power of Christ, gaining “the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action.” Through this type of cleansing, believers would come to “reflect the image of Jesus fully.” They would receive the seal of the living God (Rev 7:2) and be protected against the seven last plagues during the time of trouble.³

The great disappointment forced Adventists to take nothing for granted but to test all things by the Bible. They rejected all teachings and practices not supported or upheld by its testimony. In taking this attitude they followed the true spirit of the Protestant Reformation. Like the early Reformers, they believed that true reform is not static but dynamic and would continue to mold the believers as God's providence revealed new duties and responsibilities. And their quest for reform led Adventists to the blessings of still further significant discoveries.

Truth Restored.

One question that frequently occupied the early Adventists was how long it would be before Jesus would return. Peter's sermon in Acts 3 gave them the answer: Jesus would remain in heaven until the times of restoration of all things (verses 20-21). This discovery led to a link between the antitypical Day of Atonement and the concept of the restoration of all truth.

Adventists interpreted Acts 3:20-21 to mean that Christ would not return before there would be a restoration of all truths among God's people and a purification of the church from all error in belief and practice.

This insight stimulated a continual quest for Bible truth. Adventists scrutinized their religious heritage in the light of the Bible, willing to give up any doctrine not in harmony with it. Light from the sanctuary molded them into a prophetic, Bible-centered remnant with a message calling people everywhere out of Babylon and back to the Bible in preparation for meeting their Lord at His

return.

Day of Worship Restored.

Light from the sanctuary pointed Adventists to the end-time opening of heaven's most holy place, drawing attention to the “ark of his testament” containing the Decalogue (Rev 11:19). Quickly they came to realize the importance of the ten commandments as the absolute standard in the judgment even now going on since 1844.

If the ten commandments were still in force, then Saturday, not Sunday, was the Bible day of rest and worship. Sunday worship was the prophesied work of the “man of sin” (Dan 7:25; 2 Thess 2:3-8).

Adventists who accepted the sanctuary doctrine changed their day of worship from Sunday to Saturday. They accepted the warning that Sunday observance would result in receiving the mark of the beast. As God's remnant, habitually keeping the commandments of God (Rev 12:17; 14:12), they experienced the rich blessings that accompany keeping the Sabbath holy (see Isa 58:13, 14).

Truth Regarding Death Restored.

In studying the second advent and questing for pure Bible-based doctrines, Adventists found, contrary to the general Christian view, that human nature is not immortal. Consequently, they adopted the biblical view of the nature of man that teaches that death is a sleep. When people die they sleep in the grave till the time of their resurrection.

Adoption of this Bible doctrine helped restore the second advent as the magnificent “Blessed Hope” (Titus 2:13) of the earliest Christians, for at the second coming they would meet their Savior in person and be reunited with their loved ones who died in Christ.

The erroneous belief that people go to heaven directly after death to be with Jesus and their deceased loved ones, detracts from any excitement about the imminence of Christ's return; for if upon death a believer meets Jesus, what is particularly exciting about the second advent? Adventists rediscovered the true blessedness of

Christ's return.

Biblical Mission Adopted.

Through the unsealing of Daniel, Adventists discovered new insights that formed the central core of the final gospel message which Christ wanted taken to the whole world. This message, which seemed to be unnoticed by the vast majority of Christians, was brought to the forefront by Adventists after 1844. An expansion of the great commission (Matt 28:18-20), it is recorded in Revelation 14:6-12 as the messages of three angels. These messages contain the final gospel invitation to humanity before the outpouring of God's wrath through the seven last plagues. For believers, these messages encouraged the blessed assurance that they were God's remnant, because this message was the last warning of mercy to be given to the world before the seven last plagues and Christ's return (Rev 14:6-15:8).

The combined message of the three angels ended with an encouraging observation that it would produce a faithful people, uniquely characterized by keeping God's commandments and the faith of Jesus (Rev 14:12).

Other Truths Restored.

In the decades following the great disappointment the influence of Christ's sanctuary ministry continued to affect the remnant church. Under the inspired testimonies of the Spirit of Prophecy, believers were urged to live what they believed. Awareness of Christ's cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary on the antitypical Day of Atonement should have made a difference in their lifestyle; and it did.

Stewardship.

One lifestyle change involved stewardship. To tackle the immense task of sharing with all humanity Christ's urgent and final gospel invitation, Seventh-day Adventist gladly adopted biblical stewardship principles. Time, money and talents were gifts God had generously given to His people. In response they heard the call of their Savior to dedicate all these gifts on the altar of sacrifice to

be used to His glory (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 13:3) in the world-wide promulgation of His message.

The financial commitment which Adventists made was fully in harmony with the Bible. As a church organization they chose to make a commitment to support full-time ministers through the tithe, returning to the Lord ten percent of their earnings. In addition, they gave free-will offerings for other church work, including the building and maintaining of churches, promoting education, relief and humanitarian work, etc. Those who accepted the stewardship plan were abundantly blessed.

Wholistic Health.

Through the inspired leadership of the Spirit of Prophecy, Seventh-day Adventists took very seriously Paul's counsel in preparation for the second advent: "May God sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:23). Adventists came to realize that preparation for the second advent involves nothing less than the sanctification of all their faculties--spiritual, mental, and physical. Consequently, believers adopted health reform as part of their preparation for the second advent. They observed that there existed an inseparable link between physical habits and spirituality. When they saw that unhealthful eating, drinking, dressing and living were a detriment to character development and the overcoming of sin, health reform became an indispensable and integral part of their concept of present truth.

Adornment.

The simplicity of Christ's life was the focus of dress reform. Jewelry, cosmetics and worldly attire were gladly given up. They had no place in the lives of believers at the very time when Christ was finishing His Day of Atonement ministry. It was a most solemn time calling for total consecration and the "afflicting of souls." The goal was clear: the beauty of a Christlike spirit was the lifestyle to be admired and the witness to be displayed.

The believers experienced the new light on these subjects as a great blessing from heaven, coming from a loving God whose

object it was to alleviate human suffering and “to secure the highest possible development of mind and soul and body.”⁴

Relevance for Today.

In looking back 150 years it is clear that the events following the 1844 disappointment were of monumental significance for God's people. The publications of the early pioneers record consistent praise for the gracious guidance of the Lord's providential leadings.

Revelation 10 designates Christ Himself as the One leading out in the second-advent movement, which called the world's attention to the significant ministry Christ was about to perform for the salvation of His people (Rev 10:1-2; 1:15, 16).⁵ This world-wide second-advent awakening, accompanied by special signs in the sun, moon and stars, aroused the interest of multitudes to the study of the subject of the second advent. Participants were richly blessed.

In Revelation 10:8-10, Christ foretold, through the bitter disappointment experienced by the prophet as he digested the open book, that the Adventists would experience a major disappointment after they proclaimed the message of the opened book of Daniel. Nothing could have been a more appropriate fulfillment of His prophetic word than the historic experience of the Adventists on October 23, 1844, when their hopes of the previous day were so bitterly dashed.

But this event was not to be the end of the Advent movement. Christ gave the disappointed Adventists a new prophetic commission with a world-wide scope in which the heavenly sanctuary was to occupy a prominent place. See Revelation 10:11 and 11:1.

Looking back on the events that transpired at the great disappointment, one cannot fail to see the hand of Providence in the historical foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist church. This provides a firm assurance that God was deeply involved in the prophetic time calculations. The time element played a vital role in preparing and purifying a people in preparation for the second

advent. Only those who kept their eyes upon Jesus and took time to patiently study the Scriptures for an explanation to the disappointment received the rich and abundant blessing He had in store for them.

The early Adventist remnant continued to live with the awareness that the final judgment had begun. Now Christ was engaged in the cleansing of both the heavenly temple and the earthly temple, His church. Their only hope was to follow the leadership of Christ, allowing Him to purify them through His grace, preparing a people to stand in the day of the Lord when He returns. In the process, they have received many blessings.

Many of the problems in the church today are the result of not knowing what it means to live in the great antitypical Day of Atonement. Few even among believers seem to know the science of salvation that looks constantly to Jesus and experiences the true meaning of how to “afflict the soul,” so that God can form us into His image, fully reflecting Jesus.

We hear much talk today about the necessity of change. Some eagerly introduce new forms of worship with new types of music. Constantly there is the cry for more relevance. Waves of new Bible translations flood the market, each claiming to be the most relevant. The effectiveness of preaching is questioned, and music, dialogue and drama occupy an increasingly important part of church services. More and more ministers and church members hesitate to address “church standards.” A greater laxness than ever results in an increasing number of young people drinking, smoking, using drugs, wearing jewelry and other worldly attire, and viewing worldly movies and videos. Few lead out in the biblical spirit of true reform centered around the Scriptures, focused on the life of Jesus, so believers can reflect Him more fully.

Our contemporary situation reveals the great urgency of recapturing the spirit of the early Adventists. Unless today's believers rediscover the true meaning of the great disappointment and also of its abundant blessings, they will not know what direction to give to the remnant church and its mission. This failure

could lead to a shift of direction that God never intended.

But in spite of depressing symptoms, there is good news. The Bible reveals that God will have a faithful people, ready when Jesus returns. They will have made the Lord the only hope of their lives and the Bible their only authority. They will continue unafraid in the footsteps of the pioneers, at last accomplishing the mission they started. Difficult as their struggles and conflict may be, they will finally triumph in the strength of the Lord. Maranatha.

NOTES

1. S. S. Snow, *The True Midnight Cry*, August 22, 1844, p. [4].
2. Letter, O. R. L. Crosier to Enoch Jacobs, *The Day-Star*, April 18, 1846, p. 31.
3. See Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 71; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 424-425; and *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 6:1117, 1118.
4. Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 23.
5. “The mighty angel who instructed John was no less a personage than Jesus Christ. Setting His right foot on the sea, and His left upon the dry land, shows the part which He is acting in the closing scenes of the great controversy with Satan. This position denotes His supreme authority over the whole earth.” Ellen G. White, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 7:971.