



THE GOOD NEWS FOR LAODICEA

Study Guide Eight

What is the True History of 1888?

Why are we celebrating the centennial of the 1888 General Conference session? Why is it so special? Why didn't we celebrate a centennial of other sessions, that of 1886 for example?

1888 has been described by our church historians as "epochal," "the most crucial of all our General Conferences," "a notable landmark in Seventh-day Adventist history...like crossing a continental divide into a new country."

What made the meeting "epochal" and "crucial"? It was (a) the character of the special message there presented, and (b) the manner of its reception. The message was profoundly unique, the most glorious since the Midnight Cry of 1844; and its reception was the most emphatic and determined resistance of gospel truth that had happened within the Advent Movement since 1844.

History is always interwoven with God's messages of truth. We cannot properly appreciate the *gospel* of Christ without understanding the *history* of His humble life and ministry, His rejection by the Jews, His cruel, shameful death on the cross, and His resurrection. It is likewise impossible to appreciate the 1888 *message* without understanding the true *history* that accompanied its presentation. We see ourselves in our brethren's reaction against the Lord Jesus Christ. The import of that history is "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29). That is the effect of genuine justification by faith—a humbling of all human pride.

But understanding the 1888 history is a positive, upbeat, encouraging experience. The real truth is always *good news*. It provides hope for the future because it illuminates the mysteries of the present and reveals the strategies behind the scenes of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. We definitely lost a battle in our 1888 experience, but we did not lose the war. Now, in order to win the war, we must understand the truth of the battle that was lost.

In this era of off-shoots and heresies, the full truth of 1888 establishes confidence in the ultimate triumph of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The end is not yet, and when we correctly

understand our past we shall be better prepared to understand the perplexing present and meet the perilous future.

The Secret of the 1888 Opposition

1. Who stands back in the shadows of the well-known opposition at and after the 1888 Conference? Revelation 12:17, first part.

Note: The great enemy of Christ is determined if possible to defeat God's final work in the world. From 1844 to 1888 our pioneers had to meet strong opposition both within and without the church. But, according to Ellen White, in 1888 the opposition took a new turn: it became lodged within the leadership of the church. This started a new chapter in the history of the great controversy.

2. What special gift of the Holy Spirit has "the dragon" especially hated? Verse 17, last part; Revelation 19:10.

Note: The KJV gives the most accurate rendering of these verses: "The remnant of her seed...have the testimony of Jesus Christ." "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

"The spirit of prophecy" is the same gift that was given to the apostolic church (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:8-12). Seventh-day Adventists have always recognized that this gift has been renewed in the last days and has been manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. The unreasonable and persistent nature of the opposition manifested against her ministry for 140 years marks its source as coming from that "dragon." This opposition reached a climax in our 1888 experience.

The dragon's opposition *from without* against the remnant church centers on her keeping the commandments of God, including the seventh-day sabbath; his opposition *from within* centers on "the testimony of Jesus Christ," the Spirit of Prophecy.

3. In brief, what were the outstanding events of the 1888 Conference and its aftermath?

The Lord sent two young men with a unique message of righteousness by faith that electrified the session. The leading ministers wanted to silence them but were perplexed to see Ellen White enthusiastically support them. According to her, the opposition to the message was phenomenal, the most mysterious and pronounced in all our history. "Our ministering brethren...are here only to shut out the Spirit of God

from the people." "At this meeting,...opposition, rather than investigation, is the order of the day." "I know that at that time the Spirit of God was insulted."¹²

In spite of the opposition, she managed to secure speaking appointments for the two young men in churches and camp meetings in the months that followed. Everywhere the message was presented, its fruitage of revival and reformation was also phenomenal. Nevertheless, she says repeatedly, the influential opposition at the General Conference headquarters continued unabated, often underground.

The overwhelming, compulsive evidence of the revivals and the cumulative impact of Ellen White's repeated rebukes finally drew from many of the brethren confessions. They acknowledged they had been standing on the wrong side. But after the confessions had come in, she said that "not one" of those initial rejectors recovered what he had lost at the 1888 Conference.² She described the experience she met personally as the most disheartening of her career. In 1891 the General Conference virtually exiled her to Australia for nearly a decade.³ Years later she summed up the last eight years of the 1888 history as a victory for Satan "in a great measure" and "in a great degree."⁴

But those two phrases give us hope: *Satan's victory was not total*. The finishing of the gospel commission was delayed for at least a century, but confrontation with the truth gives us today a new opportunity for repentance. The full story may humble our pride but it will strengthen our faith in the Lord.⁵

The Correct Identification of the 1888 Message

4. What is the Biblical picture of the message that came to us at that time? Jeremiah 5:24; Hosea 6:3; Joel 2:21-32; Acts 2:17, 18.

Note: From 1844 to 1888 Ellen White never identified any message as the beginning of the latter rain, but then came a great change. Her numerous statements pinpoint that of 1888 as its initial outpouring.⁶ Our brethren had been praying for the latter rain to come ever since 1856, but when it came, they did not recognize its credentials. In the same way, says Ellen White, the Jews had been praying for their Messiah to come, but when He came, they did not recognize Him.

5. What other thrilling Bible prophecy provides the true

identification of the 1888 message? Revelation 18:1-4.

Note: Statements almost too numerous to cite show how Ellen White and her contemporaries saw the 1888 message as "the beginning" of the work of that fourth angel whose message must ultimately lighten the earth with glory.⁷ As such, the message went far beyond that of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or the Protestant or Catholic theologians and evangelical preachers of the nineteenth century. It contained precious light that still today is unique.

The Popular Identification of the 1888 Message

6. How have our church historians generally identified that message?

Note: In general, they have said that the 1888 message was a mere "re-emphasis" of the 16th century Protestant "doctrine" of justification by faith, "the same doctrine that Luther, Wesley, and many other servants of God had been teaching."⁸ One author says that the message was to be found "in the creeds of the Protestant churches of the day."⁹ They almost always refer to the message as merely the historic "doctrine of righteousness by faith" such as the popular churches believe. The logic of this is similar to speaking of Jesus of Nazareth as a great rabbi (which is factual) while ignoring His true identity as the Messiah and the Son of God (which is the truth).

7. This view logically requires another inconsistent conclusion. What is the popular Adventist view of how the 1888 message was received?

The popular view is: (a) The 1888 message was accepted by the leadership of the church and is thus our secure doctrinal possession today. (b) The opposition at that time was insignificant, being confined to a few die-hards, less than ten to be exact, a persistent minority who were overruled by the faithful majority. (c) The confessions of opposers are understood to have changed their previous rejection into an acceptance. (d) The revivals experienced by some younger ministers and laity in the months immediately after the 1888 Conference are assumed to constitute General Conference and *Review and Herald* acceptance of the message. (e) The 1901 General Conference is understood as the final about-face that changed into "victory" whatever insignificant rejection may still have lingered at the turn of the century.¹⁰

This popular and rather official view also logically maintains (f) that we have no need to study the 1888 message because in general we already possess it and proclaim it. Further, the 1888 message really belongs in a museum with the Model T because we have now evolved a better message.

However, it is a question whether the sparks of our own kindling are brighter than the light the Lord sent us (cf. Isaiah 50:10, 11).

8. What special message does the Lord Jesus address to the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Revelation 3:14-17.

Note: The import of the original language escaped the translators: "You say, I am rich and I *have been enriched*." This makes sense in the light of our Seventh-day Adventist history. We claim to be have been enriched by an acceptance of the message that was to lighten the earth with glory and prepare those believers for translation; yet no one has been translated and the loud cry message has not yet lighted the earth. This means either one of two things: the message was not what Ellen White said it was, or *our supposed acceptance of it was not what we have said it was*.

9. How does Ellen White testify concerning the reception of the message?

"Some" accepted the message, but she always characterizes them as "few." Those who rejected it she always identifies as "many." The principal rejectors were "men of influence," "leading men," brethren who exerted "a controlling influence." At the Minneapolis Conference she said, "At this meeting...opposition rather than investigation is the order of the day." "The spirit and influence of the ministers generally who have come to this meeting is to discard light." "Our ministering brethren...are here only to shut out the Spirit of God from the people...I was never more alarmed than at the present time....If the ministers will not receive the light, I want to give the people a chance; perhaps they may receive it."

Later she said, "Again and again did I bear my testimony to those assembled [at Minneapolis] but that testimony was not received." "The Lord had [a blessing] for us at Minneapolis...but there was no reception. Some received the light for the people and rejoiced in it. Then there were others that stood right back, and *their position* has given confidence to others to talk unbelief." "Leading men are giving a mold to the work that will result in a loss of many souls." "The Spirit of God has been present in power among His people, but it could

not be bestowed upon them, because they did not open their hearts to receive it." "Those in responsible positions in Battle Creek...have rejected light....They have interposed themselves between the heaven-sent light and the people." The laity and younger ministers would have gladly received the message had it not been for the persistent leadership resistance.¹¹

She says that the most influential opposers who confessed later returned to their previous stance of opposition. Of some she was forced to say, "The same spirit that actuated the rejecters of Christ rankles in their hearts." Of the total number of opposers "not one" ever recovered the experience or power that he had lost. So far as the 1901 Conference is concerned, she said that its *spiritual* "result" was "the greatest, the most terrible sorrow of my life. No change was made."¹²

10. What report is given us by authentic eyewitnesses present at the Conference in 1888?

"What then did the brethren reject at Minneapolis? (Some in the congregation: 'The loud cry.')

...What did the brethren in that fearful position in which they stood, reject at Minneapolis? They rejected the latter rain, the loud cry of the third angel's message....And brethren, the time has come to take up to-night what we there rejected."¹³

"In 1888 I was sent as a delegate from the Kansas Conference to the General Conference held that year in Minneapolis, Minnesota, that notable conference long to be remembered by many....I am sorry for anyone who was at the Conference in Minneapolis in 1888 who does not recognize that there was opposition and rejection of the message that the Lord sent to His people at that time."¹⁴

"The writer of this tract, then a young man, was present at that [1888] conference meeting, and saw and heard many of the various things that were done and said in opposition to the message then presented....When Christ was lifted up as the only hope of the church and of all men, the speakers met a united opposition from nearly all the senior ministers. They tried to put a stop to this teaching by Elders Waggoner and Jones."¹⁵

"There are many in this audience [the 1901 session] who can remember ...when, thirteen years ago at Minneapolis, God sent a message to his people....For the past thirteen years this light has been rejected and turned against by many, and they are rejecting it and turning from it

today."¹⁶

A former General Conference President, not present at the 1888 Conference but close to its history, adds: "The message has never been received, nor proclaimed, nor given free course as it should have been in order to convey to the church the measureless blessings that were wrapped within it."¹⁷

11. How can an understanding of this truth of our history bring hope and encouragement for the future? Revelation 3:18-21.

Note: We can respond to our Lord's appeal to "repent." Truth is always *good news*. Only when we reject it does bad news take over. Our Lord counsels us to "buy" that "gold tried in the fire" by surrendering our false ideas in exchange for truth like we exchange money for something we want to buy. The Laodicean message is addressed primarily to the leadership of the church, on all levels. If we will listen to His voice and believe what He says, the long-awaited blessings of the latter rain and the loud cry can become reality in this generation. The world desperately needs the blessing!

¹ Mss. 9, 15, 1888; Letter S 24, 1892.

² Letter B2a, 1892.

³ Letter 127, 1896.

⁴ *Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 234, 235.

⁵ Abundant Ellen White evidence is cited in *1888 Re-examined, Revised and Updated* (1987). The Ellen G. White Estate are also making readily available at their research centers and possibly at our colleges a large collection of her testimonies concerning 1888. They assure us that the full story is now available to anyone prepared to consult these inspired sources.

⁶ *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 6, p. 20; *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, pp. 183, 243, 377.

⁷ *Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 234, 235; *Review and Herald*, May 27, 1890; July 26, November 8, 22, 29, 1892; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91-94, 98; *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, pp. 16, 38, 66, 67, 72, 93, 104, 105, 167, 183-185, 243, 386, 463; *ibid.*, 1895, p. 367.

8 L. H. Christian, *The Fruitage of Spiritual Gifts*, p. 239; A. W. Spalding, *Captains of the Host*, p. 583.

9 *By Faith Alone*, p. 138.

10 See for example, N. F. Pease, *By Faith Alone* (Pacific Press, 1962); A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory 1888-1901* (Review and Herald, 1966); L. E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Review and Herald, 1971); A. L. White, *The Lonely Years* (Review and Herald, 1984).

11 See the Appendix of *Through Crisis to Victory 1888-1901* for Ellen White's Minneapolis sermons; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 63-81, 89-98; *Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 234, 235; *ibid.*, Book Three, pp. 163-189. Scores of Ellen White statements are found in *1888 Re-examined, Revised and Updated*.

12 Letters, August 30, November 5, 1892; January 9, 1893; May 31, 1896; August 5, 1902; January 15, 1903; *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 76-81; *Testimonies*, Vol. 8, pp. 104-106.

13 Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, pp. 184, 185.

14 C. C. McReynolds, D. File 189, Ellen G. White Estate.

15 R. T. Nash, "Eyewitness Report of the 1888 General Conference."

16 W. W. Prescott, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, p. 321.

17 A. G. Daniells, *Christ Our Righteousness*, p. 47.