

The Atonement

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The "testimony of Jesus" speaks. Hear the voice of the pioneers.

One of the earliest publications of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a small tract entitled A Word to the Little Flock. In it there is an article dated April 21, 1847 written by Ellen G. White. Near the end of the article she makes a very significant statement in regard to the Sanctuary.

"I believe the Sanctuary to be cleansed at the end of the 2300 days is the New Jerusalem Temple, of which Christ is a minister. The Lord showed me in vision, more than one year ago, that Brother Crosier had the true light on the cleansing of the Sanctuary; and that it was His will that Brother Crosier should write out the view which he gave us in the Day Star Extra, February 7, 1846. I feel fully authorized by the Lord to recommend that Extra to every saint." Word to the Little Flock, page 12

What does Brother Crosier say in respect to the subject under discussion--when was the atonement to be completed? He makes six solid points.

- 1. If the atonement was made on Calvary, by whom was it made? The making of the atonement is the work of a Priest; but who officiated on Calvary? Roman Soldiers and wicked Jews.**
- 2. The slaying of the victim was not making the atonement: the sinner slew the victim; after that, the Priest took the blood and made the atonement.**
- 3. Christ was the appointed High Priest who would make the atonement; and He certainly could not have acted in that capacity until after His resurrection. We have no record of His doing anything on earth after His resurrection which could be called the atonement.**
- 4. The atonement was made in the Sanctuary, but Calvary was not such a place.**
- 5. He could not, according to Hebrews 8:4 make the atonement while on earth. "If He were on earth, He should not be a Priest." The Levitical was the earthly priesthood--the Divine, the heavenly.**
- 6. Therefore, He did not begin the work of making the atonement, whatever the nature of that work may be, until after His ascension, when by His own blood He entered His heavenly Sanctuary for us. Facsimile, page 45**

In Desire of Ages, Ellen G. White makes note of an important point regarding this subject. On pages 136 and 137 she says this of John the Baptist: "He did not distinguish clearly the two phases of

Christ's work as a suffering sacrifice, and a conquering king." What of these two phases? On one side we find that sins will "stand on record in the Sanctuary until the final atonement;" (referring to 1844) and "at the final atonement, the sins of the truly penitent are to be blotted from the records of heaven." Patriarchs and Prophets, page 357, 358. In the Great Controversy, Ellen G. White firmly establishes the final work of the atonement.

"Thus, those who followed in the light of the prophetic work saw that, instead of coming to the earth at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844, Christ then entered the most holy place of the heavenly Sanctuary to perform the closing work of atonement preparatory to His coming." Great Controversy, page 422.

The confusion in regard to a correct understanding of the work of the atonement stems from a failure to differentiate between the two phases of the atonement. Notice again what is said of John the Baptist: "He did not distinguish clearly the two phases of Christ's work, as a suffering sacrifice and a conquering king." Desire of Ages, pages 136-137. The first phase, or work, of Christ's atonement was that of a suffering sacrifice.

This began before the formation of the world--for Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:8) It included the incarnation, His temptation in the wilderness, the ordeal in the garden, His death on the cross, and finally His resurrection.

The agreement made before the foundation of the world between the Father and the Son included the following: Christ was to work out a righteous character on the earth as a pattern for man to follow.

He was to demonstrate that fallen man could do what He did. If He could present man as a new creature in Christ Jesus, then the Father would receive repentant man and love him as He loves His own son. Ibid., page 140. When Christ said, "I have finished the work which thou gave me to do," Ellen White comments: "He had wrought out a righteous character on earth as an example for man to follow." Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 3, page 260.

In summary, the first phase of the atonement was completed with the cross. Christ's work as the suffering sacrifice was finished. With His death on the cross, the work of atonement had just begun.

"After His ascension our Savior began His work as High Priest. In harmony with the typical service, He began His ministration in the holy place; and at the termination of the prophetic days in 1844. He entered the most holy to perform the last division of His solemn work, to cleanse the Sanctuary." Ibid., Volume 4, pages 265-266

Ellen G. White re-emphasized that with the termination of the 2300 days in 1844, Christ entered the most holy, into the presence of God, to perform the closing work of the atonement preparatory to His coming. It is during this period in time that God finally demonstrates what He can do in the weakest of humanity. The last generation bears all the infirmities and weaknesses which the race has accumulated through six thousand years of transgression. It is in this generation that the mighty power of God is made manifest in working out His perfect righteousness in their characters. In His humanity Christ had gone before and demonstrated that it could be done. Now it needs to be demonstrated that sinful, though repentant, man must do the same. Christ guarantees that it can be done, and this is the work of the second phase of the atonement.

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