

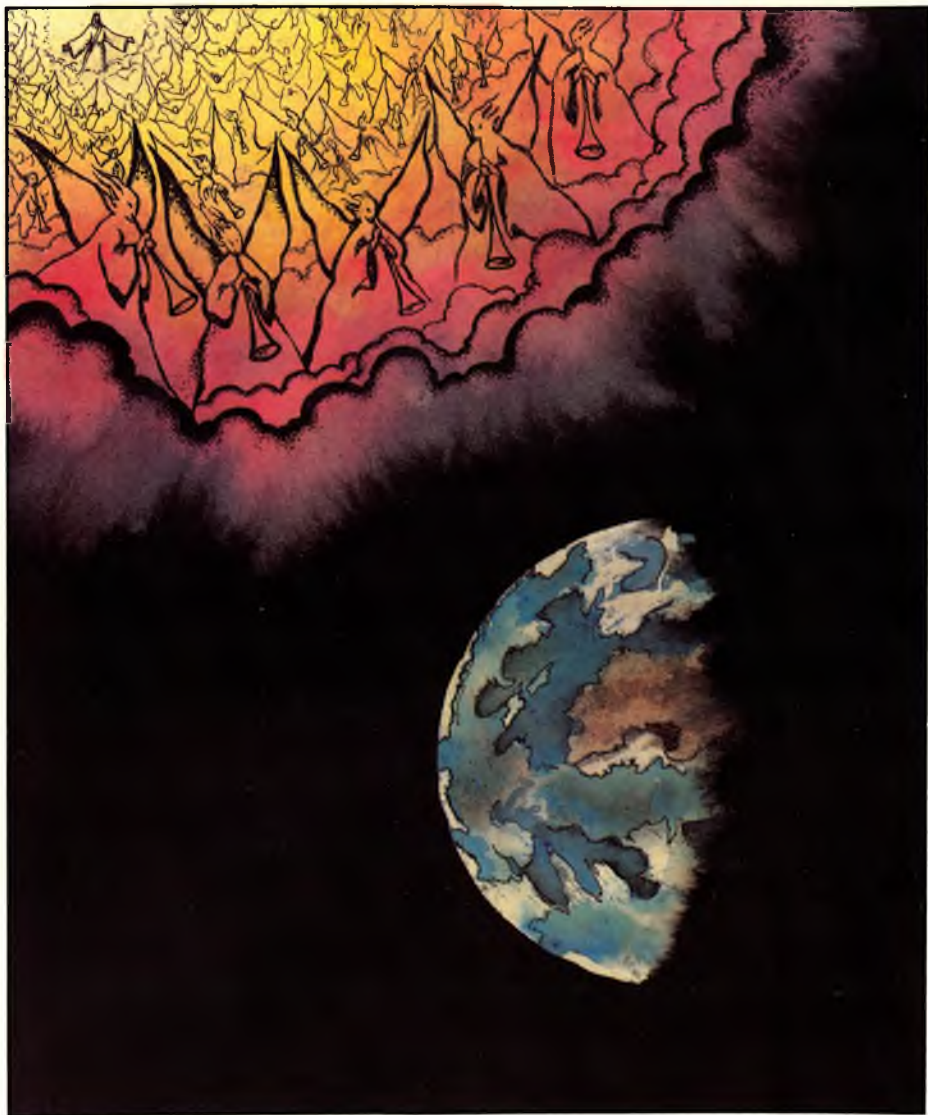
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication

April-June 1989

Apocalypse Now

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

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THIS QUARTER'S ARTIST

After spending many years working as an artist and graphic designer for various advertising agencies and publishing houses, Kathryn Searing had the opportunity to travel to South Africa where she taught art, oil painting, and multi-media production as a missionary at Helderberg College.

"While I was there," Kathryn explained, "the Lord gave me a deep desire to continue working for Him in missionary service. Reading the Spirit of Prophecy, especially *Ministry of Healing*, has brought me to the realization that the Lord has called all of us to His service wherever we may be.

"Although I thank God for the artistic abilities he has given me, I also realize that I must expand my fields of knowledge and learn the

practical art of coming close to people so that I can meet their real needs.

"In His providence, the Lord has led me to Uchee Pines Institute in Seale, Alabama, where I am learning such skills as nutrition, natural healing remedies, literature evangelism, and Bible work.

"It surely appears that Christ's method alone gives true success in reaching people through healing the sick, and practicing the love of God in your personal life."

Presently Kathryn is rejoicing in the Lord; working as the managing editor of *Emphasis Your Health* magazine, produced by Uchee Pines; and doing freelance art work for the Review and Herald and Pacific Press publishing houses.

Lesson 1, March 26—April 1

Encounter With the Divine



“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near” (Rev. 1:3, NIV).

Sunday, March 26

The Alpha and Omega

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 1:1-8

In the far depths of eternity past in the black circle of infinite space, a Being breathed, lived, and moved in the universe: the Infinite entity of three in one. It always had been; it always would be.

But there came a time when the death of the God-man sent a shock-wave through the universe. Angels cried out, beings of perfection wept, and all of nature groaned. But the human race stood silent and bewildered, unable to grasp the full import of what the death of the Infinite meant, or even what had taken place.

Still we are unable to grasp the concept of the Infinite. Everything we know on earth has a beginning and an end. When I was a little girl I used to close my eyes tightly and think very hard, trying to imagine that God has always been. I often found myself thinking of a huge glowing circle in the universe, which I could follow for hours and never reach the beginning—because there simply wasn't one. To me God was the infinite circle, bright and never-ending. However, I usually became so dizzy from the strain on my imagination that I would have to open my eyes and stop thinking about it.

Have you ever tried to understand the concept of infinity? God is the personification of infinity.

He says in Revelation 1:8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, . . . who is, and who was, and who is to come" (NIV). He is the beginning and the end. All things and all time are encompassed by Him. He is the center of all things because infinity stretches out to the same limitlessness before and behind Him. What a concept!

But could humanity grasp it? God wanted Himself to be known and understood by mankind. The question was how to reveal Himself in terms understandable to limited human comprehension. It would have to be a revelation of both great clarity and subtlety, which could impress upon the human mind the concept of Eternal God.

This week we begin the study of this Revelation: the Revelation of Jesus Christ. But can we understand it fully? or just as mankind stood dumb at His death, do we also sit and look blankly at the pages of His revelation, bewildered by symbols, images, and prophecies we do not understand? There is a lot more to Revelation than beasts, and seals, and time prophecies. As Adventists we tend to emphasize doctrine and prophecy in revelation so much that the Person of the book is sometimes forgotten.

As you begin reading Revelation this week, think about the Infinite Circle who wants to reveal Himself to you and encompass you in His love.

by Laurie Procell

Laurie Procell graduated from Newbold College with a B.A. degree in English in 1988.

Christ With Us at All Times

LOGOS

Theme: *The message of the book of Revelation was given by God to enable you to prepare for the second coming of Jesus. Christ's purpose in passing on the message was to awaken and nurture hope in His soon return, and to inspire spiritual dependence upon Him as the means of making ready for the Advent. Those who read, hear, and live in harmony with the prophetic message are assured of the divine blessing awaiting the faithful at the end of time.*

The theme of the message of Revelation is twofold: an unfolding of the mysteries of the future, culminating in the glorious triumph of Christ, and an assurance of God's presence with His people now.

1. The Divine Revelation (read Rev. 1:1, 2)

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John" (Rev. 1:1, NIV).

Revelation 1:1 clearly indicates the purpose of the book: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . ." (cf. 1:9; 22:6). The expression "the revelation of Jesus Christ" could either be objective genitive, i.e., Christ is the object revealed in the book and that the great purpose is to make Him known, or subjective genitive, i.e., this is a revelation that Christ makes to

us. It seems that both ideas are possible. However, the crucial question is: Why was a revelation of Jesus Christ needed by the first-century church? Do we need that revelation today?

The book of Revelation was written for people living in hard times. The reigning emperor was Domitian, and emperor worship and persecution were crucial issues for the young church. For the early Christians to read letters written by Domitian in the name of his procurators beginning with such words, "Our Master and our God bids this to be done" (Domitian xiii.2; Loeb ed., Suetonius vol. 2, p. 367), was no easy matter. The church was faced with the fiercest threat that challenged the faith of each Christian. And John himself was banished on the rugged and barren isle of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (1:9, NIV).

The church needed a new revelation of the risen and ascended Lord. John's message was primarily an appeal for staunch resistance to all demands and encroachments of cult and emperor worship. In addition, John says: "Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev. 14:7, NIV; cf. Matt. 4:10), not the goddess Roma or the emperor Domitian. The book of Revelation said to the early Christians and to us: Do not give up! Hold on! Victory is near!

The church received that rev-

by Vassel Kerr

Dr. Vassel Kerr is director of church ministries in the British Union Conference.

elation of Christ. In glorious splendor He revealed Himself and said: "Do not be afraid" (see 1:17).

Are there things or other people that demand our attention and allegiance today? Do we also need an urgent revelation of God?

2. The Divine Blessing (read Rev. 1:3)

"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (1:3, NIV).

"[Revelation] contains so much that is large with immortality and full of glory¹ that no one would want to miss out on it; "such glimpses of the open gates of heaven"² are certainly for those who *read, hear* and "take to heart what is written." One of the blessings of the book of Revelation is that "the connection between God and His people is close and decided."³ Some of the other blessings include Revelation 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:17.

Notice the motivation for reading, hearing, and taking to heart the word of God: "Because the time is near;" the imminence of the event, the soon return of Christ, the speedy fulfillment of prophecy—these provide the motivation for daily Christian living and witnessing.

Give reasons why we should be happy as we study the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation and realize that the coming of our Lord is near.

3. The Divine Source of the Message (read Rev. 1:4, 5)

"Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne" (1:4, NIV).

John is describing God the Father. God is the one who exists in the *past, present, and future*, as set forth in the phrase "who is, and who was, and who is to come."

In a topsy-turvy world the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the discouraged can learn that in their darkest moments God brings grace and peace (*shalom*—"wholeness").

Can we always trust God to take care of our lives? Why? What does the unchanging nature of God say to us in a world of change and decay?

4. The Divine Cleansing (read Rev. 1:5, 6)

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (1:5, NIV).

This seems to be the very core of the book of Revelation: It is the love of God, the vicarious death of Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, the cross, all these meet in the Lamb of God, the focus of Revelation. We are *loosed* (Greek, *luo*; "to loose"), or set free, from the penalty and power of sin. This is made possible by Christ's blood (see Isa. 53:4-6).

Is there a relationship between a lack of assurance, forgiveness, and guilt feelings? (See Ps. 32; cf. Rom. 4:1-9).

5. The Divine Promise (read Rev. 1:1, 8)

"Look, he is coming. . . . So shall it be! Amen." (1:7, NIV).

Revelation 1:7 draws on the imagery of Daniel 7:13 to describe Christ and His imminent second coming. This sustained the early church in their trying times. John uses three important words to express the certainty and urgency of Christ's second coming: (1) *nai*, or "yes," denotes a divine promise (Rev. 22:20; 2 Cor. 1:20). In Revelation 14:13; 16:7 it is used to

confirm what has just been said of the heavenly voice.⁴ (2) *Amen* expresses the truthful acceptance of the promise (Rev. 1:6, 7; 22:21). (3) The Greek adverb *taxu* (22:7, 12, 20) meaning "shortly," or "soon." This is a term of strong affirmation, like the Old English "verily."⁵

Paul expresses the ultimate wish of all Christians: "Come, O Lord!" (1 Cor. 16:22, NIV).

In view of the nearness of the second advent of Christ what are some of the ways in which we ought to be watchful?

1. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 114.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. R. H. Charles, *The International Critical Commentary*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1971), vol. 1, p. 20.

5. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 898.

Tuesday, March 28

Study Revelation

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 1:3

In the book of Revelation we find a reason for being Seventh-day Adventists. The members of this church "have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention."¹

A right understanding of the book of Revelation enables God's people to be more effective witnesses for Christ in these last days. "When we as a people understand what this book [Revelation] means to us, there will be seen among us a great revival."²

Today many Christians claim that it is impossible to understand Revelation. They maintain that a study of this book is not important. "Religious teachers have declared that it is a sealed book and its secrets cannot be explained. Therefore many have turned from the prophetic record, refusing to devote time and study to its mysteries. But God does not wish His people to regard the book thus."³ "The very name given to its inspired pages, 'the Revelation,' contradicts the statement that this is a sealed book. A

revelation is something revealed."⁴ In fact, "it is sealed only to those who reject light and truth."⁵ "Those who would be co-workers with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will show a deep interest in the truths found in this book."⁶

There are many difficult verses in the book of Revelation.

However, "none should become discouraged in the study of the Revelation because of its apparently mystical symbols."⁷ The book can be understood. If not, the words "blessed is he that readeth" become meaningless.

Not only should we study this book, we should also proclaim its message. "The book of Revelation must be opened to the people. . . . The truth it contains must be proclaimed, that people may have an opportunity to prepare for the events which are so soon to transpire."⁸

Students of Revelation have in all ages found comfort and encouragement in its message, especially when the church has gone through persecution. "In figures and symbols, subjects of vast importance were presented to John, which he was to record, that the people of God living in his age and in future ages might have an intelligent understanding of the perils and conflicts before them."⁹

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 19.

2. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 113.

3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 583.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 584.

5. *Evangelism*, p. 195.

6. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 301.

7. *Education*, p. 191.

8. *Evangelism*, pp. 195, 196.

9. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 583.

by Kenneth Jorgensen

Kenneth Jorgensen is a theology student graduating in 1988 from Newbold College, England.

Revelation: Blessing and Curse

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Deut. 11:26-28

For nineteen centuries people have struggled to understand the message of Revelation. The first word of the book, *apokalupsis*, "apocalypse," suggests a revelation of heavenly secrets. However, John intended this revelation for seven churches for which he probably cared specially.¹ In this study we will try to deal with the fact that Revelation was originally meant for these seven churches situated in Asia Minor about 90 A.D.

Revelation 1:1, 2 and 2:1, 8, 12ff explain to us the different stages of the transmission of the message: from God via Jesus, to an angel, to John, to the seven churches. In other words, this is a message for "a specific group of people with specific needs."²

They, like us today, had their own specific world view. In those days it was common among the apocalypticists to view the universe dualistically as a struggle between God and Satan. The people who received the message of Revelation probably knew the apocryphal books like 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra. This means that they understood the themes like heaven, hell, angels, demons, and the future life in the new, du-

alistic way that was uncommon to the Old Testament.³

For them the book of Revelation carried a message of hope. It told them, as other apocalyptic literature did, that God would soon deliver the righteous who kept the commandments of God (Rev. 14:12), and would punish immoral worldly powers (Rev. 18:4-8). In that context, Revelation told them to do away with 'idolatry' and 'immorality' (Rev. 2:14, 20) and to acknowledge God as the Creator (Rev. 14:7).⁴ For them the imagery was not important, because in apocalyptic literature the imagery and its explanation was not a goal in itself, but helped to stress the principle of God's final victory (Rev. 19:1, 2) and His deliverance of the righteous (Rev. 21:7, 8).

This means that the seven churches understood John's messages as the reinforcement of the basic Christian principle of obedience to God while awaiting His salvation. John "wrote for his own time, but he had laid hold of principles which would be ever valid."⁵

REACT

If Jesus wrote a letter to your local church how would He describe its spiritual condition? What would be your local church's response? What does this reveal about your church?

1. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), p. 963.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 961.

3. Phillip Carrington, *The Meaning of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1931), p. 31.

4. John Sweet, *Revelation* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 4.

5. E. F. Scott, *The Book of Revelation* (London: SCM, 1939), pp. 150, 151.

by Jurrien den Hollander

Jurrien den Hollander is an M.A. religion student at Newbold College, England.

Thursday, March 30

Don't Only Discuss It: Tell It

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 1:5

Since its inception, the Christian church's task has been to communicate (Luke 24:45-47; Matt. 28:19, 20). Reduced to its barest essentials, the message is: (1) all of mankind is in an incorrect relationship with God—sinners; and (2) Christ died to restore that relationship—salvation.

However, throughout the Christian Era the messengers have disagreed about what the message was, to whom it should go, and how it should be spread. We have only to turn from Acts 1 to Acts 11 to find a 'committee' of apostles asking Peter why he preached about Christ in Cornelius' house. Frequently in Paul's writing he defends his version of the message and justifies his decision to deliver it to the Gentiles.

Perhaps the most violent disagreement among Christians occurred during the Reformation. Men like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli disagreed with the church—in word and action—about the content, delivery, and recipients of the message from God. Seventh-day Adventists can look at their own history and see the same type of disagreements. The reluctance to send missionaries until the 1870's and the dispute about righteousness by faith in the 1880's are example enough.

With these examples in mind, it is interesting to note that in Revelation 1:5 Christ presents

Himself as "the faithful witness." What did Christ mean? Did He make this claim because He knew then—and knows now—that we are invariably inaccurate and even unfaithful representatives of God? The fact that Christians are called priests (verse 6) suggests that, however badly we do it, we cannot escape the task of representing God.

Of what, then, is Christ a faithful witness? In the strictest theological sense—a set of facts about God. But Christ in His earthly life not only revealed a God who can be described in doctrinal formula but a personal being, One with whom human beings would want to have a relationship (John 14:7-9). The book of Revelation shows what will happen in the future to those who restore the relationship with God; that is, its 'witness.' While Christ also spoke about the future reward for His followers, His phrase "the kingdom of God is within you" emphasized the relationship available now.

REACT

1. How can fallible human beings be true witnesses about God? Is Christ holding out an ideal that His church can never reach?

2. How much time should Christians spend discussing subjects like theology and missionology, compared with 'actual' witnessing?

3. Can a person be theologically incorrect and still witness correctly about Christ?

by Keith Francis

Keith Francis is a part-time history lecturer at Newbold College, England.

God's Revelation For Today

OPINION

Key Text: Revelation 1:8

Why does God use the letters of the Greek alphabet to represent Himself? Christians have a natural desire to learn something more about the God to whom they have committed their lives. However, the problem is that however much we want to know God, we cannot gain a knowledge of God except through God's revelation. I believe that the book of Revelation has for its goal to reveal something particular about God. And indeed, by using the names Alpha and Omega, God reveals two significant characteristics about Himself. God is referred to as the Alpha and Omega several times in the book of Revelation (21:6; 22:13), and on each occasion it points to God as originator and terminator of all things. The idea of God being originator and terminator of all things is not entirely new. In Isaiah 41:4 a similar idea is expressed in different words: "Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am He" (RSV).

However, the idea that God is

the Alpha and the Omega does *not* suggest that He was active only in the past, when He created everything, and in the future when He will bring this world to its end, while in the present He is not involved in human history! God is described also as the One who *is*. Not only is God originator and terminator of all things, but He is the Alpha and the Omega of every single event in human history—because He causes things to happen or allows them to happen.

Looking at our world today, we see that many people often do not see an active God leading the world toward a purposeful end. Indeed, there is so much evil on this earth, and life often is so tough, that people question whether there is any meaning in life, or any hope for a better future. The crisis of meaninglessness is one of the main characteristics of our time. Adventists, however, have a message for this world in which meaninglessness and pessimism do not prevail. God is Alpha and Omega, the Originator, Sustainer and Terminator of all things, and however bad things may seem, He takes care of everything and gives meaning to our lives, and hope for the future.

by Radivoj Suvacarov

Radivoj Suvacarov is an M.A. religion student at Newbold College, England.

Mission Projects



**Thirteenth Sabbath Special Projects Offerings
Sabbath, June 24**

Lesson 2, April 2 - 8

Keeper of the Keys



“I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades’” (Rev. 1:18, NIV).

Sunday, April 2

The Zepurites

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 1:9-20

The creatures of Zepure had it tough with their system of life. To them life meant hard labor to keep their planet afloat, and indeed it was a laborious task. Aware of the consequences of failure to keep their planet afloat, each creature felt obliged to work constantly for fear of the ultimate—total darkness. But one unfortunate day the Zepurites did surrender themselves to total darkness. They became tired of their laborious life-style, stopped working, and suffered the consequences—gradual disintegration of their lives.

Out of the inhabitants of the planet Zepure, only a few escaped this disaster just in time and began life anew on the neighboring planet, Muz. And to their amazement the Zepurites (now Muzites) discovered that this particular planet was an exceptional one, because on it, hung high in the atmosphere, was a bright circular object. In the course of time the Muzites learned to depend on this bright object for strength and discovered that the more strength they received, the harder they could labor. And as they became stronger and relied more on the bright light, the closer the circular object came to Muz and the

brighter their planet shone.

Their past haunted them no more, for now they were aware of the reward of their task and continued their labor. They knew that in time the circular object of light would become part of their lives, lighting up their whole planet and fulfilling their task. Surely this was a time for which to look forward.

Can you imagine what our world would be like if we were to live lives similar to that of the Zepurites? Can you imagine how hard our lives would be if it were a necessity for us, without help, to labor constantly to avoid sinning?

Many of us have regretful memories of our past and dare not look back. Furthermore, some of us fear what the future may have in store for us. If, like the Zepurites, we continue sinning, our lives will end in total darkness—blinding our minds and disallowing us to face our past or aim for the future, knowing that the end result would be our destruction.

Revelation 1:18 makes it clear to us that the circular object, Christ, holds the keys of death and of hell. Our part, like the Muzites, is to aim high, look up and depend wholly and solely on Christ, surrendering our lives to Him so we can face our past without regret and embrace the future without fear.

by Diana Ataman

Diana Ataman is an English major at Newbold College, England.

Monday, April 3

The Conquering Christ

LOGOS

Theme: *The heart of the Christian faith is inspiringly expressed in the words of Revelation 1:18, NIV. Since Jesus lives and holds the keys of hell and of death, by trusting ourselves to His care you and I can face the past without regret and the future without fear.*

1. John's Exile and Christ's Command (read Rev. 1:9-11)

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isa. 46:10, NIV).

A main theme of the book of Revelation is that God is in control of human affairs. Though the world be in a state of turmoil, and though at times it may seem that the church is facing an impossible task, God's final victory is assured.

The experience of the church as a whole is mirrored in the experience of the apostle John. John found himself on the small and unfriendly isle of Patmos, a grim and desolate place to which enemies of the Roman state were exiled to work in quarries. John, banished for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, no doubt felt despair as he reached those shores, separated from his fellow Christians.

Yet in the face of this apparent defeat, God had a plan. John had been chosen to write one of the

most stirring and comforting books in the Christian canon: the words that he would write under the inspiration of the Spirit would give comfort and hope to countless thousands who were to keep the flame of truth burning throughout the long centuries to come. John might have been forgiven for feeling sorry for himself as he sat alone on that Sabbath day; but what joy was his when he heard the voice of his Lord commanding, "Write": John's greatest act of testimony was about to begin.

Which other Biblical and non-Biblical characters might have had reason to think God had deserted them and yet did not give up their faith in Him?

2. 'The Lord's Day' (read Rev. 1:10)

"So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28, NIV).

Biblical scholars have made several suggestions concerning the meaning of the phrase 'the Lord's day' in Revelation 1:10, and since many hold that it refers to the Sunday (as in present-day Christian parlance), we should pause to note carefully the most probable meaning. One suggestion is that 'on the Lord's day' means 'on the day of judgment' and indeed, the final day of judgment is often called 'the day of the Lord' in the Old Testament (see Joel 2:11, 31). This under-

by Ken Newport

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standing fails, however, when we note that not all the events depicted in Revelation pertain directly to the final day of the Lord. Also, as the *SDA Bible Commentary* notes, when the phrase 'the Lord's day' does refer to the day of judgment, the Greek is *hemera (tou) Kuriou*, as in 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; and 1 Thessalonians 5:2. In the present phrase, however, "day of the Lord" is rendered by the Greek "*te kuriake hemera*."

As noted, others think 'the Lord's day' refers to Sunday, but this interpretation fails, for there is no evidence in Scripture to suggest that Sunday was ever thought of as 'the Lord's day,' though this text is one of those most often cited in favor of the view that early Christians kept Sunday.

An altogether more reasonable suggestion is that "the Lord's day" refers to the Sabbath, a day that God set aside for His own purpose and thus is truly "His." We need not look far for support of this view; the Old Testament is unequivocal in identifying the seventh-day Sabbath as a day special to the Lord; the texts are too numerous to mention, but see for example Isaiah 58:13, 14.

What reasons could you give why God chose the Sabbath as the day on which to give John this great revelation?

3. The Recipients of the Message (read Rev. 1:12)

The order in which the seven churches are listed is not haphazard, but rather represents the route in which a messenger would have delivered messages in Asia Minor.¹ The prophecy that John was about to write, then, in the first place had a literal application to the seven churches mentioned. But the book of Revelation is not limited to the first century

alone. God's message is for all people at all times, and as such the seven churches of Revelation are symbolic of seven prophetic periods in the history of the Christian church. The book previews the remainder of human history, and as such bears a witness to all generations until the end of the age.

What particular relevance has the book of Revelation for today? Did it have the same relevance for the churches to whom it was originally addressed?

4. Christ the Son of Man (read Rev. 1:12-16)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:31, 32, NIV).

The term 'the Son of man' is one of the important christological titles found in the Bible. It is used of Christ many times in the New Testament, most often in the Gospels. The phrase as it appears in Revelation 1:12, however, is different from the majority of biblical references, since it does not have the definite article; it simply states 'a son of man' and not, as is often the case, 'the Son of man.' This difference links the phrase in Revelation 1:12 closely with Daniel 7:13, where the original Aramaic reads '*kebar enash*.' Thus we should read Revelation 1:12 in the light of Daniel 7:13, since the two texts are closely allied, and in view of this we would be correct to concentrate upon the eschatological importance of the title. Christ, the humble servant, is also the victorious Son of man, and it is in this capacity that He will return. To those who have accepted His salvation and followed

His Word this will be a marvelous and happy event: to those who have rejected His call, however, it will be a terrible day of judgment from which there is no escape. The description of Christ here is truly awesome, and it is with awe that we read it: Christ is the Lamb; He is the gentle and meek One; and yet He is also the stern Master who speaks with great authority to His church. Christ is judge and His Word, here represented as a two-edged sword, has the power to save—and the authority to condemn.

How does the clear link between Daniel and Revelation affect our interpretation of these books?

5. Christ With His Church (read Rev. 1:17-20)

“Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age”
(Matt. 28:20, NIV).

Shown the awe and majesty of heaven, John could do nothing but fall at the feet of his Master. But Christ, who is glorious and majestic, cares for His servants and for His church. Christ is all to the church; He is the Alpha and the Omega: the First and the Last. Though Christ was dead, He

is alive. The implications of this fact have been forcefully summed up by G. B. Caird: “By the resurrection [Christ] had not just resumed the eternal life which he had with the Father before the world began; he had entered upon a new, victorious life in which death was forever conquered. Not only had he burst out of prison, he had carried away the keys. His followers may pass confidently into the dungeons of death and the grave, knowing that he holds the authority to unlock the gates and set them free.”²

Christ, then, will set free the captives of death, for He has conquered death; and in the present time He is with His church. The seven stars that Christ has in His right hand are symbolic of the supernatural guardians of the churches that He is holding in His power. Similarly, the golden lampstands among which Christ moves are in reality the churches from the apostle John’s time to the end of the age. Though things may look bad, Christ is with His church. This is a ‘mystery’ known to the church itself.

Can you think of other biblical passages where a clear promise is given that Christ is with His people?

1. See further *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 737.

2. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 2nd edition (London: A & C Black, 1984), p. 26.

Tuesday, April 4

The Wise Choice

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Rev. 1:19

We must be wise and choose to follow Jesus every day of our lives. John did. "Among the cliffs and rocks of Patmos, John held communion with his Maker. He reviewed his past life, and at the thought of the blessings he had received, peace filled his heart. He had lived the life of a Christian, and he could say in faith, 'We know that we passed from death unto life.' 1 John 3:14. Not so the emperor who had banished him. He could look back only on fields of warfare and carnage, on desolated homes, on weeping widows and orphans, the fruit of his ambitious desire for preeminence."¹ What a striking contrast! John was at peace with God. He did not fear even death, because he trusted Jesus. The emperor had no one other than himself in whom to put his trust.

Yet, even believers may not always understand the difficulties they face in this world. "God leads His children by a way that they know not, but He does not forget or cast off those who put their trust in Him. . . . He allowed the beloved John to be exiled to lonely Patmos, but the Son of God met him there, and his vision was filled with scenes of immortal glory."² Likewise, Jesus will meet us where we are and remind us of His promise—eternal life.

Not only does Jesus promise us happiness in a life in the future but as John benefited from viewing Jesus, so will we. "He [John] had seen Him [Jesus] in the hands of the Roman soldiers, clothed with an old purple robe and crowned with thorns. He had seen Him hanging on the cross of Calvary, the object of cruel mockery and abuse. Now John is once more permitted to behold his Lord. But how changed is His appearance! He is no longer a Man of Sorrows, despised and humiliated by men. He is clothed in a garment of heavenly brightness. . . . John was strengthened to live in the presence of his glorified Lord."³

When Jesus is present in our lives we also experience His forgiving power. "'Fear not,' is His everlasting assurance; 'I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore.' 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' The blood of the spotless Lamb of God the believers [should] apply to their own hearts."⁴ John did this, and we ought to follow his example.

Jesus also cares and sustains us as a body of believers. "When God was about to open to the beloved John the history of the church for future ages, He gave him an assurance of the Saviour's interest and care for His people by revealing to him 'One like unto the Son of man,' walking among the candlesticks, which symbolized the seven churches."⁵

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 571.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 129.
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 582.

4. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 95.
5. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 752.

by Allan Jensen

Allan Jensen is a theology student at Newbold College, England.

Confined to the Mines

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 1:9

Many of those convicted of crimes against Rome would have preferred death over banishment to the mines of Patmos. The unfortunate felons sent there provided the convict labor that moved tons of earth and rock with bare hands and minimal tools. It is hard to believe that a person like John the apostle could survive several years in the mines, especially since he was about 70 years old by this time—obviously Someone sustained him. Even while imprisoned as slave labor, John could still be chosen by the Lord as the conduit for communication between God and humanity.

John was enabled to survive both physically and spiritually through “patient endurance” (Rev. 1:9), through a faith grounded in the Jesus he loved and trusted. John never forgot those three and a half years with Jesus. That trust—strengthened by an unshakable knowledge that he had been with the Lord—empowered John to endure unendurable hardships that broke seemingly stronger men.

John was sent to Patmos after he ran afoul of Roman law. More specifically, we know from the records and writings of the early church as it chronicled its history, that John spoke out against the worship of the emperor as God. Exalting a nation’s emperor as deity was not unknown in the ancient

world—the Roman emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) followed this practice as a means of unifying the empire. Emperor worship is virtually indistinguishable in practice from misplaced patriotism, as people who worship the god-head of state also are worshipping the state. In making acceptance of their emperor as god mandatory under penalty of law the Romans were also, in one sense, tolerant of people’s religious beliefs. People were free to worship other gods, but the emperor must be among those honored and served. (See *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 720-722.)

John made his home in the city of Ephesus, where, since 29 B.C., there had been a temple to the goddess Roma and to the Caesars. John had come to Ephesus after fleeing Jerusalem with Mary the mother of Jesus, and it was to be their home for the rest of their lives (op. cit., p. 716). Living in the same city as one of the major shrines of the official state religion made John an immediate target for suppression when he, as a leading figure of a sect that refused to honor the state’s official gods, spoke out to denounce Domitian as a false god. Perhaps, because of his reputation (John was one of the last who had seen Jesus in the flesh), the civil authorities made him an example of what would happen to similar nonconformists: they sent him to the mines of Patmos—a fate worse than death.

It was while he was confined

by David M. Ritter

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on Patmos, a small island in the Aegean Sea near the coast of what is today Turkey, that John saw and heard the Lord Jesus Christ; and was given visions of "what is now and what will take place later" (Rev. 1:19, NIV).

Even "the disciple who Jesus loved" (John 21:7, 20) was awestruck at the sight of the Lord. He fell at Jesus' feet as though dead (verse 17), completely overcome by a sense of his own unworthiness. In John, Jesus found a consecrated and humble instrument through whom He could

work. Thus the youngest of the disciples and the last of the Twelve became the channel through whom Christ revealed to the church His truths.

REACT

Can those of us who live in societies where freedom of religion is a basic human right comprehend what it is like to live under a regime where the only authorized religious practices are those of the state? Try to visualize what it would be like to be a Christian in such a situation.

Catch the Vision

HOW-TO

Key Text: Proverbs 29:18

The Roman authorities hoped that the exiled John on Patmos would be silenced and forgotten. But here it was that John enjoyed close communication with God, saw a dazzling vision of Jesus, and received His messages. These experiences he was commissioned to record so that Christ's testimony could be preserved for the church. In our own sphere we may suffer degrees of persecution at the hands of unsympathizing classmates, family members, or church administrators; figuratively even be exiled from their friendship, acceptance, or respect, all because of the profession and application of our faith. Yet in spite of such circumstances, God gives opportunities in woods, under stars, in church, or by a lake to nurture our relationship with Him. Here we also can see a vision of Jesus and be ready for the personal messages He has to give.

For John, the vision of Christ on Patmos was vastly different from the Jesus he had known in the scenes of weariness and suffering they had experienced on earth. Even so, because of the quality time spent becoming acquainted with Jesus, John was now able to recognize His form and voice in this new display of

brightness. When we are tuned in to hear God's voice He can speak to us through church activities in their various forms, through worship, through fellowship with friends, as well as through our daily experiences.

As the voice and the vision are internalized, the symbols become part of our experience. Christ's golden sash makes a fitting symbol of His service (Rev. 1:13; John 13:4) and of ours; we can count on His wisdom and experience represented by His white hair; His beautiful, loving, pleading eyes penetrate even the closed areas of our lives; His feet are quick to bring us messages of healing, comfort, and direction; and His shining face makes it impossible to mistake His identity.

Carrying our own pocket-sized vision encourages us into worship and reverence as it did for John (Rev. 1:17); it brings us the reassurance it brought to him (verse 18) and it challenges us to share this vision (verse 19).

REACT

1. How do you handle the adverse circumstances in your life?
2. How can you recognize God's voice speaking in the unexpected, as well as in expected situations?
3. Do you have a clear, personal, motivating vision of Jesus in your heart? John was asked to write *his*, how could you share *yours* with others?

by Maureen Smith

Maureen Smith is an M.A. student in education at Newbold College, England.

Friday, April 7

Return or Reform?

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 13:24-30

The book of Revelation is filled with names of geographic places. Names such as Jerusalem, Babylon, Armageddon, and Zion (not to mention hell and heaven) are clearly symbolic. But the churches in the seven cities mentioned in the opening chapter of Revelation are not only used symbolically; they were also geographically located realities. This brings out two interesting lessons.

The first lesson concerns the power of the gospel message and the dedication of the first missionaries. In a short span of 15 years the apostles had established churches more than 400 miles from home-base. This tremendous outreach suggests a challenge to our modern missionary movement.

The second lesson is also significant for the church today. Only 30 years after their establishment, the seven churches of Asia Minor were facing staggering challenges and problems. *Ephesus* was a backslidden church. *Smyrna*, a poor church, was facing persecution. *Pergamum* was steadfast but infested with heresy. *Thyatira* had good works but tolerated a false prophet. *Sardis* was a dying church. *Philadelphia* was weak but faithful. And *Laodicea* was lukewarm, self-satisfied, and boasting of her wealth while being wretched, poor, and blind (Rev. 2:1—3:22).

This means that within one

generation (30 years) problems with false teachers, heresy, loss of mission fervor, apostasy, hypocrisy, and slack discipline existed in the early Christian churches. There are saints today dissatisfied with the present state of affairs among Adventists who are talking about a reform. They maintain that a return to a New Testament Christianity, or a pioneer Adventist life-style, would solve problems with worldliness and lack of zeal. The lesson, however, from Revelation is that even the first Christian churches, established by the apostles, were not immune to attacks from the enemy of the church. Satan was able even then to, quickly and efficiently, infiltrate the community of saints.

The experience of these New Testament churches proves that the devil can get in anywhere. But it also demonstrates that God does not reject His people. The angels of the different churches not only reproved them for their apostasy; they also commended them on the positive aspects of their relationship to God, counseled them on how to deal with their situation, and promised that God had not forgotten them.

Today's church can claim the same divine understanding, help, and support. The future of God's people does not depend on a return to past experiences and circumstances. The solution is to heed the voice of God speaking to us *today*.

by Borge Schantz

Borge Schantz is the head of the theology department at Newbold College, England.

Lesson 3, April 9 - 15

Memos From Heaven



“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’ ” (Rev. 2:7, NIV).

Sunday, April 9

No Place to Hide?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 2

Joe had forgotten to put his wood away after woodwork class, and he could remember that the teacher, Mr. Leo, had stressed that all wood should be carefully stored in the right place when class ended. He had to make a plan to avoid punishment. Finding a small piece of wood, he wrote the last part of his name in such a way that it looked as if someone had sawed his wood up.

"Sir. Look what someone has done to my wood! They took it out of the cupboard and now it is all cut up," said Joe with a pained expression on his face. "Joe, think carefully before you tell me this, because it is clear to me that you aren't telling the truth."

Joe tried to argue and show that his name was on the small remnant, but Mr. Leo was not convinced. Imagine Joe's embarrassment when Mr. Leo took out Joe's wood from where he had hidden it and explained that he had found it after the class had been dismissed and hidden it to see how Joe would react.

Have you noticed how many times the phrase "I know thy works" is repeated in the mes-

sages to the churches? What does this mean to you? How do you picture God and the way He handles sinners? Do you find God's knowledge of you a threat, as though there's no place to hide?

The attitude of many people must cause God much sadness. He is not the "roaring lion seeking to devour." Jeremiah 31:3 shows God's attitude toward Israel after the MANY times they failed Him: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (NIV). We cannot hide from God, but if we truly understand His concern and love for us we will not want to. Guilt and a sense of unworthiness is tearing at the feelings and heart of our society. Often it prevents us from coming to the One who came to "seek and save the lost." We are unworthy, but God loves us, knows our inner thoughts, and allowed His Son to bear our blame. Those wounded hands are held out to "whosoever believeth" (John 3:16). That *whosoever* includes everyone.

Praise God! That means you, dear reader, He calls you to accept His infinite love.

How many promises can you think of that encourage sinners to find forgiveness and joy from a loving Father? There are many, and some of them you will find in this lesson.

by R. N. Bell

R. N. Bell is an English lecturer at Helderberg College, South Africa.

Hear What the Spirit Says

LOGOS

Theme: *Hearing God's Word means not only listening to the message but also responding obediently to its requirements. To have "an ear" in the Biblical sense means to be receptive to the influence of the Holy Spirit.*

1. Love for Truth, but Loss of Love? (read Revelation 2:1-7)

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13, NIV).

As a microcosm of the apostolic age in the first century, and as the experiences of millions of Christians throughout the ages since the cross testify, the ancient congregation of Ephesus struggled with the ever-present problem of imperceptibly replacing their spontaneous love for Christ with a mechanical, doctrinally oriented form of religion. They were increasingly beginning to experience the paradox of still loving the "truth," while at the same time losing their love for Him who is the truth (John 14:6).

When reading the letter to the church at Ephesus, you are immediately struck with the apparent contradiction between the commendation and the admonition. On the one hand they are hard at work, persevering in the faith with longsuffering and rejecting false apostles. Yet on the other hand, the Lord admonishes

them to repent and do the things they did at first! The answer clearly lies not in what they were doing, but how they were doing it. Their works increasingly lack the inner motivation for obedience and Christian service, namely love for God and love for neighbor (see Matt. 22:37-40).

When our love for God wanes, it is because we have wandered away from the energizing, enabling, and meaning-filled presence of God. Together with the corrosive and bewitching effect of affection for this world, and preoccupation with irrelevant and minimal aspects of doctrines, one can take the blessings of God's redemptive presence so much for granted that we forget the presence of God (see Ex. 16:8-10).

Because love for God is something that we receive and experience only in the presence of God, repentance for the Christians of Ephesus meant "practicing" anew the presence of God. Even as the Spirit-filled wheels of God's throne in the visions of Ezekiel had a lightning fast omnimobility of the presence of God, so the study of God's Word, the life of prayer, childlike obedience, and the public testimony of the truth, are the modern "wheels" of the Spirit that bring God's presence back into Christian experience. Then Christians will indeed practice acts of love and acts of faith, because they confess that the work of God is right, and good, and possible, and personal (see 1 John 5:3, 4; Rom. 7:12, 14).

by Johan A. Japp

Johan Japp is a theology professor at Helderberg College and chairman of the department of religion.

How do you go about testing yourself to discover your true spiritual condition before God?

2. The Cross Precedes the Crown (read Revelation 2:8-11)

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:25, 26, NIV).

In a short memo that John the revelator wrote, he expressed the desire that his dear friend Gaius might enjoy good health, and that all might go well with him, even as his soul prospered (see 3 John 2). This is God's wish for all His children. But Satan, who according to Jesus is a murderer and liar from the beginning (John 8:44), hates the evidences of Christ's victory—happy, caring Christians. With all the diabolical hatred of hell, he goes after them in a raging "torrent" of fury and persecution (Rev. 12:13-15), as was the case with the church at Smyrna.

When earthly agents of evil plunge Christians into the cauldron of trial, temptation, and affliction, dramatically epitomized by the church of the second and third century A.D., they may be tempted to ask whether life as a Christian is really worth living.

Paradoxically Christians must first "lose" their earthly life for the sake of Christ, before they find *real* life (see Matt. 10:39).

In the second place Christians must remember that our life is not our own (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Jesus laid down His life in order to save the life of others (John 3:14, 15). The "blood" of the martyrs, whether it be actual death or great suffering, has always been the "seed" of the church. From the one lonely kernel of wheat that falls into the ground and dies, many multiply and live (John 12:24-28). Therefore, while

it might appear as if the persecutors of the faithful have the last word with their instruments of torture, God will triumph in the judgment. Fully vindicated from their own sins and the misrepresentations of evil men, Christians will emerge from the fiery furnace of this world clothed in innocence and immortality (see Rom. 8:27-29; Rev. 6:9-11; Dan. 3:19, 20).

What motivated the "Jews" of the "synagogue of Satan" to slander the faithful in the church at Smyrna?

3. The Fight of Faith (read Revelation 2:12-17)

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12, NIV).

The most dangerous test for Christian faith is often not open persecution, but insipient, persuasive compromise and conformity. Not only because of its deceptive nature, but because it appeals to the basic need of men and women to be needed and accepted. And when the pure stream from "Mount Zion" is diverted to converge with the polluted stream from "Mount Olympus," you have a religious stream that flows through territory where Satan rules supremely.

Paul warned the early church that savage wolves would come in among the early Christians to distort the truth and draw disciples away after them (Acts 20:28-31). This was fulfilled on a large scale in the centuries after Christianity became recognized, popular, and prosperous. Unable to beat the Christian church by force in the arena of pagan persecution, Satan slips into the pulpit of the church at Pergamum with the most masterful masquerade of all

time—the “man of sin” dressed up in the pious “sheep skin” of godliness (2 Thess. 2:7-12; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 Cor. 11:13-15). The teaching of the Nicolaitans, the teaching of Balaam, and the teaching of Jezebel are only different manifestations of the same system of progressive compromise with the principles of pagan religion (see Rev. 2:6, 14, 15, 20).

To save His true followers from the dark deceptions of the devil, Christ unsheathes the flaming sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (see Eph. 6:17, cf. Gen. 3:24). For those who persist in compromise, the Word becomes God’s instrument of judgment (see Ex. 14:20). But for those who repent, the Word becomes the life-giving manna of the soul, inscribing on the heart the unfading insignia of heaven (see 2 Cor. 3:3; Jer. 31:33; Eze. 11:19; 36:26).

Analyze the anatomy of the apostasy that Balaam suggested to Balak (see Numbers 22-25; 31:13-16; 2 Peter 2:9-22; Jude 10, 11).

4. No Room for Compromise (read Revelation 2:18, 19)

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14, NIV).

From a crude tendency to confuse Christian liberty with sensual license, compromise with the principles of pagan worship gradually developed into an elaborate system described in the letter to the church in Thyatira as spiritual prostitution (see Gal. 5:13, 14; Rev. 17:3-6). Here, in the papal system from the sixth to the sixteenth century A.D., is the full flowering of religious and

political alliance with paganism (see 2 Kings 9:22; 1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:13; 21:4-15). This spiritual “Jezebel” manifests a curious disparity in her policies toward the people of medieval Europe: while apparently maintaining a broad-minded openness to the speculative teaching of Western pagan philosophers and the bewitching mysticism of Eastern pagan religions, she at the same time ravages with merciless intolerance the faithful remnant of believers who prefer to adhere to the teachings of the primitive church.

Whereas Christ reveals Himself to the Pergamum church with the flaming sword of judgment through His Word, He now reveals Himself in the full glow of divine displeasure, reminiscent of the fiery judgment of Daniel 7 (see Dan. 7:9, 10). Even as poor, defenseless Christians were persecuted and martyred by their inquisitors, so God will recompense the church’s persecutors with poetic justice. As Azariah the son of Jezebel was struck down with a terminal disease because he consulted Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, God will let the unrepentant, spiritual Jezebel and her children writhe in pain and suffering in the doctrinal and ethical bed they made for themselves (see 2 Kings 1:2-17).

At the darkest hour of the church, when the truth of the gospel was well-nigh eclipsed by the darkness of error and superstition, Christ sent a fresh revelation of Himself that shone like the morning star in the preaching of people like Huss, Wycliff, Luther, and Calvin.

What are some of the specific acts of “immorality” that spiritual Jezebel committed in the history of the Christian church?

Tuesday, April 11

God's Plan

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 2:1

1. Christ the Author of His Church

"God's ministers [the stars or angels of the churches] are symbolized by the seven stars, which He who is the first and the last has under His special care and protection."¹

"In the weakness of human judgment, men were gathering into their finite hands the lines of control, while God's will, God's way and counsel, were not sought as indispensable."²

"The purpose which God seeks to accomplish through His people today is the same that He desired to accomplish through Israel when He brought them forth out of Egypt."³

"Our lives may seem a tangle; but as we commit ourselves to the wise Master Worker, He will bring out the pattern of life and character that will be to His own glory."⁴

"Christ has made provision that His church shall be a transformed body, illumined with the light of heaven, possessing the glory of Immanuel."⁵

"Christ ascended to heaven and sent His Holy Spirit to give power to the work of the disciples."⁶

"The church is God's fortress, His city of refuge, which He holds in a revolted world."⁷

2. A Church for All People

"The casting of the net is the preaching of the gospel. This gathers both good and evil into the church. When the mission of the gospel is completed, the judgment will accomplish the work of separation."⁸

"The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reprov'd, warn'd, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard."⁹

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ: and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to 'the principalities and powers in heavenly places,' the final and full display of the love of God."¹⁰

1. *Gospel Workers*, p. 13.

2. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 461.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 12.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 331.

5. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 19.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

7. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 11.

8. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 122.

9. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 49.

10. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

by Izak van Zyl

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Wednesday, April 12

If the Shoe Fits, Wear It

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 2:7

When studying the seven churches of Revelation many questions naturally come to mind. To which denomination, age, or congregation are the letters to the churches being addressed?

Although there are those who have been and others who still are restrictive in their interpretation of the meaning of the seven churches of Revelation, the most satisfactory approach, and one used by E. G. White, is what one writer has termed the "philosophy of history approach."¹ This approach is an all-embracing one that views the seven churches not only as being literal, historical congregations but also as having symbolic representation that is in keeping with the character of other Biblical apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel, with its broad cosmic sweep of world events and God's activity in guiding these events toward a climactic end beyond the confines of history. In this symbolic approach the seven churches are seen first as being representative of seven phases or periods in church history, each predominated by particular distinguishing characteristics. These distinguishing characteristics portrayed by John have identified the Ephesian period as that of the apostolic church in its purity till

A.D. 100; the Smyrna period as the period of persecution and steadfastness from A.D. 100 to 313; the popular and prosperous period of the church from A.D. 313 to 538 as being that of Pergamos; and the Thyatiran period as that of the powerful and corrupt papal church in the years A.D. 538 to 1517.²

However, it is the other relevant applications of the "philosophy-of-history approach" that are found on the personal level (you) with which we should concern ourselves as individuals. Questions you should ask yourself might include: "In what congregation am I worshipping today?" "Where do I find myself in my Christian experience at this moment?"

"Am I or my church in an Ephesian period, where, although there is warmth and love for Jesus, there is also a cooling, a loss of that first fervent love for the Lord? Or am I or my congregation in the triumph of the Smyrna period of devotedness, in which no rebuke can be leveled; or perhaps in the Pergamite period, where liberal theology is stifling my faith in God and His Word? Or are you falling foul of the worldly practices of the Thyatiran period? And what of the distinguishable and applicable characteristics found in the remaining churches?"

If the shoe fits, wear it! "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

1. Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 2nd Edition (Naples, Florida: Ann Arbor Publishers Inc., 1979), p. 14.

2. Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Pacific Union College, Angwin, CA 94508, 1984), pp. 33-52.

by Douglas Frank McLeod

Douglas McLeod is a theology student at Helderberg College, South Africa.

Thursday, April 13

Is Anybody Listening?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Isaiah 53:3

How do you react when people ignore you? What is your response to a person who never listens to what you are saying? Initially, you would probably feel hurt or abandoned. It is not easy to handle rejection. You might feel angry, and decide to retaliate. It is natural to respond to rejection in these ways.

Often we are shocked to read of how Christ was treated like a door mat. How people despised and rejected Him. He was continually ignored. People refused to listen to what Christ was trying to say (see Isaiah 53).

Through the prophet John, Jesus spoke to His church. He communicated a specific message for several specific periods throughout church history. And at the end of each message He continually repeated, "If you have ears, then, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches!" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22, TEV).

Listening does not merely occur passively. To really listen means to be seriously concerned with another's opinion. People who honestly listen show it in their actions. Eye contact, nodding your head—interspersed with verbal signs of approval: "Yes . . . uh-huh . . . that's interesting . . . go on," and showing your interest by repeating back in your own words what was said indicates that you were really listening.

Do you really listen when Christ speaks to you? Are you careful not to let your eyes wander as He tries to communicate His all-important, life-giving message?

If you have found that it is often difficult to picture Jesus actually speaking with you, then here is one suggestion that could help. Try to write a letter to yourself from Jesus. This takes a creative imagination, so before you start, let's try to sketch the scene.

We all enjoy receiving mail. So imagine yourself walking up to your mailbox and finding an envelope with no return address. You rip it open and are stunned to find a letter from Jesus. At first you tend to dismiss it as some kind of joke, but the words have the ring of truth. What does it say? Well, that is up to you. Now you write the letter. It might take a bit of serious thinking, but at least it will be personal. And that makes it meaningful! If you don't know where to begin, then try to follow the format of Christ's letters to the seven churches.

1. A personalized greeting.
2. God (Jesus) giving Himself a special name.
3. Praise for a Christian virtue—some good news.
4. Blame for a specific sin—some bad news.
5. Request for change in attitude or behavior.
6. A warning if the request is ignored.
7. A promise if change is made.

by Mike Lemon

Mike Lemon is a theology graduate from Helderberg College, South Africa.

Lest We Forget

OPINION

Key Text: Psalm 77:11, 12

"I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds" (Ps. 77:11, 12, NIV).

It seems so easy to forget! And sin quickly follows the act of forgetting. Eve forgot and fell: When the Lord God asked her what she had done, she claimed that the serpent had deceived her—had caused her to forget the loving relationships she enjoyed with her husband and with her Creator-God. Moses forgot the way God intended him to go, and this resulted in the murder of an Egyptian. David forgot the high ideals to which he had been called, committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered her husband, and, in so doing, probably broke every law in the Decalogue he claimed to love so much. Peter quickly forgot the commitment he had made to following Jesus to the end, and denied Him. "They soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel" (Ps. 106:13, NIV).

Lovingly God reminded them all of His forgiveness and drew them again to Himself. He faithfully offers forgiveness to forgetful sinners, together with the necessary re-creation of a heart-mind to serve Him.

On the other hand, Joseph remembered that he was a son of

the God of heaven, and chose imprisonment rather than to sleep with Potiphar's wife. Daniel too was far away from home, and yet he remembered the religious principles he had learned there, and resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine offered him in Babylon.

The members of the churches referred to in Revelation 2 are counseled to remember the love they had at first, to be faithful, and to hold on to what they have. Revelation 3 continues this idea, for Sardis is also challenged to "remember, therefore, what you have received and heard" (Rev. 3:3, NIV).

REACT

1. Think about the many ways we can remember what God has done to save us and to reveal His love to us. How can we make these more meaningful to our everyday lives?

2. How do I feel about someone reminding me of God's interest in my life?

by Dave Allen

Dave Allen is campus chaplain for Helderberg College, South Africa.

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Lesson 4, April 16 - 22

More Memos From Heaven



“ ‘Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me’ ” (Rev. 3:20, NIV).

Sunday, April 16

Knock, Knock! Anybody Home?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 3

How much meaning do you attach to the word *Home*? As a 9-year-old I had to go to boarding school: I was homesick! I counted hours to the holidays when I'd see my parents and be at home. Note the promises to the overcomers of each of the churches: Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21. Each of these refers to an eternal reward: heaven.

How real is heaven to you? Do you long for home? Revelation is full of references to the heavenly home that God is preparing for the overcomer. Read Chapter 21 and see whether it does not make you homesick for the place where God Himself will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and where sorrow and sighing will be no more. Jesus not only invites you home, He also promises that you will taste "home cooking" at the great welcome He is preparing.

The thing that concerns many of us is getting there. The promise is to "overcomers." The original thought would be better translated: he who "continues to overcome" (see *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p.745). The New Testament has many references to the need for patience and endurance (see Heb. 10:36, 37; 12:1,

2; Matt. 24:13, 14). The good news is that we need not despair, because through Jesus we are "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37). With Paul we can say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

We do not have to wait for heaven in order to experience the joy of the divine presence. There is a knock referred to in the key text. Can you hear it? The poet Wordsworth begins a poem with the words "The world is too much with us." This is true in many ways: "Lord, have you knocked on my heart's door yet?"

"Yes, My child, but you were listening to another beat." One writer expresses the situation thus: "You can see Him there now. He is carrying presents: white garments, eye salve, gold. And concerned though He is with the salvation of the whole world, He nonethelss has as much time for each one of us as we have for Him."*

At the beginning of this week and lesson, take time to "be still, and know that . . . [He is] God" (Ps. 46:10). There are so many things in our lives that can drown the sound of that knocking. Search your heart and ask for wisdom so that you can see what it is in your life that blocks out that all-important fellowship with Jesus.

* C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1985), vol. 2, p. 135.

by R. N. Bell

R. N. Bell is an English lecturer at Helderberg College, South Africa.

Hear What the Spirit Says II

LOGOS

Theme: *Fellowship with the Lord Jesus takes place when you respond without reservation to His initiative, and receive His Word completely into your life.*

1. No Time to Sleep (read Revelation 3:1-6)

"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matt. 24:12, 13, NIV).

After a period of great revival and reformation, there is always the danger of spiritual stagnation, in which Christian fervor may be fossilized into creeds, confessions, and elaborate theologies. This is what happened to a lesser degree to the apostolic church, and to a greater degree to the post-Reformation church, which was a period of "quarrelsome theologians and a parched Protestantism."*

In both the letter to the church in Ephesus and the letter to the church in Sardis, the number 7 features in the preamble where Christ identifies Himself, emphasizing thereby the need to complete the work that God has entrusted to the church, whether it be in the individual or in the church corporately. The Holy Spirit was given as the One who would not only represent Jesus Christ on earth but also complete the work of salvation that Jesus had accomplished—thus the "sevenfold" Spirit of God repre-

sents the perfect application of the fullness of Christ's ministry in the life of the church.

What is the nature of Christian perfection to which the church in Sardis must awake? In the story of the rich young ruler the one thing that was still lacking was not some personality trait or some forgotten commandment. It was simple, childlike faith in Christ, who alone could do the "impossible" "good thing" of dying for our sins after He kept the laws of God perfectly (see Matt. 19:16-26). Therefore, while keeping the dynamic nature of faith in mind, it is safe to say that Christian faith is the perfect fulfillment of the law of God (see Rom. 3:22, 27, 28); because through faith you receive the gift of Christ's righteousness and through faith it becomes part of you (see Rom. 8:3, 4).

Unless the motivation for Christian perfection comes out of the "heart" daily renewed and sensitized by the Spirit of God, Christian perfection will be just another counterfeit system of superficial human accomplishments (see Ps. 51:12, 13).

Do you think that the reproduction of Christ's character is a prerequisite for personal salvation or a condition for effective evangelism?

2. An Open-Door Policy (read Revelation 3:7-13)

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

by Johan A. Japp

Johan Japp is a professor of theology at Helderberg College and chairman of the department of religion.

It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf" (Heb. 6:19, 20, NIV).

To the church in Philadelphia, Christ gives the most precious invitation that any human can hear—the invitation to enter by faith into the Messianic kingdom of Jesus Christ, which means to have full entrance into the city and the sanctuary of God.

When King David conquered the ancient Canaanite stronghold of Jebus, it became the personal property of the royal dynasty of David (see 2 Sam. 5:7). In the same way, Jesus Christ gained entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem and its sanctuary through the most dreadful conflict ever waged in eternity. In Gethsemane and on Calvary the sins of the lost world tore the members of the Trinity apart! In His human form, Christ could not bear this fathomless Godforsakenness, and as it ripped through His soul and heart He died, alone. But at that moment and through that infinite trauma, the veil of separation between God and humanity was torn open, from the highest heaven to the lowest earth (see Matt. 27:50-53; Heb. 10:19-22).

While the cross of Christ brings reconciliation between God and people, it was at the same time God's ultimate judgment on sin, and on such belongs the last judgment proper, which according to Daniel 8 and 9 commenced in 1844. But because the cross was an infinite event for heaven and earth, it broke out of the future into the present for all to behold and accept. Nothing less than this great act of atonement is the key of David that opens the way to God (see Matt. 16:19; Rev. 1:18). It is no wonder, then, that this message is given to the church of Philadelphia. Not only did this

church, which hinges like a narrow door between the post-Reformation period and the time of the end, produce a burst of new interest in prophecy, Bible translations, and worldwide missionary activity but it also focused the attention on the last judgment, when God would finally and irrevocably vindicate His saints before the persecuting, lying "synagogue of Satan." It is also the time where the shekina glory of God's redemptive presence in Christ, as well as the full meaning of God's holy law, will shine forth from the testimony and the lives of those who, like the Philadelphians, are known for their brotherly love (John 13:34, 35).

In what way can Christian experience be a hindrance or a help for people to enter into the saving presence of God?

3. All or Nothing (read Revelation 3:14-22)

"But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver" (Mal. 3:2, 3, NIV).

As the faithful and true witness of the New Covenant, Christ holds Himself responsible for the successful completion of the plan of salvation. As the origin and ruler of God's creation, He will see to it that God's new creation will be fully restored. Therefore He cannot tolerate the half-heartedness of His people that retards the visible establishment of His throne of glory in the kingdom of God.

While He will force no one to open the door of the heart, Christ will use every measure at the disposal of His being to shock the self-righteous and complacent out

of their spiritual lethargy. With severe acts of discipline, reminiscent of the covenant curses of the Old Testament, Christ knocks at the door of the heart impoverished by self-delusion and conformity to the world.

When one recognizes the voice of Christ speaking through the hardships and heartaches caused by one's own sin, as well as the suffering of trials, temptations, and persecution brought about by others, one will remember that God disciplines those whom He loves as His legitimate sons and daughters. (See Heb. 12:5-15). Even as Jesus learned obedience and was perfected from what He suffered, so His followers will be perfected in a time of unprecedented hardship and persecution (see Heb. 5:8; Dan. 12:1). Their faith and love will be refined like gold (1 Peter 1:7-9). Their character will become pure with the righteousness of Christ

(Rev. 7:13, 14). And their spiritual perspective will be enlightened by the vision of Christ's beauty and perfection (see Eph. 1:18; 2 Cor. 3:18).

The promises to the church of Laodicea belong to all in the Christian dispensation. But to the last church on the "circular route" of history, namely the church of today, Christ's promises have an extra ring of urgency and an extra dimension of fulfillment. Not only will He enter into the heart of those who reverently submit to His discipline, but suddenly He will appear on the clouds of heaven to purify the "sons of Levi" even of their sinful natures and mortality, and once again eat with them in His visible kingdom (see Luke 22:18; Ps. 24:3-6).

What difference do you see in the church becoming doctrinally complacent, and religiously complacent?

* C. Merwyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., 1985), vol. 2., p. 127.

Tuesday, April 18

Man's Opportunity and Responsibility

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 2:1

"This Scripture shows Christ's relation to the churches. . . . He watches them with intense interest to see whether they are in such a condition spiritually that they can advance His kingdom."¹

"At the first the experience of the church at Ephesus was marked with childlike simplicity and fervor. The believers sought earnestly to obey every word of God, and their lives revealed an earnest, sincere love for Christ. They rejoiced to do the will of God because the Saviour was in their hearts as an abiding presence."²

"But after a time the zeal of the believers began to wane, and their love for God and for one another grew less. . . . In their desire for something novel and startling they attempted to introduce new phases of doctrine, more pleasing to many minds, but not in harmony with the fundamental principles of the gospel."³

"The losing of the first love is specified as a moral fall. The loss of this love is represented as something that will affect the en-

tire religious life."⁴

"Is not this experience of the Ephesian church repeated in the experience of the church of this generation?"⁵

"But what are the members of the church doing that they should be designated 'laborers together with God'? 1 Corinthians 3:9. Where do we see travail of soul? Where do we see the members of the church absorbed in religious themes, self-surrendered to the will of God?" "Whatever their occupation—whether they were farmers, mechanics, teachers, or pastors—if they had wholly consecrated themselves to God they would have become efficient workers for the heavenly Master."⁶

"The eye of the Lord is upon all the work, all the plans, all the imaginings of every mind; He sees beneath the surface of things, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is not a deed of darkness, not a plan, not an imagination of the heart, not a thought of the mind, but that He reads it as an open book. Every act, every word, every motive, is faithfully chronicled in the records of the great Heart-searcher, who said, 'I know thy works.'"⁷

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 418.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 578, 579.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 580.

4. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 957.

5. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 422.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 423.

7. *Life Sketches*, p. 322.

by Izak van Zyl

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Wednesday, April 19

Rich Young Men or Spiritual Paupers?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 19:23-26, NIV

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.’ . . . Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’ ” (Matt. 19:23-26, NIV).

The periods of church history symbolized by the churches of Revelation 3 are eras that we are better acquainted with because of their relatively close proximity to our time. In fact, we are living during one of these periods of church history.

First, the church of the Sardis period extends from 1517 to 1792 and as such constitutes the “weak, worldly and degenerate” church of the post-Reformation period.¹ One would expect this young church of the Reformation to have been vital and alive, but not so. Instead, the period was characterized by theological wrangling and controversy as the living faith of the Reformers died with them and their churches degenerated into dead orthodoxy. Instead of standing firmly on their new-found authority and reliance on the Word of God and in their opposition to the papal church, the followers of the Reformers concentrated on theological differences, and a polarization took place in the Reformation

movement. Instead of proclaiming the gospel, they concentrated their efforts on developing doctrinal creeds, and the gospel was all but lost.

The church of the Philadelphia period, 1792 to 1844, stands in stark contrast to that of the Sardis period. Influenced by the evangelical preaching of John Wesley and others, this period was marked by a fervent revival of the proclamation of the gospel.² This was accomplished by an awakening awareness of the need to take the good news to the whole world, and the age of missions and missionary activity was born. This revival and its accompanying awareness of Christ’s imminent return was a significant event in the fulfillment of prophecy as the stage was set for the proclamation of the three angels’ judgment-hour messages.

Following Philadelphia comes the period of the Laodicean church. Our church, our milieu. This period of Christianity is characterized by lukewarmness, materialism, and wealthy self-satisfaction. A time when covetousness is described as “the greatest sin which now exists in the church.”³ It is interesting to note that the various negative characteristics ascribed to the churches of Revelation are often a reflection of the social conditions of the day. This is especially true of the Laodicean church. During this time period tremendous

by Douglas Frank McLeod

Douglas McLeod is a theology student at Helderberg College, South Africa.

changes have taken place in the structure of society as a result of the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century and the technological revolution of the twentieth. Traditional, rural-type family ties have been disrupted as great cities have sprung up and as individuals, you and I, have been forced into a technological and mobile life-style, with its need to achieve, its lack of real meaningful social relationships, and a media-stimulated chase for material gain. Yet just as social or peer pressure is no excuse for breaking God's laws, so Laodiceans have no excuse for their lukewarm condition—which elicits a strong rebuke from the

Head of the churches.

REACT

1. Is it possible for you and me to divorce ourselves from our environment?

2. From the root cause of our spiritually lukewarm malady, what do you see as the solution? "The only hope for the Laodiceans is a clear view of their standing before God, a knowledge of the nature of their disease. They are neither cold nor hot; they occupy a neutral position, and at the same time flatter themselves that they are in need of nothing."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 87.

1. Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Pacific Union College, Angwin, CA 94508, 1984), p. 52.
2. C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 129-131.
3. *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 194.

Go Away, the Door Is Locked!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 3:20

Jesus introduces Himself to each of us in various ways. Perhaps He has revealed His love to you through your parents, a friend, or even a teacher. The Lord is not limited in His capacity to speak to us. I have been convinced of this through personal experience. Although Jesus has intervened in my life numerous times, one occasion specially comes to mind.

Pastor Ron Wombold was the dean of men's residence at Canadian Union College. As a dormitory dean he was all right. I mean, at least he didn't come across as the authoritarian type. But, as a pastor, well, let's say that I wasn't really into religion. His worship talks usually fell on deaf ears. The door was locked, and his master key wasn't working. But for some strange reason he kept on knocking.

"Mike, the Lord is really interested in your life," he would say.

I wasn't listening. He continued to knock, "Mike, I am confident that you will choose to follow Christ."

He usually didn't preach it in words, but I could sense it in his manner.

The door was locked; yet, he

kept on knocking. Today, I am very thankful for concerned friends like Pastor Wombold who persevered in their service for the Lord.

The perseverance of Jesus, the eternal Knocker, teaches us a few important lessons about His character.

1. His Love Is Tough

True love doesn't give in when the going gets tough. Instead, it is based on a solid, 100-percent commitment. Jesus is totally committed to sharing a relationship with you. It's not easy to turn Him away.

2. He Has No Favorites

Jesus knocks at every door, so His invitation is open to all. "If *anyone* hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and eat with him, and he will eat with me" (Rev. 3:20, TEV).

3. He Honors Our Will to Choose

Jesus does not try to pick the lock or force the door. Instead, He knocks at the door so that we know He is there, then He remains standing and waiting patiently for us to let Him in.

REACT

What makes it so hard for us to open the door of our hearts to Christ?

by Mike Lemon

Mike Lemon is a theology graduate of Helderberg College, South Africa.

Friday, April 21

Dependent Children

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 18:3

“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3, NIV).

I have often thought about Christ’s words to the church at Laodicea. If “lukewarmness” refers to my Christian zeal, how is it that He would wish that I rather be hot or cold—hot, yes! But would Christ actually wish that I be cold for Him?

It has helped me to think of the “temperature” of the church and its members in terms of **dependence** upon Christ. In this sense, a lukewarm Christian is someone who no longer realizes his need of Christ—he or she does not need a thing! Cold Christians look at their condition and at least realize that they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked—they have a need. God cannot help lukewarm Christians until they are brought to the place where they realize they have a need.

A big difference between adults and children is that children are dependent on others to meet their needs, but adults are self-sufficient. The aim of educating

children is that they should become adult in their behavior and should act independently. Sophisticated learning has somehow trained us to depend too much upon ourselves, forgetting our real need. Christ reminds us that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who can honestly look at themselves, realize their need of Him, and turn in childlike dependence to Him.

Imagine getting up one morning to go shopping in the busiest store in town. After selecting all the items you intend to purchase, you arrive at the cashier, reach for your wallet, and realize in horror that you forgot to get dressed before you left home! You shamefully acknowledge to the cashier that up to this point of the day you were unaware of your nakedness—your need to be clothed. Christ’s letter to the Laodiceans tells us that an experience such as this could be something other than a dream!

REACT

1. How do I go about developing childlike dependence upon Christ?
2. Is it my responsibility to help my friends realize their need of Christ? If so, how do I go about it in such a way as not to cause unnecessary hurt?

by Dave Allen

Dave Allen is campus chaplain for Helderberg College, South Africa.

Lesson 5, April 23 - 29

Glimpse Into Glory



“Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come’ ” (Rev. 4:8, NIV).

Sunday, April 23

The Trouble With Hyperbole

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 4

It is not easy for technicians to deal with hyperbole. We have been schooled—in the scientific age—to give simple face-value meaning to everything. In this literalistic setting, this proof text way of life, sometimes the vigor of apocalyptic expression is difficult to grasp.

Look at the description of worship in Revelation 4. Flashes of lightning, peals of thunder. Seven lamps blazing. Four living creatures, which are covered with eyes and look like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. They never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy."

Then the twenty-four elders fall down before the throne whenever the living creatures give glory. This picture, in a literalistic sense, is one of creatures who never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy." And elders who, in their continuing response to the comments of the creatures, are in a constant state of rising and falling before the throne. Not a very workable picture is it? How does anything ever get done in such a setting? And wouldn't God become a little weary of such activity going on endlessly into eternity?

No, the literalistic approach is not very satisfactory in analysis of apocalyptic descriptions of heavenly scenes of worship. What do you expect of John? Glimpses of heaven with all its perfect

beauty are a bit hard to portray for one who lives in virtual sensory deprivation on a stark and isolated island used primarily as a penal colony. How would you describe the grandeur of live heavenly high-fidelity stereophonic choral and orchestral music when the most you have heard before are rudimentary musical instruments and limited choral groups?

John did the best he could to portray visions and concepts that were totally beyond the scope of his experience or descriptive ability. And it was a valiant attempt. Who, after all, has experienced a worship event in heaven? We who live in the stereo age, who view the entertainment extravaganzas of electronic and laser-light technology with a jaundiced boredom, would probably be no better in expressive powers were the task assigned to us.

To read Revelation with the eye of either the literalist or the cynic is at best to miss the point. Or even worse, to destroy its meaning. John invites us into the heavenly worship event, not as an analyst or an interpreter, but as a participant. Indeed, that is the point of worship. It is not a spectator sport, it is a participation event.

John seeks, in his hyperbole, not to make a scientific analysis of what he presents. Science is probably a discipline not particularly comfortable in the setting of a first century fisherman anyway. Join him in what he has to give, the fellowship of worship.

by Gary B. Patterson

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What Is Worship?

LOGOS

Theme: *The recognition of and response to God's holiness in adoration, praise, and thanksgiving constitutes acceptable worship. Without a proper knowledge of the holiness of God and an awareness of His love and care for His created beings, it is impossible for us to offer Him our service.*

It started out as a search for some way to express to my people what worship was all about. Granted, that sounds like a rather fruitless or redundant endeavor. After all, doesn't everyone in church know about worship? But what is worship?

Scripture enjoins it. Revelation 14:7 says, "Worship him." Psalms is loaded with allusions to worship. In fact, there is a collection of psalms in the 90-to-100 section that are a virtual study course on worship. But what is worship?

The hymnal, likewise, is rich in worship imagery and exhortation. There is for example "O Worship the King" or "O Worship the Lord." And in addition to these direct titular references to worship, the word or the concept shows up in the bulk of all the rest of the hymns in the book. But what is worship?

Even the church bulletin gets into the act. We have a section called "Worship Service" or "Divine Worship." Sometimes we say "Worship in Song" or "Worship in Giving." Sometimes we

"have worship" or we "go to worship." But what is worship?

As I pondered this question and a means of conveying an answer to my congregation, an idea hit me. "Why not diagram a worship service with real live people?" Then we can see what we are doing and what it is all about.

Exactly what would happen I wasn't sure, but here was the plan. I would select some unsuspecting-but-cooperative soul from the congregation and ask him or her to join me at the pulpit. Then together we would use others to make a living diagram of a worship. Each of the parts was to be represented by only one person. One for elders, one for musicians, one for deacons, one for congregation, etc. until we had fairly represented every aspect.

The unpredictability of it all was a bit scary. What if the person I chose did things that went a different direction from what I expected? I could look pretty foolish trying to pull out of that eventually. Maybe it was the risk that made the idea compelling, the doing of something unpredictable in church.

But it all worked out well. By now I have tried the idea many times in different settings and, within small parameters of variation, the results have been the same. We usually start out with a preacher (a fact that gives me a certain amount of assurance), and move from there through the various participants and finally to

by Gary B. Patterson

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the congregation, whom we usually think of last (a fact that gives me a certain amount of concern).

After placing all these representatives in depictive locations, we take a look and say, "Ah yes, this is a worship service." But then we start rearranging the whole thing. The first thing we do is ask the question "Where is God in this worship service?" Somehow we always seem to forget Him in the diagram.

This poses a problem. What do we do with God in a worship service? It seems like an odd question, but no one seems to know where to put Him. Some say in the balcony. One even suggested that we hang Him from the ceiling (a suggestion not only theologically questionable but also practically impossible for our live diagram).

It always makes for a moment of awkward silence while we try to figure out what to do with God. Then we start to change the whole thing around. For starters we move the "congregation" representative from his or her seat to a position in front and center, maybe in the pulpit.

This always generates a buzz of incredulity. Then we place the others in a grouping around the congregation as both assistants and fellow worshipers. Then the reality of it all dawns when we place God in the seat where the congregation had been previously.

Who after all is the audience at a worship service, God or us? The text for this week, Revelation 4, contains three aspects or elements of a worship service: The venue, the personnel, and the agenda. We will look at these in greater depth.

1. The Venue

John locates this event in heaven. He says he went through a door and into the location of the throne. But this is no ordinary room or building. It is surrounded

with a rainbow and twenty-four other thrones. And it is apparently beside a rather large body of water.

Maybe, for that matter, it is not a building at all. Maybe the climate of heaven is such as to permit these functions and events to occur outside. Our perceptions of churches and tabernacles and sanctuaries are so conditioned by the physical settings we know that it is hard to think in heavenly terms. Whatever it may be like, we must be careful to avoid the temptation to make heaven into our own perception of what we now know.

Describe your impressions of the scene in the throne room of heaven. Research the Old Testament images associated with this vision (see Gen. 9:12-17; Ex. 19:16-19; 25:31-40; 2 Chron. 4:2-6; Ezekiel 1).

2. The Personnel

First, there is God. He sits on the throne. The description of Him is a bit difficult to grasp. For starters, I do not think I would describe Him as looking like "jasper and carnelian," especially since I do not even know what carnelian looks like. John frequently refers to such gems as were the brightest colored objects known in his day. There seems to be an attempt to portray an intense brilliance to the entire scene.

As far as the "living creatures" are concerned, I hardly have a clue. The King James calls them "beasts." But that word has some less than ideal baggage these days. In deference to these holy beings, modern translations have gone with the living-creature terminology pretty much as a general rule. But where are we even with that? Scripture does not reveal what these and similar beings are like or to what order of life they belong.

Somehow I am a little more comfortable with the elders. Evidently, they represent the human factor in the heavenly worship setting. And their recognition of God and His worthiness for worship is obvious. They know what it's all about. They and God are in one another's audience. No question here as to who is the center of attention and where to put Him.

What does the vision in the throne room say to you about who God is and how He relates to the world? What is it about God that elicits such praise?

3. The Agenda

Songs and statements of worth and praise are the agenda. The sound, the sight, the fellowship of

it all is magnificent. There is antiphonal liturgy and one-on-one relationship. God's worth and authority are celebrated. He has the authority because He is the Author.

But let us recognize that these are not merely servants of lowly estate. They sit on thrones with God and wear crowns. The point is that they recognize the source of the blessings and lofty estate that they have attained. It is at the invitation of God, who said, "Sit down with Me in My throne."

How have you worshiped God today? How good do you feel about the way you worship God? Why? What needs to happen in your life for you to feel better?

Tuesday, April 25

Back to the Future

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Psalm 95:6, 7

Probably the "living creatures" are as mystifying to us as any of the features of this Revelation 4 worship event. But there is much more symbolism here, and for that matter, throughout the book of Revelation, as well as in all of Scripture. It seems strange to us because we are not familiar with the setting in which it arises. But symbolism is common, even to us. We just don't notice it when the symbols are familiar. If it's the mascot of the football team or the national emblem we see it with clear understanding. It is only strange to the uninitiated or the uninformed.

"In the Revelation are portrayed the deep things of God. The very name given to its inspired pages, 'the Revelation,' contradicts the statement that this is a sealed book. A revelation is something revealed. The Lord Himself revealed to His servant the mysteries contained in this book, and He designs that they shall be open to the study of all. Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth's history, as well as to those living in the days of John. Some of the scenes depicted in this prophecy are in the past, some are now taking place; some bring to view the close of the great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven,

and some reveal the triumphs and joys of the redeemed in the earth made new.

"Let none think, because they cannot explain the meaning of every symbol in the Revelation, that it is useless for them to search this book in an effort to know the meaning of the truth it contains. The One who revealed these mysteries to John will give to the diligent searcher for truth a foretaste of heavenly things. Those whose hearts are open to the reception of truth will be enabled to understand its teachings. . . ."¹

"The sanctuary in heaven, in which Jesus ministers on our behalf, is the great original, of which the sanctuary built by Moses was a copy. . . . The abiding place of the King of kings, where thousand thousands minister unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him (Daniel 7:10); that temple, filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration, could find, in the most magnificent structure ever reared by human hands, but a faint reflection of its vastness and glory."²

REACT

Should I be concerned if the symbols in apocalyptic scriptures seem strange to me?

How do these symbols tie together the history of salvation from Israel through the Christian church to the worship scene in heaven?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 584.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 414.

by Gary B. Patterson

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The Feud of Form and Freedom

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Psalm 100:1

I met a man in a church where I once preached who told me that he did not like to sing songs in the hymnal that contained the word *hallelujah* in them. I was astounded by his comment and asked, Why? He said that it was too charismatic.

In another church where I was preaching about a year or so later, another man was so enthusiastic in his "Amen's" and "Hallelujah's" and "Praise the Lords," that the deacons finally remonstrated with him and asked him not to return unless he could temper his outbursts.

Paul Anderson, in an article printed in the May 16, 1986, issue of *Christianity Today*, tells us of a woman who responded to the preacher with a loud "Praise the Lord!" A nearby seat mate counseled her that "we don't praise the Lord in this church," to which yet another responded, "Yes we do, it is on page 19."

And then there was the old man who stood up in the midst of a spirited charismatic service and said, "I just got word from the Lord, He is sick to death of guitars and tambourines."

The fine line between form and freedom, which balances both, is hand to foot. It is particularly so when the diversity of education, cultural background, age, and interests is so great in the church.

And this is only to name a few of the diversities. Anderson asks, "Can order and ardor coexist in worship?"

Certainly there is need for both, but it is so easy for one to dominate the other. On the one hand, the excesses of heathen religion are soundly rejected in both the Old and New Testaments. "Order is the first law of heaven," we are fond of saying. Yet we must remember that Jesus addresses the strictures of formalism, saying at the triumphal entry, "... if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40, NIV).

There is ever the risk that we will confuse our forms and procedures with worship. When in actuality they may at best be incidental to or even hostile to worship. John Killing in his book *Experimental Preaching*, page 11, says, "What is heard too long or seen too long or felt too long in the same manner inevitably becomes idolatrous. It is first *associated* with the object of worship. Then it becomes *identified* and *confused* with the object of worship. And it ends, in most cases, by supplanting the object of worship."

Forms and liturgies are nice. I like them. I like order. But I must remember that the forms are not worship, only the vehicle to worship. And when the forms of any process, be it liturgical, charismatic, or any other process, get in the way and obstruct or obscure the object of worship, then we have missed the whole point.

by Gary B. Patterson

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Thursday, April 27

Who's to Say

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Corinthians 12:12

Did you ever try to change the order of the way things are done at church? Or the arrangement of platform furniture? Or who sits where in the pews? These things and many other aspects of corporate worship seem over time to take on a life of their own. They are invested with religious authority that is difficult to demonstrate scripturally, but rigidly held nonetheless.

Who's to say? What are the limits of diversity in the church? It should be noted and carefully remembered that God did not just find diversity in the church and decide to live with it. No, He created diversity. Paul uses the "body" imagery to describe this phenomenon. Through this he makes it clear that to force the church into sameness is as foolish as all the body trying to be an eye, a foot, or a hand.

Unity must be an intentional process within the diverse members. The physical body is tragic in its various manifestations of disunity maladies. When the parts of the body do not function in harmony, it creates disaster. Likewise a disunified church is a disaster. There are ways that the church can—no, must—learn to work together.

The Church as Community

The fact that there is community predisposes us to institu-

tional authority. That this is dangerous can easily be demonstrated from history. But it is also necessary. We would be foolish to flee from the council of community into our own isolated existentialism. The community of the church with its institutional and administrative authority provides for greater strength and safety for its members. There is wisdom in the council of the body. This is not to say that the church never errs, but the potential of collective wisdom is greater than that of a person in isolation.

Dealing With Diversity

Somewhere between the extreme of, say, dressing in uniforms or enjoying no commonality at all, there needs to be shared values and ideals with room for variant opinions. The problem is not agreeing that there should be room for variety. We all know that. But where is the line to be drawn? This delicate task must be done as the work of community, keeping in mind both our perceptions of truth and an openness to the ideas of others.

REACT

What could we do to make our worship a blessing to the worshipers and a joy to God?

Are there positions and processes in the church that need to be reviewed? How can we do the task without straying from truth or frightening other members?

by Gary B. Patterson

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Friday, April 28

Origin and Destiny

OPINION

Key Text: Psalm 95:6

Recently I was driving through a very familiar part of town. My thoughts were, as we say, "a million miles away." I don't even remember what I was thinking about at the time, but I remember what happened. I was so engrossed in thought that I forgot where I was. I knew I wanted to go home, that's where I was headed, but I had no idea where I was.

What do you do in a situation like that? It would have been of no value to stop and look at a map. I didn't know where I was. What good would a map do? I wouldn't know where to begin. I tried to read a few street signs, but for a block or two I didn't recognize any. Finally a few familiar sights reminded me of where I was, and the lostness was over.

If a person is unsure of his origin, he will not know how to reach his destination. All the maps and road signs he looks at will only frustrate, since the information they contain is not usable. The spiritual implication is obvious. We are called to worship the Creator God. If this worship had been maintained as established at Creation and reiterated in the Ten Commandments, the world would not be in the confusion it is in today.

Creation and redemption—which is in reality re-creation—are the justifications given for the heavenly worship scene. But one need not wait till some distant day in heaven's sanctuary for the orientation that worship provides. Worship is not enjoined upon us because God needs the ego satisfaction. Rather, it is we who discover ourselves, our true selves, in the worship experience.

The significant issue of the weekly Sabbath experience is that in memorializing Creation we learn who we are. We are made in the image of God. "In the beginning, man was created in the likeness of God, not only in character, but in form and feature. Sin defaced and almost obliterated the divine image; but Christ came to restore that which had been lost."*

To be reminded of this twofold identity definition—creation and redemption—in a regular program of worship is the ultimate ego satisfaction. That's why God loves worship. In it He establishes again and again who we are, His children.

REACT

Have I and my fellow worshipers comprehended the issues of origin and destiny inherent in a worship service?

Is my worship affirming my relationship with God and identifying who I am in relation to other people?

* *The Great Controversy*, pp. 644, 645.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.



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Lesson 6, April 30 - May 6

Deed to a Planet



“ ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ ” (Rev. 5:12, NIV).

Sunday, April 30

We Have No Key!

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 5:1-5

Some years ago we were at a camp meeting with our Pathfinder group. On the last day of camp we decided to play a cross-country game. Each team we set up received a key that would unlock a treasure chest that had been hidden somewhere in the woods. The group that would be the first to find the treasure would be the winner. All the groups scattered on their quest for the treasure. After about two hours our group came to the place for which we were looking. We examined our handmade map and tried to locate the spot where we should dig for the chest. A few moments later I shouted, "Come right here! I am sure this is the place!" The others in my group came running. You can imagine how excited we were while digging.

After a few minutes of shoveling and scratching, our fingers got hold of something wooden. A moment later we had the chest in our hands. How jubilant we were! But we were also curious to see what was inside! Well, where is the key? Come on, now, get the key out. We want the treasure! Suddenly I realized that I was the one responsible for taking care of the key. But where was it? Frantically I searched my pockets—once, twice—but no key! If I had lost it somewhere on the way there was no chance of finding it!

What a disappointment! No key, no treasure! Our faces dropped. We had almost won! The game was lost! I was devastated!

We were so disappointed that we were unaware of someone approaching us from the woods until he called out. What a surprise! It was our Master Guide! "I think you left behind something very important," he smiled. "After you started out I found the key you were supposed to take with you! Here you are. Cheer up now." This changed everything! What a relief, what a joy! We quickly opened the chest and discovered that it contained a little medal for each of us. We had been successful because someone brought the key.

As I think back on this experience in my life I can feel something of the disappointment the apostle John must have felt when nobody could be found to open the scroll. He was distressed because nobody had the "key" to open the book. How glad he was when one of the elders said, "Don't cry. Look! The Lion from Judah's tribe, the great descendant of David, has won the victory, and he can break the seven seals and open the scroll!" (Rev. 5:5, TEV).

How thankful we should be to God, whose love for us never ends! In this week's lesson we will study how Heaven gives honor to the One who made it possible to break the seals and to open the book. Let us see what we can learn from this chapter about God's care for us and how we should give Him the glory!

by Ottmar Wander

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No More Weeping

LOGOS

Theme: *Jesus is our Mediator and Judge in the heavenly sanctuary. His death and resurrection make possible forgiveness, cleansing, and eternal life for all who trust Him as Lord and Saviour.*

1. The Scroll With the Seven Seals (read Revelation 5:1)

John is looking through an open door into heaven (Rev. 4:1), which together with the setting of thrones suggests that the whole scene has to do with the heavenly sanctuary. From here God Himself directs the universe (cf. Rev. 11:19; 15:5ff; 19:11). And after watching and listening intently to what happens in this throne room (i.e., the holy place, cf. 4:5), John suddenly sees a scroll in God's hand. Obviously the scroll is the main focal point of this section of the book and the starting point for a number of striking and frightening events. But it cannot be accidental that before this scroll comes into view two perspectives become the center of John's attention and provide a framework for the first half of the throne scene: a. God on the throne (4:2, 3) which points to Him as Judge; b. The worship of God as the Creator (4:11).

It is noteworthy that in biblical as well as in Jewish tradition the association of creation and judgment is a clear reference to the Day of Atonement.¹

"Blessed be thou, Lord our

God, King of the universe, who opens the doors to mercy and gives light to the eyes of those who expect forgiveness from the one who creates light and darkness, and creates everything."
—*Yotser leyom Kuppur.*²

However, the integral part of the judgment scene—according to Daniel 7—is the opening of books (see Dan. 7:10). The opening of a book in a divine judgment setting means the disclosure of human destinies here on earth and their final reward. But in Revelation 5 the scroll is still sealed, which strongly suggests that the judgment has not commenced, although the "stage" is now set.

God holds the scroll in His own hand, i.e., He is the one to decide about the eternal fate of those written in the book. This is emphasized by the fact that the seven seals keep the book closed—the symbolic figure "seven" reminding the reader of the divine fullness implied here and pointing to the authority of the Creator God, who alone is able to settle the issue of sin and salvation for humanity.

2. No Cause for Weeping (read Revelation 5:2-5)

Judgment is "made in favor of the saints" (Dan. 7:22, NKJV). From his own experience of the Day of Atonement John knows that we are totally dependent on the final vindication of humanity through the blood of the Lamb. Judgment is absolutely necessary finally to fix the trust relationship

by Winfried Vogel

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between God and people and to defend the decision before the "accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10) and the universe. Since in the judgment the books are opened, and the opening of the books means final vindication for God and the saints, the closed and sealed book is a horrifying view to the onlooking apostle. It means that not even an investigation of the records is possible—which is a necessity in any judgment. John sees God on His throne worshiped by holy creatures and infers from the nature of the scene that there is no chance for human destiny if someone cannot be found worthy to open the book.

The weeping of John reminds us of Daniel weeping in a similar situation (Daniel 9). The motive in both instances is the same: the all-absorbing desire for the liberation of God's people. While in Daniel's mind the focus was on the end of the 70-year exile and the return to Jerusalem, John's eyes are directed toward the final and eternal return of all of God's people to the heavenly Jerusalem. While Daniel's weeping is answered by the most intriguing of the Messianic prophecies, focusing on the act of salvation at the cross in the middle of the last week (see Dan. 9:27), John's weeping is answered by the introduction of the "Lamb that was slain." God's people live by total dependence on the One who alone is worthy to open the book by His being slain (Rev. 5:9).

Moreover, while Daniel's vision in chapter 9 of his book gives the clue to the 2300-year prophecy and thereby opens the perspective for the investigative judgment, John sees in his vision the Lamb and His blood as the prerequisite for that judgment. This is the good news—the gospel—for the apostle John and every believer. This is no cause for weeping, but

reason for rejoicing.

For an Old Testament prophetic view of the vindication of humanity by God read Isaiah 62: 1-12.

3. The Lion and the Lamb (read Revelation 5:5-7)

It is of special significance that Jesus Christ is depicted in these verses as the Lion and the Lamb.

a. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah

This reminds us of two prominent messianic prophecies, the one given to Judah by his father, Jacob, when He blessed him before he died (Gen. 49:9, 10; cf. Isa. 11:1); and the other one contained in the involuntary blessing of Balaam over Israel (Num. 23:24; 24:9).

Apart from the fact that in the ancient world the lion itself was considered a royal animal and used as a symbol for the highest rulers (e.g., the enameled bricks of the processional street and the famous Ishtar gate in Babylon), the lion in prophecy is also associated with the scepter, particularly pointing to Christ as the ruler of the nations (cf. Rev. 12:5; 19:15).

The additional mention of "the Root . . . of David" in conjunction with Revelation 22:16 leaves no doubt as to who is meant here, and further strengthens the prophetic fulfillment of Christ's role as Saviour (see Jer. 23:5, 6).

b. The Lamb With Seven Horns and Seven Eyes

There could hardly be any greater contrast than the one between a strong and victorious lion and a Lamb that looked "as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5: 6, NKJV). But the symbol of the Lamb is a clear indication of another prophetic fulfillment (Isa. 53:7) and is used here for the first time in the book of Revelation (28 times altogether). Jesus Christ,

the Lamb, that *was* slain but now lives, is the hope of the world (John 1:29).

John stresses the fact that the Lamb is in the center of the throne and in the midst of the elders. In doing so, he is pointing to the centrality of the cross in the salvation process and its significance for the coming judgment.

The seven horns show divine omnipotence and the seven eyes divine omniscience (cf. Rev. 1:4; 3:1).

c. The Association of Lion and Lamb

The association of lion and lamb could also have an eschatological connotation, i.e., pointing to the future life in heaven, where animals like the lion and the wolf will live peacefully together with lambs (cf. Isa. 11:6, 7; 65:25).

If these symbolic animals had not been selected to depict our Lord Jesus, what then would it mean to you personally that Christ is the Lion, the Lamb? Which of the two symbols appeals to you more? Why?

4. Rejoicing in Heaven (read Revelation 5:8-14)

The immediate reaction to the Lamb's reception of the sealed book is worship. The Lamb receives absolute homage and honor as the Creator (see Rev. 4:11; 5:9, 13), where the same expression "you are worthy" is used of Christ as Saviour and as Judge. These three functions or ministries of God are the framework of the whole plan of salvation.

Revelation 5:9 parallels 14:4, 6

and shows that the everlasting gospel is to be preached on earth while the "judgment of the saints" takes place in heaven. This thought is supported by the biblical references to sing a new song (cf. Ps. 33:3-5; 40:1ff; 96:1-13; 98:1-9; Isa. 42:5-17). In each instance the reasons given for singing a new song to God are His righteousness, His faithfulness, and His truth; which are the basis for judgment. The same idea is presented in Revelation 15:3, 4 with regard to the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, where in the end "all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (NKJV). All those who accept Christ's redemption will apparently join in the jubilee and praise with the four creatures, the 24 elders, and the multitude of angels described in chapter 5.

The singing of songs has traditionally been the reaction of the people of God in moments of triumph (e.g., Exodus 15). This new song, the book of Revelation mentions, can be sung only out of the experience of salvation and is the devoted expression of those who acknowledge that God through Jesus Christ has saved them by His grace. The new song therefore manifests the absolute recognition of righteousness by faith.

Is it possible for Christians to sing a new song today, or do we have to wait until we get to heaven?

How can you and I learn this new song? (read Rev. 14:3-5).

1. Jaques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1987), p. 60.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Tuesday, May 2

The Book and the Lamb

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Jude 24, 25

By His life in our midst, Jesus was to make known to humans and angels the character of God. He was the Word of God; by Him the thoughts of God became perceptible. In His high-priestly prayer, Jesus says: "And I have declared unto them thy name, and I will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26).

But the Jewish priesthood and scribes did not love God. They were jealous of Christ for His faultless nature.

"His [Christ's] whole life was a reproof to their selfishness, and when the final test came, the test which meant obedience unto eternal life or disobedience unto eternal death, they rejected the Holy One of Israel. . . .

"Thus the Jewish leaders made their choice. Their decision was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open. In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah."¹

"Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of it in relation to God. Few

give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him."²

"The fifth chapter of Revelation needs to be closely studied. It is of great importance to those who shall act a part in the work of God for these last days. There are some who are deceived. They do not realize what is coming on the earth. Those who have permitted their minds to become beclouded in regard to what constitutes sin are fearfully deceived. Unless they make a decided change they will be found wanting when God pronounces judgment upon the children of men. They have transgressed the law and broken the everlasting covenant, and they will receive according to their works."³

"The Lamb of God is represented before us as in the midst of the throne of God. He is the great ordinance by which man and God are united and commune together. Thus men are represented as sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. This is the appointed place of meeting between God and humanity."⁴

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 294.

2. *Education*, p. 263.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 267.

4. Ellen G. White Comments,

SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7,

p. 967.

by Rene Dlouhy

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Who Is Worthy?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 3:4; 5:12

A prominent word in Revelation 5 is "worthy" (Greek: *axios*), as in the key phrase "You are worthy." The original meaning is "bringing up the other beam of the scales," or "bringing into equilibrium,"¹¹ which again is suggestive of judgment. Scales are symbolical for just judgments in the hands of *iustitia*, the Roman personification of justice. The English noun that is derived from the Greek *axios* is *axis*, which describes the connection between two equal parts, e.g., the beam of the scales.

To be just or worthy it is necessary to have a balance in the scales of justice. The same picture is used in Daniel 5, where the prophet interprets the handwriting on the wall as telling the king: "You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting" (verse 27, NKJV). After the investigation (the weighing in the balances) the verdict was spoken and judgment executed. "In pagan inscriptions the judgment *axios* is passed on action, and sometimes . . . *axios* . . . can be asserted as the motive of action."¹² This is only another way of describing the terms *just* and *worthy*.

God is worthy because there is no evil in His nature that would disturb the balance. The Lamb is worthy because He has put His sacrifice and righteousness into the scale of humanity so that it

becomes balanced.

Axios is used seven times in Revelation, and it is interesting to observe the structure in which it is found in the book:

1. 3:4, "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they walk with Me in white, for *they are worthy*" (NKJV).

2. 4:11, "*You are worthy*, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (NKJV).

3. 5:2, "*Who is worthy* to open the scroll?" (NKJV).

4. 5:4, "So I wept much, because *no one was found worthy* to open and read the scroll" (NKJV).

5. 5:9, "*You are worthy* to take the scroll, . . . for You were slain" NKJV).

6. 5:12, "*Worthy is the Lamb* who was slain" (NKJV).

7. 16:6, "For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is *their just due*." (NKJV).

The central focus of the term *axios* is on God and the Lamb being praised as the Creator and Redeemer/Recreator. Chapter 4:11 is like a hub around which the whole throne scene of chapters 4 and 5 seem to turn, whereas the disappointment of John in Revelation 5:2, 4 is met in verses 9 and 12 when the Lamb is presented as the One who is worthy.

In Revelation 3:4 and 16:6 the term is used for humans, the first

by Winfried Vogel

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one showing that only Christ's righteousness, the white garments, can make a person worthy, so that he or she is not found wanting before the heavenly Judge. The last one demonstrates the opposite: those who have not accepted the blood of Christ for salvation, but have instead shed

the blood of the saints, are worthy of a guilty verdict at the last judgment.

REACT

What does it mean to wear the white garment of Christ's righteousness and be worthy before God?

1. Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964), vol. 1, p. 379.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 379, 380.

Thursday, May 4

Praise the Lord!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 5:1-14

1. Jesus—the Key to God's Revelations

God wants to reveal Himself to us, and He has a lot to say. Sinful humans are not open to these revelations. Therefore God looks for mediators and appoints prophets and apostles. His highest revelation, however, appeared in Christ. Whoever wants to understand God must understand the life of Christ and His ministry in the sanctuary.

If we allow God to impart to us this understanding, then we will have the best key in our hands for understanding His revelations. The incomprehensible God thus becomes understandable to us to a certain degree. By studying the Bible we discover how God has revealed Himself in Christ.

What aspects of Christ's life and ministry have become important to you? Why? (see Hebrews 8, 9).

2. Overwhelming Joy

In Revelation 5 John is permitted to witness singing in heaven. The song grows stronger and stronger until it reaches the earth. The inhabitants of heaven are singing a song of joy about the restored relationship between God and humanity—for Jesus died for us. He makes us priests and gives us the opportunity to enter a relationship with Himself.

He has redeemed us—as a bridegroom does for his bride in the Orient. This picture shows us the intimacy of this relationship. God wants to establish an intimate connection with us. As marriage partners communicate with each other, God and I may communicate with each other. The bride reads every wish from the lips of the one she adores.

How real is your devotion to God? What are the important things in our relationship with God?

3. Praise God!

Let us accept the challenge to represent God as the One who deserves honor above all. By developing our imagination we can discover new ways to honor God. The heavenly beings sang a new song. This means we need to express our decision for Jesus and what He means to us in new ways.

God has given us talents and abilities through which we can express ourselves. Revealing our joy in music, in songs, and in loving our neighbor can enrich our own lives, as well as those of other people. Our behavior illustrates to the world what God is like. What kind of picture does your life portray?

What forms of expression do you find to honor God? How can praising God change your daily attitude—toward yourself, toward others?

by Oliver Schulz

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Friday, May 5

Holiness is More Than Rules

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 3:18

One of the questions that inevitably arises from this week's study of Revelation 5 is: What does it mean to worship God and be worthy in His sight? And how can we be holy before a holy God?

Charles Colson in his thought-provoking book *Loving God* takes Mother Teresa as an example to answer these questions: "Mother Teresa is not in love with a cause, noble as her cause is. Rather, she loves God and is dedicated to living His life, not her own. This is holiness. It is the complete surrender of self in obedience to the will and service of God. Or as Mother Teresa sums it up, complete 'acceptance of the will of God.'

"Mother Teresa's definition may sound rather nebulous to many Christians who have from childhood associated holiness with a long string of do's and don'ts. But seeing holiness only as rule-keeping breeds serious problems: first, it limits the scope of true biblical holiness, which must affect every aspect of our lives. Second, even though the rules may be biblically based, we often end up obeying the rules rather than obeying God; concern with the letter of the law can cause us to lose its spirit. Third, emphasis on rule-keeping deludes us into thinking we can be holy through our own

efforts. But there can be no holiness apart from the work of the Holy Spirit—in quickening us through the conviction of sin and bringing us by grace to Christ, and in sanctifying us—for it is grace that causes us to even *want* to be holy. And finally, our pious efforts can become ego-gratifying, as if holy living were some kind of beauty contest. Such self-centered spirituality in turn leads to self-righteousness—the very opposite of the selflessness of true holiness.

"No, holiness is much more than a set of rules against sin. Holiness must be seen as the opposite of sin. Sin, as the Westminster Confession defines it, is 'any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God and obedience to the will of God. . . .' Conformity to the character of God—separating ourselves from sin and cleaving to Him—is the essence of biblical holiness, and it is the foundational covenant, a central theme running throughout Scripture."¹

Worshiping God, then, which according to Revelation is the decisive activity of God's professed people in the last days of earth's history, does not find its expression in beautiful words or a show that we put on, but rather in a trust relationship with Jesus Christ that "is close and decided." This, according to Ellen White, is the one thing that "will certainly be understood from the study of Revelation."²

1. Charles Colson, *Loving God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), pp. 126, 127.

2. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 114.

by Winfried Vogel

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Lesson 7, May 7 - 13

Celestial Equalizers



“They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’” (Rev. 6:10, NIV).

Sunday, May 7

When Love Gets Tough

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 6

We gathered in the cemetery—family, school friends, church family, and nurses—to say goodbye to a young lad who had struggled valiantly with disease nearly all his life. During his brief life he had impressed many with his faith and courage. At the age of 15 his body finally gave up the struggle. He knew it could come to this someday in his youth, and yet he fought to live—and he lived to the full during those few days when he was well. Despite numerous radical emergency surgeries, constant physiotherapy and medication, his spirit seemed to keep his body alive, year in, year out. As we gathered around the grave each person stood silent, deep in his own thoughts,

some crying, others as though they could at any moment. The family clung to one another, trying to keep each from collapsing physically and emotionally. It seemed so unfair. It wasn't fair—one who had in his few short years lived more zestfully than most people live in a lifetime, was now dead—he had treasured life, and yet it was rudely taken from him. These and other such apparent injustices of life have frequently caused individuals to cry to God. "How long, O Lord?" "How long must evil seem to win the day?" "How long will the good guys be treated as the bad guys should?" However, the sicknesses and tragedies of the present are nothing in comparison with the picture of the breakdown of peaceful order, justice, and safety portrayed in Revelation 6!

by Kevin Howse

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Vindicated by the Lord!

LOGOS

Theme: *The cry of the afflicted righteous is heard and registered in heaven, and toward the end of human history those who have suffered for Christ's sake are vindicated by the Lord Himself.*

God's answer to the problem of suffering has two parts: Part one of the answer is found on the cross, where God Himself identifies with our suffering and through Christ's death and resurrection God opens the way to an eternal solution. Satan attempted to thwart the plan of salvation and secure our eternal damnation. With Christ's death on the cross the devil thought he had achieved his mission. Instead, the cross became our eternal hope and salvation and the assurance of Satan's eternal damnation. Ever since Calvary, Satan has been a defeated foe. He knows it and so works to drag as many into perdition with him as he can. Part two of God's answer is found in the judgment of the wicked—when love gets tough. Then the score with evil will be eternally settled. The defeat that Satan suffered at the cross will be actualized.

Two questions haunt us as we study this chapter:

a. Is this chapter a description of events in the past, which have occurred in church history since John's writing? Or, is this chapter a description of events soon to

come? Those who adopt the first suggestion believe that each of the seven seals describes a period of church history. Those who believe that the events foretold in Revelation 6 are yet to come point to Revelation 4:1, where the events of the seals are spoken of as coming "after this," that is, after the seven churches. The buildup to chapter 6 in chapters 4 and 5 implies that something of importance is about to happen which consummates in the eternal reward of the saints (5:9, 10) and the judgment of the wicked. This buildup, it is suggested, is hardly understandable if Revelation 6 refers to the checkered career of the Christian church. The Lamb is about to step into a new role, for which He is declared worthy by all heaven because of His death (5:6, 13). This buildup is in anticipation of the opening of all the seals and the events they portray leading up to Christ's second advent (Rev. 6:17).

b. Are there comparative scriptures that shed light on this passage? You can draw the similarities for yourself: The picture of the four horses of Revelation 6, reminds us of similarly colored horses in Zechariah 6:1-7, which brought messages of judgment to the nations that had oppressed Judah and Israel, besides promises for the restoration of God's people.

Christ's prophecy regarding the last days (Matthew 24) also contains some striking similarities to Revelation 6. Both predict:

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War (Matt. 24:6, 7; Rev. 6:3, 4).
Famine (Matt. 24:7; Rev. 6:5,
6).
Death (Matt. 24:7-9; Rev. 6:7,
8).
Martyrdom (Matt. 24:9, 10;
Rev. 6:9-11).

Sun and moon darkened, stars
falling (Matt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12-14).

Divine judgment (Matt. 24:36-
51; Rev. 6:15-17). It is also inter-
esting to note that the events of
Revelation 6 are in the same
chronological order as those proph-
esied by Christ!

The judgments described in
the seven seals found in chapters
6 and 8 also sound strangely like
the description of the last plagues
in Revelation 16. Both refer to
hail, earthquakes, rivers, seas,
darkness of sun, moon, stars, and
death. Revelation 9:20 actually re-
fers to the prophecy of the seven
seals as "plagues."

The nature of seals in Bible
times was to authenticate the
document to which they were at-
tached and to claim ownership.
But why is it necessary for God to
use this symbol in forecasting
these events? Is He trying to reas-
sure His people that even when
things are going against them,
His judgments are sure and
guaranteed? One thing is clear:
The final event about which each
of these chapters is primarily con-
cerned is the vindication of God's
people through the executive
phase of the judgment of the
wicked.

THE FOUR HORSES AND HORSEMEN OF THE APO- CALYPSE

1. The White Horse

In the Old and New Testa-
ments the horse is regularly as-
sociated with war and power,
especially in prophetic literature.
After victory in battle, Roman
generals would ride a white horse
at the head of a victory procession
through the city of Rome, leading

their conquering army with the
captives shuffling along behind.
Hence the white horse is a symbol
of victory. For this reason Christ
is seen riding a white horse when
He returns in final victory to
deliver final judgment (19:11).

2. The Red Horse

This horse and its rider intro-
duces a picture of war and
bloodshed.

3. The Black Horse

Inevitably in the aftermath of
war comes famine. Can you im-
agine paying a day's wage for one
day's meals? It certainly would
not feed a family.

4. The Pale Horse

This is no small disaster. One
quarter of the earth's population
is affected by war, hunger, and
disease! God's judgments have
fallen even though this state has
been brought on by sinful people
led by the powers of darkness.

*To what extent could the last-
day plagues be seen as being
brought on by man himself?*

5. The Fifth Seal

Meanwhile God's people are
being persecuted and martyred.
The cry "How long" is a common
theme of Scripture. It is the cry of
the saints who when standing for
right have been tormented,
mocked, and cut down. It is the
cry of saints waiting on God to
vindicate His people and judge
the wicked. In Daniel 8:13, and
Zechariah 1:12, the cry "How
Long . . ." is a plea to God for His
intervention as the forces of
wickedness oppress God's people
and their worship. David asks the
Lord "how long" when feeling
God's wrath and distance (Ps.
90:13), and when watching the ap-
parent success of the wicked over
good (Ps. 89:46).

Tuesday, May 9

Our Day Will Come

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 22:4

"Men who claim to be Christians may now defraud and oppress the poor; they may rob the widow and fatherless; they may indulge their Satanic hatred because they cannot control the consciences of God's people; but for all this God will bring them into judgment. They 'shall have judgment without mercy' that have 'showed no mercy.' (James 2:13.) Not long hence they will stand before the Judge of all the earth, to render an account for the pain they have caused to the bodies and souls of His heritage. . . . From hovels, from dungeons, from scaffolds, from mountains and deserts, from the caves of the earth and the caverns of the sea, Christ will gather His children to Himself. On earth they have been destitute, afflicted, and tormented. Millions have gone down to the grave loaded with infamy because they refused to yield to the deceptive claims of Satan. By

human tribunals the children of God have been adjudged the vilest criminals. But the day is near when 'God is judge himself' (Ps. 50:6.) Then the decisions of the earth shall be reversed. 'The rebuke of his people shall he take away.' Isa. 25:8. White robes will be given to every one of them. (Rev. 6:11.) And 'they shall call them the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord.' Isa. 62:12."

"Whatever crosses they have been called to bear, whatever losses they have sustained, whatever persecution they have suffered, even to the loss of their temporal life, the children of God are amply recompensed. 'They shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.' Rev. 22:4."*

REACT

What do you think would be the most difficult thing for you to suffer or endure for Christ? Why?

When you have experienced hard and painful times, what Bible promises have been of special help? Why?

* *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 178-180.

by Kevin Howse

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Wednesday, May 10

Turn Around is Fair Play

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 6:12-17

The natural disasters described under the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17) seem to occur immediately before the seventh seal or the seven trumpets of Revelation 8 and 9, which describe latter-day scenes even more awful than those described in Revelation 6.

After the earth-shaking events of the sixth seal, where nature itself seems bent on destroying humanity, there appears a strange turnaround of events. Instead of the saints hiding from their persecutors in the caves and mountains, the persecutors themselves are now on the run, desperately trying to find a place to hide in the mountains and caves.

This idea of "turnaround" is frequently used in the language of the book of Revelation, as illustrated by Revelation 13:10, "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword."

Other Examples of "Turnaround:"

1. *Worship*: In Revelation 13:4 the forces of evil are worshiped; in Revelation 14:7 God calls for true worship.

2. *Mark*: In Revelation 13:16 the wicked receive a mark on their hands and foreheads; whereas in Revelation 7:3 the saints are sealed by a mark in

their foreheads.

3. *Drink*: In Revelation 17:6 the power of evil is drunk with the blood of saints; whereas in Revelation 14:10, the powers of wickedness shall drink of the wine of God's wrath.

4. *Women*: In Revelation 12 the woman spoken of is the persecuted church; whereas the persecuting power is also spoken of as a woman (Revelation 17).

5. *Fire*: In Revelation 13:13 the power of evil attempts to convince the world of its power by making fire come down out of heaven; God punishes and destroys the wicked by sending fire and brimstone (Revelation 14).

6. *Blood*: The powers of evil freely spill the blood of the saints (Rev. 6:10; 17:6); whereas under the third plague (Rev. 16:3) the rivers and seas turn to blood.

REACT

How many more of these "turnarounds" can you find in Revelation?

When you look at the big picture of the book of Revelation the central issue seems to be: Whom do you wish to worship? Whose wrath do you wish to incur? Whose mark do you wish to bear? Do you want to stand on God's side and incur Satan's wrath, which can temporarily affect your physical well-being, or do you want to go along with the forces of evil and incur God's wrath, which will effect your eternal ruin?

by Kevin Howse

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Thursday, May 11

Free From Fear

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

How can I be sure that should I face martyrdom I will receive eternal life?

John saw in prophetic symbolism the martyrs who had given their lives because of God's Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Some have found comfort in the thought that the gift of martyrdom is a gift of the Spirit that can be used only once per person! However, I don't know about you, but for me the thought of being a martyr at all gives rise to fear, because personally I am allergic to pain. Paul's testimony in the face of imminent death is for me a comfort and reassurance: "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Another scripture that gives me reassurance was written by John: "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). When my life is in Christ I need have no fear of the future, no matter how tough it gets. I need not fear guilt, for to be justified by faith is that judicial act of God's free mercy, accom-

panied by the entrance of the Holy Spirit's enabling presence into one's life, whereby He pronounces guiltless those sinners heretofore condemned under the law. The repentant sinner is now considered righteous, at the point of justification, in the imputed righteousness of Christ (white robes). Here begins the experience of which Paul spoke to Titus as "the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). This gracious offer assures me of full pardon, acceptance in God's sight, adoption as His child, and heir of eternal life. I am of the simple opinion (faith) that "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Praise be to God. It was the assurance of this salvation that helped me in 1986 when I underwent brain surgery, and I trust it will be with me and you in the future when we face the forces of evil.

REACT

How would you feel if God should lead you to the point of martyrdom? Is what you believe worth dying for? On what basis would you be sure of eternal life?

If you are willing to die for God are you also willing to live for Him?

by Kevin Howse

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Friday, May 12

We Will Not Fear

OPINION

Key Text: Psalm 46

While the following promise was given at a different time in a different context, it is nonetheless a challenging promise to God's people facing the last days, especially as we see a rise in popular spiritualism. "Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life: Therefore ye shall see no more vanity, nor divine divinations: for I will deliver my people out of your hand: and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (Eze. 13:22, 23).

Psalm 46 is so applicable to the theme of Revelation 6 that it could almost have been written by John! "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the

heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.' The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (NIV).

REACT

Do you see the judgment of God primarily as the punishment of the wicked or as vindication for the faithful? Why?

by Kevin Howse

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Lesson 8, May 14 - 20

Ticket Out of Doomsday



“Then I heard the number of those who were sealed:
144,000 from all the tribes of Israel” (Rev. 7:4, NIV).

Sunday, May 14

Sealed? What's That?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 7:1-8

Ntate Thabiso always carried a big stick, but he didn't speak softly. Once, with tongue loosened by home-brewed alcohol, he insulted another gentleman, who also carried a big stick. In the fight, Thabiso came out second best; and I tried to salvage what remained of his left eye. For the police, I wrote a description of his injuries, our treatment, and the visual prognosis, and signed my name. But Thabiso was not satisfied. He insisted there must also be a rubber stamp at the bottom of the page. I live and work in the Kingdom of Lesotho, an African country in which people really love rubber stamps. They feel that signatures are too easy to forge, and the "seal" of a rubber stamp conveys more authority. So I carry around in my trouser pocket a stamp that reads: "Maluti Adventist Hospital; Robert R. Wresch, M.D., Ophthalmic Surgeon." Please note the three components:

1. My identifying name.
2. My title.
3. The zone of my activity and influence.

We are all familiar with such seals—the seal of the university, the national seal, or the seal of a notary public.

Joseph Bates and other Adven-

tist pioneers, encountering the phrase "seal of God," looked through their Bibles for some divine equivalent of human seals, and believed they found it in the fourth of the Ten Commandments:

1. Identifying name: The Lord thy God.
2. Title: Creator.
3. Zone of activity and influence: Heaven and earth.

Certainly the parallels are striking. Bates and his colleagues had only recently discovered that the Bible Sabbath is Saturday. They concluded that those who were "sealed" in Revelation 7 and who bore the Father's name in Revelation 14 would be keepers of the seventh-day Sabbath. Ellen White later endorsed their position. But is that all there is to it? If you keep the right day, are you sealed?

The first-century Jews kept the right day, and hurried home from the crucifixion of Christ to welcome the Sabbath as the sun went down.

Their descendants preserved the Sabbath. Does that make them "sealed"? Why, or why not?

Could it be that to be "sealed" is to be recognized by God as one of His friends? Could the Sabbath someday come to symbolize the bond between appreciative children and their delighted heavenly Father?

Could it happen even now? To you?

by Robert R. Wresch

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Dare We Discuss the 144,000?

LOGOS

Theme: *God's work of sealing His people saves them from the impending doom and secures them for His kingdom. If you live till Jesus comes, you must receive the end-time seal of God to be saved. To be unsealed is to be lost.*

1. Revelation 7:1-7 introduces the 144,000, who are described more fully in chapter 14:1-5. Let us interpret these two passages together.

The first important question could be: Are these descriptions to be considered symbolic or literal? Let's first assume them literal. John saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth. (The earth may be a rectangle, parallelogram, rhomboid, or trapezoid, but has exactly four corners.) The angels were holding back the four winds. (Winds can be held back, at least by angels. There is not a breath of wind on the whole earth.) He called out . . . "Do not harm . . . until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God" (Rev. 7:3, NIV). (God has servants, presumably people, whose foreheads are to be marked in some important way.) "I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." (The servants in question were all descendants of Jacob, and their tribal origin could be known.)

Twelve thousand were sealed from each of the 12 tribes, which

are then named. (The tribe of Ephraim is absent, perhaps merged with Manassah? From the tribe of Dan, not one is to be sealed. All the other tribes have been preserved. Regardless of their population and apparent spirituality, exactly the same number, 12,000, are sealed from each tribe. The total number to be sealed is, by chance or intent, exactly the square of the number of tribes, multiplied by one thousand.) The 144,000 stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Sealed on each forehead is the name of the Lamb and His Father.

John heard a sound from heaven that was simultaneously comparable to rushing waters, thunder, and massed harps. The 144,000 are singing a song before the "throne," "living creatures," and "elders" mentioned earlier in Revelation.

The song is new, the 144,000 all know it, but no one else can learn it. The 144,000 have been redeemed from the earth. They are described as "virgins," not having "defiled themselves with women." (These 144,000 Israelite men have been totally celibate.) They were purchased from among men. (The identity of the purchaser is not revealed.) They were offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. (We are not told by whom they are offered. Could they be both purchased by the Lamb, and offered to Him?)

Now, I don't know about you, but I have great difficulty imagining 144,000 celibate Israelite men

by Robert R. Wresch

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redeemed from a quadrangular earth, each with identical literal marks in his forehead, singing a literal rushing, thundering, harp-like new song to a literal lamb.

Of course this description is in no way dependent upon my imagination. But in a book entitled *Revelation*, and billed as “faithful and true” (Rev. 22:6), acceptance of this description as literal, would seem to, in the words of the *SDA Bible Commentary*, “put too great a strain on one’s credulity.”¹

But there are at least two more alternatives:

a. The passages could be partly literal and partly symbolic. But I’m afraid any division of the chapter into literal and symbolic portions would be completely arbitrary.

b. The passages could be totally symbolic. This alternative is much the easier to accept. Again, to quote the *SDA Bible Commentary*: “If, however, the 144,000 are not literal Jews but figurative Israelites, spiritual Israel, the Christian church, then the tribal divisions and other details are also figurative, and the difficulties vanish.”²

Of course, this way, if the Israelites, tribes, and virgins are not literal, neither is their number. But that should not be a problem. Let’s again try to imagine John’s experience as these persons are introduced. “I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000” (Rev. 7:4, NIV). “After this I looked” (Rev. 7:9, NIV). And what did John see when he looked? No, not exactly 144,000. (But how many of us could accurately number a choir of 144,000?) “And there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7:9, NIV).

And just like the 144,000, the people who are part of the “great

multitude” are “standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” They too sing. They are said to have come out of the great tribulation. And they “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev. 14:4, NIV). It certainly sounds to me as though the 144,000 and the “great multitude” are the same people.

Are the joys of heaven offered to a select few or to “whosoever will”? Does our passage promise special privileges to an elite minority? Do you think Abraham, Moses, Job, and Paul will be members of the 144,000? What difference would it make to them? To you?

“It is not His will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will not help them spiritually, such as, Who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand.”—Ellen G. White Comments, SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 978. Why did Ellen White caution us not to debate this point?

2. “No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless” (Rev. 14:5, NIV).

Do you feel perhaps that lies might have been found, but were hidden by the robe of Christ’s righteousness? Or are the 144,000 people who can be depended upon to tell the truth? About the Lamb? About the Father?

3. “I saw four angels . . . holding back the four winds” (Rev. 7:1, NIV).

Why do the angels hold the winds? For how long? Until God’s great clock strikes an hour previously and arbitrarily chosen? Until the world becomes sufficiently wicked? Until God’s people can meet Satan masquerading as an angel of light and not be deceived?

1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 784.

2. *Ibid.*

“Sealed” = Settled?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Colossians 1:27

“Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a *settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved*—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come.”¹

“Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand.”²

“OK,” I want to be sealed, and I admire the 144,000. But how do I “strive”?

“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 perfection of righteousness and holiness. He is the author and finisher of our faith. . . . 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.*”³

Seventh-day Adventists are known for many things: like health statistics and healing insti-

tutions; education and upward social mobility.

Could we someday be known first for our admiration of Jesus Christ and the Father He came to reveal?

Suppose God became our favorite study—and by beholding Him, we were changed. Suppose we knew God so well, that Satan’s misrepresentations could not fool us. Suppose we allowed God’s Holy Spirit of truth to guide us to “**a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually,**” so we could not be moved. With what joy and courage would we then represent God to the billions of His children He would like to heal, before the end is allowed to come!

And what about the Sabbath? **“Those who would have the seal of God in their foreheads must keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. This is what distinguishes them from the disloyal, who have accepted a man-made institution in the place of the true Sabbath. The observance of God’s rest day is the mark of distinction between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.”**⁴

Can you observe and offer the Sabbath as a joyous badge of commitment to our Lord? Could you even present the Sabbath as a “mark of distinction” without corrupting it with stuffy legalism?

1. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1166.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 970.

3. *Ibid.* Italics supplied.

4. *Ibid.*

by Robert R. Wresch

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Wednesday, May 17

What Keeps the “Sealed” Sealed?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: John 14:16, 17

Basotho African girls of two generations ago strove earnestly for beauty. Despite pain, expense, and health risk, they tattooed black circles on each cheek; and a vertical black line from forehead to nose. Their beauty was thus complete. They could command many crows from any suitor. These beauties are now more than 60 years old. They come seeking cataract surgery to restore their vision. Their youth has faded, but the glamorous tattoos remain. Their beauty is indelible. Ellen White speaks of God’s seal as “the indelible mark of God” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 446). When God seals His friends, are they permanently sealed? Could they ever become “unsealed”? Why?

Some look wistfully for a day when God will not only wipe tears from eyes but will wipe out all memory of sin, and all possibility of evil. These people would gladly give up freedom in exchange for eternal security.

Yes, the universe will be ultimately and eternally secure, but is the price the loss of freedom? Is freedom only a needless and expensive luxury, soon to be exchanged for eternal security?

If God wished only humble servants who would dutifully obey, why did He ever leave Mt. Sinai?

That mountain shook with fearful power. And the people promised, “All that the Lord has spoken, we will do!” But within six weeks their fear had faded, and with it, their obedience.

And that’s why God didn’t stay on Mt. Sinai, He was already planning other mountains. On a hillside in Galilee, the same God sat quietly, and spoke of the kingdom of heaven. He did not thunder or shout, and sometimes He even wept. Jesus said, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends” (John 15:15, NIV). Servants obey; but not always. True friends work together permanently, because they understand and appreciate each other.

How do the “sealed” stay sealed for eternity? Not by losing freedom, falling from servants to slaves. Rather, they graduate from being God’s faithful servants, to being His faithful friends. God need not scare them, or even command them. They are His friends; they share His goals.

“And if we consent, He [Christ] will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.”*

Only then can we be safely entrusted with eternal life. God’s friends will be secure, but free!

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

by Robert R. Wresch

Robert R. Wresch is an ophthalmologist at Maluti Adventist Hospital in the Kingdom of Lesotho, Africa.

Revelation or Mystery?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 1:1-3

The church at Ephesus seethed with excitement. Despite John's isolation on the island at Patmos, he had tried to keep in touch. There were other letters, but this was special. Jesus Christ had personally appeared to John and entrusted him with messages for the churches. These were part of a long letter just received.

For years now, since Paul founded their church, the Ephesians had been copying and circulating the letters of the apostles. In coming weeks they would be quick to make copies of John's latest letter. But this Sabbath there was only the original from which to read. The members and guests crowded into their meeting hall until there was standing room only.

There were few preliminaries. A hush fell on the congregation as all eyes and ears strained forward. The lecturer unrolled a papyrus scroll and began to read: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him. . . . I, John, your brother . . . was on the island of Patmos. . . . And I heard behind me a loud voice. . . . And when I turned I saw . . . someone 'like a son of man' " (Rev. 1:1-13, NIV). And it turned out to be their Lord!

They had already been standing for more than 30 minutes when they heard the words,

"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth" (Rev. 7:1, NIV). They spent less than five minutes on the passage we study this week. And the lecturer read on, pausing occasionally, only to wet his throat.

More than two hours had elapsed when they heard the words, " 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen" (Rev. 22:20, 21, NIV).

And as they milled about outside the church, and walked home in small groups, what was their conversation? Were they totally mystified by the heads, beasts, and numbers? Did they calculate dates, or debate the decline and fall of empires? What was the message God intended his hard-pressed believers to understand?

REACT

1. Is there a main point to the book of Revelation? Does it come through plainly as a message of inspiration and encouragement?

2. Is it clear despite confusing and discouraging events on earth, that Jesus Christ is still Lord, is still in control, and will ultimately triumph?

3. Do you think the believers left the Revelation reading with faith strengthened? Could they face the future with more hope? What made the difference?

4. Did they reap any practical benefits in living their Christian lives?

by Robert R. Wresch

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Friday, May 19

Was Job Sealed?

OPINION

Key Text: Job 1:1

"In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1, NIV). Was Job "sealed?" Perhaps. But Revelation (7:14, NIV) seems to associate the "sealed" with those "who have come out of great tribulation."

Would Job remain "blameless, and upright" even in the face of "great tribulation"? That was the question.

"Quite to the contrary!" Satan claimed. "Job is a *rice Christian*.^{*} Stop your material blessings, and he will surely curse you to your face."

God replied, "Very well then, he is in your hands."

And Satan took away Job's property, his children, and his health. But that's just the beginning of the story. Enter the three friends: And then Job's "great tribulation" really begins.

These were caring friends. They cared enough to come. They cared enough to sit in silent sympathy with Job's pain. They believed Job had offended God. They then revealed the depth of their caring, by trying at length to correct Job's understanding of God.

But the friends described God in terms that only Satan could approve. And Job held fast to the God he knew. At the end of the

book, God addresses the "friends:" "You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:8, NIV).

Job's tribulation included the loss of his wealth, his family, and his health. But what really bothered him, for forty chapters, was the seemingly well-meaning counsel given him by caring theologians—who turned out to be messengers of Satan! And Job survived his time of shaking, only because he was so settled into the truth (about God) that he could not be moved. Job emerged triumphant **because he and God were friends.**

We don't know what evidence Job had for his trust in God. But surely we have that much, and more. Since then, we have seen God at work in thousands of years of recorded human history. We have the Bible. We have the testimony of one of God's modern friends, Ellen White. We have a great chain of witnesses, who share that "unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13, NEB).

Suppose Satan and his modern agents should seek to deceive you about God, with such influence that "if it were possible," he could "deceive the very elect." Can you prepare for that "shaking?"

REACT

Do I seek every opportunity to become a better friend of God?

^{*} Rice Christian—a missionary term to describe a person who becomes a Christian in order to receive material benefits.

by Robert R. Wresch

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Lesson 9, May 21 - 27

Sound of Silence



“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’ ” (Rev. 7:9, 10, NIV).

Sunday, May 21

“Grandpa John”

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 7:9-17; 8:1

John was born near Kiev, in the heart of the Ukraine, in 1861. His father was a farmer, and John followed in his father's footsteps, working the same forty acres.

One day a Protestant woman gave John a Bible, which he eagerly read. As he studied he learned that the state church was not practicing the teachings of the Holy Bible, so he stopped attending its services. This was a serious offense, and the church officials sent several men to inquire as to why John was not attending. He listened to their arguments, but refused to return.

He was branded a heretic and one night, upon returning home from a Bible study, he heard angry voices approaching and knew that they were coming after him. Quickly he climbed inside a large steamer trunk, and his wife, after opening the door, seated herself upon it. The men demanded to know John's whereabouts, but she told the officials to look for him themselves.

After searching the entire house and attic they figured that John was hiding in the trunk. The men turned the trunk over and over with John inside. After breaking him out, they rewarded John with a cruel dragging down a dirt road carpeted with mud holes, toward the police headquarters. Every hole became a

miniature baptismal pool as John was raised and dropped into the muddy water. His drunken tormentors shouted out with each muddy splash, "We now baptize you!" After they arrived at the police station, John was sentenced to a six-month prison term. Before he was released his jailers severely whipped the soles of his feet to prevent him from spreading more "falsehood."

Injured but victorious, this sturdy farmer limped home while his clear tenor voice declared the love of God to the entire countryside. Such persecution made life intolerable for John Shanko and his family, and they decided to flee Czarist Russia.

Under cover of darkness John loaded his wife, Lena, and their three sons on to an old wagon and made their way south to the Port of Odessa on the Black Sea. With his meager savings he bought passage on a cattle boat bound for America. Three weeks later the old Russian steamer arrived at New York. During those early years all immigrants, in order to receive alien status in the United States, had to be met personally by a sponsor on Ellis Island. Immigrants who failed to do this were returned to their native country on the next vessel. John had made contact with a Russian-speaking Jew who had faithfully promised to meet him in New York. He was not there. He was never to be found.

John then met the fateful question from the immigration officer,

by Rob Shanko

Rob Shanko is a senior public-relations major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

"Where is your sponsor?" Silence. Again he asked, "Where is your sponsor?" Silence. John and Lena pulled their sons around them as tears filled their eyes. The consequences were obvious. The officer posed the question again.

After a long period of silence, seemingly from nowhere, a total stranger who had observed the entire incident stepped forward, put out his hand toward John and in fluent Russian said, "I am an American, I can help you."

Monday, May 22

The Sound of Singing

LOGOS

Theme: *In spite of human sinfulness and persecution by evil forces, divine grace is sufficient to save out of every nation, tongue, and people "whomsoever will" and to present them faultless with great joy before the throne of God.*

1. Homecoming International! (read Rev. 7:9)

"Behold, a great multitude . . . from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands" (Rev. 7:9, RSV).

Can you see them coming? Hundreds of delegates, trooping the flags of 184 countries before the Lord and 30,000 brothers and sisters! Missionaries and nationals from scores of racial groups, attired in colorful costumes, marching in triumph under the 9 1/2-acre roof of the New Orleans super-dome! See their faces—bright with excitement and holy joy over what God has wrought in the steady mission outreach of His people!

But the Sabbath mission pageant of the 1985 New Orleans General Conference Session, representing at that time a world membership of 4 1/2 million, was only a tiny microcosm of the coming heavenly scene! This is Heaven's Homecoming International—long, long planned for, now arrived!

The human mind can scarcely comprehend the magnificent

scene. Acres and acres and acres of people stretch away from the throne as far as the eye can see, congregated on the "sea of glass"—crystal-clear (Rev. 4:6), clothed in victory "whites" and shouting, excitedly waving palm branches to signal their intense joy, happiness, and triumph!

The expression, "no man could number" (Rev. 7:9)—just as no one can number the stars of heaven or the sand of the shore (cf. Gen. 22:17; Gal. 3:29)—identifies this multitude of happy people. Since they come "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues," they represent the full fruitage of the "everlasting gospel" that opened the door back to Eden after the Fall (Gen. 3:15) and continued to be proclaimed to all peoples to the end of the world (Rev. 14:6).

John does not pinpoint the time of this homecoming scene. It could take place most naturally at Christ's second Advent and the saints' entrance into heaven (cf. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 645, 646). However, it may occur—or be repeated—at Christ's coronation in the executive judgment at the close of the millennium (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 665, 666).

What is the message of the Christian Scriptures? Why does it have universal appeal, cutting across all racial and cultural barriers?

2. The Sound of Singing (read Rev. 7:10-12)

by Frank Holbrook

Frank Holbrook is an associate director with the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, Washington D.C.

[The multitude] "crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev. 7:10, RSV).

Turbulent emotions are not easily calmed. When the frightened Israelites unexpectedly found an escape through the Red Sea, their emotions were so charged that Moses and Miriam allowed the throng to release their overflowing joy in sacred song and dance: "I will sing to the Lord," they exulted, "for he has triumphed gloriously. . . . The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" (Ex. 15:1, 2, RSV).

Such will be the experience of the redeemed. As they begin to sense the full significance of their deliverance from Satan and sin, and the marvel of their immortal vigor, they will be rapturously happy.

John observes an interesting contrast between the exclamations and singing of the redeemed and the ascriptions of praise rendered by the angels assembled around the throne. Whereas the saved sing of their experience and praise God for deliverance from sin, the angels reply only with a resounding "Amen" and a sevenfold doxology (Rev. 7:1-12). The angels are silent about personal redemption, for they have never known the bitterness of sin nor the thrill of forgiving grace.

What method do all false religions use to accomplish human salvation? (See The Desire of Ages, pp. 35, 36). What is distinctively unique about the Christian gospel in this respect? What does the expression mean: "Salvation belongs to God and the Lamb"?

3. Companions of the Lamb (read Rev. 7:13-17)

"The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and

he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes'" (Rev. 7:17, RSV).

At this point (in the vision) one of the 24 elders sitting in the throne room asks the prophet, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" (verse 13, RSV). John professes ignorance, and the elder answers his own question: "These . . . have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (verse 14, RSV).

Adventist Bible students have generally identified this group (verses 13-17) with the 144,000 mentioned earlier in the chapter (verses 1-8). In recent years some have equated them with the "great multitude" (verse 9), or, at least a part of that throng. The identification hinges on the location of "the great tribulation" (verse 14).

If the "elder" is referring to the time of trouble (seven last plagues) that precedes the second coming of Christ (Dan. 12:1), then the group is probably the 144,000, the last generation of God's people who live through the final conflict over the Sabbath and the Law of God. If we understand "the great tribulation" more broadly to include the various periods of tribulation God's people have experienced through the centuries (cf. Acts 14:22), then we may infer that the group is representative of all those who have suffered persecution for the cause of Christ.

It is not essential to our spiritual well-being to resolve the question of identity, since the plan of salvation is the same for all. As the song writer says: "Some through the fire, some through the flood; some through deep waters, but all through the blood." The "blood" symbolizes

Christ's atoning death and sinless life. The "robes" of our characters are "washed" when we enter and remain in a bond of union with Christ as our personal Saviour and Lord. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Revelation 7:15-17 portrays a picture of ongoing devotion between Christ and the redeemed. My mother once rescued a small, well-trained dog that had been lost for several days. For seventeen years Mimi was the family pet, but her real attachment was to mother. If she stood at the sink to peel potatoes, Mimi curled up against her foot. If she went downstairs to put a load of clothes in the washer, Mimi followed and adoringly watched. If Mom sat at the desk to write a letter, or lay down to rest, Mimi was beside her. Everywhere Mom went, Mimi had to go. Mimi was content only in the presence of her beloved "rescuer."

Greater than that of an animal will be the devotion of the saved to the Saviour! However, the love relationship between them is mutual. The NIV reflects the original language when it states: "He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them" (Rev. 7:15, NIV).

A loving companionship involves time together. How am I presently nurturing my relationship to Jesus?

4. From Singing to Silence (read Rev. 8:1).

"When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (Rev. 8:1, RSV).

The "silence" of the seventh seal is commonly attributed to an empty heaven—during the Second

Advent and the return of the saints with the angels. But the Second Advent is implied under the sixth seal (6:16). Furthermore, it seems strange for the prophetic spotlight to focus on an empty, silent heaven when it might illumine the victorious action—the "sweet chariots" of angels and their "passengers" of redeemed saints rolling ever upward to the gates of the New Jerusalem!

In the original, the verse says literally that silence "became," "occurred," or "happened" in heaven. If we were to say that silence occurred in a classroom, it would not be construed that the room was empty. It would simply mean that for some reason the students had quieted down. To say that silence occurred in heaven may indicate that the angels simply ceased their activity for some reason. But what would "silence" the lips of angels?

Since the number seven suggests completeness, the seven seals probably extend to the establishment of the new earth. If the Second Advent takes place under the sixth seal, it would be equated to the "Day of the Lord" which, according to Peter, extends from the Second Advent to the recreation of the earth (2 Peter 3:9-13).

Once before, at Gethsemane and Calvary, "there was silence in heaven" as the angelic hosts witnessed the awesome sufferings of Christ in behalf of sinners (see *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 693, 753). May it not be that heaven will once again fall silent when judgment is meted out in the destruction of the wicked (Rev. 20:11-15)? How could heaven sing at the loss of human beings who did not have to die!

Why is the "accepted time" for salvation always "now" and not tomorrow? (2 Cor. 6:2).

Triumph with the Lamb

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 25:34

Praise God for revealing to us the future! We can look ahead with certainty and believe that with Christ at our side we will be victorious. No matter how hard Satan hunts us down, victory is assured for the servants of God. With Christ, the Lamb of God, as our captain, we will stand triumphant. As Ellen White wrote to the people of God:

"We may have a vision of the future, the blessedness of heaven. In the Bible are revealed visions of the future glory, scenes pictured by the hand of God, and these are dear to His church. By faith we may stand on the threshold of the eternal city, and hear the gracious welcome given to those who in this life cooperate with Christ, regarding it as an honor to suffer for His sake. As the words are spoken, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father,' they cast their crowns at the feet of the Redeemer, exclaiming, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. . . . Honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.' Matthew 25:34; Revelation 5:12, 13.

"There the redeemed greet those who led them to the Saviour, and all unite in praising

Him who died that human beings might have the life that measures with the life of God. The conflict is over. Tribulation and strife are at an end. Songs of victory fill all heaven as the ransomed ones take up the joyful strain, Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and lives again, a triumphant conqueror. . . .

"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' 'And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.' Revelation 7:14-17; 21:4."*

REACT

1. If Christ were to come today, would you be one of the redeemed? How do you know?

2. Would you be happy spending the rest of eternity worshipping the Lamb, or is your relationship with Christ built on a few minutes a day?

* *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 601, 602.

by David J. Barnett

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Wednesday, May 24

Our Role—An Active One

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 7:10, 14

The shout of triumph, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev. 7:10, NIV) is reminiscent of the confident prayers of the psalmist: “From the Lord comes deliverance” (Ps. 3:8, NIV); “O Lord, you will keep us safe” (Ps. 12:7, NIV).

Indeed the shout in heaven is a confirmation of God’s answer to those prayers and others like them. Those gathered before God in this scene from Revelation sing the song of their experience.

Those who have come through tribulation have been brought through their trial by God. But this is not a deliverance of escape—it is a deliverance of conquest. Our hope is that, like Job, we may endure every test and come to glory because we are in Christ.

In reading Revelation 7:14 we must take note that people have an active role in salvation, they must wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Our assurance is that Christ has won the victory, but humans must participate in that victory.

We must examine carefully, too, the phrase “the blood of the Lamb.” To the Hebrews blood meant life, not death. This is seen in God’s covenant with Noah, that “‘you must not eat meat that has

its lifeblood still in it’” (Gen. 9:4, NIV). To the Jews the life (blood) belongs to God and should be sacrificed to Him.

Our strength then can be found in the blood, that is the life, of Jesus even as our righteousness (before God) is found in His atoning death.

Uriah Smith in *Daniel and the Revelation* writes, “To the last generation the testimony is very emphatic on the subject of obtaining the white raiment. Rev. 3:5, 18. And though the 144,000 are accused of rejecting Christ, and trusting to their own works for salvation, because they refuse to violate the commandments of God (Rev. 14:1, 12), in the great day that calumny will be wiped off. It will be seen that they have rested their hope of life on the merits of the shed blood of their divine Redeemer, making him their source of righteousness. There is peculiar force in saying of these that they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* Indeed, in Christ’s strength you can endure the tribulation, triumph over the enemy, and receive the blessed reward prepared for the faithful.

REACT

How must we participate in the washing of the raiment? What role do prayer and vigilance and daily living with and for Jesus play?

* Smith, Uriah. *Daniel and the Revelation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Southern Publishing Association, 1897), p. 473.

by Ron Smith

Ron Smith is an assistant professor of journalism at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

The Best Years of My Life?

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 16:33

Obtaining a college degree can be a challenging experience. Thoughts of accomplishments, success, and a rewarding career are surpassed in importance only by the visions of grasping that hard-earned diploma. It means that you have endured, and have by all standards completed a college-level education.

But during these so-called "best years of your life," things aren't always so. This higher education at times can be overwhelming, as deadlines, research projects, and despair creep upon you.

And in the same way we allow class deadlines to cloud and diminish our love and desire for knowledge, we allow our spiritual lives to be pushed aside and hindered by everyday tribulations and temptations. This is why a constant communication with Christ is so important—to accept the opportunity we have to receive His unfailing power daily.

When the rigors of school are weighing down, off in the distance there is still that hope of graduating. It is what makes the tribulations worth enduring, and what gives us the perseverance to continue. Just so, if we accept

Christ's power to overcome the enemy in our lives, we can experience the joy of the redeemed in heaven, where living with Christ is our reward, and a crown of life our diploma.

When tribulations seem too much to bear, consider the following:

1. Remember the great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the mighty throne of the Lamb. These faithful ones triumphed over the enemy, but did it with the help of One who had overcome the world (John 16:33, NKJV). It is to Him they raised their cries of thanks, the One whose justifying blood was their salvation.

2. Continue putting our faith and trust in Him, because Jesus has assured us that "in Me you may have peace" (John 16:33, NKJV). We can count on Him to lift us up from the depths of our despair and give us the strength we need to endure our earthly tribulations.

REACT

The same power that Christ used to overcome earthly temptations is available to us today. Do we try to do it all on our own? Why do you think we continually fall into this trap?

by Jennifer Reid

Jennifer Reid is a senior public-relations major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Friday, May 26

Lift Up Your Head

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 21:28

In this intensely time-consuming age, it is often quite easy to get caught up in the daily concerns we all have. As a student, my time seems to belong to someone else as I scramble to complete all my required assignments. As an upcoming college graduate, I am beginning to get a glimpse of the "real world" and already starting to worry about securing a good job, paying the bills, and all the other numerous things I have never had to think of as a student. Many times the crush of daily work and concern for the future overwhelms me, blotting out all except necessary considerations, so that I find myself waking up in the morning thinking about my "things to do" list and falling asleep at night wondering what I really got done.

At times like this I find peace of mind by thinking on the words of Christ in Luke 21:28. This Scripture reminds me of one of my favorite songs in academy, "Behold, He Cometh." But the message of Luke 21:28 is what really moves me. Christ is foretelling the events of the last days, and as He finished He gave a marvelous piece of advice for all those who await His second coming. He told us to "lift up" our heads and look for His redemption, because

it is rapidly approaching. No matter how important our daily schedule may seem, or how overwhelming our work load may be, we should always take time to look ahead to the glorious future Christ has promised to those who believe in Him. The apostle Peter knew of the importance of looking forward to the second coming when he said, "Look eagerly for the coming of the Day of God and work to hasten it on" (2 Peter 3:12, NEB).

We, as Adventists, need to look forward with anticipation to the soon-coming of Jesus Christ. It is stylish today to use the power of positive thinking about our own faculties to bring about the realization of those same possibilities. It's time we started to think about the ultimate positive—heaven. Nothing gives me more encouragement about my day-to-day schedule and problems than to get my mind off these things and think about the joys that await me above. An Appalachian saying sums it up pretty well, "If you're always playing in the mud puddles, you'll never see the sun come out." I'm going to spend more time looking up so that I will see the *Son* come out.

REACT

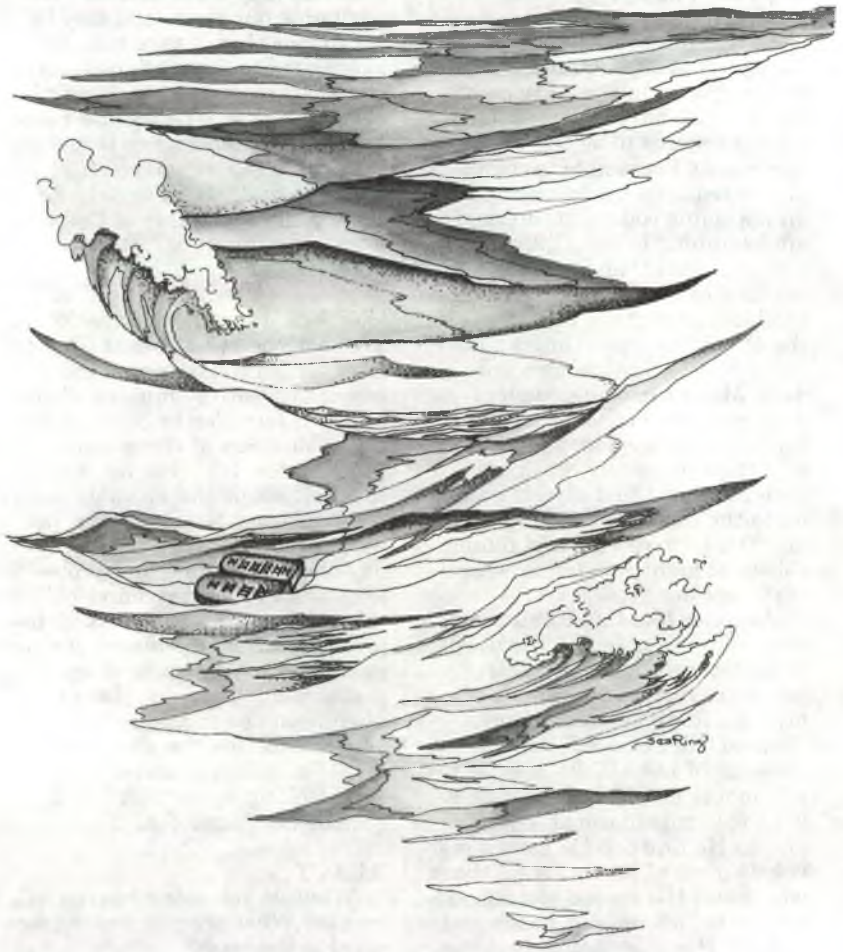
What do you think heaven will be like? What are you looking forward to the most?

by J. Scott Begley

J. Scott Begley is a graduating English major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Lesson 10, May 28—June 3

A Life Raft on a Hostile Sea



“The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand” (Rev. 8:4, NIV).

Sunday, May 28

Prayer . . . The Last Resort

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:17
and Matthew 6:6

The crippled *Apollo 13* spacecraft tumbled back into the atmosphere with its explosion-ripped body. Millions of viewers around the world united in prayer asking God's protection over the three astronauts. After experiencing a power failure and an oxygen leak 200,000 miles from earth the astronauts knew that their chances of returning safely home were slim. Nonetheless, anxious audiences around the world hovered by their TV sets and prayed—hoping a miracle would occur. As the parachutes unfurled over the *Apollo 13* capsule the module finally splashed down successfully in the waters of the South Pacific. Prayers all over the world went up in unison thanking God for His watchful hand. A national day of prayer and thanksgiving was proclaimed by President Nixon, who said, "The prayers of millions all over the world helped to bring them home safely." *TIME* magazine's cover that week showed the three astronauts praying on the deck of the recovery ship as the captain offered a prayer of thanks. Over 100 Jews in Jerusalem went to the wailing wall in a special prayer service over the *Apollo 13* ordeal. The historic flight brought the world jointly to its knees as few events have ever done.

Many times we, as humans, think of ourselves as self-sufficient, needing no one. Yet, if we would stop and think, we would realize that our next heartbeat is in God's hands. In a speech following the *Apollo 13* episode the main speaker at a prayer breakfast said, "Why is it we wait until there is a catastrophe, until it is evident that human efforts are not able to cope with the situation, to turn to prayer?" Prayer is an integral part of our very existence, yet we don't even realize the awesome power this tool can bring when used consistently. Our lives become so filled with work, school, and other things that our perspectives become distorted as we lose sight of our ultimate goals and dreams. Martin Luther was once quoted as having said, "I have so many things to do that I cannot get along without three hours a day in prayer."

How important is prayer in your Christian life? According to a published estimate, the average Christian layperson gets along with about three or four minutes a day in prayer, and the average full-time Christian worker gets along with about seven minutes per day. Are Christians today actually getting *along* with time spent in prayer or getting *away* with time spent in prayer?

Is Christ truly the center of all our goals, dreams, and daily decisions, or is He merely someone to whom to go when all our options have been exhausted?

by Arthur A. Tabvenca

Arthur A. Tabvenca is a business-management major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

From Whisper to Shout

LOGOS

Theme: *The prayers of the saints play an important part in God's intervention in a rebellious world and in hastening the return of Jesus as sovereign Lord.*

I. The Angel at the Altar (read Revelation 8:2-6)

"The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand" (Rev. 8:4, NIV).

The Altar and the Angel. In the earthly sanctuary the altar that had incense stood in the holy place, just in front of the veil that separated the two rooms (Ex. 30:1-6). The other two items in this room helped to introduce the previous scenes in Revelation. The lampstands surround the Christ of the Seven Churches (Rev. 1:12, 13), and the throne, or the table having the bread of the Presence, surround the Lamb of the Seven Seals (Rev. 5:6).

The high priest offered incense at the earthly altar (Ex. 30:7, 8); but we have a better High Priest before the heavenly altar (Heb. 8:1, 2). The Angel of the Lord, or Christ Himself, offers His own gifts as incense with our prayers. (See Acts 7:30-33 and 1 Cor. 10:4 for Christ as the Angel of the Lord.)

Prayers and Incense. As we peruse the book of Revelation, we may feel that the cosmic conflict goes on as planned long ago, without any input as to how God's

people feel about it. In the midst of the seals, we hear the cry, "How long?" from those who have suffered, and we too wonder whether that cry makes any difference to God.

However, in Revelation 8 we see special recognition given to the prayers of the saints. John the revelator had himself recorded Jesus' sevenfold invitation to ask anything in His name (John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24, 26). The concept of asking in His name, or according to His will, corresponds with the concept of His offering His gifts as incense so the smoke can ascend with the prayers.

Yet the question still remains as to whether these prayers have anything to do with the cosmic events in which we exist. We take the position that prayer is meaningful even toward God's intervention in cosmic affairs.

1. The "prayers of the saints" give God the legal right to limit Satan's control over the will and circumstances of others (GC 505-530), over circumstances surrounding us and our Christian projects (EW 266, 267), and over our own will and emotions.

2. The "prayers of the saints" open our own minds to understanding of spiritual truth (TM 113-118), to perception of God's leading (DA 668), and to reception of the Holy Spirit (DA 672; EW 269-273).

3. The "prayers of the saints" assert our dominion over the powers of evil by verbal use of

by Wilma Zalabak

Wilma Zalabak is the Bible instructor with the Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church and a theology student at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Scripture and our personal testimony of salvation (Rev. 12:11).

4. The "prayers of the saints" open the way for miraculous confirmation with credit going to God rather than to humans.

The mention of the "prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8) before the introduction of the trumpets, or judgments of God (see Jer. 4:19 and Lev. 23:23-32 for connection of trumpets with war and judgment), would appear to affirm our position that the "prayers of the saints" do indeed play a part in making way for divine intervention in cosmic affairs.

The Censer Thrown Down.

Ellen White cites a throwing down of the censer in connection with the close of probation (EW 279), however, this is clearly the censer of the Most Holy Place. (See EW 32, 251, 252 for indication of two censers in the sanctuary). The censer of Revelation 8 came from the holy place. Thus, although this act shows a definite change, a time of decision of some sort, Adventists have seen the trumpets as historical and not necessarily tied to a worldwide close of probation.

Why don't we as Christians spend more time in prayer? List some of the things or reasons why you think Adventists generally don't spend much time in prayer.

II. The First Four Trumpets (read Revelation 8:7-13)

"Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them" (Rev. 8:6, NIV).

Ellen White gives little direction for the interpretation of the trumpets, except for her affirmation of Josiah Litch's exposition predicting the fall of the Ottoman Empire (GC 334, 335).

Fall of Rome. Litch's interpretation followed that which had been popular for several centuries. It is the view presented in the

SDA Bible Commentary, volume 7, pages 788-790.

This view sees the first four trumpets as representing the fall of Western Rome to the invading barbarians, the next two as representing the fall of Eastern Rome to the powers of Islam, and the last as representing the final fall of all that Rome represents. Thus, in our passage, the first trumpet would represent the invasion of the Visigoths, the second that of the Vandals, the third that of the Huns, and the fourth the final removal of the ruling powers of Western Rome.

Periods of the Christian Era. Maxwell follows the lead of Victorinus of the third century in seeing another parallel in the trumpets to the periods of the Christian Era already delineated in the churches and the seals. Thus the first trumpet represents the attack on the Jewish nation, the second the attack on the Roman Empire, and the third the attack on true Christianity under the Roman Church, the fourth the attack on the heavenly sanctuary under the Roman Church, the fifth and sixth, the attack on the Eastern Roman Empire by Islam, and the seventh the final judgment of earth.

Concerning the first four trumpets, Maxwell observes:

"The first two trumpets make a pair. In the first, the Roman Empire devastates the Jewish nation; in the second, invading tribes devastate the Roman Empire. The third and fourth trumpets also make a pair. In the third, error pollutes Christ's church on earth. In the fourth, error obscures Christ's work in heaven."*

The Plagues. Because so many similarities exist between the trumpets and the plagues, some would like to see these two sevens as parallel and representing the same events.

However, there are some important differences to be dealt with. Maxwell highlights the limitation of facts we have on the trumpets and plagues; the long time periods of the trumpets contrasted with the plagues falling in a day or an hour (Rev. 18:8, 10); and the openness of the sanctuary and its ministry during the trumpet period in contrast with the closedness of the sanctuary during the plagues (Rev. 15:5-8).

Perhaps it would be more important for us to learn the spiritual lessons of the trumpets. I once heard Mark Finley, Ministerial Association Secretary of the Trans-European Division, explain the spiritual impact of the plagues in a way that could be applied to the message of the trumpets.

The first trumpet warns us not to look for physical security in this world. The second trumpet warns us not to look for economic security in the world—the plague interrupts sea trade—a major basis of economic hope. The third trumpet warns us that if we look for “the water of life” in this world we will be bitterly disappointed. The fourth trumpet warns us to look for shelter only in Christ the Light of the world.

Chapter 8 concludes with a cry of woe for the three warnings yet to sound. The flying eagle symbolizes that these warnings should take top priority in our lives.

What are some things to which we look for security and fulfillment apart from Christ? How can we change that?

* Maxwell, C. Mervyn. *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985), vol. 2, p. 241.

Tuesday, May 30

Christ's Blood and Our Prayers

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 8:4

Imagine the slain lamb, still warm, as it lies on the altar, suffering because of our sin.

Imagine Christ dying on the cross, warm blood dripping slowly from His forehead, hands, feet, and side. At the base of the cross a still pool of blood grows bigger, covering the sinful earth with His gift of salvation.

In Revelation 8:3, 4, John tells of an angel, not one of the seven angels with seven trumpets, but a different one. This angel stood at the altar with a golden censer and was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all saints before the throne of God. Then the smoke of the incense along with the prayers of the saints ascended up before the throne of God.

What does this mean? Ellen G. White comments about Revelation 8:3, 4 portraying the Israelites when they offered the sacrificial lamb.

"As the high priest sprinkled the warm blood upon the mercy seat while the fragrant cloud of incense ascended before God, so, while we confess our sins and plead the efficacy of Christ's atoning blood, our prayers are to ascend to heaven, fragrant with the merits of our Saviour's character."¹

Our prayers are important to God and the merits of Christ's blood sanctifies them as they ascend to heaven.

"He mingles with their [our] prayers the incense of His righteousness, and offers them to God as a fragrant sacrifice."²

The first part of Revelation 8 says the prayers of the saints are a vital link in God's intervention in this rebellious world. Our prayers along with His blood can hasten His return.

In this way, Christ becomes our life raft in a dangerous, tossing sea of sin. The life raft (Christ) is our only chance to keep from slipping into the depths.

"With His own blood He paid the penalty for all wrongdoers. Every sin acknowledged before God with a contrite heart, He will remove."³

"The price paid for our redemption, the infinite sacrifice of our heavenly Father in giving His Son to die for us, should give us exalted conceptions of what we may become through Christ. . . . Through transgression the sons of man become subjects of Satan. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ the sons of Adam may become the sons of God. By assuming human nature, Christ elevates humanity. Fallen men are placed where, through connection with Christ, they may indeed become worthy of the name 'sons of God.'"⁴

1. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 970.

2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 96.

3. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 970.

4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 29.

by Gene Krishingner

Gene Krishingner is a junior journalism major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Interpreting the Trumpets

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 8:5

“A number of views have been set forth as to the interpretation of the successive scenes that follow the blowing of the trumpets.

“One view of the trumpets is based on the assumption that since the symbolization of v. 5 points to the end of Christ’s intercession, the events that follow might logically be taken to represent judgments of God poured out on the earth after the close of probation. According to this view these judgments parallel the seven last plagues (ch. 16). The proponents of this view point to certain aspects of each of the trumpets that find similar features in each of the plagues.

“According to another view the seven trumpets should not be thought of chronologically, but as symbolic of the divine answer

to the prayers of God’s suffering people of all ages. In other words, this interpretation sees the trumpets as God’s reassurance to His persecuted saints that in spite of the wars, plagues, famines, and death through which they may pass, He has not lost control of the world. He is still judge and will punish unrighteous men. . . .

“The view favored by Seventh-day Adventists is that these trumpets retrace, to a large extent, the period of Christian history already covered by the seven churches (ch. 2; 3) and the seven seals (ch. 6; 8:1), and that they emphasize outstanding political and military events during this period.”*

REACT

Should there be room for different interpretations of prophecy among Adventists? Is this good or bad for the Church? Why?

* SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 788.

Thursday, June 1

“Hey, Saint Judy!”

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:17

Revelation 8:4 tells us that the “prayers of the saints” went up before God. These prayers, we see in verse 5, help in bringing about the final events and hastening the Second Coming. It’s pleasant to think that God will hear the saints’ prayers and respond. But who are the saints? Someone who wrote a book in the New Testament? A fourteenth-century missionary? Someone a Catholic church is named after? Although these people may be saints, a brief look at Scripture will show that a saint may not be too distant from us.

In Exodus 32 we find Aaron, the one just consecrated by God, helping the Israelites fashion a golden idol—an act that almost caused God to destroy the entire multitude. Later, in Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam speak out against Moses, and once again arouse God’s anger. Aaron, like Moses, was excluded from entering Canaan because of his errors, and he died on Mount Hor.

Why mention Aaron’s shortcomings? Psalm 106:16, NKJV, calls Aaron the “saint of the Lord.”

Aaron was not a saint because he was perfect, but rather because he stayed with the Lord and (usually) allowed Him to lead.

Scripture points out five particular qualities identifying saints:

1) They call on the name of Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2).

2) They love God (Ps. 31:23).

3) They fear and reverence Him (Ps. 89:7).

4) They have faith (Jude 3).

5) They are prayerful (Rev. 5:8; 8:3, 4).

So all, by accepting Christ, may be “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19, NKJV).

With this picture in mind, we can see Revelation 8:4 in a more personal way. Each believer has a role to play in Christ’s return. Although we are sinful, imperfect, and sometimes lazy and inconsiderate (just like Aaron!), God wishes for *us* to be His saints. The work will not be finished by missionaries, evangelists, and conference presidents. Every single believer has a part. Not all have the gift of public speaking, witnessing door-to-door, or giving Bible studies, but all can help finish the work through their continual, earnest, prayers.

by Richard Moody

Richard Moody is a junior history major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Mobile Messages, Minute Memos, and a Mediating Messiah

OPINION

Key Text: Rev. 8:3, 4; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17

Car-phone systems, satellite communications, network computer data access, Federal Express next-day service. Communication. Fast communication. Our culture seems almost obsessed with creating means for immediate information interaction.

A need of speed is highlighted in every UPS shipping commercial. Mobile telephones are portrayed as an essential to any business. But there is only one communication medium that stands alone as the fastest means. Before the businessman can dial his access code, or the secretary can type the inter-office memo, or the executive can dictate a letter, God knows the desires and yearnings of each heart.

Prayer is the essence of immediate communication. The message we wish to relay to the Father is already known to Him. If He already knows, then what is the use of prayer? In any relationship communication is vital. Although you may *know* your parents love you, the communication of their affection in conversation and action serves a vital role in the nurturing of that love; so it is with our heavenly Father.

Earthly communication sys-

tems, no matter how technically sophisticated, often deliver misunderstood messages, errors, and often are in need of repair. Weather interference, power failure, and system breakdown are among the reasons for impaired communication ability.

Similarly, Satan and his forces are constantly at work to create a communication gap between us and God. Sin has not only temporarily destroyed our face-to-face interaction with God but it has also made our simple prayers unworthy to be presented to the Father.

Christ is the link we have to the Father. Using His merit to make our petitions worthy, Jesus Christ has broken through the barrier of sin and restored our communication with God. Moreover, He has reconciled us to His Father so we can, one day, again talk with Him face to face.

In a world where progressive mutating diseases reign, where murder and suffering are commonplace, and where humanity is a poor commodity, it is time that we, as a Christian body of believers, made a commitment to continual communication with God. We must pray without ceasing for our disintegrating world.

Optic fibers, radio waves, and laser beams may move words faster than ever. Conference calls, air freight, and international data links may shorten the communica-

by A. Allan Martin

A. Allan Martin is a Task Force assistant at Florida Conference Youth Ministries, Orlando, Florida.

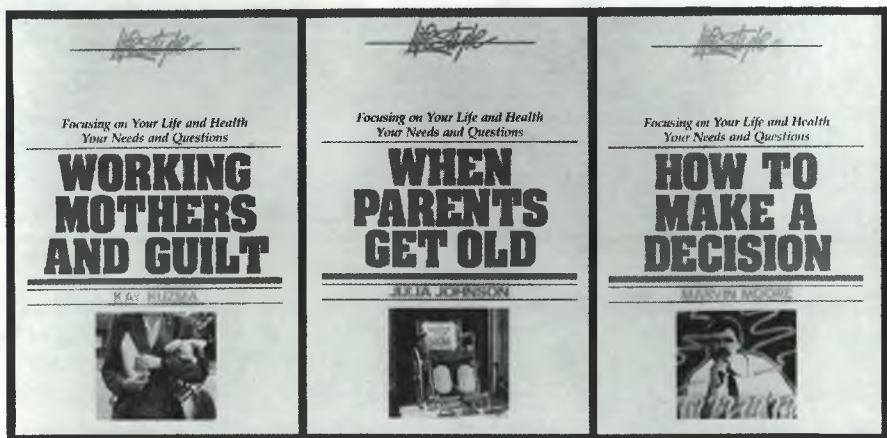
tion distance to a certain degree. But **He** is just a prayer away. Communication—fast communication.

REACT

1. How do you pray without

ceasing? Why is ceaseless prayer needed today?

2. Who really benefits from prayer? Does God really need us to inform Him about our needs and world conditions? Explain.



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Lesson 11, June 4 - 10

Demonic Locusts and Scorpion Stings



“They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (Rev. 9:4, NIV).

Sunday, June 4

Murder by Night

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 9

It's slightly after midnight, and my sleep is troubled. The air seems thick, dark—suffocatingly humid. Pale-yellow moonlight filters through a square window, vaguely outlining turbid shadows near my bed. I'm uneasy. It's too quiet outside. I don't even hear a stray dog barking. Slowly I slide out of bed, making my way toward the window overlooking the city.

In the distance there's an eerie glow I've never seen before. I shiver despite the heat. Usually a cooling breeze filters through the city at night, but I'm consciously aware of its absence now.

I open the bedroom door and peer down the hall. My uneasy feeling grows. Where are the guards? Quickly I make my way through deserted halls, the clap of my slippers echoing faintly down an empty corridor. Up some stairs and to the left. Still no one. There, my son's room. I'm relieved to see him sleeping, his rhythmic breathing breaking the silence as I sit near his bed to rest. The eerie glow is brighter now, seems to be closing in on the city. I'm exhausted though, and leaning back in the chair, I drift off briefly.

Suddenly I'm awakened.

Screams. Terrible, piercing screams cutting through the stillness. Cries from all over the city. What's happening?

The strange glow is at the window now and seems to be coming into the room. It stops over my sleeping son. I watch, horrified, as his body stiffens. Then the light disappears. My son is no longer breathing. I shake him vigorously, calling his name. No response—he's dead.

My name is Pharaoh and my land is Egypt. I have seen the hand of God.

* * * * *

Like Pharaoh, people who haven't determined to follow God will someday face a series of plagues while God's wrath will pass over His faithful sons and daughters. Even as the Israelites sprinkled lamb's blood on the doors of their homes to escape the death angel, so we must sprinkle Christ's blood on the mantle of our hearts, to escape the final plagues.

David wrote, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). We can claim that promise every day, no matter what trials we face. Then, when the end of time comes and the final plagues fall on the unrighteous, we will be safe. Unlike Pharaoh's experience, the hand *we* see will be the hand of deliverance.

by Kevin Waite

Kevin Waite is a journalism major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

God's Seal Against Perilous Times

LOGOS

Theme: *During the perilous times awaiting the church, those who are sealed by God will escape the demonic assault of the evil forces. You can have shelter in the time of trouble.*

1. Demonic Locusts With the Sting of Scorpions (read Revelation 9:1-3)

"Then over the earth, out of the smoke, came locusts, and they were given the powers that earthly scorpions have" (Rev. 9:3, NEB).

In the colorful, highly symbolic language of this apocalyptic prophecy, God sets out coming events in history centuries before they happened—events in the running battle between God and Satan, especially as they affect the people of God on earth.

To state that, and believe it, is to declare oneself a historicist, as Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally been. Historicists look for real events on the earth involving peoples, and nations, and the church of Jesus Christ, at the time portrayed. (By contrast, Preterists do not see anything predictive in apocalyptic prophecy—except, maybe, a hunch, a reasoned guess. Futurists would mostly be looking for end-time or millennial events to fulfill what is symbolized.)

Strand and Maxwell (at least)* see the fifth and sixth trumpets as

part of the historical first half of Revelation—the centuries across which the ongoing battle between Christ and Satan raged. And during the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15); the eschatological (*dealing with last things* from the Greek: *eschaton*, "end") section of the prophecy continues when the great controversy comes to its climax with Christ and the saints triumphant.

Past lessons have dealt with the 7 churches, and the 7 seals. We are now into the 7 trumpets (divided 4 and 3)—dealing with warfare, announcements, assemblies, and judgments. As the fifth trumpet sounds, it introduces severe judgments to arrest the attention of people, to lead them to recognize the overruling hand of God, to help them respond to His underlying mercy. There is coming TROUBLE!—darkness, a bottomless pit (*abussos*, as in Genesis 1:2, LXX), and swarming locusts that command the respect readily granted to scorpions!

Eleven verses of Revelation are devoted to the first of the fearful "woe" trumpets (Rev. 9:1-11). The trumpets somewhat resemble the 7 final plagues. If people heed the trumpet judgments, they need not receive the plagues. There is HOPE, there is SALVATION. A sanctuary scene precedes the trumpets (8:2-5; 9:13), there is reference to receiving the seal of God in the forehead as protection from the trumpet judgments (9:4, 5); and destroying angels have to be

by Gordon M. Hyde

Gordon M. Hyde is editor, Religion Publications, Ellen G. White Memorial Chair, Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

released to bring judgments under the sixth trumpet (9:15, 16).

Where might one identify today's locust/scorpion forces unleashed upon segments of the world, and is there evidence that God's angels hold back the winds?

With reference to the "seal of God on their foreheads," is it possible that these trumpet/woe events are really the seven last plagues (which they resemble in various details)?

2. Trumpets Announce Both Deliverance and Doom (read Revelation 9:4-11)

"They were told to do no injury to the grass or to any plant or tree, but only to those men who had not received the seal of God on their foreheads" (Rev. 9:4, NEB).

This verse and its context picture forces of punishment and destruction being permitted to decimate once-God-fearing people who had grown careless in faith and works. They reveal an overruling Providence that raises up kings, and puts them down when they ignore the hand of God in the play and counterplay of nations.

What have you been seeing in the past twelve months that suggests God is working out His purposes in, through, behind, and over the nations as you hear, read, or view the news daily?

Most historicist commentators have seen the fifth trumpet (first woe) as fulfilled in the swift and deadly sweeps of Middle East Islamic hordes westward against the Christian nations of Europe. The five symbolic months of torture (9:5, 10) represent the earlier literal attacks of Islam on Constantinople (capital of Eastern Orthodox Christianity) between early A.D. 674 and late 823. Satan, through the Islamic

leaders, (the "fallen star" of 9:1, 11) is permitted to serve as God's scourge to awaken His own people. Subsequently, these persecuting forces receive their own due. Thus God keeps fair accounts with the nations.

The same trumpet blast heralds the day of the Lord for the penitent, believing, and obedient; but a day of darkness and destruction for those professing but denying His Lordship in their lives.

3. The angels at the River Euphrates are released to do their work of destruction (read Revelation 9:13-21)

"The sixth angel then blew his trumpet; and I heard a voice coming from between the horns of the golden altar that stood in the presence of God" (Rev. 9:13, NEB).

In the apocalyptic books of Daniel and the Revelation, the self-revealing God pictures the center of His redemptive work for humanity in the sanctuary/temple dwelling-place that He designed—involving both the earthly replica and the heavenly original. From universe headquarters He dispatches John Milton's "thousands [who] at His bidding speed and post o'er land and ocean without rest."

But what of the "four angels held bound at the great river Euphrates"; what happens when they are "let loose"? A "third of mankind" is killed by the overwhelming, figurative numbers of "squadrons" not of planes, but "cavalry" (verses 15, 16, NEB).

The earlier Islamic armies of "locusts . . . like horses equipped for battle" (verse 7) are replaced by the Ottoman Turks, who with newly invented gunpowder, toppled Christian Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire, in 1453.

* C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985), vol. 2, p. 65, cites Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Naples, Florida: Ann Arbor Publishers, Inc., 1970, 1972, 1976, 1979).

The Scorpion's Sting

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 18:7, 8

The sting or bite of any insect is not a pleasant experience, but the sting of the scorpion is certainly one of the most painful. It's the lingering and irritating kind of pain that doesn't go away.

John says in Revelation 9:6, that during the time when the "scorpion's sting" is inflicted upon Christians, those afflicted will "want to die, but death will flee from them" (Rev. 9:6, TEV).

Sound frightening? None of us particularly enjoys pain, but sometimes it is a necessary part of life. From the description that John gives, it sounds as though there is quite a lot of pain involved with the sting. So, you ask, is there any way I can escape the sting?

Being a follower of Christ at the end of time is definitely not the popular way. Yes, God does expect us to make the decision of being on His side or not, but He's not going to desert us and leave us hanging. Ellen G. White encourages us by saying that God will not leave us to battle alone.

"Could men see with heavenly vision, they would behold companies of angels that excel in strength stationed about those

who have kept the word of Christ's patience. With sympathizing tenderness, angels have witnessed their distress and have heard their prayers. They are waiting the word of their Commander to snatch them from their peril. But they must wait yet a little longer. The people of God must drink of the cup and be baptized with the baptism. The very delay, so painful to them, is the best answer to their petitions. As they endeavor to wait trustingly for the Lord to work they are led to exercise faith, hope, and patience, which have been too little exercised during their religious experience. Yet for the elect's sake the time of trouble will be shortened."*

God isn't going to let us suffer longer than necessary, He is going to deliver as quickly as He can. He is not a God of pain and suffering. Our pain cannot come even close to what He felt hanging on the cross that dark afternoon on Calvary!

We should not be discouraged when persecution comes. Deliverance is just around the corner.

REACT

Why do you think we as Christians have problems exercising faith, hope, and patience during times of persecution?

* *The Great Controversy*, pp. 630, 631.

by Valerie Long

Valerie Long is a social-work/physical-education major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Wednesday, June 7

Sealed—and Safe

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 9:4 and Ezekiel 9:6

Often, when disembarking from an airliner, passengers will ask for a peek inside the cockpit. Reactions to what they see are varied and interesting. To the uninitiated, the cockpit looks bewildering. To the pilot, however, it is a place of perfect symmetry and function.

The book of Revelation is much the same. To the uninitiated, the book is intimidating. But there is a key that unlocks the symmetry and beauty of Revelation—it is a literary structure called a chiasm.*

The chiasmic structure of Revelation reveals a balance between the historical and prophetic aspects of the book. Each historical aspect of Revelation is balanced by a prophetic passage with the same theme as its historical counterpart.

Thus the seven trumpets are warning judgments in history whose counterparts are the seven last plagues of the future. Both are retributive judgments against apostate Christians. This week's key text, Revelation 9:4, is not a prophetic passage of promise, but a lesson from history that can teach us how to escape the final plagues. The secret is in the seal of God.

The protection of the righteous,

both in history and in the future, is under the seal of God. It is that seal we must seek to understand.

We should remember that the seal of God is more than just the Sabbath. The Sabbath is only a sign or emblem of some principle of righteousness, just as circumcision was an emblem of true Israel. To keep the Sabbath, or to be circumcised as were the Jews, is merely an outward act that becomes meaningless without true submission to Christ. To claim the seal of God by keeping the Sabbath while still committing known sin is no better than a corrupt policeman wearing a badge: the badge becomes a mockery. How will the righteous escape the demon locusts and scorpion stings? The answer is found in the Psalms.

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.” “Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.” For “the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry” (Ps. 91:1, 2, 9, 10; 34:7, 15).

* *Chiasm* from the Greek *chiasma*, placing crosswise. The inversion of parallelisms.

See Kenneth A. Strand, *The Open Gates of Heaven* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1972).
C. Mervin Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., 1985), vol. 2, pp. 54-61.

by Robin Jester

Robin Jester is a theology major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

I'd Rather Die . . . or Would I?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Revelation 9:6

Have you ever wanted to flee, or escape? Have you ever said to yourself, "I wish I were dead"?

When I was growing up I felt that there was absolutely nothing worse than upsetting my mother. Whenever I did something that I shouldn't have, my mother would discipline me in accordance with parental duty, and I felt horrible. For the short period my mother was unhappy with me, my little world was miserable. I would have done almost anything to be anywhere else.

I remember an especially embarrassing moment during my senior year of academy. That year, the Boys' Club banquet happened to coincide with my birthday. As my escort approached the microphone and began singing "Happy Birthday," I felt my cheeks redden slightly. Then I noticed two of my friends walking toward me carrying a cake loaded with burning candles. Again, I felt only slightly uncomfortable. These were merely birthday traditions. One expects these things annually. I naturally assumed that my birthday celebration was over. I was wrong.

Just as I had blown out the last candle and was settling down to the banquet meal, I thought I heard my name being called in the distance. I looked up from my plate as I heard my name called out a second time. I realized that

fingers were pointing in my direction, and every eye in the cafeteria was focused on me. A little man dressed as a clown made his way to my table. I stood as he handed me a bouquet of balloons. The clown then took my hand and conducted a comedy routine for the next five minutes. The punch lines, to my dismay, were about me.

Looking back on that incident, I will never forget the way I felt. I was the undisputed center of attention. I remember feeling weak with embarrassment. I would have paid money to be someplace else. I said to myself, "I could just die!"

Fortunately, such experiences do come to an end. Though we often mutter that we'd rather die than endure them, we really don't mean what we say.

In the time of the end, those whose lives have not been centered on Christ will honestly desire to die. Their uncomfortable situation will not end in a moment. Unlike me, they won't be able to look back and laugh at things that have happened to them.

REACT

1. What will the end time be like for you? Will you wish to die, or will you be prepared for eternal life? Try to picture yourself in each situation.

2. How do the small persecutions of everyday life prepare us for the serious persecutions of the future?

by Leigh Whicker

Leigh Whicker is a public-relations major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Friday, June 9

God's "Mark"

OPINION

Key Text: Exodus 12:23

"The Lord's our rock, In Him we hide,
A shelter in the time of storm;
Secure whatever may betide,
A shelter in the time of storm."
I can still hear my mother playing this hymn on the piano. My sister and I would sing while father sat in his chair and listened. It was his favorite old hymn, and we would always turn to it at least once before we closed the hymnal.

Daddy is not musically talented, so he would usually just sit and listen. But, whenever we came to this one he would quietly hum along, thinking no one could hear.

But I could hear him, and I always wondered what made this hymn so special.

"A shelter in the time of storm . . ." I had so many questions about those seven words. Who would be sheltered; and from what do we need shelter? These thoughts scared me as a child. What if God overlooked me and didn't include me in His shelter?

John the Revelator says, "They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (Rev. 9:4,

NIV). Other verses refer to God "marking" His people. "For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you" (Ex. 12:23).

But doesn't God know everything about everybody, including their thoughts? Why would He need a "mark" to identify them?

He doesn't, but maybe we do. The "mark" may not be for God, it may be for His people. Possibly an outward sign of acceptance for them. God wants us to accept Him *openly* without being ashamed of our decision.

The "mark" certainly serves as assurance of shelter. We could look upon it as a visible sign from God to instill confidence and peace in our hearts.

Daddy must have already known that which took me so long to understand. Those words, along with the melody, make more than just another pretty song. The lyrics are a powerful promise to God's people.

REACT

1. In what way(s) do you feel God has placed His "mark" on you?
2. Do you think God's "mark" is visible, tangible, or both? Why?

by Dana Knecht

Dana Knecht is a public-relations major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Lesson 12, June 11 - 17

Bitter Honey



"I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour" (Rev. 10:10, NIV).

Sunday, June 11

For Now . . . The Test

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 10

Exploding shells were heard in the background as the pastors repeatedly pronounced, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost." It was no lukewarm faith that these Cambodian refugees were baptized into. It was a faith that would have to trust God when there was no food. It was a faith that would strengthen when their Bibles were confiscated; it was a faith that would fasten onto God's promises when shells landed inside their refugee camp.

Bamboo homes and bamboo churches burn quickly. So do Bibles. But the faith of the Cambodian Christians has risen with the smoke that ascended from the burning paper copies of God's promises. Of course, persecution of Christians is nothing new. The privilege we know as *freedom of religion* has historically been the exception. Christians have always looked for the reward in heaven, but before the reward comes the test.

In 1844 a group of Christians

awaited their reward, but instead met a test. They suffered and didn't understand why, but some believed God anyway. They stood the test, their faith grew, and in God's perfect time they will receive their reward.

In the 1980's, a group of Cambodians await freedom. They fled their homeland—their first country—to seek a temporary home in Thailand—their second country. From there they hope to move on to a more permanent home in a third country such as Australia, France, Canada, or the United States. But even in that third country there are problems and frustrations of trying to learn a new language and trying to adapt to a different culture. Those who are Christians, however, look forward to their arrival in the heavenly country, where their faith will be rewarded. They're going to a country where God's children never starve, and where everyone speaks the same language. But for now . . . the test.

Christians around the world still await the event that was expected in 1844. In faith we await the promise of Christ's return. But for now . . . the test.

by Karen Carter

Karen Carter has served as a student missionary in Thailand and is an English major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

The Mighty Angel and the Little Scroll

LOGOS

Theme: *We are to rejoice in the triumph of Christ and the glorious reward we will receive as a result of that victory. The way to the kingdom is, nevertheless, the way of the cross. For some it may mean martyrdom. For everyone it will mean trial and suffering.*

1. The Mighty Angel and the Little Scroll (read Revelation 10:1-3)

"And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven. . . and [he] cried with a loud voice . . . and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices" (Rev. 10:1-3).

The events depicted in this chapter are descriptive of activities to occur between the sixth (Rev. 9:13-21) and seventh trumpets (11:15), which usher in the end of the world. The setting of chapter ten is just prior to the close of probation. In true apocalyptic style John portrays another mighty angel descending from heaven. The descriptive terms used differentiates this angel from the trumpet angels, suggesting to the reader that he is special. The word *angel* means "messenger," and it can be used for an earthly messenger (as John the Baptist [Mark 1:2], or heavenly messengers [Luke 2:10]). Jesus is sometimes referred to as an angel, not be-

cause He is a created being like other angels, but because He bears messages to His people and supervises the movements of the angelic entourage (1 Thess. 4:16).

Although this angel is not named, the terms describing Him suggest it is Christ: (1) Clouds are associated with the presence of the Godhead (Ps. 104:3; Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7; Ex. 19:16). (2) The rainbow is associated in other apocalyptic passages with God (Eze. 1:26-28; Rev. 4:3). (3) Face shining as the sun exemplifies similes used in other passages that speak of Christ or the Godhead (see Rev. 1:14; Ex. 13:21, 22; Dan. 6; 10; SL 49, 50; GC 470-471 state this is Christ). (4) Feet as pillars of fire (Rev. 1:15 is clearly describing the glorified Christ; Dan. 10:6; Rev. 2:18).

It is also significant that this Being has in hand a little book, now opened. This book must not be confused with the one found in Revelation 5:1, for that one was sealed and was not a little book. The diminutive form of the word *little* is evidently meant to distinguish it from the one in 5:1. This emphasis on an open little book seems to be related to another apocalyptic prophecy in Daniel 12:4, where Daniel was admonished to seal a book until the time of the end. "The book that was sealed is not the Revelation, but that portion of the prophecy

by Douglas Bennett

Douglas Bennett is a professor of theology at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

of Daniel relating to the last days.¹ "But since 1798 the book of Daniel has been unsealed, knowledge of the prophecies has increased. . . ."²

"Sea and land" is an Old Testament idiom for the totality of terrestrial things (Ex. 20:4, 11; Ps. 69:34; Rev. 7:2, 14:7). "The angel's position, with one foot on the sea, the other on the land, signifies the wide extent of the proclamation of the message. It will cross the broad waters and be proclaimed in other countries, even to all the world."³ Also "This position denotes His supreme power and authority over the whole earth."⁴

True to the prophecy, from 1798, in the old world and the new, there was a connected study of the prophecies of Daniel. Only seven writers in the sixteenth century explained the 1260-day or 2300-day prophecy; 12 in the seventeenth century, and 22 in the eighteenth century. But this swelled to more than 100 writers in the early nineteenth century. (See LeRoy Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 528; vol. 3, p. 270; vol. 4, p. 713.) The preaching of the time prophecy of Daniel 8:14 in America began with William Miller in 1831, arousing the religious world and culminating in the disappointment of 1844. During this period the first and second angel's messages of Revelation 14 were sounded. "Advent publications have been sent by the hundred thousand, broadcast all over the world. . . ."⁵ Thousands were poised and expecting the return of Christ, a teaching that had been seriously overlooked. Thousands received this message of hope gladly, never suspecting bitter disappointment would follow.

All of this apparently is contained in the messages of the seven thunders, which John was admonished to refrain from writ-

ing (Rev. 10:3, 4), for this message contained information that would be relevant only for the people at the time of the end. It was "a delineation of events which would transpire under the first and second messages."⁶

Why would God not wish for the people in the nineteenth century to know in advance the outcome of the Second Advent movement?

2. There Should Be Time No Longer (read Revelation 10:4-7)

"There should be time no longer" (Rev. 10:6).

The *time of the end* is not the same as the *end of time*. One is the preparation, the other is the consummation. It is comparable to the holiday season of Christmas. For weeks before December 25 everyone is aware that we are living in the Christmas season. The shopper is, in various ways, alerted to the fact that the day of Christmas is approaching, and he is urged to prepare. In like manner the *time of the end* is that indefinite length of time commencing in 1798 (see GC 356) during which earth's inhabitants are to be aroused to prepare for the Second Advent—which is the *end of time*.

At the proper time God raised up the Advent movement, providing it with a message to warn the world, that the end is approaching. With the disappointment of 1844 the movement collapsed. But God chose a remnant from the movement and developed a full-blown message that would more thoroughly prepare mankind for the end.

The angel with the book is described as taking an oath before the Creator of all things as a means of communicating to the reader the absolute truthfulness of what follows; namely, "that there should be time no longer."

The lifting of the hand is a part of taking an oath in the Old Testament (Gen. 14:22, 23; Deut. 32:40; Dan. 12:7; Eze. 20:15). Time is *chronos*, from which we get *chronology* (long spans of time). It is evident that it can't be announcing the end of probationary time, for this continues until Revelation 15. Since nations and history continue in Revelation until chapter 19:11-21, it cannot be referring to the end of history or nations. Ellen White declares, "This time, which the angel declares with a solemn oath, is not the end of this world's history, neither of probationary time, but of prophetic time, which should precede the advent of our Lord."¹

Why is it significant that we know that there will be no more time prophecies?

3. A Sweet-and-Bitter Experience (read Revelation 10:8-11)

"And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (Rev. 10:11).

One does not live long before realizing that life has both sunshine and rain, joy and sorrow, sweetness and bitterness. Although our usual preference is for sunshine, joy, and sweetness; yet rain, sorrow, and bitterness are not without merit.

In our lesson John is serving as the representative of those who proclaimed the special message from 1840 to 1844. The angel holds in his hand a message metaphorically pictured as being eaten (10:8-11), which suggests the

word is to be received into the heart, allowing it to become the controlling power of one's life (Jer. 15:16; 20:9; Job 23:12; Eze. 2:8; 3:3).

The symbolism used in this prophecy appropriately represents the sweet-bitter experience of the early Adventists who joyously received the message that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844. As the day approached they earnestly prepared themselves and attempted to prepare others. But when the day arrived their joy yielded to the bitterness of disappointment, just as the prophecy had indicated. However, the prophecy suggests their work was not completed. The Adventists divided into three groups following the disappointment: (1) The Advent Christian body, who rejected the 1844 movement, (2) A fanatical group that burned itself out, (3) A group that believed God led in the 1844 movement and continued to study and understand the true meaning of October 22, 1844. Edson first understood the two-phase ministry of Christ in the sanctuary when his attention was directed to Revelation 10:9-11. This group came to accept the Sabbath and Spirit of Prophecy, along with the sanctuary truth and other teachings (Rev. 14:6-12), which culminated in the organizing of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863. Truly this group, proven and tested, were intrusted with a message to preach again, and thus prepare mankind for the coming of Christ.

How can we assist in fulfilling this prophecy?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 585.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 356.

3. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 971.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Signs of the Times*, July 19, 1843. Quoted in Leroy Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 4, p. 712.

6. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 971, 972.

7. Ellen White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 971.

Tuesday, June 12

Mission With Might

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Daniel 12:3

A definite theme of mission rings clear in Revelation chapter 10. "The angel's position, with one foot on the sea, the other on land, signifies the wide extent of the proclamation of the message. It will cross the broad waters and be proclaimed in other countries, even to all the world. The comprehension of truth, the glad reception of the message, is represented in the eating of the little book."¹

"A great work is to be done, and those who know the truth should make mighty intercession for help. The love of Christ must fill their own hearts. The Spirit of Christ must be poured out upon them, and they must be making ready to stand in the judgment. As they consecrate themselves to God, a convincing power will attend their efforts to present the truth to others. We must no longer sleep on Satan's enchanted ground, but call into requisition all our resources, avail ourselves of every facility with which Providence has furnished us. The last warning is to be proclaimed before 'many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings,' and the promise is given, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' Revelation

10:11; Matthew 28:20."²

God's presence is our assurance. "Not one cloud has fallen upon the church that God has not prepared for; not one opposing force has risen to counterwork the work of God but He has foreseen. All has taken place as He has predicted through His prophets. He has not left His church in darkness, forsaken, but has traced in prophetic declarations what would occur, and through His providence, acting in its appointed place in the world's history, He has brought about that which His Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to foretell. All His purposes will be fulfilled and established. His law is linked with His throne, and satanic agencies combined with human agencies cannot destroy it. Truth is inspired and guarded by God; it will live, and will succeed, although it may appear at times to be overshadowed. The gospel of Christ is the law exemplified in character. The deceptions practiced against it, every device for vindicating falsehood, every error forged by satanic agencies, will eventually be eternally broken, and the triumph of truth will be like the appearing of the sun at noonday. The Sun of Righteousness shall shine forth with healing in His wings, and the whole earth shall be filled with His glory."³

1. Ellen White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 971.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 123.

3. *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 108.

by Werner Stavenhagen

Werner Stavenhagen is collegiate missions president and a theology major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Wednesday, June 14

Day of Anticipation

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 10:10

Private Jenkins looked down the long, black flattop, as his platoon marched across the parade deck during a boot-camp graduation. He was chosen the platoon's best man, as symbolized in his wearing of the "dress blue" uniform. Jenkins had entered boot camp three months earlier. As a new recruit, every minute of his day was accounted for in the training schedule. From day one, he knew what events were to take place and when. Jenkins not only depended on the rigid schedule for a record of his daily training but he used it in the countdown of his remaining time in boot camp. He looked forward to the day when he would reach the height of training. Graduation had finally arrived according to schedule. After today he would no longer be called a "recruit." He would be called a "United States Marine."

You and I look forward to the day when we, as soldiers of God, will march into the pearly gates of heaven. In recognition of a job well done, our uniforms will be the "dress whites" of the righteousness of Jesus. Until that day comes we are provided with a schedule of prophetic events. This schedule points to the soon coming of Jesus. Early Adventists

thought the advent of Christ was near at hand. According to their prophetic interpretations, 1844 was to be the year of His coming. With anticipation sweet as honey, they prepared for this great event, but 1844 passed without a sign of the coming Lord. How disappointing and bitter their unfulfilled hopes must have been. Today we still await the Second Coming. It is easy to become discouraged when reflecting on the past disappointments of early Adventists and our beloved ancestors, who patiently waited for the Lord. We tend to overlook what God has planned in love for everyone. Commenting on the great disappointment, Ellen White says, "It was in the Lord's order that this disappointment should come, and that hearts should be revealed."* What seemed bitter to early Adventists can be sweet as honey for us. The Great Disappointment was a part of the prophetic schedule. It was God's way of preparing people for the Second Coming, and a means to call forth His last-day church. We can rejoice knowing that there are no more prophecies of disappointment. Jesus is soon to come, and He will not disappoint His people.

REACT

Do you believe that the last-day events are being set in motion? Can you point out the evidences?

* *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 108.

by Victor J. Maddox

Victor J. Maddox is a religion major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Thursday, June 15

Bitter-Sweet Feelings

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rev. 10:10

It was Week of Prayer at our school. The speaker preached enthusiastically of the need for our relationship with Christ to carry us through the end. I was excited, and I was on fire. I rededicated my life to Christ, and I knew this time it was for good. My morning devotions had a new meaning. I felt vibrant and refreshed. I wanted to share Jesus with everyone I came in contact with. My experience was as sweet as honey.

The next day, however, the speaker left; and for all practical purposes, so did my experience. It somehow turned bitter in my stomach. Now, perhaps, everyone does not turn sour overnight; but I am reminded of October 22, 1844. One day they were waiting and were positive that Christ was coming. The next day most of them doubted the very existence of God.

Why hasn't Christ come yet? How can I keep my own experience as sweet as honey? First, I believe Christ is waiting on us. He is waiting for us to duplicate perfectly His character through His strength. There is, however, a

time when He will wait no more. I think we are almost there. Second, the way to keep your experience alive is to follow a few simple steps:

1. Paul once said, "I die daily." So must you daily commit and sacrifice yourself to God. Don't merely give God lip service; pray and talk with God in sincerity. If you think you will have trouble living for Him that day, tell Him. He will help you.

2. Don't end your talk with God in the morning. Relate and converse with Him all through the day. He wants to be a part of everything you do. It doesn't have to be an elaborate prayer every time. Just a quick "Thank You" or "Help!" can work wonders.

3. Don't fall into a routine religious experience. Be creative. If you usually say a prayer, try singing. If you usually read your Bible in your bed, try reading it out-doors.

The point is we are the last generation on this wicked planet. The time to get ready is *now*. Christ is coming, and He wants to take us home; but it is up to us. Do not let that sweet feeling you find in Christ turn bitter. For without Him we have nothing.

by Kyle Robinson

Kyle Robinson is a religion major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Friday, June 16

Victory Ticket Anyone?

OPINION

Key Text: Revelation 22:20

Was it really true? They had told me that they were coming. But it just didn't seem possible. Mom and dad assured me that they were serious about traveling over to the Far East to visit me during my term of service as a student missionary. I was so excited (as well as my Korean students) and began to prepare right away. Time was short, and there was so much to do: Travel schedules, tickets, phone calls, letters, letters, and more letters. I had teaching to attend to, as well as other responsibilities. But I made time every day to ensure that things would be in order when they arrived.

I wanted to show them all over the little country that had been my home for more than eight months. It was my plan, after traveling throughout South Korea, to take them over to Japan, where I had visited recently. It would be a perfect tour. As I studied maps, made more phone calls, and completed further details, thoughts kept rushing through my head: "What if they don't come? All of your big plans won't mean a thing, and you'll have to cancel those reservations and apply for refunds. Is all this preparation really worth it?" I could imagine getting a call the day before they were due to arrive in Seoul: "Chris, we're sorry, but dad is just too busy at the

hospital these days; things are much too hectic. We don't think we'll be able to . . ." Pushing the thought from my mind, I determined that no details would be left unattended . . .

My parents took off from Tokyo, headed back to the States, with a lot of souvenirs, slides, and memories. Me? Flying back to Korea, I felt the greatest sense of satisfaction because everything had worked out perfectly. I had prepared diligently for their visit. But what if for some strange reason they wouldn't have been able to come? As I thought about it, my mind went back to a group of believers who had prepared for another coming. They were sure of the arrival time of their Saviour, and yes, many even quit work, to get ready to meet Him. What a heartbreaking experience it must have been when He never showed up!

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24:42). This has been our Lord's message, both then and now. There is no time to wait until that next Week of Prayer to start preparations. God says: "Behold, I come quickly . . ." (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). Not once, but three times in the final chapter of Revelation He emphasizes this to those whose minds will receive it.

You have no guarantee of having another day to live. In some cases His coming really is quick, isn't it? But one thing is *sure*. When God decides the time

by Chris Lang

Chris Lang is an accounting major at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

has come, nothing will stop Him from making our hopes become reality. Begin each day with your personal preparations for our

Saviour's soon return; and then encourage others to reserve a victory ticket. You know they'll be glad they did!



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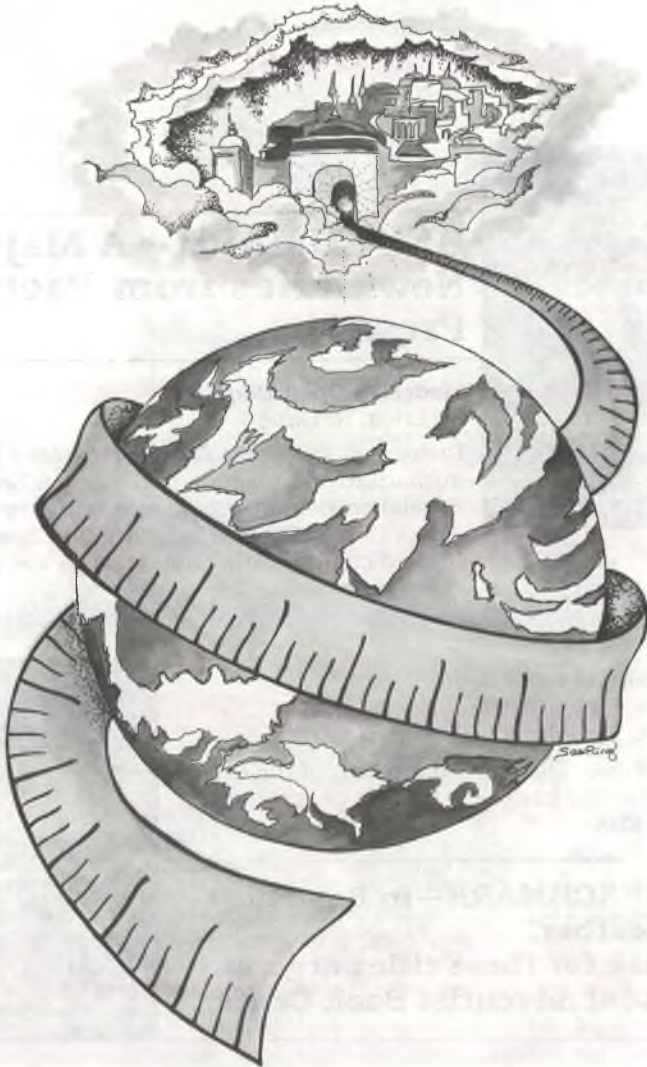
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Lesson 13, June 18 - 24

Measuring Up?



“ ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever’ ” (Rev. 11:15, NIV).

Sunday, June 18

“Struck Down, but Not Destroyed”

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Revelation 11

Any person who steps into the arena of leadership has to be willing to pay a price. Good leadership is not easy, it taxes the whole person. A large part of the difficulty of leadership lies in facing the criticism that leadership brings. Throughout history leaders have selflessly exposed themselves to the stinging barbs of their critics. Take Nehemiah for example.

Nehemiah was called to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah planned the work carefully, organized and supervised the workers well, and, as a good leader, was making steady progress toward his goal. Everything was going well except that Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official were watching. Sanballat and Tobiah were critics of what Nehemiah was doing—vociferous critics. Their sarcasm is almost humorous in Nehemiah 4:3. “Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him [Sanballat] and he said, ‘Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall

down!’” (NASB).

Sanballat and Tobiah were not Nehemiah’s only critics, there was a host of dissent. Other great leaders have faced similar opposition. In 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 Paul wrote: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (NASB).

Opposition is levied not only against human leaders but also against the leaders’ source of courage—the Bible. History shows that there are numerous times when the Bible itself was opposed almost to the point of extinction. The French Revolution is an example of a movement that tried to destroy the Bible.

This week’s lesson focuses on prophecies relating to the French Revolution. During the French Revolution the Bible was banned for three and a half years. Did you know that this was prophesied in the Bible? Can you think of other movements in history that sought to eradicate God’s Word? How did God intervene?

by Renou Korff

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“Hope for Short Christians”

LOGOS

Theme: *Faith in Christ enables us to accept spiritual victory as an accomplished fact while we are in the midst of the final conflict with the enemy.*

Most of us can remember when our parents had us stand up straight while they made a mark on a wall or doorway. We didn't mind that kind of measurement. But we tend to become a little nervous when we think about God measuring our spirituality. Talking about the sanctuary, the judgment, and the coming conflict can be a scary proposition. But it does not have to be, as we will see in Revelation 11.

This chapter is part of a parenthesis between the sixth and seventh trumpets “intended as a reassurance that in the midst of the horrors attendant on the blowing of the trumpets, God's temple—that is, the plan of redemption portrayed there—and His true worshipers are secure.”¹

1. The Measuring and Its Meaning (read Revelation 11:1, 2).

“And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it’” (Rev. 11:1, NASB).

Revelation 11 is a continuation of chapter 10. In that chapter we

learned that after the Millerites had gone through the bitterness of the Great Disappointment in 1844, they were told to “prophesy again” (Rev. 10:9-11). The instruction to “rise and measure the temple of God” (Rev. 11:1) followed immediately.

This was encouraging to the early pioneers, because it meant that there was indeed life after the apparent death of the Advent movement. They had a mission and a message! The temple and altar referred to are in heaven (Rev. 11:19), and the worshipers are those who enter the sanctuary by faith (Heb. 10:19). What the believers needed was to have their attention focused on the heavenly sanctuary.

In the heavenly temple they would see Christ, our high priest, ministering in the “true tabernacle” in behalf of His people (Heb. 8:1, 2). To Him they could go “with confidence” and “in full assurance” for help, especially when they knew they didn't completely measure up (Heb. 4:16; 10:19-21; 1 John 2:1, NASB). They would also come to understand the pre-Advent or investigative judgment.

In what ways would we benefit from giving the temple in heaven our attention? What is going on there now?

2. The Testimony of the Two Witnesses (read Revelation 11:3-13).

“And I will grant authority to

by Mark Bresee

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my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth'" (Rev. 11:3, NASB).

God's two witnesses are said to be the "two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord" (verse 4). This is an obvious allusion to Zechariah 4:1-6, 11-14.

Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally understood the two witnesses as a symbolic reference to the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments. The psalmist sang, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" and "The entrance of your words gives light" (Ps. 119:105, 130, NIV).

It is also significant that Jesus said, "The Scriptures . . . bear witness of Me'" (John 5:39, NASB). And during the Olivet sermon Christ promised, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations . . .'" (Matt. 24:14, NASB). See also *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 801, and *The Great Controversy*, p. 267.

These witnesses are forced to give their testimony clothed in sackcloth "for twelve hundred and sixty days" (Rev. 11:3). Careful study indicates that this prophecy covers the period of time from A.D. 538 to 1798.

During this time were intense periods of persecution against both the Bible and God's people. For example, the Council of Tarrogon, 1234, ruled that: "No one may possess the books of the Old and New Testaments in the Romance language, and if anyone possesses them he must turn them over to the local bishop within eight days after the promulgation of this decree, so that they may be burned lest, be he a cleric or a layman, he be suspected until he is cleared of all suspicion."²

France was foremost in **rejecting the Reformation**. The Reformers had proclaimed and provided the Scriptures in the language of the people. But in France the Bible was banned for significant periods. As a result the nation **reaped the Revolution** in which thousands were slaughtered in the upheaval (Rev. 11:13).

One of the lessons worth noting is the chaos and anarchy that result from total rejection of God and His Word. The French Revolution was a **microcosm** of what will yet take place on a worldwide scale.

The two witnesses, which had prophesied in sackcloth and finally lay dead in the streets for three and a half days, were caught up to heaven (verses 9-12). This was fulfilled immediately after the French Revolution, when the Bible Societies began printing millions of Bibles in hundreds of languages. It was a new day for God's Word!

This should give us hope today. In spite of problems and persecution, **God's truth goes marching on!**

In what ways do we nullify the power of the Bible in our lives? Does spirituality flourish better in times of difficulty or during periods of comfort and freedom? Why? How should we feel about the coming time of trouble?

3. The Seventh Trumpet and Christ's Triumph (read Revelation 11:14-19).

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever'" (Rev. 11:15, NASB).

Satan and sinners may at times seem to be in the driver's seat, but above and beyond, our

God is still on the throne! He will take the reins from the rebels and rule once again! The present kingdom of grace will give way to the kingdom of glory.

Thanks to the cross of Christ, the devil is a doomed and defeated foe. Soon will be the day when the tables are turned and rewards are passed out to the righteous, and the wicked receive their just due (verse 18).

We get a glimpse of Day of Atonement imagery in verse 19, with the view of the temple of God open in heaven. The ark is visible, and in Old Testament times the ark was seen only on the Day of Atonement. Since 1844 we have been living in the

time of the pre-Advent judgment, symbolized by the Day of Atonement.

And that gives us courage too. Though we should take the judgment that is going on in heaven seriously, we would do well to remember that the primary purpose of the judgment is to do away with the pretenders and the persecutors, and to give the kingdom to the people of God. (See Dan. 7:9-14, 17, 18, 21, 22, 25-27.) The judgment signals to the universe that sin's days are nearly done. Hallelujah!

How can we have hope as we face the judgment? What can we do to prepare for this event?

1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 800.

2. (D. Lortsch, *Histoire de la Bible en France*, 1910, p. 14. Quoted *The Great Controversy*, p. 688.)

Tuesday, June 20

Are You an Evergreen?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Jude 20-22

"The grand judgment is taking place, and has been going on for some time. Now the Lord says, Measure the temple and the worshipers thereof. Remember when you are walking the streets about your business, God is measuring you; when you are attending your household duties, when you engage in conversation, God is measuring you. Remember that your words and actions are being daguerreotyped [photographed] in the books of heaven, as the face is reproduced by the artist on the polished plate. . . .

"Here is the work going on, measuring the temple and its worshipers to see who will stand in the last day. Those who stand fast shall have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. When we are doing our work remember there is One that is watching the spirit in which we are doing it. Shall we not bring the Saviour into our everyday lives, into our secular work and domestic duties? Then in the name of God we want to leave behind everything that is not necessary, all gossiping or unprofitable visiting, and present ourselves as servants of the living God."¹

"The time has come when everything is to be shaken that can be shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may re-

main. Every case is coming in review before God; He is measuring the temple and the worshipers therein."²

Does the final shaking scare you? To many it is looked upon as a very fearful time, when those who love the Lord will go through times of trial. Our encouragement should come from the knowledge that the Lord will give us the strength to carry us through the last days—if we will just put our trust in Him.

"In all ages the Saviour's chosen have been educated and disciplined in the school of trial. They walked in narrow paths on earth; they were purified in the furnace of affliction. For Jesus' sake they endured opposition, hatred, calumny. They followed Him through conflicts sore; they endured self-denial and experienced bitter disappointments. By their own painful experience they learned the evil of sin, its power, its guilt, its woe; and they look upon it with abhorrence. A sense of the infinite sacrifice made for its cure humbles them in their own sight and fills their hearts with gratitude and praise which those who have never fallen cannot appreciate. They love much because they have been forgiven much. Having been partakers of Christ's sufferings, they are fitted to be partakers with Him of His glory."³

"When the testing time shall come, those who have made God's word their rule of life will be revealed. . . . The true Christian

by Pam Dysinger

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will stand firm as a rock, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, than in days of prosperity.¹

REACT

"In summer there is no noticeable difference between evergreens and other trees; but when

the blasts of winter come, the evergreens remain unchanged, while other trees are stripped of their foliage."²

How will your faith stand in times of trial? Will you be like all the other trees or will you stand firm like the evergreen?

1. Ellen White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 972.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 219.

3. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 649, 650.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 602.

5. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, June 21

“The Annoying Witnesses”

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Revelation 11:10

The two witnesses in Revelation are considered, by the majority of Seventh-day Adventist theologians, to represent the Old and New Testament of the Bible. To most Christians, the Bible is a source of comfort, hope, and joy, but in Revelation 11:10 we see that the Bible has a different effect on those who oppose it.

In verses 9 and 10 those who opposed the Word of God celebrate because it appeared as if the Bible had lost its power. They rejoice because their source of torment apparently had died. The Bible meant something totally different to them from what it does to us.

Webster's dictionary defines torment as: 1. Extreme physical or mental anguish. 2. A source of harassment, annoyance, or pain. This definition raises an important question: Does God try purposely to inflict pain upon those who reject Him? If this is so, then it is a form of blackmail because God would be like a captor torturing His prisoners until they choose to do His will. If we looked at verse 10 from this perspective we would undoubtedly question the justice of God.

Does God force His enemies to do His will? When we look at the context of Scripture we see that God is much different from the captor torturing his prisoners. He is the gentle Shepherd carrying

the lost lamb, the worried Father running to meet His rebellious son, the compassionate Teacher defending an adulteress, the selfless Lover forgiving those who crucified Him.

The image of God as a tormentor clashes with the many tender revelations we see in the life of Jesus. How, then, did God, through His two witnesses, torment those who rejected Him? To understand this, we must realize that God's moral law is an innate part of the universe just as are the physical laws. If we try to break the law of gravity we will face certain consequences. If a large rock is thrown into the air one would be foolish to stand under it, because it *will* fall. When a person breaks God's moral law he accepts the consequence, which is ultimately death. We have all sinned, and all deserve death. We know, though, that God is merciful, offering life to all who will accept His Son; and those who reject Him are choosing death when they could have life. God goes even further by pleading with those who reject Him. The rebellious see God's pleading as annoyances and harassments, while in reality, He is trying to prevent them from putting the noose around their own necks.

When we look at the broad picture of God's work we see things differently from the way we see if we focus narrowly on one point. God could be seen as unjust if we

by Kent D. Boyle

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looked only at the perspective of those who reject Him. But when we realize that He gives hope to a no-hope situation we see Him from a different light. By offering life to all, He has done enough. He goes the extra mile by pleading with those who are rebellious (2 Peter 3:9). Maybe this is why

the twenty-four elders were so happy in John's vision when they proclaimed: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign" (Rev. 11:17, NIV). They could trust His leadership!

Thursday, June 22

Measuring Salvation

HOW-TO

Key Text: Zech. 4:6

Global events rarely seem to correspond to the measurements on God's "end-of-time" yardstick. Often prophecies about the last days are difficult to interpret, because this world has suffered from 'wars and rumors of wars' for centuries. Some of the most tragic events of recent years might be the body's war with AIDS, the environment's war with nuclear disasters like Chernobyl, or man's war with technology in the *Challenger* explosion. Yet which of these, if any, is a sure sign of the end, an inch marker on the "end-of-time" yardstick?

Gauging our own small places in relation to global events can be even more difficult. How do we know whether or not we measure up to God's plan of salvation? Do we have to find out alone? This week's lesson concentrates on a chapter in one of the most interpretationally elusive books of the Bible—Revelation. Although its symbolism often seems more focused on the global picture than on our parts in it, God inspired John, the book's writer, with a message for the individual, as well as the earth.

1. God is measuring believers. John's vision of measuring the temple and its worshipers has two meanings (Rev. 11:1). In its symbolic aspect, this vision represents the fuller understanding of

Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary that has come since 1844. On a more personal level, it represents God's pledge to restore peace on earth through His redemptive power.

2. God gives two guides to help us measure up. These two guides, referred to as olive trees, candlesticks, and witnesses (Rev. 11:3, 4; Zech. 4:12-14) represent the Old and New Testaments. "Inasmuch as the fullest expression of the Holy Spirit to men is contained in the Scriptures of the OT and the NT, they may be considered to be the two witnesses."*

3. God does not expect us to find salvation alone. Through the Bible we can learn what to expect from the end of time and how to measure the signs of the end. Daniel 2:31-45 characterizes our age as the era of mixed iron and clay in the image of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. These non-cohesive elements provide a weak foundation for the present "kingdoms of this world" (Rev. 11:15). Christ's second coming will destroy these kingdoms and establish an everlasting kingdom for those who trust in God's salvation.

REACT

1. How can we differentiate between mere events and legitimate signs of the end?

2. The Bible is our guidebook to salvation. Why are so many parts of it hard to understand? Could this symbolize the difficulty of attaining salvation?

* SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 801.

by Janet L. Conley

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Going for the Gold (Olympic Observations)

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Cor. 9:24

My wife says I'm obsessed. I think it's just a fever though—Olympic fever. Once every four years I throw all self-control out the window and become a genuine "couch potato" as I root for my country to win the gold. Because I've got the glitter of gold in my eyes (not to mention the Olympic-sized rings around my eyes from staying up late), I'd like to draw some analogies between the Olympics and Revelation 11.

Have you ever heard the saying "No pain, no gain?" I'm beginning to think that it applies to spiritual, as well as physical, exercise. When I see all the training and exercise that athletes go through to reach the Olympics I can't help drawing comparisons with my own anemic spiritual exercise program. These athletes are willing to endure the hours of pain and hard work that it takes each day to be the best. I have a hard time taking ten or fifteen minutes a day to keep my spiritual life healthy!

In Revelation 11 we get a brief history of the Christian church and some of the obstacles it had to overcome. History shows us time and time again that the church gains power through the pain of persecution and hardship. Is our Christianity being challenged today? Would we be

stronger spiritual athletes if we had to endure some pain for the Lord? I know from my own experience that I grow the most when I'm up against trials and obstacles that I can't humanly handle. Maybe we need bigger spiritual challenges! That may involve some pain, but remember, "No pain, no gain." A faith that is not challenged is not faith at all.

Another thing that impresses me about Olympic athletes is the complete dedication they have to their sport. Their one driving goal is to be the best, and they do it all for a little gold medallion. We are promised a whole city where the streets are paved with gold—but how much time do we spend preparing for it? We need to set our spiritual goals higher! True, heaven is a lofty goal, but it is attainable to all.

Television has brought a whole new aspect to the Olympics. We are now able to watch pre-taped events as if they were live. Many times you can know the final results before you even watch the race. That's a little bit like the Christian race. The Bible tells us that the victory has been won (Rev. 11:15). Christ has won the race for us! Sure, it takes away a little bit of the suspense, but it's awfully nice to run a race that you know you're not going to lose!

Let's just remember that we don't have to be Olympic athletes to go for God's gold!

by John Dysinger

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ARE YOU GETTING READY FOR MARRIAGE OR JUST FOR THE WEDDING CEREMONY?



The dress. The flowers. The music. You want everything to be just right for that special moment when the two of you say, "I do!" But a marriage is more than a wedding. Now is the time to talk about what you want your relationship to be like. What you expect of the one you will marry. The strengths you both possess that will help make your marriage a lasting one. Could there be some weaknesses? Conflicts? How do you plan to deal with these? What are you afraid of in marriage? How will decisions be made? What about a house? Kids? Your career?

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