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Streaming *to the* Lord

Isaiah prophesied, “In the days to come the mountain of the LORD’s house will be the highest of the mountains. It will be lifted above the hills; peoples will stream to it. Many nations will go and say, ‘Come, let’s go up to the LORD’s mountain, to the house of Jacob’s God so that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in God’s paths.’ Instruction will come from Zion; the LORD’s word from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:2, 3, CEB).*

This prophetic vision was so important that another prophet, Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, expressed it almost word for word in Micah 4:1, 2. The temple mount is *physically* lower even than the nearby Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus. But, speaking through Isaiah and Micah, God said it would become higher than all other mountains in terms of its *significance* for the nations.

This would fulfill an earlier hope. Just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Moses urged them regarding God’s instructions: “Keep them faithfully because that will show your wisdom and insight to the nations who will hear about all these regulations. They will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and insightful people!’ After all, is there any great nation that has gods as close to it as the LORD our God is close to us whenever we call to him? Or does any great nation have regulations and case laws as righteous as all this instruction that I am setting before you today?” (Deut. 4:6–8).

If the Israelites continued to accept the loving guidance of the Lord, who had already redeemed them from slavery and provided cause-and-effect principles for their good (Deut. 10:13), they would receive the wonderful blessings He was eager to lavish upon them (cf. Lev. 26:3–13; Deut. 28:1–14). These include, “Then the LORD your God will set you high above all nations on earth. . . . The LORD will make you the head of things, not the tail; you will be at the top of things, not the bottom” (Deut. 28:1, 13). Other nations would see the blessings on the Israelites and be drawn to the deity who gave them. In this way, God’s covenant promise to Abraham that “all the families of the earth will be blessed because of you” (Gen. 12:3) could be fulfilled.

Challenge by “Babylon”

Of course, in our fallen world, no divine vision goes unchallenged. Isaiah and Micah speak of peoples streaming to the Lord’s temple mount (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1). The only other use of the rare Hebrew verb from the root *n-h-r*, “to stream,” which is derived from the noun *nahar*, “river/stream,” is found in Jeremiah 51:44. In this verse and the beginning of the next verse (v. 45), God warns, “I will punish Bel [lord, the title of the god Marduk] in Babylon; I will force him to vomit what he’s consumed. Then nations will no longer stream to him, and Babylon’s walls will collapse! Get out of Babylon, my people!” Until this point, people have been streaming to the predatory god

of Babylon, rather than to the Lord at His temple in Jerusalem.

Ancient Babylon did fall, but the book of Revelation describes an end-time “Babylon” that opposes God and that is supported by many peoples (Rev. 17:1, 15). Again God warns, “ ‘Come out of her, my people’ ” (Rev. 18:4, NIV).

Fulfillment through Christ

Was the prophecy of Isaiah and Micah already fulfilled, or will it be fulfilled in the future? This classical prophecy is conditional according to human cooperation. God’s chosen people did not cooperate. The temple in Jerusalem, referred to here as “the Lord’s house” and “the house of Jacob’s God,” has vanished. So the prophecy cannot be fulfilled with regard to that structure. However, it can be fulfilled in another way.

Jesus made a related prophecy that does not refer to the temple in Jerusalem: “ ‘When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.’ (He said this to show how he was going to die.)” (John 12:32, 33). Like the mountain of the Lord’s house, Jesus is exalted. He called His body a temple (John 2:19–21) because in Him, God was dwelling, literally tabernacling, in human flesh (John 1:14). So the hill of Golgotha where Jesus was lifted up on the cross was a temple mount, higher than Mount Everest in significance.

Solomon had built a temple on Mount Moriah at the threshing floor

of Ornan the Jebusite (2 Chron. 3:1), where innocent Isaac and guilty David were redeemed through animal sacrifices (Gen. 22; 2 Sam. 24). This location showed that the temple was all about ransom for human life. Now Jesus came and accomplished that ransom, to which all the animal sacrifices pointed. This is why He draws/attracts/pulls all people toward Himself as “the true light that shines on all people” (John 1:9). This does not mean that all people accept Him; it means that God gives them the opportunity.

We have an awesome privilege to participate with Christ in drawing

(1 John 4:8). This is not Hollywood love, but the kind of unselfish love that Jesus demonstrated. He told His disciples: “ ‘Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other’ ” (John 13:34). That kind of love is a high standard. In fact, it is an impossible standard—unless we have the transforming miracle of the Holy Spirit pouring love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5) as a divine gift of amazingly free grace that we can receive only through faith.

God saves us with our free choice intact, and He does not want sin, which is destructive, selfish un-love, to

that those who do not receive this victory from God will not be in the New Jerusalem (v. 8; cf. v. 27; 22:15).

Like God, we do not want anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9), and we devote ourselves to helping as many as possible to live. But a popular teaching now exists, saying that total commitment to Christ is optional and “nice” people will be saved just because God is so gracious. This is a dangerous deception that proclaims “ ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; cf. Ezek. 13:10, 16).

Jesus saw this condition. He spoke of ten girls who went to sleep at the

We have an awesome privilege to participate with Christ in drawing precious people to Him and eternal life.

precious people to Him and eternal life, thereby reversing the streaming of people to Babylon and destruction. Jesus does the pulling, but we can increase the results by pointing to Him primarily through our lives and, secondarily, through our words, provided that our words and lives are in harmony with each other. As God commissioned the ancient Israelites to teach all nations about Him and His character through the way they lived, Jesus commissions us: “ ‘Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you’ ” (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Requirement to choose love forever

The greatest of Christ’s commandments, which is the basis of all other commandments, is love (Matt. 22:37–40) because “God is love”

arise again after He purges it from our fallen world. How can human beings voluntarily keep on choosing to live in harmony with God’s love for all eternity so that every imagination of our hearts will be only good continually (reversing Gen. 6:5)? We must choose in this life to submit to God’s radical change of the source of our choices. The result is change in our characters as we progressively receive and grow in His love, thereby becoming more like Him (cf. 1 Thess. 3:12, 13).

Fatal complacency

Tragically, many in our broken world do not experience enough of a “thirst” for something better to motivate them to fully accept God’s offer: “ ‘To the thirsty I will freely give water from the life-giving spring. Those who emerge victorious will inherit these things. I will be their God, and they will be my sons and daughters’ ” (Rev. 21:6, 7). The next verse makes it clear

time of a wedding (Matt. 25:1–13) and a church of Laodicea that is lukewarm (Rev. 3:14–22). Theoretically, our numbers are booming, with somewhere around 18 million Seventh-day Adventists worldwide. These numbers are based on baptisms. But are baptisms enough? Do those who are baptized understand our message enough to live it and share it with others or even to really believe it themselves? Or are many merely cultural Adventists, regarded as Adventists because they self-identify as such, even if they do not really believe and live the basic pillars of the Adventist message? Will a social club of merely cultural Adventists finish the gospel work? Or do they dilute and distort the Adventist mission, confusing people and thereby slowing down real progress? What happens to their children who see a disconnect between their profession and their practice?

Need for ministers to awaken cultural Adventists

Why are many of our members cultural Adventists? Perhaps they have not been warned or taught to be otherwise? This is where the work of a gospel minister comes in. Ministry as a pastor, chaplain, or teacher is not merely a job; you cannot accomplish a fraction of it by yourself. This is a calling to receive power from the Holy Spirit and wisdom from careful study of God's Word that empowers you to effectively influence, lead, and teach other people to make radical changes, perhaps including at least some of the following:

- The need to be broken and revived to new life at the foot of the cross.

- The need to wake up and realize how close we are to Christ's second coming, as shown by biblical signs of the times and the sanctuary teaching.
- The need to sense a burden for lost souls all around us.
- The need to learn the Bible and the inspired guidance provided through God's modern messenger to see the true character of God and how to live in harmony with Him.
- The need to experience true, interactive worship rather than performance.
- The need for more times of prayer and less times of religious monologue.
- The need to revive the priesthood of *all* believers, with a variety of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ.

Conclusion

The towers of this world are coming down, the enduring mountain of the Lord's house is coming up, and "peoples will stream to it." This is an exciting and challenging time for those involved in pastoral ministry. The demands are overwhelming. There is not a moment to waste. But the God who created and sustains the universe says to you, His servant, through Isaiah:

"Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand" (Isa. 41:10). 

* Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references are from the Common English Bible.

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