

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

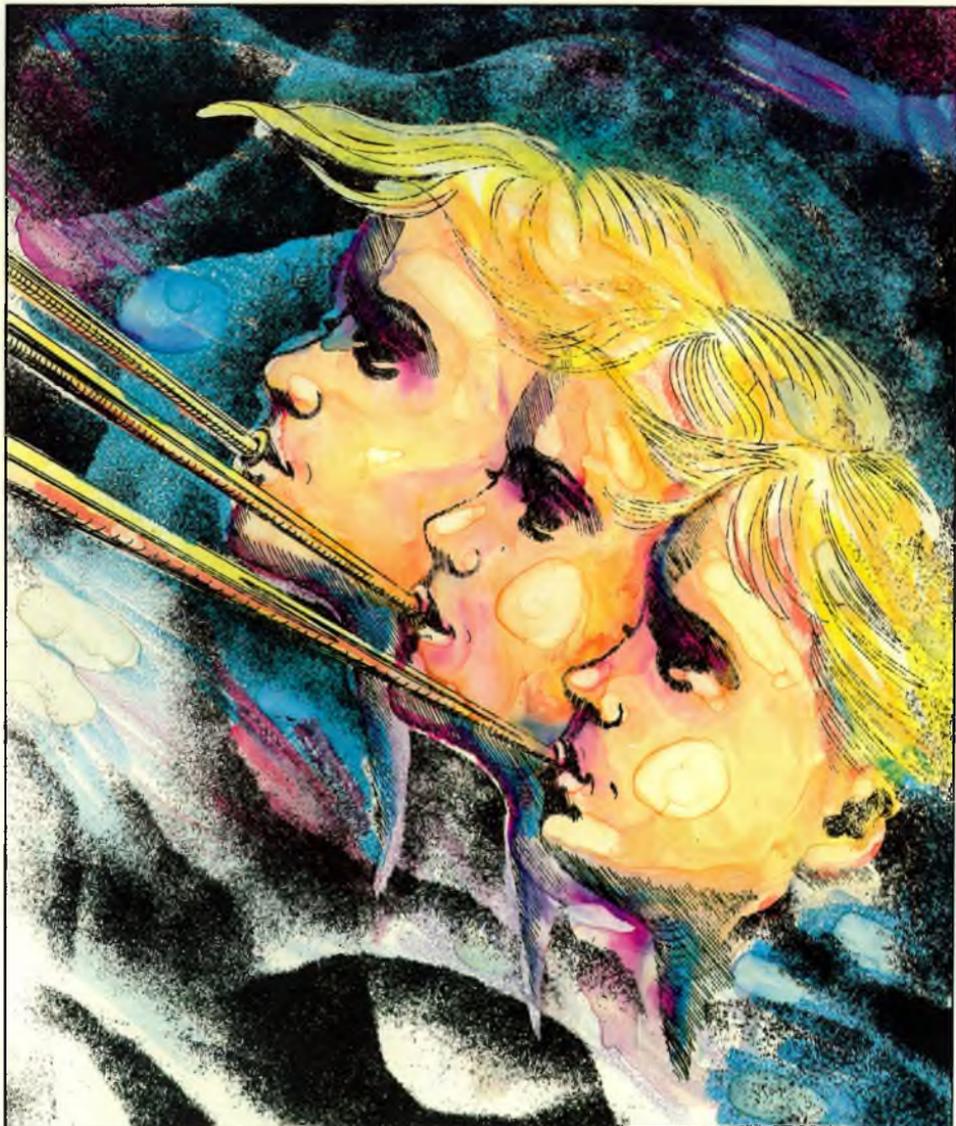
A General Conference Church Ministries Publication

July-September 1989

Apocalypse Now

Part 2

The Book of Revelation



Worthy goal.



“Success to me means making life a little better for people.”

*Lisa Bjelland, 23, WWC social work graduate 1987,
child and family service specialist, candidate for
WWC master of social work degree*

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Apocalypse Now—II

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THIS QUARTER'S ARTISTS

The artists for this quarter's COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY are Margie Mitchell and Eric Shults.

Margie was born in Evant, Michigan. She is a single parent with two daughters. In 1986 she decided to return to college and earned a B.F.A. in design from Andrews University. Her previous work experience includes 5 years as a graphic artist and 8 years doing chinoiserie on furniture. For the future Margie plans to pursue a career as an illustrator. She says, "I enjoy print making and plan to use my gift for illustrating in serving the Lord."

Eric was born in London, England. He received a B.A. Honors Degree in fine art painting from Ravensbourne College of Art and Design, Boomley, Kent, England. After working as a book editor for several years Eric emigrated to the United States in 1981. At first he worked on a number of jobs including screen printing and driving. Then in 1986 he decided to return to school and earn a Master's Degree. At Andrews University he is studying design and communication. Eric plans to pursue a career as a designer/illustrator.

Lesson 1, June 25—July 1

The Woman in White



"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (2 Corinthians 11:2, NIV).

Sunday, June 25

Whose Battle Is This?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 12:1-16

As I entered my teen years thoughts about the *end of time* produced a lot of fear and uncertainty in my life. The prophecies of pestilence, strife, and hardship gripped my heart like a slimy three-clawed hand. It terrified me when I heard that the end of time would be worse than any previous period of persecution. Dark pictures of Stalin and Hitler loomed in my thoughts. I couldn't help thinking of all the ugly things people suffered under their regimes. How could anything be worse? Such questions plagued me, and I cowered to think that my worst fears would be true. Would I be ready when Jesus came like a thief in the night? Would I be called to stand on trial for my faith? Would I be thrown in a dungeon for refusing to obey the Sunday laws? Would I be tortured or killed in cold blood? Yet,

whose battle is this? Ours? No, we aren't the contenders in this war. Revelation 12:7 tells us that Michael and the dragon are the opposing sides. Jesus won the war at Calvary, and on the cross He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30). It is true that Revelation 12 prophesies trouble for the end of time, but nestled right in the middle of this chapter is a message full of hope. It prophesies that through Christ we can overcome Satan. Verse 11 says, "They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (NIV).

Just before Christ's crucifixion He tried to give His people hope for the trials ahead. He didn't want them to live in fear of the future, and He doesn't want His children to be fearful today. He gives us the promise, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

by Stephanie Pitford

Stephanie Pitford is a language-arts-education and art-education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Monday, June 26

The Dragon, the Woman, and the Man Child

LOGOS

Theme: *Using the symbol of a pure woman, in contrast with the impure woman of Revelation chapter 17, Christ portrays the struggles and stamina of the Christian church, particularly through the centuries since His incarnation. Although the devil opposes us with great wrath, we are to remember that Christ has defeated him. In Revelation 12 we are given the formula for victory over the evil one.*

A woman is held captive by a dragon in its den. One day a brave knight charges into the den, slays the dragon, and rescues the woman. This familiar plot draws its characters from Genesis 3 where the dragon, the woman and the Child first appear in human history. In Revelation 12, John draws upon the same imagery to sketch the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

1. The Attack on the Man Child (read Rev. 12:1-4)

The drama begins at the tense moment when a majestic woman cries out in anguish to deliver her Child while a dragon waits to devour it. Mother Zion writhes in hope of a Deliverer. The birth of the Child triggers a series of events—the dragon's attack, the Child's escape to paradise, war in

heaven, the ouster of Satan, and the flight of the woman into the wilderness.

When did the war in heaven take place? John's description suggests the original conflict at creation when Satan was cast out of heaven with a third of the angels (verse 4), or the birth of Jesus when Herod, representing the Roman dragon, attempted to slay Him (verse 4). While the overtones of these events are present in the text, it is more likely that the war in heaven was precipitated by the death and ascension of Christ. The fact that the Child was caught up to heaven right after birth (verse 5) suggests that the birth represents Christ's appearance as Messiah. The dragon's attempt to devour the Child was his attack on Christ at the cross. But before the dragon could devour his prey the Child was snatched from his jaws and taken to heaven.

2. The Enthronement Struggle (read Rev. 12:7-10)

At this point another conflict broke out, precipitated by Christ's ascent to heaven. When He was about to be enthroned, He found a usurper sitting in His place! Ever since the fall, Satan had claimed Adam's position as head of the human race. But his attempt to defend his position by eliminating Christ backfired. His act of uplifting Christ on the cross surprisingly brought glory to Christ

by Beatrice S. Neall

Beatrice S. Neall is an associate professor of religion at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

and caused Satan's expulsion (John 12:23, 31, 32). Christ by His death achieved the right to restore the kingdom to God and exercise His own authority (Rev. 12:10).

3. The Legal Battle Over the Saints (Rev. 12:10, 12)

The war in heaven at Christ's ascension was not a military conflict, but a legal battle over Christ's right to represent this world and to save His people. *Satan* is a legal word meaning accuser; the words *throne, testimony, deceive, and overcome* all conjure images of the law court.* When Satan as prosecutor accuses Christ's brethren of their sins, they win their case by testifying that the blood of the Lamb has canceled their sins—they are legally innocent (verse 11). Satan's ouster causes an outburst of joy. For centuries the supposed representative of the human race to the councils of heaven had functioned only as their accuser (Job 1:6-11; Zech. 3:1, 2). Now the accuser is replaced by an Advocate (1 John 2:1)!

4. The Attack on the Woman (read Rev. 12:13-16)

Satan's legal defeat fills him with fury. Unable to attack the Man Child, he vents his wrath on the woman (verse 13). But God gives her eagle's wings so she can soar away to the wilderness (verse 14) where God's people find refuge from persecution. "You yourselves have seen . . . how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Ex. 19:4). It is to the wilderness that God calls His backsliding people to renew their marriage vows (Hosea 2:14, 15). There He "nourishes" His people with manna from heaven and water from the rock. These are their staples

during the long centuries of persecution (Rev. 12:6, 14).

The serpent renews his attack on the woman by spewing water out of his mouth like a river to sweep her away in a flood. In Revelation the word *mouth* with something issuing from it refers to a verbal attack. Christ slays His enemies with a sword issuing from His mouth—His Word (Rev. 19:15, 21). The beast uses its mouth to blaspheme God and the saints (13:6, 7). From the mouth of the dragon, beast, and false prophet come demonic spirits that incite the kings to battle (Rev. 16:13, 14). Satan pours rivers of lies out of his mouth to overwhelm God's church—the flood of error that has eroded confidence in God and His Word. But the earth helps the woman as the dry ground in the midst of the sea helped Israel of old.

5. The Attack on the Remnant (read Rev. 12:17)

Thwarted again, the dragon attacks the rest of the woman's offspring, those living after the 1260 years of persecution. This final attack is described in chapter 13 as the decree to worship the beast and its image under penalty of death. But the remnant of the woman's offspring hold to the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus (12:17).

Every attack of the dragon only issues in his defeat and Christ's victory.

When do you think the war in heaven occurred? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.

Why did Satan kill Christ when he knew the crucifixion would lead to his own defeat?

*Allison A. Trites in *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 161, points out much more legal language in the book of Revelation.

Victory in Christ

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Phil. 4:13

The concept of victory presented in Revelation 12:10-12 is a heartening one for Christians who are concerned with overcoming in the daily Christian life. Too often we forget the war is not between the struggling Christian and Satan, but between Christ and Satan. In addition, Christ has already won the decisive battle.

"Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, 'It is finished.' John 19:30. The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory. As a Conqueror He planted His banner on the eternal heights. Was there not joy among the angels? All heaven triumphed in the Saviour's victory. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost.

"To the angels and the un-fallen worlds the cry, 'It is finished,' had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ's victory.

"Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the

unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion."¹

"Henceforward Christ's followers were to look upon Satan as a conquered foe. Upon the cross, Jesus was to gain the victory for them; that victory He desired them to accept as their own."²

"There are Christians who think and speak altogether too much about the power of Satan. They think of their adversary, they pray about him, they talk about him, and he looms up greater and greater in their imagination. It is true that Satan is a powerful being; but, thank God, we have a mighty Saviour, who cast out the evil one from heaven. Satan is pleased when we magnify his power. Why not talk of Jesus? Why not magnify His power and His love?

"The rainbow of promise encircling the throne on high is an everlasting testimony that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' John 3:16. It testifies to the universe that God will never forsake His people in their struggle with evil. It is an assurance to us of strength and protection as long as the throne itself shall endure."³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 758.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 490.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 493.

by Kelly Schmitt

Kelly Schmitt is a senior religion-education and history major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Wednesday, June 28

Now Have Come

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 12:10

As the clouds of dust clear from the battlefield, Michael and His angels stand victorious. The accuser has been cast out. Oh, but the great cost of war—the casualties, the wounded, the dead. As He looks upon the dreadful scene, Michael knows that He can now reclaim His most precious creation. And He comes to do just that—to preach good news, to proclaim freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, and to release the oppressed (Luke 4:18).

At this time a loud voice cries out, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ” (Rev. 12:10, NIV).

To see the full effect of this passage let us examine the things that “now have come” to us because of Jesus’ sacrifice and victory on the cross.

1. Salvation Has Come. The cry of the redeemed is, “Salvation belongs to our God” (Rev. 7:10, NIV). Since salvation belongs to God, it has now come to us in Jesus. In John 16:15, He says, “All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you” (NIV). Paul speaks of this very clearly in Ephesians 1, where he says we have been given the Holy Spirit because we believed “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (verses 13, 14). Here

we find that the gospel is the mode through which salvation comes.

2. Power of Strength Has Come. This power is something we need desperately. We who are “still powerless” can now be strengthened “with power through his Spirit” in our inner beings (Rom. 5:6, NIV; Eph. 3:16). And how are we strengthened? How do we obtain this power? Paul understood when he said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16, NIV). The gospel contains all the power necessary for salvation.

3. The Kingdom of God Has Come. When Jesus was walking on this earth, He went about preaching the good news of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). The apostles were charged to “preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matt. 10:7, NIV). The kingdom was something to be preached, something to be heard, something to be believed, it was a message and it was good news.

4. The Authority of Christ Has Come. In Ephesians 1:20-22 we see that Jesus has been placed above all other authority forever, and He has been given all things. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18, NIV). This authority is the reason we make disciples of all nations, the reason we preach the gospel—the *power*, of God for *salvation*.

by David A. Dill

David A. Dill is a junior theology major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Thursday, June 29

Trusting Him

HOW-TO

Key Text: Psalm 125:1

Trusting is one of the hardest things to do in this world. Yet trusting God is one thing that we must do with the Lord. First, we must trust that He really wants us to be happy people and that by following His will we will be happy and satisfied. Second, we know that if we are following Christ, Satan needs to work harder on us to pull us away from God. If we do not follow Christ, Satan does not have any work to do on us. Thus, if we follow Christ we have to learn to trust God and know that He will protect us and provide for us no matter how hard Satan tries to pull us away. The biggest way in which we need to trust God can sometimes be the hardest. We have to trust Him with the battle that Christ's death has already won for us. It is so easy to fight our own battles. "If you want to get ahead in this world *you* alone have to do something about it!" "Don't let people push you around! Stand up and fight for yourself!" These are things we have heard all our lives in this do-it-yourself world. It is our natural instinct to fight for ourselves.

Trust does not come naturally, but Revelation 12 gives us a few guidelines on how we can learn to trust God.

1. *Follow* the Lord and His principles. Truly make Him Lord of your life (see Rev. 12:5). The woman did as the Lord asked her to do, even though it was difficult and she knew that Satan was there to oppose the work that the Lord had given her to do.

2. *Believe* the Lord will protect and guide. He will provide for you under all circumstances. The woman fled from Satan and God fed and protected her because she had consecrated herself to do His will and work (Rev. 12:6).

3. *Give* the fight against Satan back to God. Do not attempt to fight the battle yourself. Mere human strength does not equip you to do so. Christ is your only hope. He will fight for you. Through His death on the cross, He has already fought and won that battle.

REACT

How often do we try to handle life by ourselves? How often do we decide that the Lord cannot handle our particular situation or will not handle it? How far does your trust go?

by Jeanne M. Walker

Jeanne M. Walker is a junior social-work major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Friday, June 30

The Devil Turns Heads

OPINION

Key Text: Revelation 12:17

Indeed! I thought to myself as I scuffed my feet on the oily garage floor. My best friend had brought me to see his father's 1987 Jaguar. To confess, it caught my eye, and a tiny pang of jealousy pooled at the bottom of my heart. I studied my distorted image in the deep shine of the fresh burgundy finish, and reflected how humans could create a machine capable of moving people at 70 miles per hour. I couldn't help imagining my hot, tired body cradled in the soft leather interior . . . ahhh . . . a fine machine indeed.

Yet as I stood, engrossed in admiration, a familiar Bible text came to mind: Luke 12:33, "Sell that ye have, and give alms," and I was torn between guilt and envy over my excessive admiration of such a fine automobile.

Yet it is all very natural to desire a nice car, a beautiful home, the fine things of life. Yet I always remember that, although I am in this world, I am not to be of it. Though this thought comes to mind, I must still admit that it is the finer automobiles my eyes follow down the street. To put it bluntly, the devil turns heads.

The desire for such possessions is my natural drive for a better and easier life. God gave us that desire, yet we must be careful what we pursue. As I considered my desires, another familiar text

came to mind. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17).

This world is Satan's realm—Satan's kingdom. His war against humanity is subtle, and Satan wants dearly to divert our attentions, our funds, and our time away from God's work. We have been deceived. To me, this text means that Satan intends to destroy the woman, the church, and how better to do that than to turn our heads away from Christ, the source of life itself? Without Christ, Satan reasons, we die. Satan's offerings detract from our relationship with God.

Any strategist trained in the art of making war would tell you that the way to defeat an enemy is to concentrate your resources, wear him down, and continue your assault unceasingly until he is weak, and finally succumbs. How accurately does this describe Satan's campaign against the woman? Satan is indeed making war. The war between God and Satan concerns all mankind. There are no uniforms, good and evil are sometimes not easily identified.

YOU are the woman. You, and millions like you, make up what we now term the remnant church. That Jaguar looked great, and continues to look great. It's so tempting just to ease back into Satan's soft leather, isn't it?

by Jim Ritzer

Jim Ritzer is a freshman theology major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Lesson 2, July 2-8

The Remnant



“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

Sunday, July 2

The Remnant

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 12:17

I'm one of those typical, protected Adventist kids who has grown up in our self-contained, sterile Adventist system, rarely venturing out into the "world." It was not until one summer when I attended a nondenominational horsemanship clinic that I got a chance to talk to any of these "worldlings." In a discussion with one of my new-found friends, she unknowingly brought up a very critical subject, a subject that more Adventists should consider.

It began on a way-off subject. She inquired about my not eating pork. I gave her the simple answer about the clean and unclean animals in Leviticus, but she promptly shot back that the Levitical law is no longer in effect. She defiantly stated that the law was abolished at the cross and the only law in effect now is the law of loving God and your neighbor as yourself. She truly believed this.

How do we know she is not right? Now hold on. Before you answer with one of those traditional answers of our forefathers, THINK, because what you decide is ultimately important, more important right now than most people think.

Read this. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make WAR with the REMNANT of her seed, which

keep the COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, and have THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST" (Rev. 12:17).

Do you know what these commandments are, what the testimony of Jesus Christ is?

Listen. Counsel tells us that in the last days, Satan's deceptions will be so great that, if possible, even the very elect might be deceived (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 411). These grand deceptions are not just the spectacular and alluring anti-Christ and shining beings that we've all been warned about and are proudly guarding ourselves against. Is the devil feeble-minded? Will he splash all of his deceptions across the front page to announce them? NO. Right now the devil is slyly using "innocent" and "harmless" little compromises that are slowly but relentlessly wearing away the Bible's "rock solid" standards and principles. He is reaching into our homes and into our minds until we are brainwashed and think that we aren't. It is these compromises that are slowly blinding the elect to the real deceptions that are to come.

That's why we must know the commandments and the testimony of Jesus. These must be cemented in our brains so that the steady, subtle waves of deception cannot quietly wash, wash, wash them away. What is our answer? If we want to be part of the remnant, we need to know it and then stick to it.

by Joelle Fisher

Joelle Fisher is a junior office-management/music major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

God's Last-Day Remnant Have Biblical-prophetic Identification Marks

LOGOS

Theme: *God has identified the last-day phase of His true church on earth and has placed great responsibilities on her shoulders. Christ claims as His those who allow His Spirit to direct their lives. These are the ones who have the will and receive the power to obey His law, and who joyfully receive the special messages He has given through the prophets.*

1. The Final Remnant (read Rev. 12:17)

God has always had a people that He called His own. They were a specially chosen people. They were often referred to as His "remnant." These faithful few in all generations survived the crisis times and kept the knowledge of the true God alive on earth.

This "remnant" has always had some distinguishing marks:

1. They are the target of Satan's wrath.
2. They are small in number and always a minority.
3. They appear a little odd and fanatical when judged by the standards of the world.
4. They are an obedient people, even if obedience means danger or death. Obedient, because they had accepted the love of God in their lives.
5. They enjoy the guidance of

the Holy Spirit, who keeps them in the path of truth and righteousness.

God has had such a "remnant" in all ages, and has such a people today.

2. The Remnant Identified as Commandment Keepers

God has called the Advent movement into being to do a work of reform similar to that carried out by Elijah, Ezra, and Nehemiah, "called, The repairer[s] of the breach, The restorer[s] of paths to dwell in" (Isa. 58:12).

Humanity's ever-present temptation through the ages has been idolatry—worshiping someone or something other than God. By rejecting the law of God, and especially the Sabbath commandment, people have rejected the lordship of the true Creator-God (see Eze. 20:24; Deut. 17:3).

Seventh-day Adventists are to be conscious of their unique position as reformers who are to call an idolatrous world back to the worship of the true Creator-God. The spiritual setting of this reform is found in the framework of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14.

Judgment is taking place in the heavenly sanctuary where the Lord Jesus Christ is officiating as the Great Advocate for His people. The points of emphasis are:

by Siegfried Roeske

Siegfried Roeske is associate professor of religion at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

1. The Law—God's standard of judgment, righteousness, and holiness.

2. The Mercy Seat—Christ's provisions of grace that satisfy the claims of the broken Law. Christ offers His robe of righteousness to the repentant sinner.

The human tendency through history has been to emphasize one of these to the neglect of the other. God's people face the serious challenge of presenting both aspects of the judgment in a balanced, soul-saving manner.

Law and grace must not be seen as opposing each other, as if originating from two different sources. Both must be seen as issuing from the same righteous and loving God. The law must be shown to be the reflection of God's perfect character. It must be seen as ten principles of God's eternal government designed to protect the God-human relationship.

The purpose of the law is seen in the glory of the cross. The law places sin and the cross in their proper perspectives. Paul makes this clear in Romans 10:4, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The Greek word for "end" is *telos*, meaning the end as a 'goal' or 'aim.' Thus we could read the text to say that Christ is the 'aim' or 'goal' of the law for righteousness to the believer. In other words, the great objective of the righteousness that the law requires of each believer is found in Christ. He is the great ideal, the great pattern each sinner is to focus upon (see Rom. 8:3, 4).

Law-keeping is not legalism, but an acceptance of the principles of Christ's character in the heart as the motivating force of a Christian's thoughts and actions. With Christ, each person can say: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8).

As Prof. Edward A. Park has

stated: "The law is a transcript of divine perfections, and . . . a man who does not love the law does not love the gospel; for the law, as well as the gospel, is a mirror reflecting the true character of God. . . . The tendency of the modern pulpit is to strain out the divine justice from the divine benevolence, to sink benevolence into a sentiment rather than exalt it into a principle. The new theological prism puts asunder what God has joined together."¹

The psalmist cried out, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (Ps. 119:136).

"The great sin of the Jews was their rejection of Christ; the great sin of the Christian world would be their rejection of the law of God, the foundation of His government in heaven and earth."²

"Satan is jubilant when he hears the professed followers of Christ making excuses for their deformity of character. It is these excuses that lead to sin."³

3. The Remnant Have the "Testimony of Jesus"

The new emphasis on the Law arose at the same time as the new emphasis on the prophetic guidance, in October, 1844.

The phrase "testimony of Jesus" is not limited to the work of Ellen G. White, but it includes the entire work of God, through the Holy Spirit in giving saving information to His prophets and apostles to guide His people through *all* time. The works of Ellen White are the last portion of the testimony of Jesus, applicable for our day.

People who do not believe in prophecy in these last days cannot believe the Bible. The teaching of the presence of the prophetic gift in the last days is a clear and crucial teaching of God's Word.

We have the testimony of a number of Old and New Testament individuals who predicted the presence of the prophetic gift in the last days.

1. *Joel* 2:28-32 gives us clear evidence for the presence of the prophetic gift in the church, and Peter, in *Acts* 2:16-20, verifies the truthfulness of Joel's prediction.

2. *Jesus* in *Matthew* 24:24-30, speaking of the last days, warns about "false prophets." He certainly would not need to warn of false prophets if He did not believe in the ministry of true prophets.

3. *Paul* in *1 Corinthians* speaks of the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit gives to guide and perfect the church till the day of Christ's coming. In his list is included the gift of prophecy (*1 Cor.* 12:28; *Eph.* 4:11).

4. *John* in *Revelation* speaks of the prophetic gift as being present among God's last day "remnant" (*Rev.* 12:17; *Rev.* 19:10).

Four Bible Tests of a True Prophet:

1. *Isaiah* 8:20, "To the Law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

2. *Jeremiah* 28:9, "When the word of the prophet shall come to pass."

3. *Matthew* 7:20, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

4. *1 John* 4:2, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God."

Purpose of the Spirit of Prophecy.

Peter says the purpose of prophecy is to expel the darkness and confusion so that Christians might not be misled by the wiles of the devil (see *2 Peter* 1:19-21).

Prophets in the Old Testament were called "seers," because they were the eyes for God's people to discern God's will in particular situations.

This light and understanding has been given to God's last day remnant so they might distinguish between truth and error in the theological and spiritual confusion that exists in the modern Christian world.

The writings of Ellen White do not supercede or take the place of the Bible. Their purpose is to lead us into a deeper and better understanding of the Bible.

God has seen fit to associate the Spirit of Prophecy with His last day remnant right from the beginning. When God's people give heed to this marvelous gift, they prosper. When they ignore or reject its counsel they suffer and experience confusion.

"Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper" (*2 Chron.* 20:20).

1. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 465, 466.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

Tuesday, July 4

Prayer: Our Weapon

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 21:36

He jerked his head up as blood spattered all over his arm. A loud gasp and the sudden collapse of a buddy on his right made him stiffen. The battle raged on. Through his choked tears, his senses were overwhelmed by the war surrounding him. The smells of sweat, blood, dirt, and smoke filled his sputtering lungs; everywhere he turned he saw the flash of metal—deadly weapons brandished in the burning sun as bodies crouched, sprang, or hurled toward the enemy. No one ever said being a soldier was going to be easy.

War—a terrible result of sin, a terrible thing to experience. Yet those who make the choice to follow God will experience the worst, most important, war ever fought. Our verse for the week tells of this war, “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17).

Why, one may ask, is the dragon waging war against the remnant? What distinguishes the remnant from the rest of the world? Ellen G. White explains, “The great conflict is between the commandments of God and the requirements of the beast. It is because the saints are keeping all ten of the commandments that

the dragon makes war upon them.”¹ The seventh-day Sabbath, the mark distinguishing between the remnant and those who war against them, is to be the main issue the dragon and his army attack. “The reverence of God’s people for His law is a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord and are trampling on His Sabbath.”²

Ellen White tells us that Satan “will employ everyone who will engage in his service to hinder the chosen people of God from showing forth the praises of Him who has called them from darkness into His marvelous light.”³

What is Satan’s strategy? “To hide, to cover up this light, to cause people to distrust it, to disbelieve it, is the work of the great rebel and his host.”⁴ He doesn’t waste his time and power on those who “make no effort to receive and obey the truth. He knows he is sure of them; but those who are seeking for truth, that they may obey it in the love of it,”⁵ these are the ones against whom he exerts his malice and power.

Though the offense is strong, our Leader gives us a weapon that is strong and sure. Through prayer “we shall obtain that sure defense that will give us security in peril.”⁶ In fact, our “only defense will be prayer,”⁷ a close, constant connection with the One who has already won the war. Prayer is the link that provides the tired, weak soldier with the strength and courage necessary to uphold God’s com-

by Dawn Nesmith

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mandments. However, "Courage, fortitude, faith, and implicit trust in God's power to save do not come in a moment. These heavenly graces are acquired by the experience of years."⁸ Satan "can never weaken them [those seeking for truth] while they keep close to Jesus."⁹

It is important to commit oneself to God daily, starting now, for good habits established in times of peace are there to rely on in time of peril. Mrs. White warns, "We are in constant danger of becoming self-sufficient, relying upon our own wisdom, and not making God our strength."¹⁰

For those who rely on God, victory is sure. The war Ellen White saw in vision between the remnant and the ungodly depicts a terrible scene. "Victory alter-

nated from side to side." Soldiers from the remnant army left to join the dragon's while many "from the ranks of the enemy united with the commandment-keeping people of God." Mrs. White saw the Captain of the remnant army "ordering the battle and sending support to His soldiers. His power was mightily displayed, encouraging them to press the battle to the gates." The victory was finally won, "the army following the banner with the inscription, 'The commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus,' was gloriously triumphant."¹¹

REACT:

How can you ensure, today, that you will be on the winning side?

Do you think the victory is worth suffering through the war?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 223.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 605.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 105.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 572.

7. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 473.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

9. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 105.

10. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 572.

11. *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 41.

Wednesday, July 5

A Light to the Nations

EVIDENCE

Key Text: John 8:12

Adventists believe themselves to be "the final remnant." While this is a doctrine of the church, it has led many into a false view of non-Adventist Christians.

"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12, NKJV). Christ tells us He is the light of the world; He also tells us we Christians are the means for spreading His light. (See Matt. 5:14, 16, NKJV.) Christ chose the Christian church to spread the light. Thus all churches—Adventist, Lutheran, Methodist, or Ethiopian—share, in some degree, Christ's light.

Reform has swept the Christian church since its foundation. When our Lord bestowed the light on His disciples, it burned uncorrupted. Unfortunately, as the centuries past, the light dimmed. But however low it fell, it remained deep in His church's heart. About its nature, St. Augustine wrote, "Light reveals other things and its own very self, opens healthy eyes and is its own witness."* Thus the besieged light thrived under the efforts of men from St. Francis of Assisi to William Miller. Time and time again the murk surrounding the light dissolved—what we call reform.

Here hides an oft-seen error. Some Adventists tend to see each reform as tearing the light from the former light bearers, leaving them in darkness and labeling these older churches "Babylon."

But each new reform not only elevates a new light bearer, but also cleans some pollution off the old ones. St. Francis and St. Benedict not only founded religious orders but also improved the education and morals of the secular clergy. The Catholic Counter-Reformation, which swept away abuse and immorality, was as much a result of Luther and Calvin as was the Protestant Reformation. Even William Miller's Advent movement occurred amidst a wider American religious revival. In each of these cases, not only was a new light source founded but the old ones were refurbished.

We often overlook this aspect of reformations. The remnant is as much a tool to reform the older churches as it is a display case to preserve its own heritage. We must not look at the Adventist Church as a fortress, protecting the light, but as the clearest present light source, spreading light to Christendom and the world.

REACT

What should be the Adventist position in regards to the ecumenical movement?

How can we remain a "peculiar people" and not appear exclusive and proud?

*H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, editors, *The Pulpit Commentary—The Gospel of St. John* (Chicago, Illinois: Wilcox and Follet Co.) p. 352.

by Shawn Patrick Nowlan

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Sure Enough to Stand

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 12:17

The following story is told about Henry Ward Beecher as a boy: His teacher posed a question. When a student answered, the teacher was much incensed at the answer and cried testily: Sit down! The abashed boy sat down abruptly. Several boys were asked the same question and gave the same answer and promptly became confused at the teacher's disapproval. Finally Beecher was called and gave the same answer. Sit down! roared the teacher. But Beecher held his ground and insisted that the answer was correct. For a few moments the teacher stormed at him, but seeing Beecher obdurate and convinced, he smiled and said: Well, boys, you were all correct, but Beecher was the only one sure enough to stand up for it.¹

Sure enough to stand up for it—in this world of uncertainty, who is? How can we be firm in our beliefs (the commandments of God) and strong enough to stick with what we believe to be right (the testimony of Jesus)?

Commitment is a key word. The first steps are difficult, but are crucial to future progress. Commitments should not be taken lightly. Growing divorce rates, empty political promises, and sinking standards of society show that a commitment is more

“casual” than it used to be. But a commitment isn’t “casual.” It is necessary in the Christian walk.

Constant communication with God is also imperative. Christ stressed this when He likened it to the life-giving flow between the main stem and branches of a grapevine. “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. . . . Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4, 5, NIV). Without this steady stream of strength, our spiritual lives wither up. And this “stream of strength” calls for more than a daily Bible verse or weekly church attendance. It requires an ever-present knowledge that friendship with Christ is indeed a priority.

Courage also plays a major role. Without it the world would know nothing of Christianity, for the world doesn’t accept ideas that are not its own. Mark Twain once said, “Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.”² Each of us will experience occasions when we are afraid. But Christ has promised His constant presence. “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NIV).

Yet we are human. There are times when we fail to keep promises, neglect our relationship with God, and become afraid of life’s difficulties. But through it all, God will remain God. If He has required His children to obey, then He will give us the strength.

1. “Stand Your Ground,” in *Leaves of Gold*, Ed. by Clyde Francis Lytle (Williamsport: Coslett, 1962), p. 168.

2. Mark Twain, “Resistance,” in *Leaves of Gold*, Ed. by Clyde Francis Lytle, (Williamsport: Coslett, 1962), p. 55.

by Melanie Whitaker

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Friday, July 7

The Wrath of Satan

Opinion

Key Text: Revelation 12:17

"Among professed Christians, and even among ministers of the gospel, there is heard scarcely a reference to Satan. . . . [Many] seem to ignore his very existence."¹

Isn't this statement true today? It seems that as Christians, although we take time to worship God, we fail to realize that Satan really exists. Sure, we do not need to dwell on this fact. However, we need to realize and consider what Satan is doing now, and what he will do in the near future.

For the past 6,000 years, a great controversy has been raging between Christ and Satan. *Not Christ and us*, but Christ and Satan. And as time draws to a close we will begin to see more clearly the fulfillment of Revelation 12:17.

Imagine for a moment that you are a spectator at a national basketball-championship game. For the majority of the game, the red team has dominated the white team, and with five minutes left to play, it looks as if it is about over for the white team. Then the white team's coach calls for time out. He gathers his players together and urges them to play as a team, carefully following the fundamentals. "We can rally and win!" he assures them.

The white team makes a comeback, and in spite of the other coach's fury and his team's frantic, unfair tactics, the white team wins.

Perhaps the story can illustrate a point. For the last 6,000 years Satan has pretty well been in control of this planet, and all those who stood for Christ never fully posed a significant problem to his existence.

However, now, as time draws to a close, there stands a people of God who "keep the commandments . . . and have the testimony of Jesus" manifest in their lives—a people ready for translation. This group of people will help God bring about Satan's destruction by hastening the second coming of Christ. It is for this reason that Satan will do all that is in his power to destroy these people.

"In the great final conflict, Satan will employ the same policy, manifest the same spirit, and work for the same end as in all preceding ages. That which has been, will be, except that the coming struggle will be marked with a terrible intensity such as the world has never witnessed."²

Now is the time for us to prepare to face that day. We must now cut every cord that binds us to the world, and learn to become fully dependent upon Christ. We can expect no mercy or justice from the world then, because all the power that is in this world will be set against us by Satan.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 508.

2. *Ibid.* p. xi.

by Carl Cosaert

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Lesson 3, July 9-15

Shadows of Oppression



“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:11, 12, NIV).

Sunday, July 9

How Much Is He Worth?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 13:1-10

A young man stepped into a florist shop to get his girl a corsage for the high-school banquet. His eyes roamed between the daisies and the orchids in the display case. He weighed his affections against his poverty. He was hoping to have some money left for his bike.

The florist helped him decide. "Well, Son," he asked after a while, "how much is she worth to you?"

As the lad walked out with an

orchid, he could only wonder what had happened.

How much is God worth? How much is God worth to you? The question is relevant, because, as we have seen in the three angels' messages (Revelation 14:6-12), the final issue in the countdown of the great controversy is one of worship, whether we worship God and the Lamb or worship the beast. And "worship" is our response to what we think someone is *worth*.*

This week we study about two beast powers in Revelation 13 who desire to force their system of worship on the world.

* God Cares, vol. 2, pp. 394, 395.

by C. Mervyn Maxwell

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The American Prophecy

LOGOS

Theme: *Revelation 13 depicts satanic forces that are pressing for allegiance from every living being. Each person's decision will determine his or her eternal destiny. Christ assures His people of divine watch care and approval. The faithfulness of Christ's followers in resisting Satan's tyranny will be acknowledged and rewarded by Heaven.*

One line of prophecy runs through Revelation 12, 13, and 14. Here we find three animal symbols: the dragon, the leopard, and the two-horned beast, which depict the enemies of God during the Christian Era. They correspond to the three parts of Babylon mentioned in Revelation 16:19, and also to the devil, the beast, and the false prophet who are cast into the lake of fire in Revelation 20:10. In chapter 14 we find the "144,000" who resist the evil powers and stay faithful to God.

Each scene of this prophecy enlarges on the final elements of the one just preceding. The leopard in chapter 13 enlarges on the final scenes of chapter 12, while the two-horned beast enlarges on the latter parts of the leopard prophecy. The three angels' messages in chapter 14 emphasize the last conflict of both 12 and 13.

1. The Main Point of the Prophecy

"This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints" (Rev. 13:10, NIV. See also Rev. 12:11 and 14:12).

Throughout the great controversy between Christ and Satan, this message remains constant. There will be great pressure on God's people to yield their allegiance (see Rev. 13:14-17), but they are called to be faithful and endure. Only so will they be ready for the final harvest of Revelation 14:13-16.

When you were growing up, who was the most patient person in your family? What impressed you most about his or her patience? What kind of grade would you give yourself on patient endurance and faithfulness? Why?

2. The Composite Leopard

"He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast" (Rev. 13:1-3, NIV).

John sees a ravenous animal combining the four beasts of Daniel 7, which pointed to Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and

by Ralph E. Neall

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Rome. The characteristics of the earlier powers are united in this symbol.

A clue to its identity is seen in the fact that the dragon (which was pagan Rome) gave it its power, throne, and authority. It speaks proud words and blasphemies, and holds power for forty-two months, the same period mentioned of the infamous "little horn" in Daniel 7:24. ("Time, times and half a time" in Daniel equals three and one-half years, which is forty-two months.) It has power to make war against the saints, both here and in Daniel 7. These clues point to the apostate Christian church, which stepped to the throne of the Caesars after the Emperor Constantine moved his seat to Constantinople. The church has fulfilled every specification of the prophecy.

Revelation 13, however, adds to Daniel's prophecy by saying that one head of the beast would be wounded, and upon recovery would excite the wonder of the whole world. This wound occurred during the French Revolution, when in 1798 the French general Berthiere took the reigning pope prisoner and the papacy seemed to be abolished.

The wound began, however, with the Protestant Reformation, the rise of nationalism in Europe, and the Enlightenment. The church was ill prepared for these great movements, and for more than a century it appeared to be little more than a Medieval relic. The twentieth century shows that it can adapt, however. Thanks to the "aggiornamento" policy of Pope John XXIII and the charisma of Pope John Paul II, the world today is indeed wondering after Rome. Prophecy is still being fulfilled.

What is the relationship between the beast and the dragon?

How do people worship the beast and the dragon?

3. The Ferocious Lamb

"Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. . . . Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed" (Rev. 13:11-15, NIV).

While the true Lamb in the book is Jesus, this one is a counterfeit. The only thing lamblike about it is its two horns. In reality, it combines the dragon and the leopard.

This beast arises at the time the leopard is going into captivity (verses 10, 11), during the French Revolution. It arises out of the earth, while the earlier beasts all came out of the sea. They conquered their predecessors; this one appears in a previously uninhabited land. These clues, along with the lamblike horns, point to the United States of America as the final actor, just before the appearance of the "144,000" and the call of the three angels.

The last battle in the great controversy will involve "an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived" (verse 14). The image will be a creation of government and church that will enforce the "mark of the beast," under pressure of threatened boycott and death. Those who refuse the mark suffer the wrath of men; those who accept it suffer the wrath of God (see Rev. 14:9-12). The final test of loyalty, therefore, will produce either life now—or life later.

Adventists have always seen future Sunday laws as the mark of the beast—the mark of allegiance to human religion. We might well remember, however, that man-centered religions appear in many forms, and the final events could develop in unexpected ways.

If the main concern of the first beast is the exercise of power, what is the main concern of the second beast? We are told that the first beast received power from the dragon (verse 2). From whom does the second beast receive power?

What are some of the beasts in your life—people, forces, institutions, etc.—that are testing you? How is God helping you deal with them?

4. The Number of the Beast

"If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666" (Rev. 13:18, NIV).

The pope claims to be the Vicar of the Son of God, and the Latin letters of this title, when

figured in Roman numerals, add up to 666. We must not put too much weight on this fact, however, because other names can also add up to 666. It is more likely that the NIV's insight is correct: "It is man's number" (Rev. 13:18). Seven is God's number; six is man's. Man was created on the sixth day of the week. The sixth stage of each prophecy in Revelation, beginning with the seals of chapters 6-8, marks the climax of man's opposition to God. The number 666 must point to man's final challenge to the authority of God. Truly "this calls for patient endurance . . . on the part of the saints" (Rev. 14:12, NIV).

Compare the view of Rome in chapter 13 with that in Mark 12:13-17; Romans 13:1-7; and 1 Peter 2:13-17. How has Rome changed over the years that might account for these differing views? What do these passages say about the Christian's relationship to the state?

Tuesday, July 11

Join the Ranks

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ephesians 6:11, 12

Sometimes in the church today adults and youth alike choose a life of comfort rather than facing the trials involved when battling with sin. Some have found a "new freedom in Christ" to sanction their own fancies. Now is the time for those who will join the side of Jesus to do so without reservation, and leave behind the tents of Satan. Now is no time for worldly comfort. It is time to "put on the full armor of God." (Eph. 6:13)

"We are soldiers of Christ; and those who enlist in His army are expected to do difficult work. . . . We must understand that a soldier's life is one of aggressive warfare. . . . For Christ's sake we are to endure trials. We are not engaged in mimic battles."¹

"If we overcome our trials and get victory over the temptations of Satan, then we . . . are stronger and better prepared to meet the next. But if we . . . give way to the temptations of Satan, we shall grow weaker and get no reward for the trial and shall not be so well prepared to meet the next. In this way we shall grow weaker, . . . until we are led captive by Satan at his will. We must have

on the whole armor of God and be ready at any moment for a conflict with the powers of darkness. When temptations and trials rush in upon us, let us go to God and agonize with Him in prayer. He will not turn us away empty, but will give us grace and strength to overcome, and to break the power of the enemy. Oh, that all could . . . endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus! Then would Israel move forward, strong in God, and in the power of His might."²

"Resolve, not in your own strength, but in the strength and grace given of God, that you will consecrate to Him . . . every power, every ability. You will then follow Jesus because He bids you, and you will not ask where, or what reward will be given."³

"Let the youth try to appreciate the privilege that may be theirs, to be directed by the unerring wisdom of God. Let them take the word of truth as the man of their counsel, and become skillful in the use of 'the sword of the Spirit.' Satan is a wise general; but the humble, devoted soldier of Jesus Christ may overcome him."⁴

REACT

If compromise weakens and overcoming strengthens, then where, between these two poles, do I lie spiritually?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 140.

2. *Early Writings*, p. 46.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 55.

4. *Review and Herald*, Feb. 28, 1888.

by Bridget (LeBard) Kern

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Casting Our Allegiance

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Romans 1:1

The thirteenth chapter of Revelation illustrates how Satan and his angels are pressing for allegiance from every human being on this planet. How each person responds will determine their eternal salvation. Everyone must either cast their allegiance with Satan or with Christ, for no one can serve two masters (see Matt. 6:24).

What constitutes true service to Christ? Some feel that true service to Christ is formed by merely having a relationship with Him, but even the devil and all his angels have a relationship with Christ. So, in order to serve Christ fully, we need to go to the Scriptures and let them explain what *true* service is, lest we are deceived and find out that we are really serving Satan.

A common expression used by the apostle Paul to begin several of his Epistles is "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ." This expression is also used in the second Epistle of Peter and in the Epistles of James and Jude. At first glance this might only appear as a cliché used by the apostles to begin their letters to the churches, but in reality it is of great significance to understanding the meaning of true service.

The Greek word that is trans-

lated "servant" in these expressions is "doulos." *Doulos* was the Greek word for "slave." Romans 1:1 can literally be translated, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ."

Paul and the other apostles chose the word *slave* to illustrate the completeness of their subjection to Christ. To understand fully how the apostles and all true followers of Christ should regard themselves we have only to study the condition of a slave.

A slave is one who is entirely the property of his master. A slave cannot use his time as he pleases, but only as his master sees fit. A slave possesses nothing of his own, because everything he has belongs to his master. Any money that a slave acquires also belongs to the master. A slave can have nothing of his own, but owes his entire allegiance to the master.

The Scriptures depict the condition of a true Christian the same way. First Corinthians 6:19, 20 tells us that we are not of our own, but we have been bought with a price. So the true Christian should do everything for the glory of God (see 1 Cor. 10:31).

The condition of a slave indicates the completeness of the control that God has over those who are truly His followers. There is no shame involved, because there is no higher honor in the world than to be called the servant of Jesus Christ.

by Carl Cosaert

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Thursday, July 13

Holding On

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 24:13

I vividly remember how, when I was a young girl growing up in the church, the knots in my stomach would jerk taut every time the words *time of trouble* were uttered. I have never been fond of pain, and that phrase always conjured up images of starved, beaten, and jailed Christians. The idea that frightened me the most, however, was that I knew I wasn't ready for the end. I pictured being thrown into the "sinner" category, unable to stand the pressure and becoming lost forever.

But I've discovered I don't have to be afraid. Here's why:

1. Even though I may not see Him, Jesus always stands beside me. After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace King Nebuchadnezzar stared in astonishment and said, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, . . . and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan. 3:25). When all the forces of the world seem to be against me, I can be assured that I'm not alone. Trusting Him now with my tough decisions can build my belief that He is there. Letting Him work through painful broken engagements, lack of funds for college, overwhelming tests, and unavailability of a much-needed job, helps me learn habitually to lean on Him so that when life is at its

darkest my dependence on Him will stay strong.

2. Jesus is stronger than anything I have to fight. The One who can speak life into being, feed a multitude with five loaves and two fish, still the seas, and make mountains shake at His presence is able to protect His people under any circumstances. I can know that not only does He accompany me wherever I go, He also is more powerful than all the forces of darkness united.

3. The one thing I have to do is hold on to Him until the end, because the battle is His, not mine. As a little girl, the thing I feared most about Christianity was not being able to stand through the trials of the "end of time." As Matthew 24:13 says, "he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (NIV). I believed then that enduring meant having to survive by eating dandelion leaves and cat-tail roots, living in caves, and staying unshowered for months. I have come to realize that the most difficult task ahead of me is fixing my eyes on Him and consciously letting Him handle the building pressures. With Him on my side, how can I fail?

REACT

1. How does enduring today affect enduring to the end?

2. What must be "endured to the end" that I might be saved?

by Lisa Gerrans

Lisa Gerrans is a sophomore accounting major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

No Match for Satan

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 24:24

The choices and temptations we face today are innumerable. Each choice seems vital and each temptation a little harder to resist than the first. As we grow older, the types of choices and temptations may change, but they don't disappear. When we were young our decisions covered areas such as what game to play at recess or what to name the family pet; and the cookie jar was always a big dilemma. Then one day we woke up and realized the magnitude of our decisions. We realized how great an effect our choices have on us and on those around us.

Although we may have just become aware of this fact for the first time, Satan has been aware of it since our birth. In his struggle to claim as many people on his side as possible, he has become an expert at the game—a master deceiver. Some of us are foolish enough to think that we can see through Satan's deceptions on our own, and so we go on our merry way, ever on guard for seedy-looking people or suspicious circumstances. If only it were that easy! Come on, folks, Satan is no dummy. He knows that we are not going to try something that doesn't appeal to us. He also doesn't expect us to fall for a trick that has his name written all over it.

No, instead, Satan observes us,

makes note of all our weak points, and then goes from there. He catches us on trivial, seemingly innocent details. And innocent though they may seem, if we're not careful Satan will reel us in slowly, keeping us unaware. When we realize we are caught on one of Satan's hooks we find ourselves having to go through a lot of heartache and pain to get off from it. This heartache and pain is so unnecessary. If we had only trusted more in God and not in our own feeble attempts to overcome the temptation, then we would never have been caught in the first place.

It still sounds so easy . . . "just keep your eyes set on Christ and accept His saving power." So, why, if it's so easy, do we fall time and time again? Why must we be constantly picking ourselves up out of the grime when we have access to a power that can conquer all? It's because we forget that we need to keep Christ by our side through the good times, as well as the bad. Things begin going our way, and we say to ourselves, "Hey, look at me, I'm doing quite well for myself. I certainly don't need to bother God for any help." It's at such moments, when we let our gaze wander from the cross, that we are most vulnerable to Satan's deceptions.

If we could only learn to keep our sights on Christ, turning to Him every day for strength instead of waiting until trouble hits. How much easier our lives would

by Tammy Eliuk

Tammy Eliuk is a junior physical-therapy student at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

be if we would but realize that victories come only through putting our trust in Christ, for only then can we be safe from the work of Satan.

REACT

1. Do I remember to trust in Christ through good times, as well as in bad?

2. Do I realize that only Christ

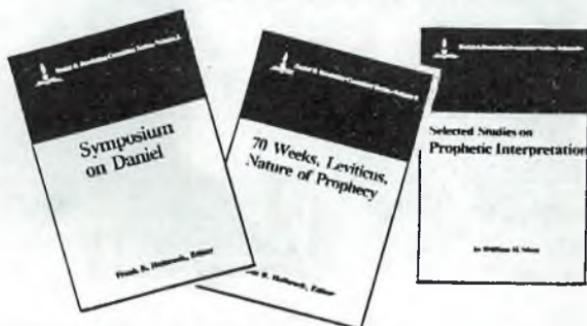
has the power to overcome Satan, no matter how much self-confidence I have in myself?

3. What bad times are you experiencing now where you need God's help?

4. Are things going so well for you now that you have forgotten how much you need God's help? Explain.

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Lesson 4, July 16-22

Lamblike Deception



“He will dwell on the heights; his place of defense will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him, his water will be sure” (Isaiah 33:16, RSV).

Sunday, July 16

Camouflaged Counterfeit

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 13:11-18

As I picked up my jacket and keys in the breakroom, I let out a sigh. In a few minutes I would finally be home. The afternoon shift had been a frantic four hours of rattling off the standard "Welcome to Taco Bell. May I take your order?" slapping together burrito supremes minus the onion, and counting out change to impatient customers. But just as I opened the door to leave, I heard the manager call, "Karen, can you come to my office, please?"

"Oops!" I thought as I stood in front of his desk, "What have I done now?" Holding a twenty-dollar bill in his hand, Mr. Deilman asked what it looked like to me. Perplexed, I just looked at him. Getting no response to his question, he asked me to feel it. Never one to turn down an opportunity to hold a twenty-dollar bill, I complied, still not seeing his point. Finally, Mr. Deilman explained that what I was holding was just an ordinary piece of paper with some green ink—a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. Sometime during the day, someone had paid for a Mexican meal with a worthless piece of paper. Comparing it with another bill, I saw how grainy the fake was, how slightly different the art

work was. The two were similar, yet one was genuine, the other an imposter. One was valuable, the other worthless.

Deception. It's as imperceptible as the day turning into night. As enticing as a hot stove to a child. As deadly as the water that slowly boils the frog. At Taco Bell, had anyone offered me a red octagonal piece of construction paper with the number 20 stamped in each corner and a picture of President Reagan drawn on the front, I wouldn't have even thought of putting it in the cash drawer. But rarely is deception blatantly obvious. Few people would buy a new house on the San Andreas fault. Beginner's swimming lessons held a few feet from the brink of Niagara Falls wouldn't have a very large enrollment. However, there are business transactions far more dangerous, yet far more enticing than these. Born by an appeal to intelligence, deception comes camouflaged in convincing wrapping paper with a white bow of authenticity on top. It is convenient, looks OK, sounds good, and feels even better, but when compared to the genuine, it's fake and fraudulent. As Screwtape quoted to Wormwood, "Old error in new dress is ever error nonetheless."* When your drawer is balanced at the end of your shift, will you have to account for anything counterfeit?

*Walter Martin, *Screwtape Writes Again* (Santa Ana: Vision House, 1975), p. 16.

by Karen Caldwell

Karen Caldwell is a freshman secondary-education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

The Beast From the Earth

LOGOS

Theme: *The second half of Revelation 13 predicts the deception and persecution that will confront God's last-day people. For such to be the work of a leopardlike beast would be expected. Wild animals attack. But for a lamblike beast to do the same is unexpected and surprising. Those who place their trust fully in Christ will be preserved from deception and enabled to endure the attack.*

1. A Beast With Two Lamblike Horns (Revelation 13:11, RSV)

"Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon" (Rev. 13:11, RSV).

John's picture of a lamblike beast seems like a contradiction of terms. The lambs I have observed have not exactly roared like a dragon. Their quiet "baa" draws the sympathetic heart-strings tight, and much attention is given to the little creature to see that all its needs are met. The only nation that fits all the specifications of this diabolical creature is the United States of America. But who this lamb is is not nearly as important as our ability to discern between truth and deception. Deception is the consequence of ignorance. If I know something to be true I will also be able more clearly to know when its counterpart is false. Error is unrecognized

able if I do not have truth. Jesus told Pilate that He came into the world to "bear witness to the truth" and that "every one who is of the truth hears my voice," to which Pilate responded, "What is truth?" (John 18:37, 38, RSV). Jesus responded that He was "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6, RSV); and that "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32, RSV). God is truth; Jesus came to reveal the truth about God; and that truth will make us free. With a clear picture of God as revealed in the life of Christ, and His promise of freedom through truth, I can have the confidence and assurance of God's direction in sorting out Satan's deceptions.

"Deception is not dealt with by delving into that which is deceptive; and concentrating my efforts on knowing all I can about the deception. Rather error is defeated by drinking deeply of the consistently clear waters of truth." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Miracle-Worker and Deceiver (read Revelation 13:13, 14)

"It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an

by Rich Carlson

Rich Carlson is campus chaplain at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived" (Rev. 13:13, 14, RSV).

Apparently, when the hands of the prophetic clock point to the final last-day events, God is going to withdraw more of His protecting hand and allow Satan to exercise additional power. Miracle-working in the presence of the beast sounds threatening. Its deceptive powers seem more than I could handle. However, within this scenario of deception is a promise of victory through concentration on the truth. The deceptive signs are performed by the beast; therefore, if I know who the beast is, and am connected with the truth, the counterfeit miracle-working will not have a telling effect on me. The deception of the miracles is to initiate a response of making an image to the beast. Any deceptive miracle, be it magical, mystical, or marvelously mysterious in its makeup, if it leads to the worship of anything or anyone other than God is obviously not from God. It also takes place when I place myself in an environment where God is not welcome and the beast rules. A concentration on the truth will deliver me from such deceptions.

How does the lamblike beast mimic true religion? How are religion and government connected in Revelation 13:11-17?

3. Great Accomplishments for the Leopardlike Beast (read Rev. 13:14-18)

"... to be marked on the right hand or the forehead. . . . This calls for wisdom" (Rev. 13:16b, 18a, RSV).

The message of this apocalyptic prophecy is not just the location of a mark, or the deciphering of a number containing three digits of equal value. It is the call for wisdom such as people have never needed before. A lamb with ven-

triloquistic abilities performing feats previously reserved for God and God alone, who calls for the worship of the beast with a persecuting mark for the uncooperative, is enough to frighten the most sincere. Unfortunately it has frightened too many into a concentration on the beast, its power, its threats, its wounds, and its number. This appears to be placing me where the beast is and not where the truth is. Victory does not come by concentrating on the false, but by concentrating on the true. This calls for wisdom. Realize its deception, and its power, its threats, and its number. But concentrate on the truth, and deception will not rule over you. Wisdom is acknowledging *who* is in charge, *who* truly rules, and *who* will be victorious in the end. If you lack wisdom, "Ask God who gives to all men generously. . . and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting" (James 1:5, 6, RSV). A desire for earthly treasure has compelled many to expend much time and energy in what often proves to be a fruitless adventure. Read Proverbs 2:1-5 and discover the eight steps that demonstrate the intense devotion that should mark the search for divine wisdom. The fear of the Lord is "the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10, RSV). Revelation 13 calls for wisdom as a solution to the deception that lies ahead. Proverbs chapters 8, 9 set the stage for, not a concentration on the deceiver, but a concerted effort to gain the wisdom of God, by becoming acquainted with Wisdom Himself.

Compare the mark of the beast with the mark of God (see Rev. 7:3). When in the chronology of prophetic events do people receive the mark of the beast / the seal of God? What sort of seal has God placed in your life? How is this seal evident to other Christians? To non-Christians? Why?

All the Answers

TESTIMONY

Key Text: John 5:39, 40 NIV

"One nation, and only one, meets the specifications of this prophecy; it points unmistakably to the United States of America."¹

"The lamblike horns, emblems of innocence and gentleness, well represent the character of our government, as expressed in its two fundamental principles, republicanism and Protestantism."²

"When the Protestant churches shall unite with the secular power to sustain a false religion, for opposing which their ancestors endured the fiercest persecution; when the state shall use its power to enforce the decrees and sustain the institutions of the church—then will Protestant America have formed an image to the papacy, and there will be a national apostasy which will end only in national ruin."³

"The Sabbath question is to be the issue in the great final conflict, in which all the world will

act a part. Men have honored Satan's principles above the principles that rule in the heavens. They have accepted the spurious sabbath, which Satan has exalted as the sign of his authority. But God has set His seal upon His royal requirement. Each Sabbath institution, both true and false, bears the name of its author, an ineffaceable mark that shows the authority of each.

"The great decision now to be made by every one is, whether he will receive the mark of the beast and his image, or the seal of the living and true God."⁴

"Sundaykeeping is not yet the mark of the beast, and will not be until the decree goes forth causing men to worship this idol sabbath. The time will come when this day will be the test, but that time has not come."⁵

"The Lord has shown me clearly that the image of the beast will be formed before probation closes; for it is to be the great test for the people of God, by which their eternal destiny will be decided. . . ."⁶

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 440.

2. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 975.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 976.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 977.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 976.

by Erik Stenbakken

Erik Stenbakken is a language-arts major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska. Erik is currently serving as a student missionary in Ponape.

Wednesday, July 19

Agent of Evil

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 13:13, 14

Revelation 13 describes several beasts. The first, most often associated with Roman Catholicism, is depicted as a heinous multi-faced terror. The next beast, a young, lamblike creature, is possibly the least known of the Revelation creatures. In Daniel, and Revelation, many beasts are said to *rise from the sea*. But the second beast will arise from the *earth*. In prophetic interpretation the *sea* has been taken to refer to multitudinous lands, whereas the *earth* indicates sparsely inhabited country. The beast is described as *having two horns*. America can fit the prophetic scenario, keeping in mind that the American system is noted for dual liberties, civil and religious, and that America was founded on a continent essentially void of population. The lamblike creature, originally benign, will begin to *cause all to worship wonders*, which will likely be peculiar events which will completely enthrall technologically oriented people. To a less "developed" civilization, these wonders would seem less spectacular, for developing peoples often experience the unexplainable. Yet, to modern Americans with their knowledge of science and technology, the unexplainable will cause them to marvel.

Next the lamblike creature enforces a civil registration. A mark will be issued to all who *worship the beast and its image*. Those without this mark will be prohibited from participation in society. Many believe this mark will be a literal stamping of humanity with evil's number. However, it can be argued that the mark, or sign, could be a figurative item. It could be a mark of character found on the worshipers of the beast. On the obverse, those sealed by God will bear in their thoughts and actions, a mark as evident to the world as a brand on the face.

It is difficult to believe that the United States could become an agent of evil. Yet nations have attempted to usurp Christ's role as saviour of the world. Due to military supremacy, massive foreign aid, and economic dominance, Americans often feel very much as if they are the only thing standing between the huddled masses of the globe and a universal hell. The French theologian Irenaeus had this to say about the second beast. "For these are indeed so called by men, but are not [really] gods; and that he will endeavour in a tyrannical manner to set himself forth as God."* When any person or nation tries to seize the role of saviour of humanity, that person or nation *is* an agent of evil.

*Alexander Roberst and James Donaldson, editors, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 553.

by Trevor Mahlum

Trevor Mahlum is a freshman at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Thursday, July 20

How Easy to Believe

HOW-TO

Key Text: Psalm 18:30

A child meets a strange man on the street. The man promises the child all the candy she can eat if she follows him. If this child likes candy and has not been warned about strangers, she will believe because she wants to believe.

Finals week has arrived, and a student with a distinct reputation for cheating sells answers to anyone willing to pay the price. They all know his reputation, but buy the answers anyway. None of them even guess he never knew the questions.

All too often we believe what we hear simply because we want to believe what we hear. We don't want to question, because that takes too much effort. So we choose to believe that someone else is the authority. We want to think that they have all the answers, because we don't want to have to find them on our own. How easy it is to be deceived when you are all too willing simply to believe.

We are all looking for the second coming of Christ. And in our hearts each one wants to believe it will be soon. It is not wrong to believe that Christ is coming

quickly. In fact, we have been warned that the time is pressing near (see Rev. 22:7, 12). But we have also been warned about a deceiver. He will speak the right words and perform miraculous signs. Will we be so willing to believe that we too are deceived? It is so easy to be deceived. You don't even know you are being had. However, there is a way to avoid being taken in by the deceiver. You must have complete trust in Christ and a firm understanding of His Word. In God's Holy Letter to us we have been warned about strangers who promise us exactly what we want. And we have been told what will happen if we follow them. We have been warned about people trying to sell us the answers we are looking for. And it is not worth the price you will have to pay.

Christ is the only one who can fulfill the promises for which we are waiting. He is the only one with all the answers. Only by knowing this and by knowing Christ can we be saved from deception.

REACT

In the light of Revelation 13:13, 14, against what dangerous deceptions would Adventists need to be on guard?

by Stephanie Huset

Stephanie Huset is a junior music-education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Friday, July 21

Don't Be Deceived (This is not a true-life situation)

OPINION

Key Text: Proverbs 3:19-26 (TLB)

I noticed the image of a familiar figure through a gap in the stack of books and crumpled papers before me. Roaming the library bookshelves is a wife hunting for the husband who forgot their lunch appointment.

"Not again," I groan to myself as I whistle and wave over to my patient mate. As usual, she forgives me and fills me in on the events of her day, while she jogs to keep up with my nervous walking pace.

Gulping down my cafeteria food, I can only hear the call of accumulating assignments and lingering labor, while other table dwellers converse.

"I have noted all the data for my assigned sermon," my brain whispers in my ear.

I begin to draw my sermon outline in my head, dehydrating, condensing, and emulsifying texts and data to fit the teacher's homiletical formula. The thesis, key word, and three main points with personal application now appear on my mind's page.

Bursting with excitement, I exclaim to my spouse that I have just figured out my sermon for class.

"Tell me about it," she smiles in anticipation.

In a flow of watery discourse, I spew out to her my thesis, key word, three main points, and per-

sonal application, all interspersed with data and texts.

"That's nice. What is the title for it?" she inquires.

"Don't Be Deceived!" I trumpet back with a triumphant look.

Her face signals a flag of confusion as a devastating question escapes her lips. "How can I keep from being deceived?"

A surge of sensory shock stands the hairs on my arms at attention. Here I have just released to her my data and texts in the condensed formula and she didn't even get the point.

In my shocked state, the events of the past week rise before me in a moment of reflection: the evening hours at home spent with books instead of my lifelong partner, the detachment from friends who once shared my free time, the sporadic devotions spent studying the Word to glean information for religion class assignments . . .

"How can I keep from being deceived?" I asked myself aloud.

I wonder, when that fatal decision of receiving the mark of falsehood confronts me, will I be deceived? Will I have time to analyze the data and texts? Will there be a formula I can plug into for the answer?

REACT

1. If wisdom keeps me from deception, how can I obtain it?

2. How can I set priorities so that I display wisdom in my lifestyle?

by Mike McConnell

Mike McConnell is a youth-ministry/history major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Lesson 5, July 23-29

The 144,000



“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10, NIV).

Sunday, July 23

Song Service

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 14:1-5

Some emotions remain fresh in the mind no matter how many years claw and bluster at them. They live on beneath the numbness of everyday concerns, and can replay themselves in vivid reality at the mere turning of memory's key. A familiar face, the tone of a voice once well known, or even the snatch of a favorite song can recreate the original reality.

"I will follow Thee, my Saviour . . ." might not be a top-40 contender to many. To a person outside the church, to a person unimpressed with the wonder of a Saviour's love, these words could be little more than religious cliché. But I know better. To me, these words roll back the years and open a wonderful door to the beginnings of my spiritual commitment.

I was in my teens and not too sure of what was to become of me. There were plenty of quick-fix pleasures available and the feeling of endless decades ahead to indulge them—but what then! The water sloshed in the baptismal font, and I knew that those other teens, my friends, had cast their lot in a different direction.

"Where Thou goest I will follow . . ." I knew the theory. I knew the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. I even comprehended in passing-grade fashion the intricacies of Christ's heavenly ministry. I knew as words on paper the promise Jesus left of His soon return, and of the Comforter to remind and lead us to Him. I knew, but had not felt the reality of it all.

Until I heard the music.

"Thou hast crossed the waves before me, and I still will follow Thee . . ." Shortly after, I too made that public commitment. Then too, the congregation sang of commitment. In a real sense the song was just beginning. The emotion continues.

"And though all men should forsake Thee, By Thy grace I'll follow Thee . . ." Even in those days of early decision, I knew that the song found many people tone deaf. I knew also that an Advent imperative looked to a remnant persisting in their preparation for the songs of heaven.

At the time, in the enthusiasm of youth, I imagined the words of the baptismal hymn to be a battle cry. Actually the words sing of victory. What a prospect to cherish as we follow our Saviour!

by Lincoln Steed

Lincoln Steed is book editor at the Pacific Press Publishing Association in Nampa, Idaho.

Glorified in His Saints

LOGOS

Theme: *The focus of Revelation 14:1-5 is on victors, not victims. After their earthly conflict the 144,000 stand before God free from persecution, temptation, and sin. Their purity of character has resulted from their wholehearted response to the three angels' messages.*

1. Safety With the Lamb (read Revelation 14:1; John 1:29)

"Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1, RSV).

Revelation shows us future events in many sharply defined scenes. There is some juxtaposition of events, but the flow of the book is inexorable as we approach the end of the great controversy and the point at which "one pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation."* Through John's narrative of the Patmos vision we are given glimpses of the heavenly finale. The first verse of chapter 14 gives us such a glimpse—made all the more graphic by the events described in the immediately preceding verses of chapter 13.

Symbolized by dragon and beasts, Satan, an apostate religious power, and a despotic United States, unite to control the

minds of the entire world. Such science fiction imaginings as those of George Orwell's 1984 pale alongside the soon-to-be-realized totalitarianism. "Those who will not worship the image of the beast . . . [are] slain" (Rev. 13:15, RSV).

Everyone is forced to accept the mark of the beast on their hand or forehead, or else they cannot buy or sell! (Rev. 13:16, 17). Total shutout for God and His people? Certainly not! And to prove it, we are transported in time and place to a victory celebration on Mount Zion after the battle is over.

The setting is, of course, heaven (see Heb. 12:22). The scene we see there gives the lie to the intentions of Satan in the previous chapter. Despite the bloodletting, despite the determination that "all" should receive the beast's mark, and that "no one" without it could buy or sell—despite Satan's "worst" efforts, a great company escape him.

There is no beast in heaven. Only the meek and mild Jesus, the Lamb, slain in effect from the beginning of the sin problem in order that people might escape its consequences. Now we see that Lamb, glorified and accompanied by 144,000 who have "his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1, NIV). This is the group that has withstood the final demands of Satan.

2. More Than a Name

The message to Philadelphia

by Lincoln Steed

Lincoln Steed is book editor at the Pacific Press Publishing Association in Nampa, Idaho.

contains a clue to the group described with the Lamb in Revelation 14. Philadelphia is a church characterized by love, faithfulness to God, and endurance. The promise given to such a believer is, "I will write on him the name of my God" (Rev. 3:12, NIV).

The 144,000 belong to God and have His name upon their foreheads—they have His character imprinted in their minds.

The name of God reveals so much. It is a unique title, admitting to no other deity. God Himself expressed His name to Moses as one who is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6, 7). God called this description of His character-name His glory. That glory He intends to share with humanity.

Jesus came to this earth to reveal the nature of God to people. In the intercessory prayer recorded in John 17, He said, "this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God" (v. 3, RSV). To accomplish this Jesus "manifested . . . [God's] name" (v. 6). The natural result of that sharing was oneness—a common character—a common glory. Again in that prayer, Jesus said, "the glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (v. 22, RSV).

Yes, the 144,000 have the name of Jesus—and all that it comprehends—character, ownership, dedication, glory.

3. Secret to Success (read Revelation 14: 4)

The 144,000 survive the time

of tribulation and experience translation without death, because of their close walk with the Lamb. This truth is inherent in the passing comment that they "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (verse 4, RSV).

We cannot expect to find the Lamb on Mount Zion if we are not following Him now. We must learn to follow Him wherever He goes. He will lead tenderly in the life of all who seek that leading.

In his first Epistle John gave the advice, so applicable to all who aspire to attend the marriage supper of the Lamb, either as part of a larger multitude or as one of a tested 144,000. "Beloved," he wrote, "we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3, RSV).

Yes, the opening scene of Revelation 14 is a glorious one. A time for singing praises, of honoring the One who has worked so wondrously in the experience of the 144,000. In the words of another song we now sing, "Victory in Jesus" is a reality. You and I can experience it now and look with anticipation to celebrating it one day with our Lord on Mt. Zion.

Does this scene of heavenly triumph inspire you to greater faith in God? Why?

What is the focus of this scene in heaven—the 144,000 or the Lamb?

What sets the 144,000 apart from the saved of all ages?

*The Great Controversy, p. 678.

Looking to Heaven

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Isaiah 54:11-17

"I saw that the four angels would hold the four winds until Jesus' work was done in the sanctuary, and then will come the seven last plagues. These plagues enraged the wicked against the righteous; they thought that we had brought the judgments of God upon them, and that if they could rid the earth of us, the plagues would then be stayed. A decree went forth to slay the saints, which caused them to cry day and night for deliverance. This was the time of Jacob's trouble. Then all the saints cried out with anguish of spirit, and were delivered by the voice of God. The one hundred and forty-four thousand triumphed. Their faces were lighted up with the glory of God.

"Then I was shown a company who were howling in agony. On their garments was written in large characters, 'Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting.' I asked who this company were. The angel said, 'These are they who have once kept the Sabbath, and have given it up.'¹

"We are to copy no human being. There is no human being wise enough to be our criterion. We are to look to the man Christ Jesus, who is complete in the per-

fection of righteousness and holiness. He is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the pattern Man. His experience is the measure of the experience that we are to gain. His character is our model. Let us, then, take our minds off the perplexities and the difficulties of this life, and fix them on Him, that by beholding we may be changed into His likeness. We may behold Christ to good purpose. We may safely look to Him; for He is all-wise. As we look to Him and think of Him, He will be formed within, the hope of glory.

"Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand. And let us do all that we can to help others to gain heaven. We are to have an intense interest in Christ Jesus; for He is our Saviour. He came to this world to be tempted in all points as we are, to prove to the universe that in this world of sin human beings can live lives that God will approve."²

REACT

1. Does Ellen White present membership in the 144,000 as a possibility for her readers?

2. Is the emphasis on attaining to the 144,000 group or on honoring God by obedience—or is there any difference between the two aspirations?

1. *Life Sketches*, p. 117.

2. *Review and Herald*, March 9, 1905, p. 8.

by Lincoln Steed

Lincoln Steed is book editor at the Pacific Press Publishing Association in Nampa, Idaho.

Wednesday, July 26

Redeemed, How They Love to Proclaim It

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ephesians 1:10-14

Saved by a miracle of divine grace and power! There is no other conclusion. The forces of evil will consolidate every effort to enforce the mark of the beast—a sign of opposition to God, and a sign marking its bearer for destruction. It would seem impossible for individuals, mere humans, to oppose and survive this pogrom. Yet God has rewarded the faith and obedience of the 144,000. He has protected them—they are His. They have His name marked on their foreheads.

As the early Christians read this comment in the Revelation it would reverberate with meanings current in their society. In their world a mark could stand for many things.

“(i) It could stand for *ownership*. Often the slave was branded with his owner’s mark as sheep and cattle are so branded. . . .

“(ii) It could stand for *loyalty*. The soldier would sometimes brand his hand with the name of the general whom he loved, and whom he would follow into any battle. . . .

“(iii) It could stand for *security*. There is a curious third or fourth century papyrus letter from a son to his father Apollo. Times are dangerous, and the son and the

father are separated. The son sends his greetings and his good wishes, and then he goes on: ‘I have indeed told you before of my grief at your absence from among us, and my fear that something dreadful might happen to you, and that we may not find your body. Indeed, I often wished to tell you that, having regard to the insecurity, I wanted to *stamp a mark* on you’ (*P. Oxy. 680*). The son wished to put a mark upon his father’s body in order to keep it safe. . . .

“(v) It could stand for *safety*. In the ancient world it was quite common for those who were the followers and devotees of a god to be stamped with the god’s sign. . . . Herodotus (2.113) tells us that there was a temple of Heracles at the Canopic mouth of the Nile. That temple possessed the right of asylum; any criminal, slave or free man, who reached that temple was safe from pursuing vengeance and justice. When such a fugitive reached that temple, he was branded with certain sacred marks in token that he had delivered himself to the god, and that none could touch him any more. The mark was the mark of absolute protection and security.”*

All of these examples have in common an external sign of ownership. The redeemed of all ages will be characterized by a mark in their very thinking—it is the mark of Christlikeness.

*William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, pp. 134, 136.

by Lincoln Steed

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Holiness Now

HOW-TO

Key Text: Hebrews 12:1, 2, 14, 22-24

Early Advent believers were fired by a vision of Christ's imminent return. They took special comfort in the belief that they might be the privileged remnant known in Revelation as the 144,000.

There are more than 4 million Adventists around the world today. Today Adventists are not as inclined to see the 144,000 as a literal number. Certainly to insist that it must be literal would impose a tension upon our Adventist expectations. Ours is a worldwide commission and, questions of the 144,000 aside, we are well assured that an unnumbered multitude will taste the joys of heaven and salvation.

And yet there is a danger that in downplaying the emphasis on the 144,000 we might also lose sight of the special work of character preparation so directly urged upon our generation by both the Bible and latter-day prophet.

The distinguishing characteristic of the group presented in the first few verses of Revelation 14 is the imprint of the character of God on their minds. The mark of the beast is also a character imprint—a character formed by rebellion against God and His ways. It is important to recognize that we cannot develop both characters simultaneously.

Holiness has taken on unfortunate implications for many

today. It is right to reject the idea of the "holy flesh" movements and the misunderstandings of the others who foolishly claim to have reached perfection. But is holiness really a dirty word theologically?

Something is said to be holy if it is set apart, dedicated to God. We must separate ourselves from all character entanglements with the world. We must be dedicated to "following the Lamb wherever He goes." With this understanding of holiness we will answer to the cleansing call of God's Holy Spirit.

A popular Christian song of today uses holiness to describe a people worshipping in God's presence.

We are standing on holy ground
And I know that there are angels all around

Let us praise Jesus now.

We are standing in His presence
on holy ground.

(Geron Davis, Meadowgreen Music Company)

Revelation chapter 14 presents a group praising God in heaven. The greatest praise we can give a holy God is an open, obedient heart—now.

REACT

1. How would you relate holiness to "a form of godliness" which denies "the power" of it (2 Tim. 3:5)?
2. How separate are we from the ways of the world? How holy should we be?
3. How is holiness acquired?
4. What could be some of the characteristics of holiness?

by Lincoln Steed

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Friday, July 28

Why Not Sing Now?

OPINION

Key Text: Exodus 15:2, 13

Study history and you cannot but be impressed with the spiritual darkness of the Dark Ages. Read carefully in the book of Revelation and you see an even greater darkness coming upon the earth. Oh yes, it eventually ends—and we read of the 144,000 and the other redeemed singing sublime songs of praise around God's blazing throne. But here and now the shadows are lengthening. What is there to sing about?

She was an old lady of well over 90 when she told me the story of her night songs. Widowed while still a young woman with young children to care for, she had learned to depend on God alone for her security. Now in old age she was being tested yet again by the growing feebleness of her body. Her eyes were clouding over, and her tired heart had begun to protest its faltering weakness.

But she was always cheerful; always praising God and talking victory.

One day she gave me a little glimpse of how she maintained her hope. "I couldn't sleep last night," she confided. "But I did what I always do when the pain is strong. I lay there all night, singing as loud as I could—singing over and over again all the wonderful hymns of praise that I know."

In my mind's eye I can see that lonely old lady singing away her night of pain. No wonder she

had such joy in the Lord! No wonder some years later, on the day that she died, there was some little talk of a slight pain in her chest but much joyful talk of the glories of heaven.

No night of pain is too long for God to turn it into hope. Elihu reminded a suffering Job that it is God "who gives songs in the night" (Job 35:10, RSV).

I am certain that the songs of the redeemed—both the 144,000 and their numberless brethren—are songs practiced joyfully in the darkness. Practiced through faith and joyful obedience, these songs describe an experience with the Lord.

It will take a special faith, a special song, for the 144,000 to endure the last night of earth's trauma. No wonder their song will be unique! But each of us will need to develop the ability to sing in harmony with God's will in order to join Him on the sea of glass. We will know the reality of the fact that "the Lord is my strength and my song; and he has become my salvation" (Ex. 15:2, NIV).

There is much to sing about. The door of heaven is still open to us. Obedience is imminently possible so long as we forget legalistic self-help and depend on God's power. The joys of following Christ are real and immediate, and the future reward is sure and glorious.

REACT

What is implied in the sealing of God's servants? Is it a moment of change or certification?

by Lincoln Steed

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Lesson 6, July 30—August 5

Good News Everybody!



“ ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ ” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

Sunday, July 30

Secure in the Lamb

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 14:6, 7

"I looked, and behold, the Lamb" (Rev. 14:1, NASB).

Revelation 14:6, 7 needs to be interpreted in the light of chapter 13. There Satan attempts to exterminate the people of God. In that dark chapter a false trinity of dragon, beast, and false prophet seek to counterfeit the saving work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in order to lead the world into rebellion. God's response in chapter 14 is to vindicate and rescue His people and destroy the beast system.

The two chapters are a unit, forming counterpoints as they contrast the *beast* with the *Lamb*. They contrast false worship with true worship as the multitudes of earth follow the beast and receive his mark on their foreheads while the 144,000 follow the Lamb and have His name written on their foreheads. Unity with the Lamb brings God's acceptance and salvation, but also the wrath of the dragon (12:17); while unity with the beast promises material security and prosperity, but brings the wrath of God (14:8-10). This is each person's ultimate choice.

Often John moves from scenes of persecution and martyrdom to visions of victory and salvation in

the Lamb. Immediately after the beast issues a death decree upon all who refuse to give him allegiance of heart or hand (13:15-18), John declares: "And I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand" (14:1, NASB). John presents not simply Christ, but the crucified and risen Christ [the "Lamb"] as God's final answer to Satan's final challenge.

The Lamb stands on *Zion*, the place of divine glory and deliverance; "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion . . . there will be deliverance" (Joel 2:32, NIV). But *Zion* no longer means the Temple mount inside literal Jerusalem (which had been destroyed by the Romans). "*Zion*" now represents the New Jerusalem already present on earth as the church of Christ: "A kingdom and priests" (Rev. 1:6) symbolized by the kingdom number, twelve, times itself (12 x 12) times a thousand (144,000). This number is not about restriction, but reveals the fullness of the redeemed community. And these 144,000 are all united *spiritually* in one place—around the Lamb. To be united to Christ *is* to be on Mt. Zion, the place of God's deliverance. This is the victory of the saints over the beast.

by Richard Fredericks

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The Gospel and Judgment

LOGOS

Scripture: Revelation 14:6, 7;
Matthew 24:14

Theme: *The new scene that begins with Revelation 14:6, takes us back to a time before the vision described in verses 1-5. Verses 6-12 have special application to the period immediately preceding the second coming of Christ. The three-part message contained in these verses prepares the 144,000 for God's final seal. This message brings about a final separation between those who accept and those who reject God's call. The message of the first angel is the everlasting gospel in its end-time application. It is an earnest appeal for worship of the true God and reverence for His holy name, at a time when most of the world is ignoring His claims.*

"The concept of judgment cannot be taken out of the NT Gospel. It cannot even be removed from the centre to the periphery. Proclamation of the love of God always presupposes that all men are moving towards God's judgment and are hopelessly exposed to it."¹

Jesus promised (Matt. 24:14) that before the end came, the gospel of the kingdom would be proclaimed as a witness to the whole world. The angel's loud cry in Revelation 14:6, 7 is the fulfillment of that prophecy. This, the first of three angels, proclaims the "everlasting gospel" to "those

who live on the earth" (verse 6, NIV). It is the everlasting (or eternal) gospel because there is no other or later gospel. The gospel is the story of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the cross as the atonement for our sins. Through this sacrifice God freely offers salvation to all who follow Christ (Rev. 7:14; 1:5, 6; cf. 1 John 5:11-13; 2 Cor. 5:14-21).

To put this in judgment language, the everlasting "good news" is that the cross was the final judgment of the whole world anticipated or prefigured in one Person. On the cross Christ suffered the punishment deserved by "the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2, NIV). These two judgments are counterparts; in the first (on Calvary) Christ bears the wrath that is rightly mankind's, and in the second (at His return) those who refused His substitutionary suffering will personally drink the same cup of wrath (Rev. 14:10, 19, 20).

God grants acquittal (justification) to those in Christ before final judgment (Rom. 8:1). This is the gospel. But those who reject God's grace, in the person of the Lamb, will face God's wrath at the coming of the Lamb. This is judgment (see Rev. 6:15-17; John 3:18, 36).

The New Testament writers accepted no other gospel, not even if an angel from heaven should proclaim it (Gal 1:8, 9). As G. B. Caird suggested, John wrote the term *gospel* and "expected his readers to fill it with the full con-

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tent of the apostolic preaching."² The apostle John's own words, from the fourth Gospel, call people to "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" in order that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 1:29, NIV; 3:16, NIV).

Thus the Lamb, who is the all-sufficient hope of the saints in their final crisis (see Rev. 14:1-5), is now offered in verses 6 and 7 as the only hope for the ungodly in "the hour of his [God's] judgment." These verses explicitly connect the terms *gospel* and *judgment*. "It may seem strange that the (first) angel with the gospel is followed immediately by (two) angels of doom. But the gospel has of necessity a double-edged quality. It is good news for those who receive it and welcome it and submit to it; it is judgment to those who reject it and disobey it and spurn it."³ In other words, the cross of Christ is the judgment that saves and the salvation that judges. At Calvary judgment and salvation coincide in such a way that he who will not have Christ for his sin-bearing Saviour must face Him as his sin-condemning Judge.

Building on the Biblical construct of a heavenly pre-Advent judicial review (see Rev. 3:5; Matt. 10:32, 33; 1 John 2:1; Dan. 7:9, 10) Adventist scholars have identified the phrase "the hour of his [God's] judgment" in the closing work of God's heavenly judgment process. During this probationary time God identifies the true disciples of Christ. Genuine fidelity to Christ as Redeemer is manifested by genuine worship of

the Creator (who is the Redeemer, see verse 7). The command to "worship him who made the heavens, the earth, sea and the springs of water" is a call to enter into Sabbath rest: a rest in the perfect and finished redeeming work of Christ our Creator (see Heb. 4:1-11) according to the commandment (see Ex. 20:8-11, Deut. 5:15; cf. Rev. 14:7). It is a call away from any attempt by human achievements or enactments to alter or add to the sufficiency of Christ's salvation. It allows our obedience to become, not a counter method of salvation, but the symbol of our rest in Christ's great salvation. The experience of loyalty to the Sabbath rest in Christ is the acid test in the last days that identifies those who have received the everlasting gospel.

Therefore, because our Creator redeemed us at Calvary (the hour of "judgment has come," NASB), we possess a present security concerning the final execution of divine judgment against sin yet to come (see Rom. 8:1). But we are called to demonstrate our allegiance to Christ now through true worship (Sabbath rest), even as the final work of the pre-Advent judgment closes in heaven ("judgment is come," KJV). God calls us to rest in Christ and "how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest" (Heb. 2:3; 4:11, NIV).

What do you consider to be the essence of "the eternal gospel" proclaimed by the first angel? Why?

What is your understanding of resting in Christ?

1. F. Buchsel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, editor, vol. 3, p. 941, s. v. "krino."

2. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 183.

3. William Barclay, *The Revelation of St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 2, p. 144.

The Everlasting Gospel

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Romans 1:16

The key phrase in Revelation 14:6 describes the angel's message as "the everlasting gospel." The adjective *everlasting* makes clear there has always only been one authentic gospel offered to judgment-bound sinners by a holy God. Of this gospel Paul declared: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the (not just 'a') *power of God for salvation*," and warned: "even though we, or *an angel from heaven*, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Rom. 1:16, NASB; Gal. 1:8, NASB). But what is this gospel? Paul makes that clear in 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the *gospel*, not in cleverness of speech, that *the cross of Christ* should not be made void. For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is *the power of God*" (NASB; see also verses 19-24).

Ellen White affirmed Paul's declaration that the saving good news was the substitutionary work of a perfect Christ dying in place of imperfect humanity on

the cross. She identifies the proclamation of this gospel as the fulfillment of the three angels' messages in Revelation 14: "Hanging upon the cross Christ was the gospel. . . . This is our message, our argument, our doctrine, our warning to the impenitent, our encouragement for the sorrowing, the hope for every believer."¹

"There is one great central truth to be kept ever before the mind in the searching of the Scriptures—Christ and Him crucified. Every other truth is invested with influence and power corresponding to its relation to this theme."²

"The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary."³

"When the sinner believes that Christ is his personal Saviour, then according to His unfailing promises, God pardons his sin and justifies him freely. The repentant soul realizes that his justification comes because Christ, as his substitute and surety, has died for him, is his atonement and righteousness."⁴

1. Ellen G. White Comments, SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1113.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 1084.

3. *Gospel Workers*, p. 315.

4. Ellen G. White Comments, SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1073.

by Richard Fredericks

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Wednesday, August 2

“And Worship Him”

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Romans 1:25

The first angel's message is a strong, final evangelistic appeal to mankind to give itself in worship to the Creator, who gave Himself in suffering for them. God's part is salvation. A person's part is genuine worship—the type of worship that always manifests itself in obedience (14:12).

Biblically, worship denotes allegiance: the giving of the highest worth to one supreme object.

“Worship” is not only (or even primarily) something we do each Saturday by donning nice clothes and going to a structure called “church.” Worship is an attitude or state of mind that goes on consciously or unconsciously, but continuously. In reality, we constantly worship. And what (or who) it is we truly worship is discerned by what we give the highest worth or value to, that which has the preeminent place in our thoughts and for which we direct our best energies.

Our supreme object of worship is not revealed simply by a religious habit, but by those priorities that define the totality of our actions and attitudes. Remember, those who not only rejected Jesus but murdered Him were firm believers in the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath. But, because they *worshipped* their own self-righteous lawkeeping or priestly power, in the eyes of God they had no conception of true

Sabbath worship.

The question is Whom do we *truly worship*? There are two basic options really, the *creature* or the *Creator*. What will have the highest worth or priority in my life, my will or God's will? Is my highest priority God's agenda for my life, or is it rather my own autonomy—or perhaps my allegiance to some human system that gives me security apart from genuine discipleship to Christ? Anything that takes the central place from Christ is anti-christ.

From the very beginning this has been the issue. The primordial sin in the garden was rooted in the serpent's appeal to displace reverence for God with a human attempt to live autonomous from God's will and thereby be “like God,” i. e. , self-sufficient (Gen. 3:5, NIV). Going back further still, the spirit of rebellion in Satan grew from his desire to “raise my throne above the stars of God; . . . I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13, 14, NIV). Notice, in neither of the above instances was there an overt rejection of God. Rather, there was simply the choice to displace God as the center of life and enthrone self. Trying to be our own “god” does not require shaking our fist in defiance at God, but only a daily attitude of indifference to God's agenda as we pursue our own. It is habitually saying: “Not today, God; I have so many more important things on my list. Maybe tomorrow, God.”

by Richard Fredericks

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What Does It Mean to Worship?

HOW-TO

Key Texts: Psalm 68:19; Isaiah 47:10, 15; Philipians 4:6, 7, 19

What does it mean to worship God? What characterizes someone's life who worships God, who places Him above all else? Let's look at it from another angle. What gives you your security today? Or perhaps, in your insecurity, what do you imagine would make you more secure?

What are your dreams for the future? Do your longings reflect a growing peace in and longing for God; or a growing insatiable need for increasing prosperity and "financial security"? Are you driven after possessions, valuing your relationships as secondary to the greater end of material success? Or are possessions (home, clothes, car) simply things you value only in terms of their ability to assist you in helping other people and in building genuine, long-term relationships?

We are, as a people, by world standards, affluent. But are we secure? Do we have enough to share abundantly or are we straining to get more for ourselves, believing then we will be secure? Are we anxiety-ridden or peaceful? Restful or troubled? Do we possess a satisfying faith or do our possessions possess us? And what does all this have to do with worship?

EVERYTHING!

The call of Revelation 14:7, the call of the Sabbath, the call to worship Him who created everything, is a call to a life of trust. Our worship is meant to be the intelligent praise, heartfelt thankfulness, and joyful obedience that comes forth from our lives as we experience the reality of Jesus' words (spoken in the context of a Sabbath controversy): "'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls'" (Matt. 11:28, 29, NIV).

Ours is a world that is scrambling away from committed relationships in a futile search for "self-fulfillment" and "affluence." We are to be worshipers whose worship is identified by our commitment to and nurturing of even costly relationships because we, individually and corporately, are experiencing deep and real rest in the provisions and plans of our Redeemer. It is a choice, a step, a decision. To make it is to worship.

REACT

When are you most able to give God your undivided attention? If you could eliminate two distractions in your life, what would they be? How could you eliminate them?

by Richard Fredericks

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Friday, August 4

Reflections on Some Disconcerting Discoveries About Worship

OPINION

Key Texts: John 3:16; 1 John 3:16

This is an opinion section. So let me state an opinion that has shaped my approach to this week's lessons. I believe the Sabbath issue in terms of Saturday versus Sunday is pretty thoroughly nailed down in Adventism. The Biblical issue is clear in terms of the seventh day. The historical roots are clear in terms of the papacy's false claim for authority to change the Sabbath to Sunday. Our rejection of that claim is clear to our young people.

But we are still losing those same young people, hundreds of them, even though they are utterly convinced that in the debate over the right day, Saturday *is* right and Sunday *is* wrong, and our denomination has the correct doctrine. Which brings me to another point. The people of Jesus' day had that one thoroughly nailed down too, and yet the majority of them, especially their religious leaders, became an image to the beast and bore his mark by rejecting and murdering Christ and fighting the church He came to form.

If we make the whole issue of true versus false worship a debate over one day versus another it is possible, very possible, even prob-

able, that we are causing our people to see the issue of worship as irrelevant in terms of daily living and/or a reason for spiritual arrogance. *We are right* about the seventh versus the first day. But the issue looms larger. The call to "worship" the Creator in Revelation 14:7 answers a lot more questions.

Several years ago I did a fairly detailed Biblical study of the term *worship*. It was interesting. Disconcerting. And in the end, very hopeful. I found out Jesus talked more about the danger of worshipping money than He did any other topic. I discovered that we are constantly prone to worship ourselves, even our insecure selves, rather than God. And in Revelation this worship of the works of our own hands is the equivalent of "worshipping demons, and idols of gold . . . [and] silver" (Rev. 9:20, NIV).

I found out that we have a penchant for taking the good things of our human religious system and heritage and putting them in place of the best thing and only true center: Jesus Christ, the true Focus of worship. I found the issue of worship, like all true Biblical issues, is a Christological issue: what will we do with this person Jesus, called the Christ? And over that issue we will either redeem or lose our young people and our own souls.

by Richard Fredericks

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Lesson 7, August 6-12

Babylon Unveiled



“Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end” (Psalm 119:33, NIV).

Sunday, August 6

A Tear-stained Victory

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 14:8

He slowly turned as she walked away from him . . . again. He had every right to despise her, even more now, for this time she was leaving for good. He was now free of the burden of her misfortunes. Yet as he turned back to gaze down the walkway so recently vibrant with her footsteps, a tear glazed his face. He thought of running after her, but compulsion was simply not an option; he wanted the free expression of love. In short, He wept for His church.

An account of longsuffering love seems strangely foreign amidst the powerful proclamations of Revelation 14. We are accustomed to seeing images of a stern messenger carrying the proclamation and judgment of a stern judge who favors the pious over the wicked. Yet the apparent anomaly of a longsuffering judge fades into oblivion when we see God weeping for Ephraim (Hosea 11:8, 9); Christ grieving because of the Rich Young Ruler's skewed priorities (Mark 10:17-22); and the Godhead's longing for the sal-

vation of all humanity (2 Peter 3:9). While God rejoices in saving those who accept the gift, He is sorrowful for the self-destructive choices of the others, here seen as "Babylon."

In our study for this week we see God's victory over a warped belief system that led to warped behavior. The entity now referred to as "Babylon the great" had prostituted the pure message it had received, and now invites the world to imbibe the deadly potion of her prostituted belief system and her compromised ethic. As Babylon speeds toward destruction, the angel swiftly heralds the message of her doom, warning all believers that both the splendor and the belief of Babylon are now defunct. Yet as seen in the example of our longsuffering lover, the warning and doom is heard in a powerful, victorious, and yet pathos-charged proclamation: "Babylon indeed has left Me; don't follow her lead."

Babylon
is
fallen,
let
us
rejoice. . .
and be sad.

by Carlos Garbutt

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Babylon the Mystery

LOGOS

Theme: *When someone rejects the message of the gospel the Lord's pleadings do not immediately cease. Warnings are sent to awaken the individual to his or her great need and Christ's ability to supply it. The second angel's message is a worldwide warning to those who have not responded to the first angel's message. The greatest enemy of last-day mankind is mystical or antitypical "Babylon." Because He loves us infinitely our Lord unmasks the wickedness of this false religious system and appeals to us to have nothing to do with it.*

The second angel of the Apocalypse's fourteenth chapter proclaims the fall of Babylon. We will look briefly at the historical antecedent for this prophetic proclamation—to be found in the Old Testament—and at the probable references to the same event elsewhere in Scripture.

1. The Fall of Ancient Babylon

The downfall of ancient Babylon is first proclaimed in Isaiah 21; in the course of a vision, Isaiah reports a vision that "Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground" (21:9b). Jeremiah records God's judgment on the greatest city of the ancient Near East, as well: "Babylon hath been a golden cup

in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed" (Jer. 51:7-8a).

The book of Daniel offers a terse description of Babylon's fall: "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain" (Dan. 5:30). The Greek historian Herodotus explains in greater detail: Babylon's great walls apparently prevented access by a military force to the city; but Cyrus, coming from Persia, to the east of the great city, entered Babylon, without having to storm its walls, by damming up the great Euphrates river, and marching his men in on the dry river bottom.

Why did divine condemnation overtake this great power? According to Jeremiah, the purpose of God's action was to deliver Israel: "Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria" (Jer. 50:17, 18).

2. The Fall of Spiritual Babylon Announced

The three angels of Revelation 14 pronounce God's judgment on spiritual Babylon. "Fear God, and

by Gary Chartier

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give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come," the first announces (14:7a). What does this message of judgment mean? The second angel, in tones harking back to the polemics of the Old Testament prophets, supplies elaboration: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Rev. 14:8). Finally, the third angel warns that complicity with the structures of evil will bring judgment as surely as will clear identification with Babylon.

Revelation 16, setting the stage for a second destruction of Babylon, recalls the fall of ancient Babylon with the note that "the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared" (verse 12). After the destruction of Babylon is envisioned in chapter 17, the anticipatory announcement of Babylon's doom is repeated in terms again reminiscent of the Old Testament account of the fall of Babylon: a powerful angel cried "mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (18:2, 3).

3. Parallel in Daniel

Seventh-day Adventists have generally identified the whore of Babylon, drunk with the blood of the saints, with the oppressive religio-political power they have understood as symbolized by the little-horn power of Daniel 7. In this Old Testament passage the "judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High" (Dan. 7:26, 27). Similarly, God's judgment on Babylon in the Apocalypse ensures that the great "whore" is made desolate and naked and burned with fire (Rev. 17:16).

4. Deliverance: The Common Denominator

In all these cases—Cyrus' overthrow of historical Babylon, the prophesied downfall of the little horn, and the two announcements of spiritual Babylon's doom—the common element is God's liberation of the faithful. The saints receive the kingdom in Daniel. The captives return to their home after Cyrus' victory. And the New Jerusalem descends to become the new home of the saints in the Apocalypse. In each instance the message is the same: God is committed to the salvation of His people.

The Sin of Babylon

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 17:3-6

Why does God judge and condemn "Babylon"? Scripture hints at several reasons; Ellen White's remarks in relation to Babylon's fall highlight two in particular:

1. The abuse of power. For Mrs. White, Babylon's pretentious display of grandeur masks a fundamental rottenness, which finds expression in persecution. "The power which has the deepest inward corruption will make the greatest display, and will clothe itself with the most elaborate signs of power. The Bible plainly declares that this covers a corrupt and deceiving wickedness. 'Upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.'"¹

While she identifies Babylon with Roman Catholicism, Mrs. White recognizes that Babylonian evil gains power from its alliance with other forms of oppression. "Protestantism, a power which, while professing to have the temper and spirit of a lamb and to be allied to Heaven, speaks with the voice of a dragon. It is moved by a power from beneath."²

"Thus is manifested the same arbitrary, oppressive power

against religious liberty, [against] freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, as was manifested by the papacy, when in the past it persecuted those who dared to refuse to conform with the religious rites and ceremonies of Romanism. In the warfare to be waged in the last days there will be united, in opposition to God's people, all the corrupt powers that have apostatized from allegiance to the law of Jehovah."³

2. The denial of God's creative power and status as Creator. Affirming the Sabbath's value as symbol of Creation, Mrs. White emphasizes God's condemnation of those structures that implicitly deny God's Creatorship and authority by their neglect of the Sabbath. "God denounces Babylon 'because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' This means that she has disregarded the only commandment which points out the true God, and has torn down the Sabbath, God's memorial of creation. . . . The man of sin, exalting himself above God. . . . God has a controversy with the churches of today. They are fulfilling the prophecy of John. 'All nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' They have divorced themselves from God by refusing to receive His sign."⁴

1. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 983.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 979.

by Gary Chartier

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Wednesday, August 9

Come Out of Her, My People

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 5:11, 12

Babylon is symbolized by an adulterous woman, strikingly attired, astride a scarlet beast (Rev. 17:1-5). Although a mother (verse 5), she pursues unlawfully "the kings of the earth" (verse 2). She holds in her hand a golden cup of intoxicating wine (verse 4).

The angel calls her a "whore" or "harlot/prostitute" (Rev. 17:1). *This implies she was originally a pure woman.* In fact, at one point in time, the woman of Revelation 17:1 and the woman of Revelation 12:1 were the same woman—the New Testament church described in the book of Acts and in the Epistles. The two women symbolize the post-apostolic history of the Christian church. One represents the loyal line of God's followers; the other, the apostasy that developed in the church. The figurative imagery is drawn from the Old Testament.

God's followers are in a committed *covenant* relationship with Him like a marriage bond (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:21-32). When they displace Him from their affections and embrace the philosophies and practices of the world, they commit spiritual adultery (cf. Ezek. 16:8, 15).

The apostle Paul foretold the development of mystical Babylon when he predicted a massive apostasy in the Christian church.

"That day [the Second Advent] shall not come, except there come a *falling away* first [Greek, *apostasia*]" (2 Thess. 2:3-4). This prophecy came to pass.

Christianity compromised herself by an illicit union with paganism in the third and fourth centuries. Under Roman emperors, a union of church and state was formed (woman guiding the beast, Rev. 17:3). This beast power persecuted those who differed with her theologically (verse 6), and she began to exercise authority over the political powers of earth (verse 18). Her cup, held out to the spiritually thirsty nations, no longer contained the pure juice of truth, but a mixture of truth and error resulting from unlawful links with the world. "Babylon"—embodying the confusion of ancient Babel and the oppression of the later empire—make a fit symbol for the merging apostasy. The papacy is the only Christian system that fits in a primary manner these identifying marks furnished by Scripture.

Revelation 16:19 indicates that in the last days "Babylon the Great" is much larger than the papacy. Babylon the Great, in her final, end-time manifestation, probably represents not only all forms of Christian apostasy, but also all forms of religion that reject the true God and His teachings as revealed in Holy Scripture.

by Frank B. Holbrook

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How to Fall—How to Warn

HOW-TO

Key Text: James 5:20

It's one thing to have the courage and the conviction to join the second angel of Revelation chapter 14, and tell it as it really is—that Babylon has fallen. It's quite another thing, however, to realize that "there, but for the grace of God, go I." How about a mildly "tongue in cheek" set of instructions?

How to Participate in the Fall of Babylon

a. *Resist the gospel.* Denounce the insulting suggestion that your eternal salvation is safe in nail-scarred hands. Take things into your own hands.

b. *Scorn the judgment.* Away with the idea that God ever examines a life, a structure, a church, and has a day of reckoning. He is far too kind for that!

c. *Abuse your position of power and authority.* Domination, and even persecution, of others is a good way to participate in the most striking characteristics of Babylon.

d. *Glorify anyone and anything but God.* Elevate your own opinions in particular.

Perhaps that's enough tongue-in-cheek for so serious a subject.

What about some serious thoughts about how to rescue others from Babylon? Surely,

when we have been given fair warning ourselves, we have an obligation to share the warning.

How to Warn a Sincere Person About the Fate of Babylon

a. *Acknowledge the good and true.* The reason Babylon is so deceptive is that it mixes truth and error so well. You can overdo your denunciation of Babylon if you deny *any* value in *anything* it teaches or does.

b. *Talk as a friend.* Not many individuals are argued, pushed, threatened, or bludgeoned out of Babylon. Many are loved out.

c. *Acknowledge the pain.* It is a painful thing to discover that you may have believed something in error. Jesus cried over Jerusalem, and truly loving Christians can afford to shed some tears over Babylon too.

d. *Recognize that any religious person or system runs the risk of participating in Babylon's sins.* Retain a sense of watchfulness and humility. If your friend from Babylonian attitudes *wherever* you find them, your witness will be much more credible.

e. *Elevate the beauty of the gospel of Jesus.* Babylon longs to obscure the gospel. But once it reaches the heart, bringing peace, forgiveness, restoration, and new vigor, that heart has left Babylon, and has found a resting place in Jerusalem.

by Lyell V. Heise

Lyell Heise is senior pastor of La Sierra Collegiate Church on the La Sierra campus of Loma Linda University.

Friday, August 11

Proclaiming the Fall of Babylon

OPINION

Key Text: Revelation 18:4, 5

What does it mean to assert that Babylon has fallen? Clearly this announcement of divine judgment does not describe a present reality: oppression and injustice still abound; totalitarian structures and malicious persons continue to intoxicate themselves with the blood of the saints. Early Millerites confidently announced the demise of the "great whore"—seeing their own exodus from established churches as a sign and symptom of its condemnation by God. But the eschatological in-breaking they anticipated has yet to occur. We still proclaim the three angels' messages with gusto; but surely the pronouncement of Babylon's fall and the call to "come out of her, my people" must take a somewhat different form in the present "in-between time" before earth's final crisis takes shape.

1. *The fall of Babylon is a present reality because Jesus has already vanquished death and the devil.* On the cross, Jesus demonstrated the consequences of separation from God, the utter futility of life lived apart from dependence upon God, and thus bankruptcy of sin. Though He was the victim of demonic assault, though unjust social, political, and religious structures had condemned Him, the only perfectly holy Man history has ever known, to a criminal's death, He

emerged victorious. On Easter morning, breaking the bonds of death, He showed that diabolic power could not hold Him in the grave. Escaping the ultimate consequences of a corrupt court's judgment, He demonstrated its impotence and the invalidity of its authority. Implicitly He had already vanquished *all* the powers of evil. His resurrection was a down payment on the ultimate triumph He promised would follow His return.

2. *The fall of Babylon can be proclaimed as a present reality because God's promise is sure.*

Though we still see evil at work about us, we know that throughout Scripture are recorded divine promises of final deliverance. The book of Daniel records God's commitment to deliver judgment against the oppressive little horn, take away its authority and "consume and destroy" it. Jesus' Olivet discourse, couched in terms taken in large measure from Daniel, promises the liberation of God's people in the context of apocalyptic judgment. We find the same imagery in 2 Thessalonians, where we are assured that Jesus will destroy the "man of lawlessness" at His return. And of course in the Apocalypse itself the promise of judgment on the oppressor is unmistakably evident. God has the *power* to triumph over death and undo the work of evil powers; the resurrection makes that clear. God *intends* to deliver the downtrodden. And we can rest confidently in that intent.

by Gary Chartier

Gary Chartier is a graduate student at Loma Linda University, La Sierra Campus.

Lesson 8, August 13-19

Marked for Eternity



“The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him” (1 John 2:4, 5, NIV).

Sunday, August 13

Angels and Beasts

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 14:9-12

In his preaching and writing on the book of Revelation, John R. W. Stott has put his finger on two key themes that should undergird every serious study of the book.

1. The book was addressed to seven *real* congregations, with *real* potential for witness, facing *real* trouble.

2. The historical setting for the book of Revelation cannot possibly exhaust its significance. "Christ's letters through John to the first-century Christian communities of Asia have a permanent value and a universal message."

Stott illustrates these two principles as he summarizes the heart of the message of Revelation: "*Persecution, error, and sin*." These were not just inexplicable phenomena. St. John recognized their source with a clarity of insight which we badly need to recapture today. The devil was at work. Behind the outward situation in the Asian churches an invisible conflict raged between Christ and antichrist, between the Lamb and the Dragon, between the 'holy city' Jerusalem (the church) and 'the great city' Babylon (the world). The devil's assault upon Christ's church was a pincer movement. He attacked from several directions. Now the

onslaught was *physical*, through a persecuting emperor and his deputies. Now it was *intellectual*, through false cults, and now *moral* through sub-ethical Christian standards. These were the devil's three strategies, symbolically represented in the Revelation as the dragon's three allies; the beast from the sea, the beast from the earth (or the false prophet) and the harlot Babylon.

"In every age it has been the same. The devil's tactics do not change. As we look around the world today, the same pressures are harassing different churches. In some areas of the world open hostility to the gospel is accompanied by *physical violence*. In others the Church is wrestling in *intellectual combat* with an insidious ideology or a materialistic philosophy with which it cannot come to terms. Elsewhere the struggle is in the *moral field*, as the world seeks to cajole the Church into conformity to its own ways.

"The Book of Revelation begins to be intelligible only when it is seen as God's word to his servants in this situation. It is a message to the Church in the world. It is a call to us to endure tribulation, to hold fast to the truth, to resist the blandishments of the devil and to obey; the commandments of God."*

*John R. W. Stott, *What Christ Thinks of His Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), pp. 13, 14.

by Lyell V. Heise

Lyell Heise is the senior pastor of the La Sierra Collegiate Church on the La Sierra campus of Loma Linda University.

Marked for Eternity

LOGOS

Theme: *We find in the message of the third angel two totally different groups of "worshippers." One group consists of those who worship the beast, receive his mark, and are destroyed. The other group consists of those who worship God with patient endurance, have faith in Christ, by His grace keep His commandments, and receive the label of "saints" and the gift of eternal life. Our passage this week is undoubtedly the most sobering in all the Bible. The question is: To which group of worshippers do you plan to belong?*

In the first angel's message we heard the call to repentance (Rev. 14:6, 7). In the second angel's message we heard God's evaluation of "Babylon" "the beast"—the greatest representation of the misuse of religious authority the world has ever seen (Rev. 14:8). Finally, in the third angel's message we hear the judgment of God on those who either follow or reject the claims of this Babylon.

1. A Description of Disloyalty (read Revelation 14:9)

"And another angel, a third, followed, saying with a loud voice, 'If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand' (Revelation 14:9, 10, RSV).

When the sword of judgment falls it cuts two ways. It judges some to be "righteous" and others

to be "unrighteous." The "mark" and the "seal" are symbolic ways of referring to final decisions—those made by the worshipers themselves. This message teaches the importance of final decisions. If we continue to be fascinated with the ways of the world we will receive the mark of the world. This eternal principle has an eschatological perspective: By beholding the beast we will at last be irreversibly changed into the likeness of the beast.

In this case, the "beast" represents all the evil the world can muster—everything that was originally good has now been perverted to the fullest possible extent, and used totally against God and His faithful. The contrast is clear: Satan versus God, the false versus the true, the synagogue of Satan versus the church of God.

The disloyal are characterized by their total enamorment (Gr. *proskuneo*—to worship, to show obeisance, literally, "to kiss toward") with the ways of the beast and any manifestation of his principles. The Greek *eikon*, "image," indicates more than just a resemblance, but rather a perfect reproduction. The beast-worshippers are marked in the head and the hand, that is to say, they have internalized ("the head") the principles of the beast and practice ("the hand") his ways. And they follow the world with a thoroughly religious fervor.

2. The Result of Disloyalty (read Revelation 14:10, 11)

by Edwin Zackrison

Edwin Zackrison is associate professor of theology and ministry at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

“He also shall drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name” (Rev. 14:10, 11, RSV).

All those alive on earth at the end of time face the consequences of their decision. On the one hand, they may seal their decision to worship God. Should they choose to do this, they suffer the force of the universal economic boycott (Rev. 13:16-18). On the other hand, they may mark themselves as worshipers of the beast and his image. With this decision they suffer the unmitigated wrath of God.

The warning to those who would choose the expedience of the beast’s rule could not be stated in more fearful or emphatic language than that of Revelation 14:10, 11. “He also shall drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (RSV). The Jews believed that punishment in God’s presence increased the emotional suffering of the convicted.

In New Testament Greek, “wrath” is expressed two ways: either as *orge* or *thumos*. As *orge*, wrath disconnects from emotion to demonstrate a settled indignation based on careful and clear thinking. As *thumos*, wrath becomes a vehement fury very much involved with emotion and feeling. As *orge*, the wrath of God suggests the surgeon who carefully extracts the cancer from the dying victim in an effort to save his life. As *thumos* the wrath of

God implies a volcanic tumult of terror and finality. The New Testament writers most often employ *orge* to describe the wrath of God, but in this passage John uses both *orge* and *thumos* to express the fearsome fury of God’s final treatment of sin.

In Bible times it was customary to mix wine with water and spices. The language here suggests that *this* wine retains the spice mixture but not the watering down, implying the stronger effects—an allusion to Psalm 75:6-8. The “wine of God’s wrath” (Rev. 14:10, RSV) is poured *unmixed* (literally “mixed unmixed”) upon the disloyal. Thus the terribleness of the divine alternative to grace is apparent.

3. A Description of the Loyal

“Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12, RSV).

Finally, John describes those whom God judges to be “saints”—those set apart through their choice to be faithful to God in the face of the great fury of the beast. Christ calls for steadfast endurance, and those who demonstrate this persistent loyalty are characterized by two qualifications: obedience and faith. This is, of course, nothing new. These two qualities have always defined the faithful. Those who claim “to know Christ” but openly deny the power of Christ in their lives are sadly deceived.

Wherever the saints appear in the book of Revelation they are described as “servants of our God” (7:3), “not defiled” (14:4, RSV), “chaste” (14:4), having “no lie” in them (14:5), “spotless” (14:5) and “had conquered” (15:2). But lest we be tempted to think that some merit goes to them, or that they have somehow earned such a sta-

tus we must always recognize how this status is achieved. They are always "clothed in white robes" (7:9, 13, RSV), with robes "washed . . . and made . . . white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14, RSV), and they have been "redeemed" (14:3, 4, RSV), i.e., a work done outside and apart from them. It is their constant song that " 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb' " (7:10, RSV). The saints have no misgivings that whatever obedience they have given has been in response to their salvation, not as a means to gain it. Indeed, the perfect obedience of Christ, imputed to

them by faith, has been their salvation. Keeping God's law is the natural response of those who have faith in Jesus.

How is one numbered with the faithful? The principle is the same at all ages and will not change at the end. Through faith in the atoning work of Christ one responds to God's directions. Indeed, the great contrast is simple: either one pays obeisance to the ways of the world, here personified in the symbol of "the beast," or he worships God through faith. And this is demonstrated through his consistent desire and effort to obey God.

Tuesday, August 15

A Beastly Predicament

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 10:16

Each quarter I am privileged to teach a course exclusively for non-Adventists on our campus, introducing them to the beliefs and subculture of Seventh-day Adventism. In any given quarter I will have a minimum of 5-10 Catholics in the class, and have had as many as 25 Catholics. Occasionally, these Catholic students will run across what appears to be a strong anti-Catholic mentality in their reading of Adventist literature or in conversations with rather zealous Adventist students. Invariably, these encounters will be raised in the form of questions about Adventist eschatology and specifically what we believe about the "mark of the beast." Read the following excerpt from *The Great Controversy*, page 446, and then reflect on the questions that follow. How would you answer the questions of these Catholic students?

"The special characteristic of the beast, and therefore of his image, is the breaking of God's commandments. Says Daniel, of the little horn, the papacy, 'He shall think to change times and the law.' Daniel 7:25, R.V. And Paul styled the same power the

'man of sin,' who was to exalt himself above God. One prophecy is a complement of the other. Only by changing God's law could the papacy exalt itself above God; whoever should understandingly keep the law as thus changed would be giving supreme honor to that power by which the change was made. Such an act of obedience to papal laws would be a mark of allegiance to the pope in the place of God. . . .

"While the worshipers of God will be especially distinguished by their regard for the fourth commandment—since this is the sign of His creative power, and the witness to His claim upon man's reverence and homage—the worshipers of the beast will be distinguished by their efforts to tear down the Creator's memorial, to exalt the institution of Rome."*

REACT

1. Adventists consider the Sabbath/Sunday question to be a crucial issue in understanding the mark of the beast. Are there other issues involved?

2. Is it possible that the mark of the beast has more to do with worshiping religious traditions and institutions than it does with singling out the imperfections of a particular religious system? Discuss.

**The Great Controversy*, p. 446.

by Steven G. Daily

Steven G. Daily is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

The Smoke of Their Torment

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 14:11

The warning of the third angel's message is that all who identify with the beast will share its fate, and all who identify with the Lamb will receive His reward. But what do we make of the violent horror of the beast's punishment? How should we understand the unmixed wine of God's wrath? And particularly the "smoke of their torment" which ascends for ever and ever?

For many Christians the question of hell's eternal duration poses no problem. The white heat of God's anger represents the natural response to rebellion and manifests itself in eternal punishing. John Walvoord maintains that God's justice is as certain as his love and that love spurned is love nullified. With no love there is only justice. The eternal duration of justice finds emphasis in such expressions as "no rest day or night," "the ages of ages," and the use of the Greek present tense, which stresses linear, continuous action. The great truth here, according to Walvoord, deals with the danger of trifling with false loyalties that dishonor God and contradict his Word.¹

While no Christian who takes

the Bible seriously would disagree with Walvoord's insistence that justice is an important principle in Revelation, there are those who have seriously challenged the notion of a hell that burns sinners without end. Such a concept, they say, presupposes that people have immortality, a gift granted only to the righteous (1 Cor. 15:53). Those who hold this view are called "conditionalists," i.e., immortality is granted only on condition of faith in Jesus.

The early Adventist conditionalist George Storrs argued that Scripture teaches that the wages of sin is *death*, not *pain*. Not only would keeping people alive in hell require a miracle of God, it would change the eternal results of sin from *punishment* to *punishing*. While pain, he argued, was a *consequence* of sin and naturally involved, only *death* could be the ultimate result.²

Not wishing to surrender the traditional evangelical position, English Scholar John Wenham has confessed that the subject is not fully settled and Christians should seriously consider the views of conditionalists.³

"I make *all* things new,' and 'there will be no more curse' (chapter 22); then God by grace puts an end to this impossible situation."⁴

1. John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), p. 219.

2. George Storrs, *Six Sermons on the Inquiry: Is There Immortality in Sin and Suffering?* 2nd Edition (New York: Bible Examiner, 1855), pp. 20-44.

3. John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), p. 41.

4. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 176, 177.

by Edwin Zackrison

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Thursday, August 17

Choose You This Day

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 14:1-12

John's Revelation is certainly an enigmatic book. Beginning with the first chapter, strange creatures arise cloaked in mysterious symbolism, and the appearance of equally fantastic beings continues unabated throughout. Juxtaposed in chapter 14 are two distinct and exceedingly dissimilar groups of people who have only one thing in common—identification marks upon their foreheads. One group bears the seal of God and receives the reward of eternal communion with Him. The second group displays the mark of the beast, and God sentences them to eternal separation from Him.

Traditional Adventist theology has taken the position that those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath receive the seal of God, and those who do not keep that day receive the mark of the beast. The logic is flawless, and there is ample Biblical evidence to support this position. But formulated as such, one is led to imagine God as a divine magistrate who rewards those who simply worship on the right day and punishes those who inadvertently or otherwise worship on the wrong day. But is this really the way God operates?

Under such a system one would surely be careful to keep the appropriate day, especially given the fact that one's eternal

destiny depended on it. But is this passage really concerned with where one happens to be one day out of the week? Or does this passage refer to God's concern for the motives of the heart?

I suggest that in the book of Revelation John portrays God as seeking our unconditional allegiance. God wants us to serve him, to follow Him, and to accept the love, grace, and salvation that He alone can provide. All too often, while studying this passage, we get caught up in discussions about the last days and how in the end Sabbathkeepers are rewarded with the seal of God while Sundaykeepers are punished with the horrid mark of the beast. But this is to misplace the text's emphasis; and this can easily lead to an attitude of self-congratulation, especially for Seventh-day Adventists. It would be helpful, then, to keep in mind that this passage is more concerned with encouraging an unwavering commitment to God than scaring sinners into worshiping on the right day. If we give God our unconditional allegiance, keeping the right day will come naturally. And we should also remember that this passage is more concerned with the present than with the future. Undoubtedly, it is eschatological in nature, but as we look to the apocalypse, it must lead us to act in the present. "Choose you this day whom you will serve"—this is the message of Revelation 14.

by David A. Pendleton

David A. Pendleton, a senior history and political science major, is president of the associated students of Loma Linda University.

Loyalty and Trust

OPINION

Key Text: John 10:28, 29

My Adventist heritage was an awesome thing to me as an eighth-grader. I trembled with the mention of "the close of probation," "the time of trouble," and "the mark of the beast." I thought of each new day as a white sheet bearing my name in the record books of heaven. My central concern in life was to keep it that way—without spot or blemish, so I moved swiftly to remove any blotches from it as soon as possible. In fact, I became obsessive about clearing up any misdeeds.

I prayed constantly for God's forgiveness, as well as for divine help in order to avoid further transgression. I made apologies to family members, friends, and acquaintances for every offense I could remember—real or imaginary. I got some strange looks from people when I recounted something uncomplimentary I had said about them to someone else. One classmate interpreted a note I wrote asking forgiveness for some careless remark I had made as a romantic overture, and her misunderstanding created a need for yet further apologies. And so it went. But I was determined that the close of probation would not find me unprepared.

I imagined this ominous event—the close of probation—resembled an immense door swinging slowly and inexorably shut on

silent hinges. It would finally arrive with a soft "click" of the latch, and those on the outside, where I feared I stood, would be forever excluded from the happiness of the saved. I was less concerned about the mark of the beast, because I had the assurance that I was at least keeping the right day of the week. But I was afraid that I would be excluded for other reasons.

As time went by I discovered that I wasn't the only one who found the events preceding Christ's return a source of anxiety. In fact, my own mother, a minister's daughter, once confided that sermons about the Second Coming always frightened her. They left her with the sinking feeling that she would never make it. She could never do enough to get ready.

There is probably less fear among young Adventists today concerning the return of Christ than in the past, but there is still the danger that this great theme will generate more negative than positive attitudes. Concern about the end of history is certainly justified. After all, the final judgment, the eternal separation of the righteous from the wicked, will take place then. But a Christian looking forward to the Advent, and everything that we associate with it, should be able to do so with complete confidence. There is no place in Christian hope for presumption—the smug self-assurance that we automatically have an "in" with God be-

by Richard Rice

Richard Rice is professor of theology in the school of religion at Loma Linda University.

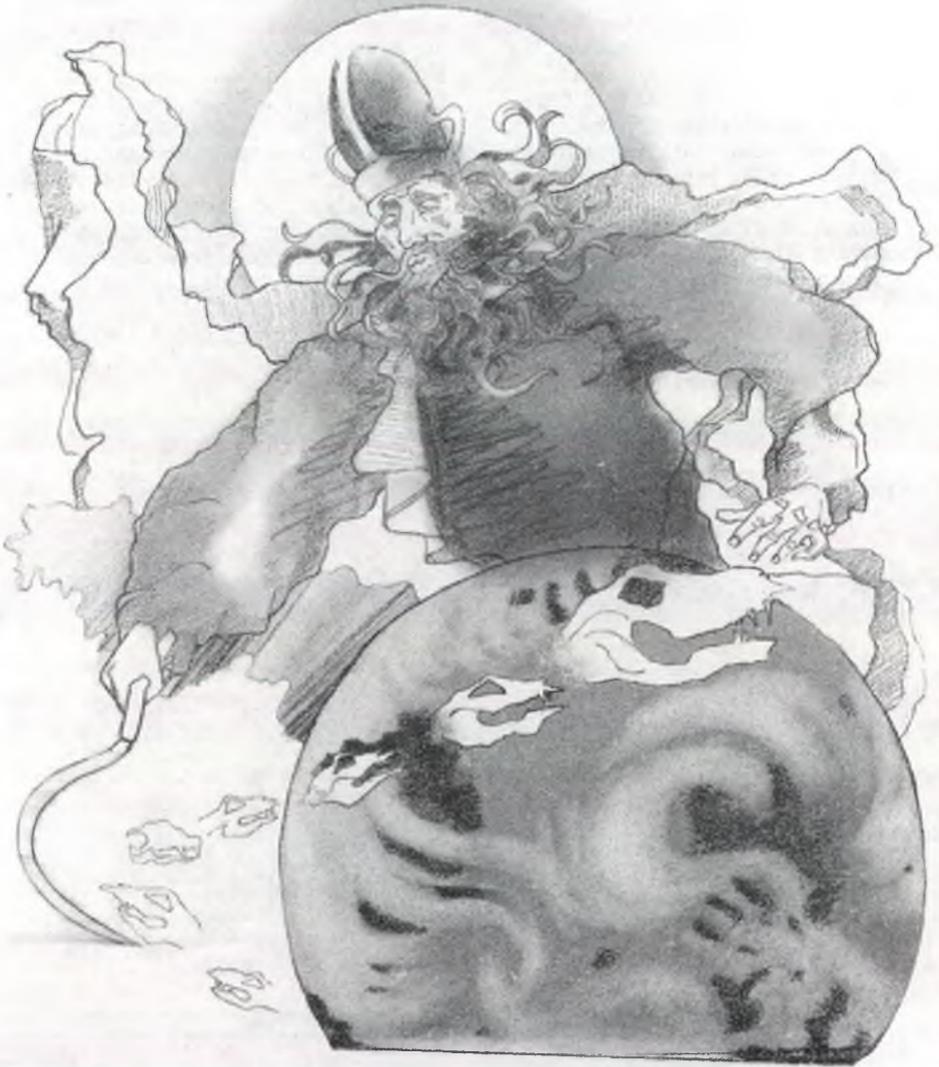
cause we are His favorites. But despair is hardly an acceptable alternative. Christ gave to His disciples the promise of His return in order to comfort and reassure them, not to keep them in perpetual anxiety.

I believe we can avoid this reaction to ideas like the mark of the beast by linking loyalty with trust. The fact is that God does much more than command our loyalty, He *inspires* it; He makes it as easy as He possibly can for us to place our future completely in His hands. Throughout the history of His dealings with human beings, God reveals Himself to be the kind of person we can commit our lives to without reservation, the sort of ruler who deserves our complete confidence.

Loyalty seems to suggest political allegiance, like the oaths of loyalty that immigrants take when becoming citizens of a new nation and soldiers take when they are inducted into military service. It emphasizes duty and sacrifice. Trust, however, directs our attention to personal relationship. Loyalty to God is more than allegiance to His government or recognition of His sovereignty. It is first and foremost personal trust in Him—because He is completely trustworthy, because He has only our best interest at heart, and because He will never let anything separate us from Him. When we trust God the way He deserves to be trusted, we can be loyal to Him no matter what happens.

Lesson 9, August 20-26

Harvesttime



“ ‘Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” ’” (Matt. 25:34, NIV).

Sunday, August 20

The Harvest

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 14:13-20

Time: The present.

Place: Somewhere; a porch; a small farm.

Characters: Father, late 50's, graying hair. Old and wise, and patient. Son, late 20's, young and robust, but he has been through some tough times. The farm has not been good to him.

(Father enters)

Father: Well, Son, is everything ready?

Son: Yes, Father, everything is still ready.

Father: Your sickle is ready?

Son: Yes, Father, I have it right here. I sharpened it again just yesterday.

Father: How about the plan? Do you remember the plan?

Son: Yes, Father, I still remember the plan. Just as soon as the

fields are ripe, I take my sickle and harvest all the grain. Then someone else takes his sickle and harvests all the grapes. (Pause)

Father: What's the matter?

What about the rest of the plan?

Son: Oh, nothing . . . I was just thinking about all those grapes in the winepress, being trampled, and all that juice flowing down the road. It's sad.

Father: Son, when the grapes are ripe, you know we have to harvest them before they go spoiling. Otherwise they'll just sit on the vine and rot.

Son: I know, but still it's sad.

Father: But don't forget the real harvest—the wheat. As soon as it's ready for harvest we can bring it into the storehouse.

Son: Yes, I suppose. So what are we waiting for?

Father: For the fields to be ready to harvest.

Son: When will that be?

Father: (Does not answer.)

by Paul Mallery

Paul Mallery is a senior psychology major at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

God's Final Harvest

LOGOS

Theme: *The Son of man is on center stage in our lesson this week. During His ministry on earth He told the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:36-43). In that parable He taught that the "harvest" would take place at the end of the world. In Revelation 14:13-20, harvesttime has come, wheat and tares are separated, eternal salvation is given to believers and eternal rejection to non-believers. The central question in this lesson is Will you be involved in the harvest of the saved or of the lost? Christ's earnest desire is to save everyone (2 Peter 3:9). Are you willing to be saved?*

The harvest may not mean much to people who buy all their food in grocery stores. But it is a very important event, even in our time, for those people who must grow all or even part of their food. Farmers know this and anxiously watch their crop grow. In times of drought or during attacks upon their fields by disease or insects, they protect their precious plants to keep them growing. They need a good harvest to live!

Nearly all the people of the Bible had to grow food to survive, and so they understood the importance of the harvest. Without a good harvest they might not live through the next season. No wonder the Bible frequently uses the harvest to teach spiritual lessons. At least three such lessons

can be drawn from the harvest symbolism.

1. Applied to the spiritual life, the harvest symbolizes the good work a person does, the fruit of one's life. In Bible times the barley harvest came in the spring, around passover time, during the feast of unleavened bread. Seven weeks later, the wheat harvest was ready, and at the end of the summer, at the time of the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles, the fruit harvest was completed.

Harvesttime is generally a joyous time, for it fills the barns and the storage houses with food for the winter. But some harvests bring sadness. The time may be right, the workers may be ready, but there may be very little to reap. Perhaps the fields were filled with weeds, or poor soil caused slow growth, or the boughs simply produced only wild shoots. When that happens the harvest becomes a symbol of God's judgment, not a time of joy, but of sorrow and fear. However, when the harvest produces much good fruit it symbolizes spiritual well-being and God's blessings.

2. The harvest comes at a very specific time, generally at the end of the growing season. Following the harvest the leaves turn yellow and brown. After the harvest season, night temperatures drop and further growth stops. It is important, therefore, that the fruit is ready at harvesttime, and that the workers are ready to collect it, for it will not wait.

by Niels-Erik Andreassen

Niels-Erik Andreassen is professor of Old Testament and associate dean of the school of religion at Loma Linda University.

We do not often think of our spiritual life that way, but assume that there is always time for it. The harvest symbolism teaches us otherwise; that there is a fixed time before which fruit grows and that there is a time after which it rots. The harvest-time falls between the two, and it is generally very short. Thus, our spiritual life must bear fruit or we may lose it irretrievably.

3. Even though joyous, the harvesttime always brings some sadness. In order to harvest grain and collect fruit, plants must be cut. Thus, the tool of the harvest is the sharp sickle. Shucks of grain and branches are amputated, cut off, so that the fruit can be retrieved. The grain is threshed by being trodden down, then winnowed, and ground between heavy stones, and the grapes are pressed until the red juice flows. Harvest work is hard, even violent work.

On the spiritual level, the harvest symbolizes the pain and suffering of being cut, shaken, and pressed. Jacob's trouble, the judgment, loneliness, waiting, and the uncertainty experienced by the believer at the time of the end are all represented symbolically by the harvest. However, the spiritual person bears it all gladly and hopefully because the reward

is great, namely, eternal life in the security of God's kingdom.

The book of Revelation (14:13-20) applies the harvest symbolism to the experience of God's saints at the end of time. They have worked well and long, and the time has come to enter God's rest (verse 13). Thus, they are ready for the harvest; their fruit is bountiful and they will be gathered in by the Son of man Himself (verses 14-16). However, another harvest, illustrated by pressed grapes and flowing juice, also brings to judgment all those whose lives have not borne good fruit (verses 17-20). The question is What will our harvest be? A joyful experience of coming together, or a crushing experience of flowing out? The answer calls us back to our time of sowing and growing. The future harvest is prepared now in the time of sowing, and God has offered to help us make it a good one.

What is one memory you have of harvesting something? What were you harvesting? How hard did you work? Did you enjoy this work? Why or why not? How ripe do you think the world is now? Do you feel that the end of the world is close? Why or why not? How does this affect your life-style? Why?

The Spirit of the Harvesters

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 12:10

One hundred and one years ago—as she prepared for the fateful 1888 General Conference session, Mrs. White sent out an appeal to her fellow church workers. Had the appeal been heeded it would have changed the nature of the Minneapolis Conference entirely. In her appeal, Mrs. White applied a “harvest principle” to the lives of Christian workers. Here is what she said:

“Heaven’s enlightenment is what is needed, so that when we look upon the faces of our brethren, we may consider: These are they that have been purchased by the price of the blood of Christ. They are precious in His sight. I must love them as Christ has loved me. These are my fellow-laborers in the harvest field. I must be perfectly united with them; I must speak only words that will tend to encourage and advance them in their forward movement.

“My brethren, you are Christ’s soldiers, making aggressive warfare against Satan and his host; but it is grievous to the Spirit of God for you to be surmising evil of one another, and letting the imagination of your hearts be controlled by the power of the great accuser, whose business it is to ac-

cuse them before God day and night (Rev. 12:10). . . .

“We are to be bound to one another in sacred bands of holy union. But it is the work of the enemy to create a party spirit, and to have party feelings, and some feel that they are doing the work of God in strengthening prejudices and jealousies among brethren. . . . We are constantly to be listening for orders from our Captain, but not be guilty of listening to reports against our brethren, or imagining evil of our brethren. . . . We are working for the same cause and under the same Master. It is one work; for the preparation of the people of God in these last days. . . . Everything like evil-speaking; every word that savors of sarcasm, every influence that would demerit our brethren or any branch of the work of God, are all working away from the prayer of Christ.”

REACT

1. Ellen White warns of a “party spirit,” a phrase borrowed from the heated political debates of her day. What “parties” might arise in today’s church?

2. If you were to take to heart this counsel, how might you respond to a rumor or story you hear from another Christian concerning a third party you both tend to dislike?

*E. G. White to the “Brethren Who Shall Assemble in General Conference,” Healdsburg, California, August 5, 1888, reprinted in the Ellen G. White Estate’s collection, *The Ellen G. White 1888, Materials*, vol. 1 (Washington, D. C. : The E. G. White Estate, 1987), pp. 41-43.

by Ron Graybill

Ron Graybill is associate professor of history and religion at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

Wednesday, August 23

The Passing of Opportunity

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Jeremiah 8:20

Have you ever felt that a great opportunity passed you by, and you did nothing about it? Someone knocked on your door, and you did not open it! Our democratic concepts and popular psychology make us resist that idea. You always have a second chance, we reply. It is never too late, we maintain. There ought to be a second opportunity, we reason. Somehow that great opportunity must return and pass by us a second time.

But will it? Of course, many times it will. A student once earned the distinction of academic probation. When failing again, he was placed on critical academic probation. Still not succeeding, he was offered another opportunity, and that was just the beginning of his illustrious career. However, the repeated opportunities of that student are rather atypical of our life experiences, and I often wonder whether universities and colleges are right in preparing stu-

dents for life by offering them such an atypical sequence of opportunities.

Real life likely will offer us a few really good opportunities, not likely to be repeated. The reason is that life itself is limited. The fact is that we cannot always do in the future what we neglect to do now, and the time will arrive when some of us can do nothing at all about these opportunities we now enjoy. Religious life works the same way. It is true that salvation is always available, for God, unlike us, is unlimited. But our religious life, like everything else about us, runs out of opportunities. Our opportunities to learn, choose a calling, love a child, serve and lend a hand, do not last forever. These opportunities are like seeds planted at the opportune time, which grow and bear fruit, or they are missed, never to be retained. As the prophet wrote: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20). The seed of a good harvest is planted now when the opportunity knocks on our door.

by Niels-Erik Andreasen

Niels-Erik Andreasen is professor of Old Testament and associate dean of the school of religion at Loma Linda University.

How to Wait for the Second Coming

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 24:42

How do we wait for the Second Coming? There are several methods to choose from:

1. The Hand-Wringing Method—In this method you allow your imagination to go wild as you dream up all the horrible, frightening, scaring things that might happen during the “time of trouble.” This includes all human cruelties and torture that could be perpetuated on another person. This method helps to keep readiness for the return of Jesus at a level of intense anxiety and fear. (Not a healthy, happy, trusting readiness, but at least intense.)

2. The Chart Method—In this method, you make a large chart of last-day events with time lines that “prove” the sequence of last-day events must happen in the order you have put on your chart. This doesn’t produce a happy, healthy, trusting readiness either, but at least you are awake to world events. This method gives both a false sense of time security (you do not have to get ready, yet) and an anxiety that the chart doesn’t seem to be working just right. Maybe because we know that the best chart makers in the world were the Jews looking for the coming of the Messiah.

3. The Hawk Method—In this method you watch all events like a hawk, whether they are re-

ligious or secular, and then swoop down and make absolute declarations that they are specific fulfillments of prophecies pointing to the return of Jesus. This method gives major significance to seemingly minor happenings. One problem with this method is that you constantly have to change your position and interpretation when the next event happens, so at least it’s not a boring method.

4. Head-in-the-Sand Method—In this method you say, “I don’t want to hear about it. I have heard this all my life. I am not worried, Jesus is not coming in my day or at least not soon. When I see significant last-day events happening, then I will get serious.” This is an easy one. There is little anxiety, fear or anticipation. The difficulty with this method is that most people who follow it don’t have a living, daily walk with God. There is little interest in or commitment to the return of Jesus. There is also a tendency to get trapped in the daily rat race, the materialistic scramble, and the let’s-have-fun-now-and-get-serious-later syndrome.

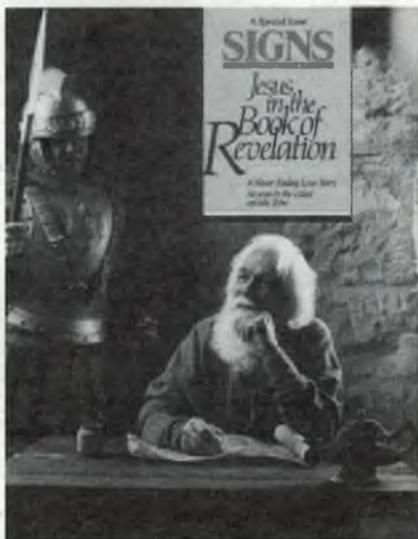
5. The Joyful Method—This method is believing that we serve a God who knows the end from the beginning and has all things in His providential care. He has guided this world throughout its history and can do the same today and in the future without

by David Osborne

David Osborne is vice-president for student affairs for Loma Linda University, La Sierra Campus.

our anxiety and handwringing. He will also fulfill all His promises of providential care and protection for us "even unto the end of the world." Therefore, we can enjoy a full, balanced, trusting, joyful, vibrant, daily relationship with our God. Whether Jesus chooses to come tomorrow or years in the future, it will be of no great personal concern. In fact,

Jesus can come immediately for each of us in a practical sense if for some reason our life should end suddenly. This method frees believers for a productive, joyful life of service and witness. The anticipation and readiness for the return of Jesus is the longing to spend eternity with our personal Friend and Saviour God as soon as possible.



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Why Jesus Waits

OPINION

**Key Texts: 1 John 1:8-10;
Matthew 24:14**

When Jesus will return is a mystery, but this has not prevented many Christians throughout history from speculating about why Jesus has not yet returned. Has Christ delayed His coming? Could He have come earlier if circumstances had been different? Is the Second Advent somehow conditional on the behavior or accomplishments of God's people? These are natural questions. Even my little 6-year-old often asks me, "Daddy, why hasn't Jesus come back yet?" It is a difficult question to answer.

Three of the most common answers given to this question in the Adventist tradition all contain certain inadequacies. First, there is the theory that Jesus will not return until His people have fully revealed His character in their lives by overcoming every sin, and thereby demonstrating that God's law can be perfectly kept by His remnant people. However, such a theory often fails to acknowledge that human righteousness is filthy rags (see Isa. 64:6). This can become a perfectionistic view that would tend to encourage spiritual elitism. God's people do keep God's law, but they do not keep it perfectly in themselves, nor can they equal the perfect Pattern of Christ's life. First John 1:8-10 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the

truth is not in us. . . . If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (NIV).

A second theory proposes that Christ will return when the gospel has been preached to the whole world (see Matt. 24:14). This viewpoint places great emphasis on the importance of evangelism and missionary outreach. However, according to Paul the gospel was preached to the whole world even in his day (see Rom. 10:18), but this did not bring about the Second Advent. On a more practical level the percentage of non-Christians in our world who have never even heard of Jesus Christ increases every day. Such a theory certainly does not allow for the imminent return of Christ in our present global situation.

Finally, there are those Christians, Adventist and non-Adventist alike, who believe that certain eschatological signs must be fulfilled before Christ can return. For example, some Adventists believe that national Sunday laws must be passed before the Advent, while the majority of dispensationalists insist that there will be a seven-year tribulation and that Russia will invade Israel before Christ's coming. However, it was this kind of unhealthy dependence on preconceived ideas of how things must happen that led the Jewish leaders to reject the Messiahship of Christ. Mature faith is not dependent on a chronological chart of last day events. It

by Steve Daily

Steven Daily is the campus chaplain at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

finds its security in the Word of God and recognizes that the end time and coming kingdom will be filled with surprises. Such faith teaches us to be ready for the Lord's return at any moment and constantly anticipates this blessed hope.

Therefore, there is no room for dogmatism when we consider the question of "why Jesus waits." However, the Bible is not silent on this point. There are a number of significant passages in Scripture that provide some helpful hints or implications with regard to the "delayed Advent." When one considers the most profound acts of divine intervention, judgment, and deliverance in Scripture, that typify or parallel the final coming of Christ, they all contain one similarity. The destruction of the antediluvians, Sodomites, Egyptians, and Canaanites, along with the corresponding deliverance of Noah, Lot, and the Israelites in Egypt and Canaan provides us with insights as to why God intervenes in history. In each of these cases it was not because God's people were worthy of deliverance that God intervened, but because the wickedness of humanity could no longer be tolerated (see Deut. 9:4-6).

God sent the Flood to save humanity from self-destruction, and Noah was saved by grace (Gen. 6:5-8). God destroyed

Sodom and Gomorrah because of the exceeding immorality of these cities and Lot was delivered by God's grace (Gen. 18:20; 19:29). God sent plagues down upon the Egyptians because of their extreme oppression and injustice, and liberated the Israelites from slavery as an act of grace (Ex. 3:7-10). Finally, God allowed the Canaanites to be destroyed because of their excessive wickedness and led His faltering people into the Promised Land by grace, and not because they deserved it (Deut. 9:4-6). According to Revelation the same pattern will hold true at the end of time. God will intervene in human history one last time because the wickedness of humanity has brought the race to the point of self-destruction. When the tragedy of sin is truly revealed God is forced to intervene to prevent sin from taking its natural course—mass suicide. In this nuclear age such a scenario is not difficult to visualize. In this context human wickedness prompts the Second Advent (Rev. 18:1-10), and God's people are delivered not because they are worthy, but because through God's grace they have overcome through the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:10, 11).

REACT

Do you honestly believe that Christ could return today? If not, why not?

Lesson 10, August 27—September 2

The Seven Last Plagues



“If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent” (Psalm 91:9, 10, NIV).

Sunday, August 27

You're Not Dreaming

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 15:1—16:21

I used to dream that I had gone to school without my pants on. I suppose everyone has this dream at one time or another. Regardless of how many times I have this dream I still have a very real feeling of panic when I wake up. "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked" (Rev. 16:15, NASB). Maybe that is the whole point of Revelation, to be ready for Him. Seven angels with bowls and plagues, that doesn't seem very real to me, but going about without some article of clothing does. Every person is reached in some different way, some understand signs, some comprehend allegories and myths, and some simply understand something a little more down to earth. I'm not trying to down-play the symbolism and deeper meaning of Revelation, but I want to look at it from a child's eyes, because that is what Christ asked us to do.

This is about Christ, about a decision that we make about our

lives and our lives with Christ. Christ wants to save all of us and does everything possible to do so. But Revelation is also about decisions; if we choose Christ the picture of Revelation is much different from what it is if we choose against Him. If we decide against Him the trials, the darkness, and the punishment are real because they are final, but if our lives include Christ, then the plagues of Revelation are only a temporary picture, they point toward a time of complete happiness and light with Christ, and the message to us is only to be ready, to keep a watch, and trust in Christ throughout the times of difficulty. The difference is perspective. Revelation 15 and 16 sound dark and scary, but we can take them as a time of expectancy, a time when light and happiness are closer than ever before, and a time when Christ is holding us nearer to His heart and making ready the gates of heaven.

I may continue to have dreams of nakedness, regardless of how I prepare for bed, but in my waking life the state of preparation in which my heart and life are makes a difference. When I am on Christ's side I will never be caught sleeping or with my pants down.

by Shannon Gillespie

Shannon Gillespie is a senior English major at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

End-Time Intensification

LOGOS

Theme: *Never has there been such a marked separation between the righteous and the wicked, as will be seen after the close of probation when the seven last plagues are poured out. Great will be the suffering of the wicked, and great the privation of the righteous. The righteous will praise God for His mercy, and the wicked will blaspheme because of His judgments. God promises, "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments" (Rev. 16:15).*

1. The Movement Builds

Having completed the freehand sketch that ran from the Child's being born of the woman to His return as a harvester, John now is ready to give the end-time a final push. He does not attempt to provide a specific event chronology here, but he does try to make us understand the final events with the use of the familiar rhythm of seven-series. But the big question remains, what is it like at the end of time? How intense is the trauma? How will the church be rescued? And what about the end itself? One can almost feel the momentum. Like a runaway truck racing down from the summit, having failed to check its brakes, the world seems to be going downhill toward crashing into something. Toward its ultimate end!

How do you feel about living in the end of time? Does it seem real

to you? Do you think that because most do not sense the trauma of the end-time they will not be ready when it comes?

2. Introduction to the Bowls (read Revelation 15:1—16:1)

"I saw the sword, famine, pestilence, and great confusion in the land. The wicked thought that we had brought the judgments upon them, and they rose up and took counsel to rid the earth of us, thinking that then the evil would be stayed."*

The end of time has always been described as a time of turmoil and confusion. John has us down to the wire here. And now the bowls are full of terrible things for the earth. But first, John gives us a positive introduction. Why such optimism? Because God will win, and the saints should know this. Why talk about a sea of glass? Perhaps glassy because eventually there will be no more evil to churn it up. Why talk about singing Moses' song? Surely, God knows that victory is sure for those who love and trust Him. And why would all of the nations worship in God's presence? The text answers that, too. "For thy just dealings stand revealed" (Rev. 15:4, NEB).

John wants us to be fully aware of the positive before we sense or experience the negative. Within these scenes are enough reminiscences of the Old Testament account of the exodus from Egypt to indicate that John most

by V. Bailey Gillespie

V. Bailey Gillespie is professor of theology and Christian personality, and chairman of the Department of Church and Ministry in the School of Religion, Loma Linda University.

likely intends it as a conscious model. The Exodus was a journey through trauma to liberation; and just so is the church's experience of the end-time. The important thing is not to be so overwhelmed by the trauma as to forget that it is liberation that is taking place.

Because this scene is built on Exodus motifs, the old Tent of the Testimony, or the tabernacle, makes an appropriate setting. It is more fitting than the permanent Temple structure, more reminiscent of God's continual caring and watchfulness than the Temple structure built much later.

What would it take to give you surety in the time of the end? During personal trauma in your life now do you find it harder or easier to trust in God and his liberation?

3. Bowls—the Worst Plagues of All (read Revelation 16:2-11)

After the Exodus theme, the bowls or plagues show even more dependence on the Old Testament account of the Egyptian plagues than those of the earlier trumpet series. Here the elements of restraint and limitation that marked the earlier end-time descriptions have all but disappeared; verse 3 even specifies that "every living thing in the sea died" (NEB). We are right near the end now, and John is intensifying the trauma with all the stops out.

Notice that as the bowls fall—trauma comes. But in the midst of all of this detailed destruction, there are glimpses of hope and light. According to verses 5-7 no matter how bad and severe the punishments, they are *just*—in true proportion to the evil that infests the earth and the crime committed. Good is good. Bad is truly bad, and the whole world is

sensing this truism.

4. Collapse at Armageddon (read Revelation 16:12-21)

There has been a continual heightening of the problems for the world in these bowls. Sores on those that have the mark. Blood kills living things in the sea and later in the rivers and springs. Next comes a curse on the sun, and light burns men with flames and the world *still* rejects God. The fifth bowl is at the center of evil itself (the seat of the beast). Next to last the evil trinity musters a great army from over the earth until it is finally over in the seventh bowl.

Could what is here represented be completely symbolic? Could the description be the growing power of evil finally seen for what it is? Could the plagues be symbolic in that they show how evil is always bad, never does good, always kills others in a real or symbolic way? These are all possibilities. And of course traditionally, the bowls could be actual literal problems that befall evil participants and performers.

But in the end—it is over. Evil has lost. Good has prevailed. The distinction between the righteous and the wicked is clearly seen. Then, the Lamb and the people appear on Mount Zion and sing a duet with heaven. And the question still remains, "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments" (Rev. 16:15). Will they be ready? Will you and I be ready?

What do you think that the bowls represent? Are they literal or are they purely symbolic? What is their theological significance for the time of John and for us now? Is there courage in the midst of this trauma? And the big question remains, Will I be ready when He comes?

*Early Writings, pp. 33, 34.

A Shelter in the Time of Storm

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 12:15

“When the third angel’s message closes, mercy no longer pleads for the guilty inhabitants of the earth. The people of God have accomplished their work. They have received ‘the latter rain,’ ‘the refreshing from the presence of the Lord,’ and they are prepared for the trying hour before them. Angels are hastening to and fro in heaven. An angel returning from the earth announces that his work is done; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received ‘the seal of the living God.’ Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above. He lifts His hands and with a loud voice says, ‘It is done’; and all the angelic host lay off their crowns as He makes the solemn announcement: ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.’ Revelation 22:11. Every case has been decided for life or death. Christ has made the atonement for His people and blotted out their sins. The number of His subjects is made up; ‘the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness

of the kingdom under the whole heaven,’ is about to be given to the heirs of salvation, and Jesus is to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.”¹

“The people of God will not be free [during the plagues] from suffering; but while persecuted and distressed, while they endure privation and suffer for want of food they will not be left to perish. That God who cared for Elijah will not pass by one of His self-sacrificing children. He who numbers the hairs of their head will care for them, and in time of famine they shall be satisfied. While the wicked are dying from hunger and pestilence, angels will shield the righteous and supply their wants. To him that ‘walketh righteously’ is the promise: ‘Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.’ ‘When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.’ Isaiah 33:15, 16; 41:17.

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls”; yet shall they that fear Him “rejoice in the Lord” and joy in the God of their salvation. Habakkuk 3:17, 18.”²

1. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 613, 614.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 629, 630.

by Steven G. Daily

Steven G. Daily is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

Wednesday, August 30

Maintaining an Eschatological Expectancy

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 15:2

"The day is far gone, and the time is short." This phrase permeates the book of Revelation as we march down the time-line of history. The marching however is not through calendarizing or identifying the dates and events in order to "be ready." The marching through time to the end is to teach us something, and to inspire us to be different. Jesus could make this kind of statement in His day, and it was true and accurate. Paul can make the same statement some years later; it is still just as true and proper then as now. Seventy years after Jesus it can be made again—still true and proper. Still true and accurate. We can make it today, as the centuries stretch into millennia—still true and proper as it was in the mouth of Jesus, even though He has not come—yet. His coming is fact in Revelation, not fiction. It is announcement and not speculation. It is viewed as historical and not symbolic.

There is a sense in which it is the obligation of the church itself to keep on making that statement until the end itself closes off the words and stops the proclamation. One could say that when the church fails to announce that the end is near and that time is

short, then she has fallen away from the truth of Revelation and the end-time plagues. Failure to proclaim means failure to interpret correctly.

This brings us to the point of the entire section of Revelation under consideration this week. We have seen the sudden expectancy that permeates the texts. Could we not say that every aspect of the church's life is driven by the motor of such expectancy of His coming and the justice that is seen in the end? This eschatological expectancy served two purposes in the early church and equally does for us, as well.

1. It is the motive and the content of the church's message in preaching, service, ministry, and atonement. It drives our message. He is returning, the end is near, and the evil one is finished.

2. It is the basis of New Testament ethical teaching. It became the source of the life in the early church and explained her distinctive and unique character. It provided the dynamism for the message, the drive for the movement, and the focus of the mission of the church.

REACT

How does the church retain the sense of the imminent "Coming"? How does the Coming drive our ethical concerns and form our ethical system?

by V. Bailey Gillespie

V. Bailey Gillespie is professor of theology and Christian personality and chairman of the Department of Church Ministry in the School of Religion, Loma Linda University.

Missing the Pay Day We Deserve

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rev. 15:3, 4

The seven last plagues of Revelation 16 are for sinners deserving of death, which certainly would include you and me. These seven plagues are God's wrath against sin, which is finally receiving its just reward. The judgment is a complete one as is indicated by the number 7. But why is it that some are recipients of the plagues, and others are not?

God has left us a case study in the experience of the children of Israel during their stay in Egypt that gives us insight as to who does and who does not receive the plagues. The Bible records in Exodus, that as the Hebrews were preparing to leave Egypt, the plagues that were poured out did not touch the children of Israel, yet the judgment was a complete judgment. Further, Pharaoh finally recognized the true God of Israel, which demonstrated it was a fulfilled judgment.

The amazing thing about the story is that the Hebrews are never afflicted with the plagues, and the Egyptians are. On the one hand, we witness the miraculous—the sparing of the Israelites from the plagues. And on the other hand, we witness the results of judgment—the affliction of the Egyptians. God's people were not superior to the Egyptians. And neither are we su-

perior to the people of this world, even though we are God's children. So why should Israel or we be spared the affliction of God's wrath? It's called receptivity. The story of Israel's experience in Egypt reveals areas of receptivity that are significant if we too are to escape the plagues:

1. Receptive Minds

Receptive minds tell us that obedience is better than disobedience. And that obedience is not a worthless chore, but a discipline given by the Spirit to keep us in the right path, safe from the plagues.

2. Receptive Will

Receptive will directed by the Spirit tells us to trust in God, not in ourselves, because it's God's righteousness that brings deliverance from the plagues, our righteousness can never protect us. A receptive will is made possible by a receptive mind that is open to God's Word.

3. Receptive Bodies

The body must work in unison with the will and the mind. The receptive body is a responder to the will and the mind that has been directed by the Spirit of God. Receptive bodies live and act out our faith in God.

REACT

Can you think of an experience where you have witnessed the deliverance of God in your life?

by Dexter A. Richardson

Dexter A. Richardson, former associate pastor of the La Sierra Collegiate Church, is now pastor of the Brawley/El Centro Seventh-day Adventist churches.

Friday, September 1

The Unlucky Seven

OPINION

Key Text: Isaiah 28:21

Seven isn't always a lucky number. When it comes to plagues, the only really lucky number is zero.

What does God need plagues for anyway? Does he scare good people by using plagues to hurt and kill bad people? Could it be that God gives the good people who are paying attention secret information for the future so they can keep their calendars tidy and say we told you so? But why monitor the calendar if it's already too late when the plagues fall? "Fall" is a clue to the problem of the plagues, by the way. Have you ever noticed that plagues never "rise"? They "fall." The verb assures us that God is the one sending the plagues from above!

But what if:

1. God doesn't send plagues at all, or what if
2. Sin itself is the source of all plagues, including the unlucky seven, and what if
3. First-century and twentieth-century apocalyptic people have both erred in requiring violent divine intervention inconsistent with God's character of love? Ending the world with screaming, violent deaths may indeed be the order of things, but is it really the divine order?

By way of reminder, apocalyptic literature is a genre created to provide assurance to a subjugated people that God is still in control.

However desperate, however violent the treatment God's chosen would receive, apocalyptic assures that it will not always be so. A less dramatic expression of the same point is found in Christ's Sermon on the Mount, where the poor inherit the kingdom, the persecuted are blessed, the mourners are comforted. The "upside-down" kingdom gets additional support from the revelator. There is, contrary to all evidence, hope for the future.

Strange, then, that violence is the source of that hope. But not so strange in the first century as in this one. Modern faith should long since have matured sufficiently to discard the notion that God requires violence to achieve His ends. Better, it seems, to assert that Providence is ultimately creative in His ability to provide meanings in something so contrary to His nature as violence.

Making sense of a violent world, in fact, requires a great deal of creativity. Each of us is free to decide how to apply our imaginations, whether we choose naturalism or other processes. But if the point of this awful contest between good and evil is to prove that God is love, it seems contradictory and absurd in the extreme to require such terrible wreckage to prove the point.

REACT

Has anything surprised you about God while studying Revelation 15 and 16? Why?

by Wayne Judd

Wayne Judd is executive director of marketing at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

Lesson 11, September 3-9

The Beauty and the Beast



“And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4).

Sunday, September 3

Backstage . . . Waiting

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 17:1—18:24

It's a familiar plot. The villain, dressed in black, struts down Main Street, six-shooter at his side, facing the man with the star pinned to his chest. There is gunfire. The man in white wins. Click. Or, the brave hero dashes his foe in time to save his beloved heroine from her captor. The music swells. Credits roll. The lights come on in the cinema. Or . . . it's the third act of a dramatic play. Two characters, each claiming virtue, battle until one is revealed as the true hero . . . the one worthy of our adoration. Curtain. Applause.

But this time it's different. This time, there's no turning off

the set, walking out of the cinema, or curtain call amid applause. This is it. The last show-down, the ultimate resolution, the final act. And we're no longer merely spectators. We're part of the production. We're just waiting for the show to begin. But there's good news: When casting was done awhile ago, there were no auditions. We simply signed up for the part we wanted. By grace, we got to choose. Some chose the more glamorous parts—those requiring glittery costumes and lots of make-up. Others took the roles of servants. It seems as if we've been in rehearsals forever. But now I hear the overture. The houselights are down, the stage lights are on. And I hear the Great Director calling, "Places, everybody. Places."

by Stephanie Irwin

Stephanie Irwin is a free-lance writer and homemaker living in Washington Township, Ohio.

O Babylon!

LOGOS

Theme: *Apostasy reaches its climax in the time period studied in this week's lesson. Satan marshals every evil force, both political and religious, against God and His people. God's final call (Rev. 18:4), which takes place before probation closes, gathers His people into a unified body. When the fall of Babylon is complete Christ makes ready to come.*

1. The Woman and the Beast (read Rev. 17:1-6)

"And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast" (Rev. 17:3, RSV).

In direct contrast to the portrayal of the virtuous woman in Revelation (as in chapter 12), and the Lamb (as in chapters 5 and 14), are the depictions of the vile woman and the beast. The chapter under consideration enumerates certain characteristic features of the vile woman and the beast.

The woman:

a. She was seated upon many waters (17:1) and upon the beast (17:3).

b. She committed fornication with earthly monarchs (17:2; 18:3).

c. The wine of her fornication intoxicated the people of the earth (17:2; 18:3).

d. She was gaudily dressed and glittered with jewelry (17:4; 18:16).

e. Her cup was filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries (17:4).

f. She was called 'mystery,' 'Babylon the Great,' and 'the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth' (17:5, NIV).

g. She was drunk with the blood of saints and martyrs (17:6; 18:24).

The beast:

a. It was scarlet in color (17:3).

b. It was filled with blasphemous names (17:3).

c. It had seven heads and ten horns (17:3).

2. The Vision Explained (read Rev. 17:8-18)

As the culmination of earth's history and the great controversy rapidly approaches, Satan (cf. 17:3; 12:3; 13:1) and his co-workers (the woman-apostate church, her "prostitute daughters," and every other derived form of apostasy—the kings of the earth, political powers)—all pledge allegiance to the beast and form alliances with the woman. Together they pool their ingenuity, lay claim to the earth, and war against the Lamb and His remnant. But as the prophecy in chapter 17 reveals, and history through the centuries has testified, their plans to exterminate the Lamb's remnant do not prove successful. As time closes, the Lamb to whom "all power is given . . . in heaven and in earth" will defeat and conquer them, and establish His kingdom, and reign

by Jeba Moses

Jeba Moses is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church at Kettering, Ohio.

as "Lord of lords, and King of kings."

What subtle yet grave danger do we fall into, when we categorize those who aren't with us as not the remnant?

3. Deliverance and Lament (read Rev. 18:1-24)

"Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues'" (Rev. 18:4, RSV).

The message of Revelation 18 is a repetition of the second angel's message—the ultimate call of divine mercy. The magnitude of God's love is revealed as He repeatedly endeavors to rescue His people from the snares of Babylon, for He "is not willing that any should perish."

Babylon—be it papal, pagan, or protestant, or a combination of the three—portrays defiance against the true Sovereign of the universe. Consequently, when she crumbles to the ground, all who have put their trust and confi-

dence in her will moan, for she has not only deceived them but has lost her splendor and power. She is "stripped" and is bare for all to see her sins "heaped high as heaven" (verse 5), for she "glorified herself and played the wanton" (verse 7), and said "a queen I sit, . . . mourning I shall never see" (verse 7).

In direct contrast to the mourning of Babylon's allies, are the songs of victory and joy on the lips of those who came out of Babylon—who heeded the call of mercy. It is a time of deliverance, for God's judgment has been on His remnant's behalf. To that remnant, all wrongs shall be made right, the crooked paths shall be straightened, and the dark things made plain. No wonder they unite in a mighty voice to sing, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just" (Rev. 19:1, 2, RSV).

What does it mean to live in the perspective that time is running out?

In Quest of the Judgment Event

TESTIMONY

Key Texts: Revelation 17, 18

Where do you find Revelation 17 and 18 pictured in the writings of Ellen White?

The judgment upon Babylon as pictured in Revelation comes between the seven last plagues of chapter 16 and the second coming of Jesus in chapter 19. That is a very short time period, especially since the seventh plague closes with the coming of Christ in the clouds. Yet the two full chapters given to this subject seem to signal its great importance.

Yet, except for the identity of Babylon and the subsequent call to come out of her, these chapters find little discussion in E. G. White's writings.

Why do you think this is so? How does a very short time period or poetic form in chapter 18 relate to the question?

Nevertheless, Mrs. White does vividly portray last-day events. The clearest outline of Babylon's judgment is found in the chapters "The Final Warning" and "Desolation of the Earth" in *The Great Controversy*. The following is a synopsis:

The call to come out is a repeat of the second angel's message, which when connected with the message of the third angel will become the final loud cry of mercy. Civil enforcement of Sunday sacredness will be the signal for the message to go out. When the

time is right God's Spirit will empower people who before were timid but now fearlessly proclaim the third angel's message. They will later marvel at what they said and did. The proclamation of the message will bring the concept of obedience to God to the forefront. Everyone will have opportunity to hear; their response will determine whether they receive the mark of beast or the seal of God. There will be a polarization of people: The greatest reformation ever will occur for those who heed the call (see p. 611), but for those who don't, the Spirit is withdrawn, leaving them to the power of Satan, who will influence them to do cruel and savage things (see pp. 604-607).

The situation is exacerbated by the plagues falling here and there around the world. A death decree is made against followers of God. The faithful are delivered by the voice of God, and catastrophic signs in nature follow (see pp. 635, 636).

The destruction of Babylon occurs. The rich and powerful lose all, the wicked are enraged that God will be victorious, and the populace turns against the ministers of religion who taught them falsely (see pp. 654, 655).

REACT

What should I be doing until the loud cry? Can I by my actions and words hasten this event and bring trouble upon God's people too soon?

by Dan Stevens

Dan Stevens is the associate pastor in charge of education and young adult ministry at the Kettering Seventh-day Adventist Church, Kettering, Ohio.

Wednesday, September 6

A Tale of Two Cities

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Rev. 17:1—19:10;
21:9—22:1.

The closing chapters of Revelation describe the final outcome between two long-time rival cities—Babylon and Jerusalem. This theme of rival cities can be traced in the books of Daniel, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. Interestingly, they are symbolized as women making the same claim; that one and only one of them is the true bride, and exhibits the true faith and practice. In such a confused world, how is one to recognize the genuine from the imposter?

God answers by telling how He sees the character of each of the cities. They are placed side-by-side for comparison; Babylon (Rev. 17:1—18:24) and Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9—22:10). Revelation highlights this Biblical contrast by starting and ending each passage with similar circumstances:

1. A plague angel begins each passage by inviting John to come and see (compare 17:1, 2 with 21:9).

2. Each city is described along with its relationship with “kings” and “nations” (compare 17:2 with 21:24).

3. In each case John is momentarily overwhelmed and falls to the ground to worship the angel, who forbids him (compare 19:10 with 22:8, 9).

But that’s where similarities end. Notice the stark contrast between these two diametrically opposed cities:

Harlot City

Holy City

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Full of demons and impurity (18:2) | 1. Nothing impure can enter (21:27) |
| 2. Sits on waters, representing humanity (17:1) | 2. River of life flows from her (22:2) |
| 3. Kings and nations drink her wine, commit immorality, reign, hate and make war with her, then weep while she burns (17:2f) | 3. Kings and nations drink her living water, eat from tree of life, and bring their glory through her gates (21:24—22:5) |
| 4. She wears attire of well-paid harlot (17:4) | 4. She is attired as a simple bride (21:2) |
| 5. She is drunk with the blood of saints (17:6) | 5. She is filled with saints and the light of God (22:5) |
| 6. Sits on seven mountains (17:9) | 6. Sits on a high mountain (21:10) |

With the imposter clearly identified before the world, God no longer waits to bring her to judgment and destruction.

by Dan Stevens

Dan Stevens is the associate pastor in charge of education and young adult ministry at the Kettering Seventh-day Adventist Church, Kettering, Ohio.

“Just Say ‘No’ ”

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rev. 18:24

The inherent truth behind the “Just Say No” to drugs campaign is that human beings made in the image of God possess the ability to think, feel, and choose for themselves. Our personal identity comes out of our decisions. Our identity as Christians is formed when we make unpopular choices that indicate our loyalty to the truth concerning God in the great controversy. Our *ultimate* ability to “just say No” to the forces of Babylon in the final conflict is determined by how we are *daily* resisting Babylon. Coming out of Babylon is not a one-time decision, it is a process whereby I distinguish between the authority of truth and authoritarianism.

1. RECOGNIZE THE BEAST IN MYSELF: Babylon is in *me*. Do I want to control people? Do I engage in pressuring, manipulating, or using people to get what I want? Do I subtly communicate disapproval of a person if they don't take my advice or make life decisions based on another value system, one not my own? When I am in the majority in a group decision-making process, how do I treat the minority? Do I respect them, or reject them? Do others have to be like me to be OK?

2. LEARN TO BE ASSERTIVE: Being assertive simply means sharing with others what I think, how I feel, and what I

want, based on my value system. Assertiveness is not rebellion, selfishness, or dominance; it is our inalienable right to be individuals in a society. If I feel helpless, dependent, or vulnerable in relationship to someone in my life (authority figure, parent, spouse, teacher, sibling, friend) then I have to ask myself the question What do I need from this person that I won't claim for myself? Do the people I choose as friends respect me? Do I respect myself enough to choose friends who do?

3. CLAIM MY PRIESTHOOD IN THE CHURCH: According to 1 Peter 2:5, “You are a holy priesthood” applies to every person in the church. Do I claim my own gifts, abilities, and ministry or rely on the paid ministers to fulfil the gospel commission? Do I help foster an environment of Babylon (unhealthy dependence) in the church by allowing the paid ministry to become too politically powerful by not raising my voice in church affairs? Do I believe something is true because a preacher said it or do I test an idea out for its integrity? Finally, do I believe that even God Himself gives me the freedom to “just say No” to Him? You certainly can trust yourself with that kind of person.

REACT

If the truth sets us free, how can I obey God and keep His commandments and still be my own person?

by Dave Evans

Dave Evans is a chaplain at the Kettering Medical Center, Kettering, Ohio.

Friday, September 8

Prophecy Personalized

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Peter 1:20, 21

Whether or not one decides to accept the traditional interpretations of prophecy which we have inherited, I would like to offer an alternative method of gaining meaning and value from study in this area. Prophecy has been demonstrated to have had a significant purpose in confirming faith for believers, when viewed retrospectively. However, throughout the ages, the effectiveness of using prophecy for precisely defining the future is questionable. Obviously, the numerous Jewish scholars who researched the Scriptures with "high-powered microscopes" did not successfully ascertain the encrypted message of the arrival of the Messiah. And our own church's derivation was from a group that, through intense scrutiny, arrived at an incorrect interpretation, or at least one that required some significant revision. With historical "failures" by dedicated Biblical scholars, what hope does this leave for the common person to gain a value from the pursuit of prophetic knowledge? Was it wasted time for these men and women of earlier days? And does this imply that we would be wasting our time by reading any of the as-yet-unfulfilled prophecies?

One possibility that exists is that prophecy is given as a tool for helping us to search, but that the process of searching is more

valuable than arriving at the destination. Just as in higher education, the purpose is not to discover the answers to all of the questions in the universe, but rather to learn how to analyze, research, and logically think through a question when it is posed to us. It is the PROCESS that has perhaps the major value in our lives, not the individual facts that were ingested along the way.

I would like to suggest the following as a meaningful way to benefit from the study of prophecy. Rather than setting your objective to be the determination of the conclusive interpretation of a passage, humbly acknowledge your limitations. Then proceed with constructing a model that (perhaps imperfectly) parallels the story. Apply that model to yourself, your church, and the world around you. Allow those resulting analogies to give you insight into truths that you probably already knew, but which you needed to approach from a new direction in order to be awakened to their relevance. The next time you approach the text, construct another model from an entirely different perspective, and once again apply that model to your experience. As with poetry, value is extracted via numerous interpretations. Perhaps the author has the only "true" interpretation, yet experience and learning are dispensed to those who read and respond from their own particular vantage point.

by Brian Christenson

Brian Christenson is a systems consultant at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.

Lesson 12, September 10-16

Supper



“Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ ’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God’ ” (Revelation 19:9, NIV).

Sunday, September 10

Going Home

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 19:1-21

Well, I did it! I made my \$200 Ingathering goal while only 10 years old and earned my first week at summer camp. I had expectations of romance, fun, and adventure—I just knew I'd never want to come home.

Summer camp was awful. The perspiration was constant with no breezes and no air-conditioning (Ah! those Florida summers!). No one told me about the food—it was terrible, except for the bread. Bread and water. Almost like jail. Romance? Forget it. The closest I came was looking through a pair of binoculars, watching the guys have pillow fights in their underwear (this, of course, was on a dare). Even Fruit of the Looms got boring after a while. The only adventure in the woods was the mosquitoes, big ones—I came back to my cabin one giant, itchy welt. By Tuesday I was crying to go home. Camp wasn't what I expected. It left me lonely and afraid. How I longed for home!

On many occasions Adventist youth get the same disillusion about the world as I had about summer camp. We've heard so much about the good time we'd have getting smashed off our rocker, or partying till we drop, or

sleeping around for variety. Nobody tells us about the emptiness of the morning after—of the hangover so bad even your toes hurt, or the loneliness when all the "friends" move on after you're broke, or the devastation when you realize someone used your body without caring whether you had a mind. "Home"—or church—was a place where you let "Dad"—or God—carry your problems, and people looked at you as a person with a mind and a soul, not just an object to use. And the sad part is that a lot of people don't know how to get back home again—home to that fellowship of believers who aren't perfect, but are fighting for a life beyond eternity, just like you. Did you know you can get home the same way I did from summer camp? You call Dad, and he comes and picks you up and takes you home. When you're tired of the empty feeling you get from bowing to the peer pressures at work or at college, you call on your Father in heaven, and He meets you where you are, and leads you to a group of Christians who are just as fed up with the world as you are. Then you don't have to wait until Jesus comes to sing hallelujah with the saints. You start belting out that hallelujah chorus in your life, right there, where you are. Because now, my friend, you're really home.

by Karen Baez

Karen Baez is currently enrolled at the University of Florida and is pursuing a career in pharmacy.

The Wedding Supper

LOGOS

Theme: *The two suppers of Revelation 19 represent the final destinies of earth's two classes of people. Every human being has the choice in this life of dining with Christ or being eternally rejected.*

1. The Invitation (read Matthew 22:1-14)

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the crossroads in the town and invite everyone you can find to the wedding'" (Matt. 22:8, 9, Jerusalem Bible).

Much preparation goes into planning a wedding: things to do, things to order, things to buy, things to prepare, people to organize, invitations to send.

Concerning the latter, two things should be noticed about ancient customs. First, when invitations were sent the time of the event was not given. Because of the involvement of preparations, the time when all would be ready was uncertain. As preparations were made and final touches were completed, the guests waited till word arrived that the party was to begin.

Second, at royal weddings guests were supplied with special garments. This would ensure the splendor and majestic nature of the celebration.

If you really hated your host, no greater insult could be given

than to refuse the invitation or to show up not wearing his gift of special clothing.

The King of kings is preparing a royal wedding feast. The invited guests have been issued special garments. These robes that symbolize Christ's righteousness are reflections of God's loving character. In Revelation 19:8, the Lord's bride—the Holy City—appears to be glistening white. Why? Because the guests have been transformed, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and they love as Jesus loved. They have become Christlike. The guests, you and I, have received invitations; the garments are ready. We wait only for the word that the supper is ready.

How can I know that I have been invited to Christ's wedding supper?

2. The Wedding (read Revelation 19:7-10)

The setting was perfect. Flowers and ferns in place. Candles uniformly lit on each side of the platform. Lights dimmed and soft music gently setting the mood. As a member of the wedding party, a family member, or a friend, one could not help being drawn into a sense of tranquility. What you felt in that church was not tension or urgency, but simple joy.

I stood next to the groom. We watched as the attendants slowly made their way down the aisle and were escorted to their proper place on the platform. Practice had made perfect. Chords from the organ rang. Then silence.

by Roy Merrifield

Roy Merrifield is the pastor of the Fort Pierce Seventh-day Adventist Church, Fort Pierce, Florida.

Everyone turned toward the back of the church and waited with anticipation. Again the organ played—this time swelling to higher decibels. A slow deep breath holds back tears of joy. The door swings open. And there she stands.

I hear the groom clear a lump of emotion from his throat. Then, as the bride steps into the sanctuary, the groom, under his breath, not really speaking to anyone, just making a quiet observation, says, "Wow, she's beautiful."

I can hear Jesus saying the exact same thing when he comes to meet His bride.

What makes the bride so beautiful?

3. The Feast

"The angel said, 'write this: 'Happy are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb,' and he added, 'All the things you have written are true messages from God' " (Rev. 19:9, Jerusalem Bible).

Weddings in Jesus' day were unlike those of today. For one thing, the actual marriage ceremony was a private affair. Only members of the immediate families were allowed to share this occasion with the bride and groom. Then came the procession through the streets of the town as they made their way to the feast where friends and neighbors joined in the celebration. The ten virgins of Matthew 25 were waiting for such a procession.

Jesus says we are to be people "that wait for their lord, when he will return *from the wedding*; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately" (Luke 12:36). What a feast we look for!

From the time two people meet until they are married, what steps take place in their lives that lead to this event?

4. The Rejection (read Luke 14:15-24)

"When the time for the banquet came, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come along: everything is ready now.' But all alike started to make excuses" (Luke 14:17, 18, Jerusalem Bible).

No one will be forced to attend the wedding supper. Not everyone who receives an invitation, and not everyone who has waited for the bridegroom, will be at the festivities.

The one thing to note at this point, however, is that there is a sense in which they *choose* not to attend.

When the 'prodigal son' came home and his father killed a special calf and threw a party of celebration, the Bible notes that his brother "was angry, and would not go in" (Luke 15:28).

Returning to Revelation 19:11-21, the scene changes for those who will not attend the wedding supper. When you read Luke 14:17 and 18, you get a clip from Hitchcock's *The Birds*. I'm not sure how literal we want to be here, but the contrast is vivid: either you are the invited guest at one feast or the main course at another.

The rejection is on the part of the sinner and never on the part of God. And be sure you know what you are rejecting. As William Barclay states: "To think of Christianity as a gloomy giving up of everything which brings laughter and sunshine and happy fellowship is to mistake its whole nature. It is to joy that the Christian is invited; and it is joy he misses, if he refuses the invitation."*

*William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), vol. 2, p. 267.

Send Out the Invitation

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Rev. 19:7

The marriage supper of the Lamb will be a time for rejoicing and communion with our Saviour. But it is important to remember that it is our choice whether we want to be there or not. Ellen G. White has good counseling to keep in mind.

For those who are indifferent to the call: "If these persons do not humble their hearts before God, if they harbor the suggestions of Satan, doubt and infidelity will take possession of the soul, and they will see everything in a false light. Let the seeds of doubt once be sown in their hearts and they will have an abundant harvest to reap. They will come to mistrust and disbelieve truths which are plain and full of beauty to others who have not educated themselves in unbelief. Those who train the mind to seize upon everything which they can use as a peg to hang a doubt upon, and suggest these thoughts to other minds, will always find occasion to doubt. They will question and criticize everything that arises in the unfolding of truth, criticize the work and position of others, criticize every branch of the work in which

they have not themselves a part. They will feed upon the errors and mistakes and faults of others, 'until,' said the angel, 'the Lord Jesus shall rise up from His mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary and shall clothe Himself with the garments of vengeance and surprise them at their unholy feast, and they will find themselves unprepared for the marriage supper of the Lamb.' Their taste has been so perverted that they would be inclined to criticize even the table of the Lord in His kingdom."¹

"To the mind of Jesus the gladness of the wedding festivities pointed forward to the rejoicing of that day when He shall bring home His bride to the Father's house, and the redeemed with the Redeemer shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb."²

"God has called this people to give to the world the message of Christ's soon coming. We are to give to men the last call to the gospel feast, the last invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Thousands of places that have not heard the call are yet to hear it. Many who have not given the message are yet to proclaim it. Again I appeal to our young men: Has not God called upon you to sound this message?"³

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 689, 690.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 151.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 412.

by Melvin J. Liwag

Melvin J. Liwag is a junior electrical-engineering student at the University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Wednesday, September 13

Salvation from Catastrophe

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Psalm 23:5

"The salvation songs and images that St. John sets before us are placed against a background of catastrophe. Salvation is the answer to catastrophe. The dimensions of catastrophe are understood, biblically, to exceed human capacity for recovery. . . .

"Nothing is exempt from the catastrophe. Nothing is innocent in the catastrophe. Heaven and earth are implicated. Bacteria foul the bloodstreams, sickening sinner and saint. Hailstones plummet out of the skies and flatten a wheat field, fragile and elegant, ready for harvest. Liquid fire rips through the earth's crust, incinerating tigers and trees in volcanic fury. Rebel angels, disbarred from practicing in the courts of heaven, infiltrate invisible world realms, twisting glories of intelligence into patterns of deception. And human beings, created in 'the image of God' discover within themselves, often in shocked horror, a 'heart desperately wicked.' . . .

"If there is no accurate perception of catastrophe, there can be no adequate perception of salvation, for salvation is God's action that deals with the catastrophe. . . .

"The root meaning in Hebrew of 'salvation' is to be broad, to become spacious, to enlarge. It carries the sense of deliverance from an existence that has become compressed, confined, and cramped. Salvation is the plot of history. It

is the most comprehensive theme of scripture, overtaking and surpassing catastrophe. Salvation is God's determination to rescue his creation; it is his activity in recovering the world. . . .

"The four hallelujah songs linked the scene of judgment, showing the dimensions of catastrophe (Rev. 15-18), with the vision of salvation. The first song proclaimed salvation, the second and third expanded the theme, and the fourth announced salvation as a marriage between Jesus (the Lamb) and Christians (his Bride). The songs have precipitated us into the pulsating center of salvation. . . .

"The salvation vision opens with an invitation to this meal:

Happy is everyone invited
to the Lamb's marriage supper!

The power of this eucharistic meal to keep us participant in the essentials of salvation is impressive. This is the primary way that Christians remember, receive, and share the meaning of our salvation: Christ crucified for us, his blood shed for the remission of our sins. This is where we affirm the action of our salvation. What we know and believe of Christ in his incarnation, and what we expect and hope of Christ in his coming again, brackets our present lives: in this large context, and in this ordinary setting, we celebrate our salvation. . . .

"Salvation, on the one hand, is Christ on the cross and risen from the tomb; on the other hand, it is eating bread and drinking wine.

by Eugene H. Peterson

Eugene H. Peterson is the author of *REVERSED THUNDER, The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

In the eucharistic meal, these cannot be separated: salvation is both Christ on Golgotha and Christ in me. . . .

"The second element in St. John's salvation vision is a war. First the image of the Bridegroom Christ married to his Bride Christians was expanded into the image of the Lamb Christ providing himself as the eucharistic meal. This is now juxtaposed to the image of the Warrior Christ riding into the great war, Armageddon. The contrast between meal and war could hardly be more extreme, but it is complementary, not contradiction, that we experience as we submit to the images. Salvation is the intimacies and festivities of marriage; salvation is aggressive battle and the defeat of evil. Salvation is neither of these things by itself. It is the two energies, the embrace of love and the assault on evil, in polar tension, each is defined by the other, each

feeding into the other. . . .

"Salvation, then, is not simply something that God does: it is something that God is doing, and not only for us but with us, enlisting us in the saving action. Eating a meal shows salvation at work in ordinary life, strengthening the people of faith; fighting a battle shows salvation at work defeating the opposition and converting all who, whether knowingly or ignorantly, are deepening the catastrophe by opposing, avoiding, or denigrating God's word and rule. . . .

"The meal is leisured and joyful. The war is strenuous and determined. The meal deals with the ordinary, the war with the extraordinary. Salvation is both. We cannot choose one over the other. If we are going to be with our saving Lord, we must regularly and often sup with him; and we must be ready, at a moment's notice, to enter the fight with him."*

*Eugene H. Peterson, *REVERSED THUNDER, The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 152-166.

Thursday, September 14

The Hazards of Leaky Lamps

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 25:1-12

Being left off an invitation list can leave a person feeling unwanted. Especially if the invitation is to an important ceremony like a wedding or a birthday party of a friend. The thought of not being asked to partake in the joy and success of others can make us feel bitter and disappointed. So if such feelings occur when we are excluded from other people's lives, then one would think that the opposite sentiments would occur if we had been invited in the first place. But surprisingly, such is not always the case, especially in the Christian world.

Every believer in God has the honor of being invited to our Lord's wedding feast, a privilege none of us has earned, yet He yearns for us to share in His joy and success as our high priest and king. He has even taken the time to go over the invitation list to make sure nobody is left out. What remains to be seen is how many will show up. Will we take heed like the wise virgins in Matthew 25:1-12, or will we be foolish and unprepared to attend such a royal gathering? What must we, as Christians, be doing to ensure that we will be among those seated at the table with Christ? Perhaps as we examine the parable of the virgins we can find something applicable to our own lives.

1. All ten virgins were invited. We see that not only the wise, but all ten were asked to attend. None need think that God plays favorites with His own. All had lamps and a source of oil. Likewise God has also provided us with a mind and with a source of oil found in His Holy word.

2. Five virgins chose to be foolish. The key word is "chose." Verse 3 implies that having the same opportunity as the other virgins, the five foolish virgins chose not to prepare sufficiently in case something happened. Funny thing is, that's like the choices we're being asked to make today.

3. The virgins who were ready went in. The lamps of the wise virgins were characterized by being trimmed and shining. And I believe that is how it should be with us. If we find ourselves 'trimming' all sinful traits out of our lives we'll find our lamps shining brighter as we share our light with others in darkness.

REACT

1. In what ways were the ten virgins alike? Different?
2. What is the point of the parable?
3. What unexpected event has happened in your life in the past six months? Were you ready to handle it?
4. What is the "oil" that keeps your "lamp" lit?

by Peter R. Payne

Peter R. Payne is a dental-laboratory technician and a member of the Altamonte Springs Seventh-day Adventist Church, Orlando, Florida.

“A Little Gray Sin” and You’re Out?

OPINION

Key Text: Ephesians 2:1-10

“For thousands of years Jesus has been patient. He has limited Satan from expressing many of his worst hostilities, but in general He has allowed him to pursue his own pertinacious inclinations. How pained Jesus must have been all through the long, long centuries to see injustice, famine, warfare, and pestilence prevalent in the world. But He has had to let rebellion unveil its innate horrors, because we have needed to learn by observation how dreadfully bad sin is and to what awful kinds of things sin leads.”*

Revelation 19 is a hallelujah chorus praising the END of these innate horrors. No more starvation, people living in cardboard boxes, children being raped by demented humans, newborns being dumped into garbage cans because they are not wanted, and individuals being beaten, dismembered, and then discarded along the road “just because.”

We are being invited to a celebration that is going to ignite the beginning of children playing in the meadows, food for all, happy homes, no more innate horrors. Earth as we know it is over.

But what do we do? We ask God why. Why do I have to live this Christian standard right

now? Let me have some fun first, then I will live my life by the rules.

We get caught up in “hot topics” like jewelry, should I or shouldn’t I? Or dress, is it proper? too short? too revealing? too long? too tight? The do’s and don’ts of SDA’s strikes again. You see, the devil wants you distracted. He doesn’t need you to be totally wrong to have you miss out on heaven’s celebration feast. Why? Because Jesus requires us to use His blood at the cross to make it possible for us to become perfect before God. Eternal life in heaven is an all-or-nothing policy based on perfect obedience.

No person has all the right answers to every issue, but God will hold us accountable for the example we choose to portray in these “hot topics.” Think, if it’s that “hot,” don’t touch it or you’ll get burned in the “lake of fire.”

Christians become uncomfortable when we talk about a God of love letting us burn over one ‘little gray sin.’ Thus we tiptoe around this subject of perfection. Here are a few texts to verify the requirements for making heaven’s invitation list: Revelation 21:27, John 3:3, Hebrew 5:9, Leviticus 5:5, and 1 John 2:6.

Now let’s balance it out. Ephesians 2:1-10 explains that by daily walking with our Lord, praying

by Tanna Spencer

Tanna Spencer is a physical-education teacher and collegiate sponsor in Orlando, Florida.

with Him, leaning on Him, the Holy Spirit will guide us in these "hot topics." When we establish a true relationship with Christ He will lead us in obedience and forgiveness and takes our filthy lives and presents them perfect before God.

REACT

1. Are there "gray sins," or "little sins"?

2. Are there any "little gray sins" worth missing heaven for? Explain.

3. Can you ever achieve perfection? How?



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*C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985), vol. 2, p. 493.

Lesson 13, September 17-23

This Is Your Life



“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!” (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3, NIV).

Sunday, September 17

Why?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Rev. 20:1-5

"Why, God! Why?" Mike cried as he rose from his seat and turned toward God. Mike, Tonya, and I had asked to speak with God, and now here we were, seated at a table somewhere in a remote corner of the universe.

The scenes of our lives since giving them to the Lord appeared before us—scenes of pain and heartache. An image of me, pleading with God for my sister, helplessly, as I watched her throw her eternity away. A scene of a funeral—it was Tonya's father. In the back Tonya was embracing her husband, tears streaming down her face. She was 8 1/2 months pregnant. This would have been his first grandchild.

The third scene was Mike. His brother in New York had called him. Mike slammed down the phone and ran out to the dock to be alone. He pounded his fist on the wood and let out a cry of anguish. He had just learned his mother had cancer. She was only 40 years old.

By this time a tear had worked its way down the face of God. He stood up and said, "Now look into My heart." Out of the screen came a three-dimensional hologram. We were behind a cloud so dark not even light could pierce through it. To the right was an opening in

the cloud. We moved over to peer through, and went numb with what we saw—Jesus. He was hanging on a cross with gaping wounds on His hands and feet. They oozed with blood and were surrounded by flies. Blood poured down the sides of the cross—blood from His back where He had been beaten with hooked chains that tore out flesh with every stroke. Then Jesus cried out with an agony that pierced the cloud, "My Father! Why has Thou forsaken me?"

"Son!" God cried out beside us from behind the cloud, with an agony that matched that of Jesus.

"I'm right here, Son!"

Then we realized Jesus could not hear His Father, or see Him, or feel Him. We watched God cry silently as He watched His Son die.

Instantly we were back at the table, trembling from the hologram that seemed so real. We looked at one another, then ran to God, who gently scooped us up into His arms because He knew. All of us knew. We were in this together.

God is giving us a thousand years. A millennium to answer all the why's—a millennium to see that God wasn't the cause of our pain. He's as much a victim of this cosmic war as we are. He is also the end—the end of all sin and its devastation. He's the answer.

by Karen Baez

Karen Baez writes regularly as a hobby and hopes to use her talent to touch the lives of young people attending the University of Florida, Gainesville.

Millennium as Judgment Scene

LOGOS

Theme: *A careful study of the one thousand years of Revelation 20 is essential for several reasons: (1) It enhances our understanding of the final vindication of God's character at the end of the great controversy; (2) indicates the reward of the righteous, and their work after the second coming of Jesus; and (3) correct understanding of the millennium keeps us from unscriptural teachings, such as the doctrine of a premillennial rapture, and the theory of a "second chance" during the millennium.*

The doctrine of the millennium does not hold interest to most people today, but a hundred years ago it created a great deal of interest and debate. The discussion harked back to a clergyman named Daniel Whitby who wrote a book with a title that read—take a deep breath—"A Treatise of the True Millennium Showing That It Is Not a Reign of Persons Raised From the Dead, but of the Church Flourishing Gloriously for a Thousand Years After the Conversion of the Jews, and the Flowing in of All Nations to Them Thus Converted to the Christian Faith."¹ At least everyone knew where Whitby stood after reading this title.

While the word *millennium* does not spark immediate interest, try talking to a follower of Jerry Falwell or others of like per-

suasion about giving the gospel to the Jews and you will find them talking about the Jews' conversion and a new temple in Jerusalem. Some will even give specific dates for the tribulation. Their prophetic interpretation even enters into their politics. Films are made about pilotless airplanes careening down from the sky and driverless cars crashing on the freeway when the secret rapture comes. Many of these ideas can be traced back directly to Daniel Whitby, whose views were a radical departure from what the church had taught for centuries.

What do Adventists believe on this subject?

Most Adventists recognize that almost every major doctrine of the Seventy-day Adventist Church, to be rightly understood, must be seen in the light of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. This is particularly true of the judgment and the millennium—indeed, the millennium is part of the judgment scene.

1. The End of the Pre-Advent Judgment Marks the Beginning of the Millennium (read Daniel 7:9, 10, 26, 27)

When Satan rebelled, the whole universe felt the trauma. An unimaginable sense of shock throbbled through the whole creation of God. Thirty-three percent of the angels handed in their credentials and chose disaffection. They "abandoned their proper abode" (Jude 6, NASB).

by Lyndon K. McDowell

Lyndon K. McDowell is the pastor of the Olney Seventh-day Adventist Church, Olney, Maryland, and editor of Ministry Tape-of-the-Month.

The scene of activity then shifted to this earth. Like some master magician, Satan created an illusion for reality, fantasy for truth, bondage for freedom, death for life; and Adam and Eve surrendered their dominion to him.

It says something for the rule of law in the universe that the consequences of that surrender were recognized and accepted. Can you imagine what a shadow his presence must have cast over the assembly when the smirking Satan took his place as Planet Earth's new representative! Yet no one denied him a seat. This fact alone tells us that there were ramifications to his revolt that will remain a mystery until the Lord comes.

For two thousand years heaven bided its time. Then, "when the time had fully come, God sent his Son . . ." (Gal. 4:4, NIV). Jesus invaded this world. He came "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners" and "to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18, NIV). He came to bring reality in place of fantasy. To bring life instead of death. But how strange it is that people still cling to illusions.

Simone Weil wrote with penetrating analysis: "Nothing is so beautiful, nothing is so continually fresh and surprising, so full of sweet and perpetual ecstasy, as the good; no desert is so dreary, monotonous and boring as evil. But with fantasy it's the other way round. Fictional good is boring and flat, while fictional evil is varied, intriguing, attractive and full of charm."² Satan's fantasies still deceive men and women. With chimeras for truth he still leads them down the path of ruin and death.

But Jesus came to bring life in place of death. "While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6, 8, NASB).

The choice given to Adam and Eve is given to us. If we will accept the reality of God's love in Christ, we are clothed in a garment of righteousness and are given again the kingdom that was lost. The pre-Advent judgment is to decide, in the face of Satan's strident claims, who may be "counted worthy" (Luke 21:36, NKJV). Because men have accepted the robe of Christ's righteousness, the X-ray of the law can find no sickness of sin. They "stand before the law without shame or remorse"³ and are welcomed back into the commonwealth of God.

2. The Millennium Enables the Saints to Participate in the Judgment of the Wicked (read Revelation 20:1-4)

Now we see a reversal of roles. The people who have been under investigation are now the investigators. Satan the accuser is now the accused. The new citizens reign "with Christ for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4, NASB). The question to be answered in the pre-Advent judgment was "How can these former subjects of Satan be allowed into the kingdom of God?" The question to be answered now is why Satan and those who have chosen to accept his delusions should be excluded from citizenship. "Do you not know," asks Paul incredulously, "that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:2, 3, NASB). The final decisions of that court echo through the whole creation and meet with the universal acclaim: "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? . . . For Your judgments have been manifested" (Rev. 15:4, NKJV).

Where will the final judgment occur? Who will be the judge? Who will be judged? How will they be

judged? What is the outcome of this judgment?

3. The Resurrection and Final Destruction of the Wicked Takes Place at the End of the Millennium (read Revelation 20:7-15)

The universe has no question about God's judgments, but how many question them now! As this is written North America is in the midst of a presidential election campaign. By the time it is read the election will be history. Readers in other countries, if at all interested, were probably puzzled and amused by the American system. But those in North America who listened to the speeches cannot help noticing the use made of caricature by both parties. Cartoonists use the same method. Grottesque representations and exaggerations capture the imagination and implant distrust in the mind. The resurrection of the wicked and their subsequent punishment by fire has suffered under the same type of distortion at the hands of verbal cartoonists and proponents of an eternal hell. You have probably seen and heard their stories. God is pictured as saying "If you don't do what I want you to do I'll kill you. What is more I will later dig you

up and burn you."

Is God being vindictive? Absolutely not. Bear in mind that the Biblical account of Satan's rebellion cries aloud with evidence of ramifications that are far beyond our ken. We get only a peep through the curtain of a drama being played out on a vast stage. Only when we sit in the heavenly court will we begin to know the depths of the mystery of iniquity and the vastness of the plan of salvation. It will provide a theme for years of exciting research.

Even in the courts of men the prisoner is brought back into court to hear his sentence. The evidence is reviewed. The guilt is acknowledged. The sentence is handed down. So it will be in the court of the universe. Then, finally, when all the evidence has been produced, truth can no longer be denied, and at the name of Jesus every knee bows and every tongue confesses "that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11, NASB). I want to be there and rejoice in that confession, don't you?

After studying this week's lesson how do you feel about heaven, hell, and judgment? Why? Will these feelings change your actions? Why or why not?

1. LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D. C. : Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), vol. 2, p. 650.

2. Quoted by Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 46.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 51.

Tuesday, September 19

Satan's Future

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 20:1-3

For six thousand years Satan has carried on his warfare against Christ and His church. Through the use of deceit and persecution, Lucifer and his angels have endeavored to lead astray the children of God. And in order that the universe may know the true nature of sin, God has allowed Satan to go unchecked in his wicked course. However, as Ellen White vividly describes, there comes a day when God will vindicate His law, and Satan will be forced to contemplate his course of action.

"The whole earth appears like a desolate wilderness. The ruins of cities and villages destroyed by the earthquake, uprooted trees, ragged rocks thrown out by the sea or torn out of the earth itself, are scattered over its surface, while vast caverns mark the spot where the mountains have been rent from their foundations."¹

"Here is to be the home of Satan with his evil angels for a thousand years. Limited to the earth, he will not have access to other worlds to tempt and annoy those who have never fallen. It is in this sense that he is bound: there are none remaining, upon whom he can exercise his power. He is wholly cut off from the work of deception and ruin

which for so many centuries has been his sole delight."²

"For a thousand years, Satan will wander to and fro in the desolate earth to behold the results of his rebellion against the law of God. During this time his sufferings are intense. Since his fall his life of unceasing activity has banished reflection; but he is now deprived of his power and left to contemplate the part which he has acted since first he rebelled against the government of heaven, and to look forward with trembling and terror to the dreadful future when he must suffer for all the evil that he has done and be punished for the sins that he has caused to be committed."³

Satan's plight is distressing, but as the Scriptures reveal, to a child of God the captivity of Satan will bring joy and happiness. "It shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth" (Isa. 14:3-6).

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 657.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 659.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 660.

by Denise Foster

Denise Foster is a registered nurse at Orlando Regional Medical Center in Orlando, Florida.

Wednesday, September 20

The Evidence . . . You Be the Judge!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 20:1-15

Paul states that the saints will judge the world: "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:3, NIV). When will the saints judge the world? And which angels will be judged?

The investigative judgment began at the close of the 2300 days in 1844. Christ entered the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary and appeared before God. It is here that the book of life is opened. Only the names of those who profess to be the people of God will be reviewed (Rev. 20:12; GC 480). "God will bring every deed into judgment . . . whether it is good or evil" (Eccl. 12:14, NIV). The sons and daughters of God who have truly repented will be found pardoned in Christ and worthy of heaven (GC 483; Rev. 3:5; Matt. 10:32).

When all the names have been reviewed, numbered, and sealed, Christ will leave the sanctuary (EW 280). It is then that the third angel's message will be completed and the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn (GC 610, 611). This is the close of the investigative judgment (probation) and the beginning of the time of trouble (EW 281; Rev. 14:9, 10; 16:17-21).

Following the time of trouble, Christ returns for His chosen people (Isa. 25:9; EW 286). Christ will call both the living saints and

those who rest in their graves, to be caught up with Him in the clouds. This marks the beginning of the millennium (Rev. 20:4).

After entering the Holy City, the saints and Christ together sit in judgment over the wicked (Dan. 7:22). The names, the evil deeds, and the sentence of Satan, his angels, and the wicked, are recorded in the book of death (EW 52, 53). It is during this time that we will judge angels and the world.

At the close of the millennium, Christ and His people will return to earth, where the wicked dead will be raised to view Jesus returning in all His glory (Rev. 20:7, 13). The wicked will assemble about the Holy City (Rev. 20:9). Before all created intelligences, Christ brings to consciousness every sin committed by the wicked and their just sentence without uttering a word (the executive judgment). The wicked fall and worship Christ with praise. Yet it is not love or loyalty that causes their action, it is the force of truth (GC 666, 669). "Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy has now been made plain. . . . God's wisdom, His justice, and His goodness stand fully vindicated."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 670.

REACT

Why do you suppose the saints participate with Christ in judging Satan, the evil angels, and the wicked?

by Chuck Badger

Chuck Badger is a senior forensic-science and chemistry major at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida.

Thursday, September 21

Christians on Trial

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 20:1-15

Ever since God established the human race on this planet we have been bound here. Despite a few weak attempts at space travel we have associated with no other beings in God's universe.

Christians must show in their finite lives a taste of God's infinite love. Discouraged Christians and non-Christians alike are looking to us for an example. Good Christians have a responsibility to these people to lead them back to "the straight and narrow path."

People cannot be led or influenced by any means other than what they see or hear. Salvation may not be based on the deeds Christians perform, but those works influence the decisions that non-Christians make for or against Christ.

People who claim to be Christians are therefore "on stage" at all times. The people they associate with will be watching to see how they handle trying and stressful situations. If a person claims to be a Christian and is out among people, *he or she is witnessing*.

New Christians have an added advantage. They typically have more zeal for witnessing and watching what they do. This is fortunate since people will be espe-

cially watching them. People want to see what happens when a person becomes a "born again" Christian.

Unfortunately, as time wears on, some Christians become static and passive and lax about their beliefs. This is the most dangerous time. These Christians should concentrate on rekindling their zeal for the Lord. It will help them and those who are watching their example.

Fortunately, Christians have a perfect example to follow—the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus was what all earth-bound Christians ought to become. We may never be able to attain the same level as Jesus, but that should not prevent us from trying.

In today's world, many Christians are being taken advantage of. Their kind and loving attitude toward other people has made them appear weak and spineless. We must look toward our example, Jesus. Jesus is the respected leader of people. A "weak" person could not fill His shoes. He was and still is strong. Being a Christian is no excuse to let people walk on you. If anything, it shows a Christian must be strong and upstanding.

Christians are a breed apart from those in the world, but we must appeal to the people of the world in ways they will understand.

by Paul Sills

Paul Sills is a business-administration major at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida.

Millennial Musings

OPINION

Key Text: Revelation 20:1-15

The topic of the millennium brings with it many opinions concerning its purpose—most of which are false. For instance, some believe that there will be a premillennial secret rapture, and others that the millennium offers a second chance, as it were, for the wicked. Neither of these ideas is correct. The real purpose of the millennium is twofold. First: to allow the righteous to judge the wicked, and second: to allow the wicked to judge themselves.

Whoa, what was that? You mean we (not to be presumptuous, but we do expect to be saved, do we not?) are going to judge others? “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1). No, we are not really judging others as in a courtroom *per se*. Well, why don’t we look at how the Bible presents the purpose of the millennium? The Bible breaks the *period* of the millennium down into three principle parts: before, during, and after the millennium.

Just before the millennium, Jesus comes to earth (does not touch it, however), collects the righteous living, resurrects the righteous dead, and takes them all to heaven with Him. The living wicked are destroyed, and the wicked dead remain in their graves. Satan is bound on the

earth (Rev. 20:1, 2, 5). Upon arriving in heaven, the righteous will begin to wonder why some of their “godly” friends are not in heaven, and why some “evil sinners” are. God will reply. “See for yourselves, the books are open, and that is why you are here.” So for one thousand years the righteous judge, as it were, the deeds of their friends by looking in heaven’s records and satisfying their curiosity concerning the absence of some, and the presence of others. Hence, the first purpose of the millennium. Jesus has judged all people for eternal life or eternal death, which can be evidenced by the fact that the righteous are in heaven and the wicked are all dead on earth. The righteous in heaven are merely confirming Jesus’ judgments so that no one can claim that Jesus was unfair.

After the one thousand years are over, Jesus, the righteous, and the New Jerusalem return to the earth.

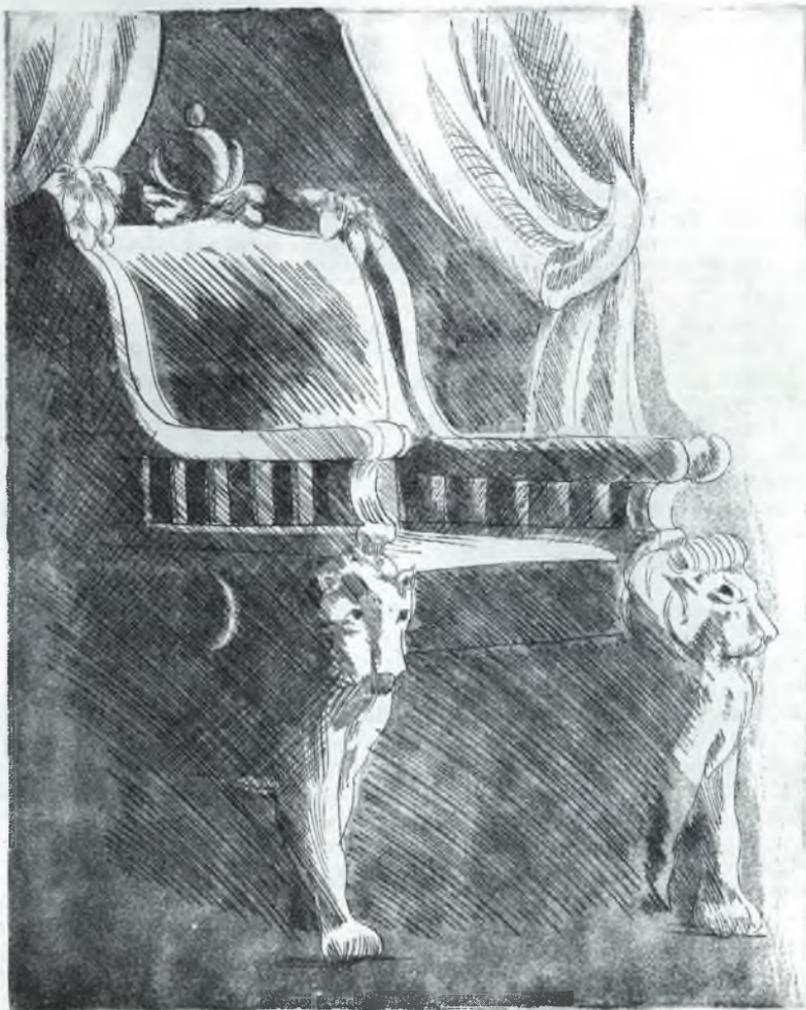
Satan is unbound and gathers all the wicked of the earth in a “last-ditch” attempt to overthrow God and the righteous. Of course they are defeated by God, but before they are exiled to final destruction, the books of heaven are transformed into video, and the wicked watch their lives pass before them. God shows them all the opportunities He gave to repent, but they did not. Now they are convinced that God *is* fair.

by J. Darin Stewart

J. Darin Stewart is a sophomore accounting major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Lesson 14, September 24-30

God Himself Shall Be With Them



“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God’ ” (Revelation 21:3, NIV).

Heavenly Sightseeing

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Rev. 21:1—22:21

Imagine yourself on a tour bus, and a guide is pointing out sights along the way. These sights are no ordinary sights, and this is no ordinary tour. Not in your wildest dreams could you imagine the things you see on this tour.

Straight ahead is the wall to a city. It is taller and wider and longer than anything mortals have seen and it is built on twelve foundations of rare gems. Now that's something you don't see every day!

You look around to see the shadow from those impressive golden walls, but find none. Looking up to see whether it is high noon, you find no sun. Puzzled, you ask your guide for an explanation: "The glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23, NASB).

Nearing the city, you notice gates of incredible size. The tour guide continues with his narrative, "There are twelve gates and each is made of only one pearl." The tour group oohs and aahs. Walking along, you look down and realize the streets approaching the city are purest gold.

Entering the city, you notice a river running through the center.

It is the most crystal-clear and pure river you have ever seen. The guide informs you that "the river of life proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

"Now approaching on your right side is one of our main attractions," the guide pipes in. "In the midst of the street and on either side of the river is a tree. Now a tree growing on two sides of a river might be awesome in and of itself, but that is not where it ends. No, my friends. This tree bears twelve different fruit and it yields its fruit every month, and we're not through yet. The leaves are for the healing of nations."

After marveling at all these wonders you may get the yearning to stay and you may ask the tour guide, "How can one become a resident of this splendid city?" He responds, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14).

You may want to make a reservation for this tour because it is a most wonderful experience. Few will ever know the beauty it has to offer, but there is room for all. The sights can be seen by those who know and love the Lamb of God.

by Jon Finch

Jon Finch is a student at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in Kirksville, Missouri.

Monday, September 25

Making All Things New

LOGOS

Theme: *The book of Revelation, and the Bible, conclude in the way that we would expect—with sin gone from the universe and the earth restored to its Edenic beauty. The difficulties of this life, however severe, are minor compared with the total joy and fulfillment of the afterlife. “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).*

1. A New Heaven and a New Earth (read Revelation 21:1-5)

The book of Revelation has built to a dramatic end. Now the focus of the book turns to God's new creation. The new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1—22:5) is described in great detail. For instance, the sea as we know it will no longer exist (Rev. 21:1). This probably had special significance for John on the island of Patmos. Cut off from fellow believers on the mainland, the exiled prophet must have longed for a heaven where the sea would no longer separate friends and loved ones. But this is just the beginning of the good news. Next, God's Holy City, the new Jerusalem, comes out of heaven “prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev. 21:2, NIV). A city beyond our imagination. A city be-decked with splendor and greatness, elegance and grace.

In Revelation 21:3 we are told

not only that this wonderful city is ours but that God will dwell with us: This is the God “who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16, NIV), the God who caused the Israelites at Mount Sinai to tremble with fear and say to Moses, “‘Do not have God speak to us or we will die’” (Ex. 20:19, NIV). What an awesome declaration of God's love for us! Not only will God be with us but He explains that pain, crying, mourning, and death will be a thing of the past. We shall be reunited with loved ones and echo the words of the apostle Paul: “‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’” (1 Cor. 15:55, NIV). Life will not end, but will be totally changed from what we now know. “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true’” (Rev. 21:5, NIV).

How do you envision the new heaven and new earth? Is it someplace where one strums a harp and plays “cloud tag” or is it a “happening place”? (See 1 Cor. 2:9.)

2. Salvation Is Complete (read Rev. 21:6-8, 27; 22:11-15)

When the work of salvation is over, Jesus declares “It is done” (Rev. 21:6). The righteous are to enjoy the new heaven and new earth with Him while evildoers perish in the fiery lake of burning

by Jeffrey Coston

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sulfur. "This is the second death" (Rev. 21:8, NIV. Compare with Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6 for clarification.)

Today, much of society is pluralistic. Almost anything is accepted as long as it doesn't bother too many people. No matter how deceitful or shameful the practice, people claim it is their "right" to do as they please. Not so with heaven. God is selective: "Nothing impure will ever enter it" (Rev. 21:27, NIV; see also Rev. 21:8; 22:15). There will be nothing in heaven to spoil it. No falsehood, slander, stealing, immorality, or rebellion will mar our future home. Nothing that leads to death can be allowed in God's new world.

A coach once said, "Practice doesn't make perfect, practice makes permanent." Can Christians be pluralistic? If so, to what extent? (See Heb. 10:26, 27; 1 Cor. 9:20-23.)

3. The New Jerusalem (read Rev. 21:9—22:6)

John is taken in vision to a high mountain where the prophet can see the Holy City of God descend from heaven. He recounts the events that then take place as best he can. It must have been breathtaking. "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal" (Rev. 21:11, NIV). As the city is described its dimensions dwarf the senses. The city is found to be about 1,400 miles long (12,000 stadia, Rev. 21:16, NIV), and the same distance in height and width. The wall around the city is about 200 feet thick (144 cubits, Rev. 21:17, NIV). Jewels decorate the wall and foundation, while the street and city itself are pure,

transparent gold. Each of the city's twelve gates is made of a single pearl.

This word-picture is comparative. Although the cities of the world sparkle with architectural triumphs and may have beautiful botanical gardens and parks, they will dim in comparison to God's city. This account serves to make us aware of that. God has planned the New Jerusalem so there is room enough for all who have set their minds on things above. He will be our temple, He will supply our light from His glory. He will give us fruit from the tree of life, heal the sorrow of people from all nations with its leaves. He will provide crystal clear water, living water, to any who thirst.

Are the river of life and tree of life mentioned here symbolic or literal or both? (See John 7:37; Gen. 2:9.)

4. Jesus Is Coming! (read Rev. 22:7-21)

At the conclusion of the Revelation John is overcome with the prophecy's message. Three times he hears the words, "I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20, NIV). He is told once again who will and will not be in the kingdom of God. He is also told that it is Jesus (Rev. 22:16) who has sent this message through an angel. Then, a final warning: If anyone changes the message of this book his share in God's kingdom will be taken away. John responds. He longs to see his Lord and Saviour. His desire has echoed down through the centuries. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

If "home is where the heart is," where is yours? (See Matt. 6:19-21; Heb. 11:13-16.)

Tuesday, September 26

Heavenly Things

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Philippians 4:8

This is a portion of a letter Ellen G. White wrote to her son on his birthday.

“Professed Christians, worldly Christians, are unacquainted with heavenly things. They will never be brought to the gates of the New Jerusalem to engage in exercises which have not hitherto specially interested them. They have not trained their minds to delight in devotion and in meditation upon things of God and heaven. How, then, can they engage in the services of heaven? how delight in the spiritual, the pure, the holy in heaven, when it was not a special delight to them upon earth? The very atmosphere there will be purity itself. But they are unacquainted with it all. When in the world, pursuing their worldly vocations, they knew just where to take hold and just what to do. The lower order of faculties being in so constant exercise, grew, while the higher, nobler powers of the mind, not being strengthened by use, are incapable of awaking at once to spiritual exercises. Spiritual things are not discerned, because they are viewed with world-loving eyes, which cannot estimate the value and glory of the divine above the temporal.

“The mind must be educated and disciplined to love purity. A love for spiritual things should be encouraged; yea, must be en-

couraged, if you would grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. Desires for goodness and true holiness are right so far as they go; but if you stop here, they will avail nothing. Good purposes are right, but will prove of no avail unless resolutely carried out. Many will be lost while hoping and desiring to be Christians; but they made no earnest effort, therefore they will be weighed in the balances and found wanting. The will must be exercised in the right direction. I *will* be a wholehearted Christian. I *will* know the length and breadth, the height and depth, of perfect love. Listen to the words of Jesus: ‘Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.’ Ample provisions are made by Christ to satisfy the soul that hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

“The pure element of love will expand the soul for higher attainments, for increased knowledge of divine things, so that it will not be satisfied short of the fullness. Most professed Christians have no sense of the spiritual strength they might obtain were they as ambitious, zealous, and persevering to gain a knowledge of divine things as they are to obtain the paltry, perishable things of this life. The masses professing to be Christians have been satisfied to be spiritual dwarfs. They have no disposition to make it their object to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; hence god-

by Tom Wilson

Dr. Wilson is an associate professor of surgery/urology at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in Kirksville, Missouri.

liness is a hidden mystery to them, they cannot understand it. They know not Christ by experiential knowledge.

“Let those men and women who are satisfied with their dwarfed, crippled condition in divine things be suddenly transported to heaven and for an instant witness the high, the holy state of perfection that ever abides there—every soul filled with love; every countenance beaming with joy; enchanting music in melodious strains rising in honor of God and the Lamb; and ceaseless streams of light flowing upon the saints from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne, and from the Lamb; and let them realize that there is higher and greater joy yet to experience, for the more they receive of the enjoyment of God, the more is their capacity increased to rise higher in eternal enjoyment, and thus continue to receive new and greater supplies from the ceaseless sources of

glory and bliss inexpressible—could such persons, I ask, mingle with the heavenly throng, participate in their songs, and endure the pure, exalted, transporting glory that emanates from God and the Lamb? Oh, no! their probation was lengthened for years that they might learn the language of heaven, that they might become ‘partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.’ But they had a selfish business of their own to engage the powers of their minds and the energies of their beings. They could not afford to serve God unreservedly and make this a business. Worldly enterprises must come first and take the best of their powers, and a transient thought is devoted to God. Are such to be transformed after the final decision: ‘He that is holy, let him be holy still,’ ‘he which is filthy, let him be filthy still’? Such a time is coming.”*

**Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 265-267.

Wednesday, September 27

The Ultimate Experience

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 21 and 22

As we read the last two chapters of Revelation, we are presented with a picture—not of symbols and representations—but of reality. To the architect and carpenter—the city described is real; to the horticulturalist—the tree of life is real; to the conservationist—the river of life flows unpolluted; to the jeweler and miner—the streets of gold, foundations of precious stones, and the gates of pearl are all so very real; to the physician—the absence of sickness and death brings wonderful satisfaction, for there is health and wellness for all time; to the homeless—it is home; to the lonely—it is a real family that will be there forever. In all our imagination we cannot fully or adequately project the grandeur, beauty, and love that will be ours, as God's children, to enjoy—for now we only see “through a glass, darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Many books have been written that break down these chapters of Revelation into a verse-by-verse study providing a greater knowledge than can be presented in this lesson. Therefore, we choose to emphasize only a couple of aspects taken from the Spirit of Prophecy dealing with the unfolding of knowledge throughout eternity and God's dwelling with the saints.

1. For those who love knowledge and learning, heaven will be

the ultimate experience. Not only will you be able to seek knowledge, but you will have understanding, as well. “All the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God's redeemed. . . . They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God's handiwork.”¹¹ “Heaven is a school; its field of study, the universe; its teacher, the Infinite One.”¹² “The redeemed throng will range from world to world, and much of their time will be employed in searching out the mysteries of redemption. And throughout the whole stretch of eternity, this subject will be continually opening to their minds. The privileges of those who overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony are beyond comprehension.”¹³

2. “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’ ” “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:3, 22, NIV).

Throughout time the tabernacle and Temple symbolized God's dwelling place among men. It also represented the need for a communicating link or mediator on the sinner's behalf—a ministration of redemption. In heaven there will no longer exist sin or sinner, and therefore the work of

by Lisa Legere and Debbie McCormick

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meditation is no longer necessary. The children of God will stand in all holiness and purity before God and the Lamb, holding face-to-face communion with them.

“The work of redemption will be complete. In the place where sin abounded, God’s grace much more abounds. The earth itself, the very field that Satan claims as his, is to be not only ransomed but exalted. Our little world, under the curse of sin the one dark blot in His glorious creation, will be honored above all other worlds in the universe of God. Here, where the Son of God tabernacled in humanity;

where the King of glory lived and suffered and died—here, when He shall make all things new, the tabernacle of God shall be with men, . . . ‘and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.’ And through endless ages as the redeemed walk in the light of the Lord, they will praise Him for His unspeakable Gift—Immanuel, ‘God with us.’”⁴

REACT

What further analogies can you draw from Revelation 21 and 22? Example: How might the gates of pearl be a symbol of trials turned to triumph?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 677.

2. *Education*, p. 301.

3. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 990.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 26.

Thursday, September 28

Can Heaven Wait?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 21:3, 4

Have you ever wondered what you are going to do for eternity? We probably all have, and when there is a spiritual ebb in our lives the prospects can be daunting! Do we really want to go to heaven, or do we just want to escape hell?

For those whose lives have been a struggle, the promise that "the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4) is wonderful. However, for those of us whose lives have been easy, who enjoy this earth, that can be a scary thought. So what should we do to become excited about heaven and eternal life with God?

1. Pray and study. Get reacquainted with Jesus. If you are going to live with Him for eternity, then you had better make sure that you like Him. Once this is accomplished, the task of becoming excited about heaven is easy.

2. Reevaluate your priorities. First, make God so important that *not* being with Him is the worst possible experience. Second, ask Him to remove all distractions that would keep you from reaching your ultimate goal.

3. Let sorrow touch you. Really let the problems of this

world sink in—don't just gloss over them and pretend they do not affect you. Once you become involved with someone else's pain you will renew your efforts for bringing the Second Coming to fruition.

4. Use your imagination. We are told over and over again that we cannot even imagine the good things God is going to provide. So try—imagine the very best! Then know that you are not even close!

5. Share with others. Talking to someone about something good gets everyone excited. See what they can imagine about heaven. While sharing ideas with someone who has thought about the new earth is stimulating, sharing with someone who has never thought much about heaven is where the real excitement comes in.

If we learn really to appreciate, by becoming involved with others, what God has done for us and start imagining the wonders of heaven and sharing our joy, it will not be long before we quit trying to avoid hell and begin wanting to win heaven.

REACT

What other ways can you think of to become excited about heaven?

What are some of your personal dreams for the new earth?

by Doug and Tracy Tacket

The Tackets are students at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in Kirksville, Missouri.

Something Wonderful

OPINION

Key Text: Revelation 21:4

I was 21 years old and should have known better. Great financial sacrifices were made by my family so I could study oceanography in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. After six weeks on land, the next six weeks would be spent sailing the North Atlantic.

After only four weeks I had squandered all my funds for the entire summer. Luckily, Bob, a fellow student, invited me to travel to Boston with him to earn some money by painting a house. After a day of hard work I anxiously anticipated our payment. But to my dismay the owner informed us we would be paid next week.

I was crushed. I was in Boston, more than 1,000 miles from my friends, my family, and my home—with nowhere to turn. I had foolishly spent every cent for which my family had worked so hard. I had lost it all. I felt so guilty. My growling stomach grimly reminded me that I had not eaten and I had no money to buy food. I had hit bottom.

Sadly, I set out walking the streets of Boston. Tears filled my eyes as I was overwhelmed with guilt and shame. In my despair I prayed, "Lord, please help me. I have foolishly squandered my

money and now I have nowhere to go. If only I had five dollars I would be OK. Would You please send me just five dollars?"

Without hesitation, I began looking for the gift I hoped the Lord would send. Continuing to pray, I walked another block and then another, but still no money. Then, on the fourth block, something wonderful happened! It was as if the gates of heaven had opened. On the sidewalk right in front of me was a five-dollar bill!

I immediately recalled the text in Matthew 7:11 of how our Father in heaven wishes to give good things to those who ask Him. I remembered the precious promises of the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:2-12) and the priceless assurance of Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (NKJV), or as my Bible's marginal reference says, "And saves such as are crushed in spirit."

We live in a world of pain and sorrow. Soon that will all come to an end. The Lord has something wonderful planned for all who seek Him. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4, NKJV).

by Glen E. Leer

Glen Leer is a student at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in Kirksville, Missouri.

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E.G. WHITE



*It's more than a health message.
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A family of four from England, had been vacationing in Florida for about three weeks when the father began feeling ill. When his condition worsened, he was admitted to Florida Hospital; tests showed he'd suffered a brain hemorrhage.

One of the nurses on the man's unit learned that her patient's son would have his fifth birthday in three days. Even though, their family was going through a tough time, the nurse knew that every child needs to celebrate his birthday. So the nurses on the unit planned a party complete with cake and gifts. The following Sunday, a Florida Hospital social worker treated both sons to a day at Disney World. "The loving care we received at Florida Hospital helped us through our crisis," the man's wife said. The staff worked on my husband's physical recovery and our whole family's emotional one."

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