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WHY DID GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE REJECT HIM?

Passover Week is about to begin. The crowd has remained outside to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, which would disqualify them from celebrating the feast. How much Passover means to them! Their families, their very nation, owe their existence to the blood of the Passover Lamb! And it is he who is being released! We can anticipate the joy, the "Hosannas!" with which they'll greet him!



(Could it happen again?)

We turn expectantly to the text:

"Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

Dear God! Why did they do it?

The question is critical because the

King is returning. And we are the ones who wait. We who owe our very existence to Him; we who have

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**Why, then, did the God's chosen people,
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services of their tabernacle, reject Jesus?**

claimed pardon through His shed blood.

How shall we greet Him? Is the tragedy outside the courtroom to be repeated? What shall *we* say?

The rejection of the Messiah is recorded for our benefit. Paul wrote: "These things which happened to our ancestors are illustrations of the way in which God works, and they were written down to be a warning to us who are the heirs of the ages" (1 Cor. 10:11, Phillips). Why did they do it?

The Evidence

Did they do it because they didn't know He was coming?

No. The Scriptures of which they were custodians outlined in detail the events surrounding His coming.

Did they do it because they had neglected the prophecies of His coming?

No. Jesus told the Pharisees: "You pore over the scriptures, for you imagine that you will find eternal life in them" (John 5:39, Phillips).

They knew where the Messiah was to be born. When the Wise Men from the East came to Herod and

asked, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews?" he summoned the Jewish theologians and asked them where "Christ" was to be born. Their reply: "In Bethlehem, in Judaea, for this is what the prophet wrote" (Matt. 2:2-5, Phillips).

Further, they knew the prophecies of Isaiah that described His mission. They thrilled when reading the 61st chapter of Isaiah. But when Jesus read these words in the Nazareth synagogue, saying, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears," they were offended. "Is not this the carpenter?" they asked (Luke 4:21; Mark 6:3, 4, KJV).

Neither were the Jews ignorant of the time of Messiah's coming. In Christ's day, many were saying, "The time has come. . . the kingdom of God is near" (see Mark 1:15, NIV). Even of the prophecy that foretold the death of the Messiah they were not wholly unaware, for Jesus publicly pointed to the prophecies that predicted His death: "And He began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three

days rise again. He spoke this word openly" (Mark 8:31, 32, NKJV).

Did the religious leaders understand what He was saying? Yes. At the time of His burial, the "chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, . . . After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say. . . He is risen from the dead" (Matt. 27:62-64, KJV).

How It Happened

Why, then, did the God's chosen people, who had the multiplied rays of divine illumination in the written Word of God and the light of ages in the services of their tabernacle, reject Jesus? Primarily because they had lost their spirituality. Their ceremonies and rituals had become hollow form. Because truth had become unwelcome in the temple of the soul, truth did not walk out through temple doors. "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you," Christ had warned. "If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (See John 12:35; Matt. 6:23, NKJV.)

Without the guiding and, when necessary, restraining influence of the Holy Spirit, the Jews were left to act out the dictates of the natural heart, which ever desires position and power, fortune, and fame. The

unconverted heart wishes to be honored and extolled. Ambition for worldly glory blinded them to the meaning of Scripture, which they studied "only to sustain their traditions. . . Their mystical construction made indistinct that which [God] had made plain."¹

Prophecies of His second coming as Lord of lords and King of kings were confused with His first coming as Suffering Servant. The prophecies foretelling Israel's triumph over their enemies and exalting the Jews as the chosen of the Lord, they loved to repeat. Such is the case when one studies not with a sincere desire to know truth but rather to find evidence to sustain one's ambitious hopes.

They loved texts that pictured the Messiah coming at the head of an army to deliver Israel. They looked for a king who would make Judea an earthly paradise, flowing with milk and honey.

So long as it appeared Jesus might fulfill these expectations, the multitudes were eager to hear Him. After He fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, enthusiasm ran high. Here was one who could satisfy every desire: break the power of the hated Romans, heal soldiers wounded in battle, supply whole armies with food, conquer heathen nations. As Jesus noted sorrowfully: "You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you did eat of

the loaves and were filled” (John 6:26, NKJV).

The Crisis Nears

When Jesus refused to accept an earthly crown, He knew that His ministry faced a crisis. The multitudes who had praised Him would curse Him. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sought to reshape their perceptions.

But even His closest followers saw through a glass darkly. The astute Judas perceived that Christ was offering spiritual rather than worldly success. His hopes of power and pomp shaken, he began to consider a defection. Even the rest of the disciples failed to understand the nature of Christ’s kingdom and mission. It took His crucifixion and resurrection to clarify their understanding of the kingdom prophecies.

So it was that the way was prepared for the Jewish nation to reject that One to whom the prophets had pointed. And at last, their love turned to hatred, and their cry was not “Hosanna,” but “Kill.”

They rejected Him, first, because of His lowly birth. The report of angels visiting shepherds with news of the birth of a king had reached the rabbis. But the manner of His birth and the obscurity of His parents led them to treat the report as unworthy of their notice. Could any good thing come out of such circumstances?

Second, they rejected Him because of His unassuming manners and humility. When John the Baptist introduced Jesus as “the Son of God” (John 1:34, NKJV), the people looked at Him with awe and wonder.

Was this the Christ? How could it be! Nothing in His dress and bearing seemed kingly. His garments were not of silk and gold; rather, He wore the humble garb of the poor. Shouldn’t Israel’s coming king be expected to dress with a splendor greater than that of all earthly kings? Their faulty perceptions would not permit them to believe that real greatness can dispense with outward show. This man’s poverty seemed wholly inconsistent with His claim to be the Messiah.

Third, they rejected Him because He didn’t have a B.Th. from the Theological Seminary of Jerusalem. “How did this man get such learning without having studied?” they asked (John 7:15, NIV). “Do you, not even a theologian, think to teach us?” Hear the sneering remarks in His hometown: “Where does he get all this?” “What is this ‘wisdom’ he’s been given?” “He’s only a carpenter!” one might expect that the Jewish leaders wouldn’t identify with a small-town teacher from Nazareth.

Fourth, they rejected Him because of the company He kept.

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Mark called them "the common people." They "heard him gladly," said the disciple (Mark 12:37, KJV). When the temple guards returned to the chief priests and Pharisees without Jesus, the officials demanded "Why didn't you bring him in?" "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared.

"You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No!" (John 7:47-49, NIV).

Finally, they rejected Him because of the high standard of character He taught, lived, and required of His followers. "It was not simply the absence of outward glory in His life that led the Jews to reject Jesus. He was the embodiment of purity, and they were impure. He dwelt among men as an example of spotless integrity."² His sincerity highlighted their pretense. His holiness highlighted their hollowness. Such a searchlight was unwelcome. Further, it demanded repentance. There was an easy answer: They determined to prove Him a false prophet.

History Lessons

Why should we trouble ourselves to study this history? Simply because history illumines the present by refocusing the past. It gives us insight into prophecies yet to be fulfilled, and in so doing, warns us, for "history is repeating."³

Ellen White repeated this warning: "Satan is working that the history of the Jewish nation may be repeated in the experience of those who claim to believe present truth. The Jews had the Old Testament Scriptures, and supposed themselves conversant with them. But they made a woeful mistake. The prophecies that refer to the glorious second appearing of Christ in the clouds of heaven they regarded as referring to His first coming. Because He did not come according to their expectations, they turned away from Him. Satan knew just how to take these men in his net, and deceive and destroy them."⁴

The Jews had been warned by the Old Testament prophets that many would reject the Messiah when He came. Isaiah had said: "He is despised

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and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3, KJV).

And we too have been warned: "The very same Satan is at work to undermine the faith of the people of God at this time."⁵

The Impending Deception

What is the deception that will cause many Seventh-day Adventists to follow in the steps of ancient Israel? Surely it will not be the manner of Christ's coming, for that occurs after probation closes and the saints are sealed. It must be some event that precedes that.

The answer has a beginning in *Testimonies to Ministers*: "Let me tell you that the Lord will work. . . [in closing events] in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning."⁶ Similarly: "God will work a work in our day that but few anticipate."⁷

What is the great work we are

anticipating? The loud cry of the third angel, the power that lightens the earth with its glory. This is the experience we have anticipated for more than a century. We read about it, talk about it, write about it, and pray about it—just as the Jews read about, talked about, wrote about, and prayed about the coming of the Messiah. Could it be that we will reject the loud cry as the Jews did the Messiah? Reject it because we misunderstand the glory of the Lord's working?

That is precisely what inspiration teaches. Unless we are aroused to a sense of our duty, we "will not recognize the work of God when the loud cry of the third angel shall be heard."⁸ What are we in danger of? Not recognizing the *work* of God. The Jews failed to recognize the *manner* of His *coming*; we are in danger of not recognizing the *manner* of His *working*.

"It is as true now as in apostolic days, that without the illumination of the divine Spirit, humanity cannot discern the glory of Christ."⁹

"Without the enlightenment of the Spirit, men will not be able to distinguish truth from error" for the "track of truth lies close beside the track of error, and both tracks may seem to be one to minds which are not worked by the Holy Spirit."¹⁰

Laodicean Blinders

It is spiritual blindness that prepares the way for many today to follow in the steps of the Jews in the days of Christ. "Even Seventh-day Adventists are in danger of closing their eyes to truth as it is in Jesus, because it contradicts something which they have taken for granted as truth but which the Holy Spirit teaches is not truth."¹¹ John pictures Jesus knocking for entrance into the heart of the Laodicean. Those who don't let Him in lack the discernment of the Holy Spirit and are unable to observe that they have accepted the spurious and rejected the true.

Are some of us expecting that our failure to overcome self, sin, love of ease, whatever, will be miraculously made up? A faithful witness said: "I was shown God's people waiting for some change to take place—a compelling power to take hold of them."¹² "Some. . . are idly waiting for some special season of spiritual refreshing. . . but unless the members of God's church today have a living connection with the Source of all spiritual growth, they

will not be ready for the time of reaping."¹³ "Those who are waiting to behold a magical change in their characters without determined effort on their part to overcome sin, will be disappointed."¹⁴ "They expect that the lack will be supplied by the latter rain. . . They are making a terrible mistake."¹⁵

Now a revelation: "Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it."¹⁶

Heart Work

What a striking parallel to the failure of the Jews to discern the Messiah! Notice three verbs: *recognize*, *discern*, and *receive*. Because of their lack of a vital connection with God, the Jews did not *recognize* in Jesus the manifestation of the glory of God. They did not *discern* in His manner of life and teaching the fulfillment of the prophecy they had expected to be fulfilled, and therefore, they did not *receive* Him. So shall it be in this generation regarding the loud cry! (See box.)

Let us not assume this process to be a legalistic check-sheet arrangement whereby we go about establishing our own righteousness by measuring our goodness against the outward standard of certain regula-

tions. Rather, here is a heart work between Christians and their God. It is a deeply spiritual experience by which we are brought to a sense of our need, as through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we see the claims of Christ. Those who overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain and thus be fitted for translation.

Probation is soon to close. Some in the church crowd who await their King have their name but not their heart on the church books. How much Christ has sacrificed for them! Their families, their church itself, owe their existence to the blood of the Lamb. And it is He who is coming "down the minster aisles of splendor, from betwixt the cherubim." We can anticipate the joy, the "Hosannas!" with which they'll greet their King—

"Take Him away! Take Him away!"

Dear God! Will I be among those who do it? □

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- ² *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- ³ *Ibid.* p. 258.
- ⁴ _____, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 111.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ See page 300.
- ⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 82.
- ⁸ _____, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 300.
- ⁹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 508.
- ¹⁰ _____, *Christ's Object Lessons*; pp. 408-411; *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 202.
- ¹¹ *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 70, 71.
- ¹² *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 261.
- ¹³ _____, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 54, 55.
- ¹⁴ *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 336.
- ¹⁵ *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 507.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*

