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Once again, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is convening a General Conference session, this time in Atlanta, Georgia. There are positions of leadership to be filled and important decisions to be made in order to carry out God's work effectively in the world. It is my fervent hope that the event will be much more than a political convention. I pray that it will be a time of covenant renewal, revival of vision, and recalibration of priorities.

Covenant

For God's people in Bible times, covenant renewal took place at regular times (Deut. 31:10-13) and on occasions of special need (e.g., Joshua 24; Nehemiah 8-10). Such group events were characterized by several features: reviewing God's covenant expectations, humbly recognizing failure to live up to the divine ideal, and solemnly committing to follow Him more closely in the future.

RENEWAL OF COVENANT, VISION, AND PRIORITIES

If the ancient Israelites needed covenant renewal, it would seem that God's end-time covenant community could benefit from this as well. Rejoicing over success that God has wrought is entirely appropriate and important, but have we fulfilled His mission in our lives, in the church, and in the world so well that reappraisal, renewal of vision, and recommitment are unnecessary?

Vision

There are various kinds of vision. What our Seventh-day Adventist movement always needs is the kind that sees the big picture and the long-range view, which only God can reveal in adequate measure. Vision doesn't limit the future according to existing constraints and budgets, but trusts in God to provide for the work that He commissions.

Living by a unified vision, linked to one another through Christ, and moving ahead by the guidance and empowerment of His Spirit, our

God-given diversity of gifts (1 Corinthians 12) can combine for earth-shaking outcomes. It was the vision of Christ's gospel commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and the three angels' messages (Rev. 14:6-12) that impelled the Adventist pioneers to succeed in the audacious task of rapidly reaching millions through evangelistic, educational, and health-care systems that straddle the globe. Now we need their kind of vision to finish the work they began so that billions can meet our loving Savior.

Taking the true gospel of Christ's kingdom of love to all the world as a witness to all nations before the end comes is the largest single venture in the history of the human race. It is totally impossible, unless we let its government rest on the strong shoulder of our Wonderful Counselor, the Son of God. We are not in charge; we just work here, and He makes amazing things happen.

If we limit our vision to what we can come up with, we may as well begin preparing for Y3K. But Jesus wants us home sooner because He has our mansions ready right now, and the title to our promised inheritance is already ours. All we need to do is to trust Him and accept His gift by going up to possess our ultimate Promised Land. As Ellen G. White put it (echoing the words of Caleb in Numbers 13:30): "I declare to you, my brethren and sisters in the Lord,

it is a goodly land, and we are well able to go up and possess it."¹

Priorities

Vision shapes priorities. Human vision seeks temporal results through earthly means, such as human energy, material things, money—and more money. Human influence and distribution of power are largely based on money. Top leaders are money managers. It is true that money is an important resource that God gives us to manage faithfully for His cause. But if our distributions of influence are largely based on money, we are operating by human "politics as usual" rather than by divine vision. Divine vision leads through penniless prophets and sees in five loaves and two fish a banquet for a multitude.

Human vision sees external qualifications for leadership, such as talent, education, experience, looking good, and sounding good (1 Sam. 16:6, 7). Those are all fine things, but for a leader of God's people, the most essential qualification is to be a person in whom His Spirit dwells, who is willing humbly to take directions from the divine King. Saul looked like the king the people wanted, but he failed to follow divine instructions.

When it was time to replace Moses, Joshua was the obvious candidate in terms of experience: He was Moses' long-time assistant, a

tribal leader, and one of the two faithful scouts, and commanded the Israelite army. When the Lord announced His choice, however, He mentioned none of these impressive details on Joshua's résumé, but simply commanded: "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit" (Num. 27:18, NASB).

In Acts 6, the same qualification of the Spirit guided selection of Christian deacons, who were to be the administrators responsible for managing material resources. The top church leaders were kept free from management responsibilities so that they could devote all their time and energy to more crucial spiritual and theological leadership.

This leadership structure helped to keep the early church focused on the divine vision that urgently looks

beyond the things of this world. If the church ever suffers from a shortage of fully engaged spiritual and theological leadership through Spirit-filled individuals, it will be like a ship with a defective or missing rudder.

In a spirit of beginning to renew our covenant commitment, vision, and priorities, the present issue of *Perspective Digest* reviews some key aspects of biblical teaching held by the Seventh-day Adventist movement and affirmed by the Adventist Theological Society. These concepts are not detached, disparate threads, but are interwoven into a dynamic system of active faith that is centered in Christ and His mission to rescue us.

REFERENCES

¹ *Early Writings*, p. 14.

“How is it possible that we may grow in grace? It is possible to us only as we empty our hearts of self, and present them to Heaven, to be molded after the Divine Pattern. We may have a connection with the living channel of light; we may be refreshed with the heavenly dew, and have the showers of heaven descend upon us. As we appropriate the blessing of God, we shall be able to receive greater measures of His grace” (*Our High Calling*, p. 217).