

The 1888 Failure

“When the fruit is brought forth, immediately He [Jesus Christ] putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come’ [Mark 4:29]. Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”—*Christ Object Lessons*, 69.1.

The Jewish calendar did not match a solar year (one complete circular movement of the earth around the sun in 365.25 days). After every few years, the Jews’ calendar would be off by a month or so. The wave sheaf (a bundle of grain stalks) was the firstfruits of the barley harvest, and was essential in determining whether or not passover could take place. In Jewish leap years, there are two Adar months, Adar I and Adar II. Adar II (the leap year month) was put in the calendar, to ensure the Jewish year remained aligned with the solar seasons. Adar II related to our March/April during leap years and after the events relating to the book of Esther, was a holiday when Purim was celebrated. (Purim: Haman convinced the king to issue a decree that all Jews in the Persian empire be killed and Esther revealed Haman’s plan to King Ahasuerus, pleading with him to spare her people.) Purim is always in Adar II while Adar I has the “Purim Katan” (Little Purim); it’s less elaborate and doesn’t involve all the same observances. The extra month, Adar II, ensured that Passover remained in the spring. To determine if the wave sheaf could be offered, the high priest looked upon the barley in the last month, the month of Adar I. If the harvest was not ready, the month of Adar II would be put into the calendar. This extra month was accepted with joy because it gave more time to prepare for the Passover that came the next month. After the Babylonian calendar started, this month was determined by math rather than the determination the high priest set for the harvest of the firstfruits.

In 1888, Christ was at the door. National Sunday laws were being discussed by the Committee of Education and Labor, in the U.S. Congress; and God appropriately sent His messengers:

“The message given us by A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner is the message of God to the Laodicean church, and woe be unto anyone who professes to believe the truth, and yet does not reflect to others the God-given rays.”—*1888 Materials*, 1052.

Our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, inspected the harvest and found it unready. The world was ready; Christ was ready, but the people of God were not ready. God sent one of His specially chosen servants to

the world, A.T. Jones. Congress accepted his message. The 1888 Sunday laws were vetoed, and more time was given for the harvest. The world accepted the message, but the people of God refused to hear the messenger.

The Messengers

God uses men in the plan of salvation—faulty, erring men. He sends them to reprove, rebuke, and appeal. Alonzo T. Jones and Ellet J. Waggoner were men like us. The blame for the rejection of the 1888 message has often been laid upon these messengers. Why did God pick faulty instruments to deliver such an important message? Why didn’t He use men in positions of power who had long been in the work?

“The Lord has chosen men to bear light and messages of great importance to the people in these last days. After years of perseverance under difficulties, the Lord has given marked success to His truth, and the ‘lo, here! and lo, there!’ have arisen on every side, and yet the message has sounded on. [See Luke 17:21-24.] Every inch of the ground had to be fought in presenting the present message, and some have not been reconciled [no longer opposed] with the providence of God in selecting the very men whom He did select to bear this special message. They ask, Why is it that He has not chosen the men who have been long in the work? The reason is that He knew that these men who had long experience would not do the work in God’s way and after God’s order.”—*1888 Materials*, 1245.

God selected the messengers of the 1888 message because they would obey Him. They would carry out the work of God in the way that God appointed. Those who oppose the message of God often find, within the messenger, some fault to exploit (use to their advantage) as an excuse to justify their sin of unbelief. The true sources of resistance to the message were deep feelings of dislike, hostility, and hatred against Christ.

“The time of peril is now upon us. It can no longer be spoken of as in the future. And the power of every mind, sanctified to the Master’s work, is to be employed, not to hedge up [limit, hinder] the way before the messages God sends to His people, but to labor unitedly in preparing a people to stand in the great day of God. It is not the inspiration from heaven that leads one to be suspicious, watching for a chance and greedily seizing upon it to prove that those brethren who differ from us in some interpretation of Scripture are not sound in the faith. There is danger that this course of action will produce the very result assumed [accepted as truth without proof]; and to a great degree, the guilt will rest upon those who are watching for evil. Had our brethren been free from

prejudice, and walking in humility, they would have been ready to receive light from whatever source; recognizing the Spirit of God and the grace of Christ, they would be indeed channels of light, and their long experience would make them counselors, men of sound judgment.”—*General Conference Daily Bulletin, February 28, 1893.*

“Now, at that meeting [Minneapolis] were many different characters and as many different temperaments. There was a striving about words to no profit, and the spirit manifested was uncourteous, ungentlemanly, and not Christlike. I know that hearts were spotted and stained with sin; yet they were the most zealous [enthusiastic] and vehement [with very strong emotion] in spirit in that meeting. Then how could there have been any fairness in decisions made at that meeting? I have been shown that it was the same ruling spirit that was revealed in the condemnation of Christ. When the papists were in controversy with men who took their stand on the Bible for proof of doctrines, they considered it a matter that only death could settle. I could see a similar spirit cherished in the hearts of our brethren and I would not give room to it for an hour. ‘Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh’ [Matthew 12:34].”—*1888 Materials, 516.*

Ellen White spoke about this rejection:

“The messenger of heaven cannot hope to please those who are determined to resist the truth. Christ describes them as saying, ‘We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented’ [expressed sorrow or regret]. [See Matthew 11:15-22.] Whatever course the messenger may pursue, it will be objectionable to the opposers of truth; and they will make capital [the most] of every defect in the manners, customs, or character of its advocate [supporter/promoter of certain ideas] in order that they may prevent those from giving it their candid [honest] attention who would listen to the evidences. If there is anything through which the opposers can find occasion to falsify the character or misinterpret the action of him who presents the truth, they will take advantage of it to deter [discourage or prevent from acting] those who would accept and obey the truth from hearing or believing the message.”—*Review and Herald, October 18, 1892.*

The so-called faults of the Lord’s messengers are no excuse to reject the message. We should always be willing to investigate a matter before pronouncing judgment against anyone. The prophecy of Baalim (Numbers 24:17) was among the prophecies the wise men followed to arrive at Bethlehem, and Balaam had become an apostate. (See *Desire of Ages, 59-60.*)

“I entreat you to exercise the spirit of Christians. Do not let strong feelings of prejudice arise, for we should be prepared to investigate the Scriptures with unbiased [free from all prejudice] minds, with reverence and candor. It becomes us to pray over

matters of difference in views of Scripture. Personal feelings should not be allowed to influence our words or our judgment. It will grieve the Spirit of God if you close your understanding to the light which God sends you.”—*1888 Materials, 163.*

God once used a donkey as His mouthpiece. Prejudice against a messenger only endangers our salvation.

The Message

E.J. Waggoner focused on *Christ and His Righteousness*, his book title containing the primary theme of his presentation in 1888. It is a joyful exaltation of the love of God as manifested in Christ. He presents Christ taking upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh; yet he carefully guarded against pointing to Christ as a sinner. His message is one that encourages his hearers and readers:

“You may have the same power that He had if you want it. He was ‘compassed with infirmity’; yet He ‘did no sin,’ because of the divine power dwelling constantly in Him.”—*Christ and His righteousness, 28.*

The 1888 message was one of hope and courage; it presents, to believers, forgiveness from any, and all sin. More than that, it holds the prospect of victory over sins through the indwelling of Christ. Waggoner gives the prescription for victory: Keep your eyes, thoughts, and affections on Jesus. He then presents Christ as our leader; if we follow Him we cannot be overcome. Waggoner warns that a man who thinks about his temptations will, inevitably, be overcome by them. He lifts up Christ as the object of thought and consideration.

“For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”—Hebrews 12:3.

Waggoner encourages every tempted one to adopt the example of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. In our own power, we can never overcome our enemy. But, if we acknowledge that God will give us the victory, we can remember the words of God:

“Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s.”—2 Chronicles 20:15.

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.”—Isaiah 59:19. [“Standard”: when God intervenes to protect His people.]

Victory over sin is a basic part in a correct understanding of the Sanctuary:

“Now Christ is in the heavenly Sanctuary. And what is He doing? Making atonement for us, cleansing the Sanctuary from the sins of the people. Then we must enter by faith into the Sanctuary with Him. We must commence [start] the work in the sanctuary of our souls. We are to cleanse ourselves from all defilement. We must ‘cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God’ [2 Corinthians 7:1]. Satan will come and tempt you, and you will give way to

his temptations. What then? Why, come and humble your hearts in confession and, by faith, grasp the arm of Christ in the heavenly Sanctuary. Believe that Christ will take your confession and hold up His hands before the Father—hands that have been bruised and wounded in our behalf—and He will make an atonement for all who will come with confession. What if you cannot understand about this matter? He says, ‘He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins’ (2 Peter 1:9).”—*1888 Materials*, 127.

When Ellen White was asked whether or not the Message of righteousness by faith was the Third Angel’s Message, she responded: “It is the third angel’s message in verity” (*1 Selected Messages*, 372; *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890). Salvation is received through faith in Jesus’ sacrifice, not through obedience to the law alone. Here, the emphasis is to be united with Christ through faith. Two years later she said:

“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.”—*Review and Herald*, November 22, 1892, par. 7.

Mrs. White knew that the message of righteousness by faith, delivered in 1888, was the loud cry of the third angel and the beginning of the light of the fourth angel of Revelation 18. The book, *Steps to Christ*, contains many portions of Ellen White’s thoughts on righteousness by faith. She began working on it in 1890 and it was published in 1892. We are blessed to have a book with so much light, readily available for us and for the world.

The Rejection

The message was rejected for a few reasons. In 1890, Ellen White gave instruction to missionaries in Africa. This letter reveals her experience with this:

“From any one who persists in stubbornness and self-will, God will remove His Spirit, and another will wear the crown that was for him. God accepts only those who will learn of Christ, those who study His Word, learning the lessons of meekness and lowliness of heart, lessons of obedience, willingness to do his work in God’s way, not their finite [limited] way. The work that is wrought in God will bear the credentials of heaven and will show marked results. Personal views should be kept subordinate in the work of God; you must in all things put Christ foremost. To present the truth as it is in Jesus is a work as enduring as eternity.... An independent judgment, that will show no respect for the judgment of others must not be cherished in the hearts of any of God’s workers; no one should feel that he is a criterion [the standard]. No one should indulge in self-esteem, for God has told us in His Word that we should esteem others better than ourselves.

“Love of self, pride, and self-sufficiency lie at the foundation of the greatest trials and discords

[disagreements between people] that have ever existed in the religious world. Again and again the angel has said to me, ‘Press together, press together, be of one mind, of one judgment.’ Christ is the leader, and you are brethren: follow Him. Walk in the light as He is in the light. Those who walk in the footsteps of Christ shall not walk in darkness but those who draw apart in unsanctified independence cannot have God’s presence and blessing in the work. Clean hands, a pure heart, and a right spirit are the gifts of God; seek for them with all diligence. Christ says: ‘Without Me ye can do nothing’ [John 15:5].”—*Testimonies to Southern Africa*, 24-25.

Some of the listeners of the messengers boldly pushed their differing views of the law in Galatians. Because they differed on this point, they made it an excuse to reject the whole message. They attacked A.T. Jones for his “course [rude] manner” because his speech was direct. Ellen White met this accusation:

“Let no soul complain of the servants of God who have come to them with a heaven-sent message. Do not any longer pick flaws in them, saying, ‘They are too positive; they talk too strongly.’ They may talk strongly; but is it not needed? God will make the ears of the hearers tingle if they will not heed His voice or His message. He will denounce those who resist the Word of God.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 410.

Anticipating the possibility of the messengers falling prey to the temptations of Satan and going into apostasy, she wrote:

“It is quite possible that Elder Jones or Waggoner may be overthrown by the temptations of the enemy; but if they should be, this would not prove that they had no message from God or that the work that they had done was all a mistake. But should this happen, how many would take this position and enter into a fatal delusion because they are not under the control of the Spirit of God. They walk in the sparks of their own kindling and cannot distinguish between the fire they have kindled and the light which God has given, and they walk in blindness as did the Jews.”—*15 Manuscript Releases*, 84-85.

She also considered the guilt of their overthrow, to a great degree, to be upon the criticizers:

“It is not the inspiration from heaven that leads one to be suspicious, watching for a chance and greedily seizing upon it to prove that those brethren who differ from us in some interpretation of Scripture are not sound in the faith. There is danger that this course of action will produce the very result which they are seeking to avoid, and to a great degree the guilt will rest upon those who are watching for evil. Had they been free from prejudice, and walking in humility, they would have been ready to receive light from whatever source.”—*15 Manuscript Releases*, 303.

It was the listeners’ accusations against Jones and Waggoner that drove them away from God. The temptations of Satan overthrew them. Then those with the spirit of the Pharisees of old said, “Aha, aha, we knew

4 it all along.” When a brother that understands some portion of Scripture differently than ourselves, do we bristle like a porcupine? Do we reject the things they say without careful study? This is the spirit that shut the light of the third angel away from the Church. This is the spirit that prevented the return of Christ—spiritual pride, self-sufficiency, trusting in our own opinions rather than seeking the Truth, and the chief sin: refusal to admit that they were wrong.

In 1903, Ellen White had a vision of what might have been. Here, we can learn what God expects of us now:

“One day at noon I was writing of the work that might have been done at the last General Conference if the men in positions of trust had followed the will and way of God. Those who have had great light have not walked in the light. The meeting was closed, and the break was not made. Men did not humble themselves before the Lord as they should have done, and the Holy Spirit was not imparted.

“I had written thus far when I lost consciousness, and I seemed to be witnessing a scene in Battle Creek.... One arose from his bowed position and said that in the past he had not been in union with certain ones and had felt no love for them, but that now he saw himself as he was. With great solemnity he repeated the message to the Laodicean church: ‘Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.’ ‘In my self-sufficiency, this is just the way I felt,’ he said. ‘And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked’ [Revelation 3:17]. ‘I now see that this is my condition. My eyes are opened. My spirit has been hard and unjust. I thought myself righteous, but my heart is broken, and I see my need of the precious counsel of the One who has searched me through and through.’ Oh, how gracious and compassionate and loving are the words, ‘I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.’ Revelation 3:18. The speaker turned to those who had been praying, and said: ‘We have something to do. We must confess our sins, and humble our hearts before God.’ He made heart-broken confessions and then stepped up to several of the brethren, one after another, and extended his hand, asking forgiveness. Those to whom he spoke sprang to their feet, making confession and asking forgiveness, and they fell upon one another’s necks, weeping. The spirit of confession spread through the entire congregation. It was a Pentecostal season. God’s praises were sung, and far into the night, until nearly morning, the work was carried on. The

following words were often repeated, with clear distinctness: ‘As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me’ [Revelation 3:19-20]. No one seemed to be too proud to make heartfelt confession, and those who led in this work were the ones who had influence, but had not before had courage to confess their sins....

“Then I aroused from my unconsciousness, and for a while could not think where I was. My pen was still in my hand. The words were spoken to me: ‘This might have been. All this the Lord was waiting to do for His people. All heaven was waiting to be gracious.’ I thought of where we might have been had thorough work been done at the last General Conference, and agony of disappointment came over me as I realized that what I had witnessed was not a reality. God’s way is always the right and the prudent [sensible and careful] way. He always brings honor to His name. Man’s only security against rash, ambitious movements is to keep the heart in harmony with Christ Jesus. Man’s wisdom is untrustworthy. Man is fickle [keeps changing their mind about what he likes or wants], filled with self-esteem, pride, and selfishness. Let the workers doing God’s service trust wholly in the Lord. Then the leaders will reveal that they are willing to be led, not by human wisdom, which is as useless to lean upon as is a broken reed, but by the wisdom of the Lord, who has said: ‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth [sharply criticize or scold] not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.’ James 1:5, 6.”—8 Testimonies, 104-106.

Here we are, ~140 years later. And we still have the same problem. The leadership refuses to apologize for their mistakes; we refuse to forgive them. There is anger, bitterness, spiritual animosity, pride, and self-sufficiency. The cowards in places of influence are supposed to lead in this work. Why are we not standing up and correcting our faults, confessing our sins of pride and self sufficiency and reconciling with our brethren?

For a finished work



Jonathan Taylor

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35

More Food for the Little Flock —