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Andrews University Hosts Summit on Human Trafficking

Submitted: Apr 17, 2013

By Jeff Boyd, Assistant Editor

Human trafficking was the focus of the second annual Summit on Social Consciousness the past weekend at Andrews University (AU), a major institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For minors, sex trafficking is defined as commercial sexual exploitation, and for adults it also includes the use of force, fraud or coercion. It is the second largest criminal industry on the globe, with only drug trafficking producing more revenue.

Three nights of events preceded Saturday's full-day schedule. To begin the Summit last Wednesday evening, Abigail Kuzma, a lawyer who co-chairs the Indiana Protection for Abused and Trafficked Human Task Force, shared foundational information regarding sex trafficking in the United States and abroad. Kuzma has seen the many faces of victims and compared two statistics. An estimated 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked annually into the United States, and between 100,000 and 300,000 American children are also victims of sex trafficking each year. Nationwide, 83 percent of trafficking victims are U.S. citizens.

To bring the statistics even closer to home, Daniel Xisto, AU seminary student and co-leader of the Summit planning committee, ended the evening by reading an email he had recently received. The unnamed writer revealed, “I’m a survivor of human trafficking, and was trafficked by my father when he was a student [at Andrews University].”

The movie Nefarious: Merchant of Souls was presented the second evening. It analyzes the sex industry in various countries, including the brutal force of the breaking grounds of Eastern Europe, familial and economic pressures in Thailand, legalization of prostitution in the Netherlands, and pimps hustling women and men in the U.S. All are shown to involve emotional and physical force that leaves the vulnerable with little control over their lives and bodies.

After looking at different manifestations of trafficking, Nefarious ends with a message of hope, highlighting both victims and traffickers who have found freedom and new life in Jesus. Pastor Esther Knott from Pioneer Memorial Church emphasized that “God wants to reach the traffickers as well. God is in the pursuit of all of us.”

Nefarious was produced by Exodus Cry, “a prayer movement to end slavery” which combines devotional life and social action. “First and foremost we believe that human trafficking must be fought in the place of prayer and that Jesus is the only answer to injustice and oppression,” shared Laila Mickelwait, who has a background in the Adventist Church and is manager of policy and public affairs for the organization. Mickelwait reported that for four years the production team “traveled to four continents, 42 cities, 19 countries and took 200 hours of film footage.”
Currently, Exodus Cry is filming *Nefarious II*, which will address “pornography, the over-sexualization of our culture, the normalization of sexual violence and how these things play into the epidemic of sexual exploitation and sex trafficking around the world.”

Annie Lobert is one of the women featured in *Nefarious* and the following evening she spoke for vespers at Pioneer Memorial Church. Lobert described how she was deceived, beaten and controlled by her pimp for years. During a bad drug trip, she called to Jesus. After regaining consciousness under medical care, she began a process of recovery and restoration. Lobert now runs a ministry for women still on the street, Hookers for Jesus. Lobert stayed long after vespers, talking and praying with many who crowded around her.

Lobert embodies the three major themes that emerged at the Summit. First, trafficking takes many forms, from brothels in India to the streets of the U.S. Second, God desires to restore everyone involved in sex trafficking—traffickers, clients, and victims. Third, God calls disciples to work for justice and peace in the world. Not only is Lobert liberated from the sex industry, she is using her experience to empower and care for others.

Saturday morning began with a panel discussion at Sabbath School. Participants included Theresa Flores, a trafficking survivor and activist; Jennifer Schirzer, an Adventist mental health professional; Carol Ryan, the mother of a survivor; and Harvey Burnett, a police officer and AU psychology professor. Following the discussion, the Deliverance Mass Choir led the congregation in a powerful worship service, and AU seminary professor Clifford Jones preached on the three requirements of God outlined in Micah 6:8—do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Each of the four panel participants led break-out sessions later in the afternoon, as did therapist Beverly Sedlacek, seminary professors David Sedlacek and Martin Hanna, mental health professional Amy Alvarado, religion professor Ante Jeroncic and René Drumm, dean of the school of social work at Southern Adventist University. Topics included trafficking myths, interventions, trafficking within the Adventist Church, psychological and emotional issues, the Bible principle of social justice, and God's role in fighting sex slavery.

Throughout Saturday afternoon and evening, a number of organizations displayed materials: Adventist Recovery Ministries, Project Liberty, Planting Hope in Michigan, Hope of Survivors, Southwest Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force, Tiny Hands International, and a new chapter of the Adventist Peace Fellowship (APF) at AU. Establishing local chapters is a new initiative for APF, said Ron Osborn, executive director. “Andrews is the first school to begin the process of forming an APF chapter.” Osborn stated that APF will soon announce a charter process, supporting “college and university groups, Sabbath school classes, and others [to] put their commitment to human rights, peacemaking, and social justice into practice by forming their own local chapters of the Adventist Peace Fellowship.”

Javier Omar Melendez, the chair of next year’s Summit planning committee, sees establishing the APF chapter as a central goal. Melendez envisions APF functioning as an umbrella organization, with various student teams focusing on specific issues. The Summit planning committee will be one of the teams.

Although the Summit concluded with a vespers and reception Saturday evening, a number of AU students traveled to nearby St. Joseph on Sunday afternoon to participate in a public awareness campaign, wearing orange t-shirts and handing out fliers. Students have also taken their influence off campus by joining the Southwest Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force and by attending the Justice Conference held this past February in Philadelphia.

Feeling powerless to effect change is a natural response to learning that worldwide 27 million people are in sex...
and labor bondage. Summit presenters addressed this reaction a number of times. For instance, during the Sabbath School panel discussion, counselor Jennifer Schwirzer emphasized that sex trafficking "can be an overwhelming topic, but God has only called us to do what we can do in our circle of influence, and to expand this circle over time." Student leader Paige Holthof drew out a spiritual lesson from the work of spirit-empowered social action. "Social justice advocacy...is not a comfortable or easy process, but it's one we're called to. Through addressing these areas of unimaginable wickedness, we are able to better appreciate all that Jesus had to die for as He hung on the cross. What a Savior!"

For those who want to get involved but do not know how, Theresa Flores explained that many effective efforts to fighting trafficking require very little expertise. She mentioned praying, writing letters to legislators calling for stronger trafficking laws, boycotting certain brands, stores and magazines that rely heavily on sexual advertisements, putting informational stickers on soap to be placed in motel bathrooms where victims are likely to work, and posting the national trafficking hotline (888–3737–888) in bars. Flores highlighted free training provided by the Polaris Project and other organizations.

Graduate student and Summit planning committee member, Sabine René, pressed home the theme of continued action after returning from the awareness-raising action in St. Joseph. "Is it over? No! Now, the work really begins. A few great speakers and powerful seminars aren’t enough to end this social injustice. How shall you respond to the cries of the innocent and the disposed? Now, the work really begins in raising your voice against the dehumanization of God’s creation."

*Jeff Boyd is an assistant editor for Adventist Today and a volunteer with Tiny Hands International.*

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Adventist Cult Leaders in Ghana Arrested for Trafficking, Forced Marriage of Girls

Submitted: Apr 14, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Five men and two women were arrested by Ghana Police Service at the Maranatha Adventist Prayer Camp in rural Akosombo District and arraigned last Wednesday (April 10) in an Accra Circuit Court charged with human trafficking and conspiracy, according to a number of sources. Among the seven alleged offenders were Veronica Agbo, age 30, who had assumed the alias Ellen Christ, and John Agbo, age 36. The other five ranged in age from 24 to 42, according to court records published in Ghana Business News on April 11.

A group formed in the Aflao Seventh-day Adventist Church about five years ago during an evangelism crusade. "The team had fasting and prayer ... and all of a sudden, the spirit fell on" Veronica Agbo, a Lucien Anane, who identified himself as an elder, told an investigative reporter for the New Crusading Guide newspaper in Ghana. When church leaders admonished Agbo, she accused them of being possessed by an evil spirit and when the group was disfellowshipped, she told church members that the Second Coming and the Battle of Armageddon were very near and they should flee to a rural area.

The investigative reporter, Anas Aremeyaw Anas joined the prayer camp near the village of Mentukwa and evidently recorded conversations with a number of the group members, including children. Transcriptions of some of the interviews are being published in a series of long stories in the New Crusading Guide.

The adherents were told that because the return of Christ was so near they must stay at the secluded camp and away from the “sinful world” in order to assure their salvation. “They were preparing themselves to be lifted to Heaven,” reported the Daily Graphic, another newspaper in Ghana. “About 50 members of the church in Aflao bought into the prophecy and followed the” Agbos to at least two other rural “prayer camps” before settling in the Mentukwa location.

Police Superintendent Patience Quaye told The Ghanaian Times that the group had built mud houses and was cultivating crops of corn, beans, cassava and plantain at the camp. The police decided to raid the group when it received a tip that girls as young as 14 were being forced into marriages with older men in the group, and that children were denied food, health care and education, reported the Daily Guide based on statements by Quaye.

A total of 18 individuals were rescued when Quaye’s team raided the camp on Sabbath, April 6. Four babies and at least seven children under 14 years of age were among the victims, according to several news reports. The Ghana national government’s Minister of Gender and Social Protection, Nana Oye Lithur, said some of the children were...
malnourished after she visited with the group. She said they were being placed in a shelter and would be provided with new living arrangements.

The investigative reporter, Anas, recorded young boys at the camp telling him, “They don’t allow us to use phones,” speaking of the adults in charge. “They say when we start using a phone, all our attention will be on the phone and we will forget God.” They were taught that their thoughts must always be focused on God if they were to be saved when Jesus returned. The boys indicated to Anas an interest in attending a nearby school but told him they were not allowed to because “when we go to school … our attention will be drawn away from the Word of God.”

Anas also reports evidence of the members of the group being whipped and caned. Physical punishment was evidently dished out to all except the Agbos. “Even the financier of the church, [an] Aflao based business woman” said when she could not immediately deliver cash to the Agbos, “for not giving the church money, I was whipped.” A 13–year–old girl for “her refusal to consent to an arranged marriage” was beaten.

Anas was told that a mother “refused to send her daughter to the hospital” when she became ill, because “the doctrinal position of the church was against orthodox medication.” Anas explains that “adherents are virtually psychologically enslaved to … Prophetess Ellen … whose words could not under any circumstances be challenged.” Anas stayed under cover in the camp for several months and reported, “The first accusation that is usually leveled against any member whose actions go against the dictates” of Veronica Ago, calling herself Prophetess Ellen Christ, “is that he or she has been possessed by ‘evil spirits.’ This accusation paves the way for deliverance,” meaning dire restrictions and physical punishment.

The camp was located beyond where rural electrification has extended in Ghana. The group wore “footwear made of wood with a leather flap. They do not take meat and pepper; members are always dressed shabbily,” Anas wrote. “They read and learnt the Bible a lot … pray more than 15 to 20 times a day … study the Bible morning, afternoon and evening.”

The first story by the investigative reporter in the New Crusading Guide likened the Adventist splinter group to the Jonestown Massacre of 1978. It also recalled a similar event in Uganda in the 1990s when “500 followers of Joseph Kibwetere under the group African Movement for the Restoration of the 10 Commandments committed mass suicide … to announce the coming apocalypse of 2000.”

There are 375,000 members of the Seventh–day Adventist Church in Ghana in a total population of about 25 million. Some researchers believe that there may be as many as three times the membership among unbaptized children and other adherents, based on census data and surveys. There are seven local conferences in the country and nearly 1,200 local churches. The denomination operates eight hospitals and nine community clinics in Ghana, as well as a large Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). In addition to Valley View University in Accra and Asokore Teacher Training College, there are four Adventist secondary schools in the nation and Advent Press is located in Ghana.

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General Conference Governing Body Marks 150 Years, Does Routine Business

Submitted: Apr 16, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team Update Appended on April 17

The executive committee of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is in Battle Creek, Michigan, this week for its yearly spring meeting. Over the weekend, members from all over the world celebrated the 150th anniversary of the denomination. The divisive issues surrounding ordination at last year’s meeting were evidently off the agenda this time.

The anniversary is actually being observed a month early and leaders took pains to say that they were not “celebrating” because the Adventist faith is focused on the soon return of Christ and a history of more than 150 years is somewhat embarrassing. The founding meeting of the denomination was held in Battle Creek in May 1863, two decades after the “Great Disappointment” of 1843–44 when early Adventists predicted the Second Coming.

The committee received recommendations from a health ministries summit last month to make the outreach of the denomination “more comprehensive,” meeting physical, mental, emotional and social needs as well as spiritual needs. Dr. Allan Handysides, director of health ministries for the General Conference, quoted from The Ministry of Healing by church founder Ellen G. White, “If less time were given to sermonizing and more time were spent in practical ministry, greater results would be seen.” Pastor Ted Wilson, the denomination’s president, also referred to White’s urging in the early 20th century that the best approach to reaching large cities is “medical missionary work.”

“Some delegates, however, questioned whether the ... current budget ... could fund a quality, appealing program that will impact the community,” reported the denomination’s official news services, Adventist News Network (ANN). A committee member from Australia “strongly urged the executive committee to review existing successful community programs and incorporate them into mainstream ministry.” Pastor Mike Ryan, a vice president of the denomination, agreed. “We have so many programs, but bridging them to create something big, we’re weak on that.”

Earlier in the meeting the committee voted to appoint a replacement for Dr. Handysides, who is retiring in September. The new director of health ministries is Dr. Peter Landless, a physician and ordained minister who has worked with Handysides as an associate since early 2002.

In other personnel changes, the committee appointed Kimberly Westphall as associate director for quality control at the General Conference Auditing Service (GCAS). She has been the GCAS regional manager for North America and is a Certified Public Accountant.

The committee also appointed Jesse Johnson to fill a vacancy on the board of Adventist World Radio. He is president of a vendor in the technology field that provides services to the General Conference.
For two days on the weekend (April 13–14) the committee squeezed into a replica of the small church in which the first General Conference Session was held and listened to presentations by scholars among the GC officers. Dr. Ella Simmons, an educator with a PhD and a vice president of the denomination, spoke about the Battle Creek headquarters of the movement and the crisis it faced at the turn of the 20th century. Simmons recalled that the denomination’s major medical institution was taken away, its publishing house burned down and its college eventually collapsed—all located in Battle Creek at the time—and quoted White that this was “necessary.” ANN reported that Simmons said, “White feared the concentration of institutions in one place would indulge insular thinking and jeopardize the church’s mission.”

Dr. David Trim, a PhD historian and director of archives, statistics and research for the GC, recounted the change in the Adventist sense of mission from solely announcing the soon coming of Christ in the solidly Christian northeastern United States to taking a full gospel into all the world.

At first, early Adventists were preoccupied with the United States’ “providential” place in history, Trim said. They were reluctant to take biblical phrases such as “all the world” and “every nation,” literally, concluding that they “did not need to leave America to fulfill prophetic destiny,” he said. Indeed, some of the church’s first missionary work was to reach immigrant populations in the U.S.

By 1873, it was James White who called for a change. In one sermon, he mentioned that the Advent message should “go to all people” 14 times. Ultimately, Trim said, it was influential leaders such as White, the visionary views of his wife and good communication—constant reports from Europe detailed the need for mission work there—that led to world mission. Together, “these implanted passion for mission in the Adventist DNA, which I hope will never be extracted,” Trim said.

Reflecting on the shifts in focus and realizations early church leaders came to, Wilson thanked the afternoon presenters for highlighting the need for humility and flexibility in leadership, drawing this lesson from the life of a 19th century GC president, George Butler: “You can’t be a leader and think you know it all. You’ve got to come to the cross every day,” Wilson said.

**Update**

Total income to the Tithe Fund in local conferences was over $2.3 billion in 2012, reported Robert Lemon, the GC treasurer. This represents an increase over the previous year of one percent in North America where it totaled $933 million and 4.4 percent in the rest of the world where it totaled $1.4 billion. Offerings for world missions totaled $83 million, with $23 million coming from North America and $60 million from the rest of the world. This is 2.6 percent less than the previous year in North America, while the total giving in the rest of the world increased six percent. Lemon hastened to add, "I want to point out that in North America, local churches often give to many projects directly, or their members go on mission trips." This "mission giving goes uncounted" in the official reporting procedures. Past research has indicated that very likely total giving to world missions in North America has increased significantly, but not through the official channels.

The executive committee voted to approve a supplemental appropriation of $300,000 to assist the Adventist Church in South Sudan due to the disruption caused by the conflict there. It also approved a $7 million dollar addition to the 2013 budget for the denomination’s auditing service as it transitions to a new arrangement under which it will be funded by auditing fees instead of the GC budget. Over the next four years the new fee structure will be phased in so that at the end of the process, Adventist institutions will pay 80 percent of the cost of
operating the auditing service and conferences, union conferences and divisions will pay 20 percent of the cost. Up to this point, denominational organizations have not paid for the audits conducted by the service; it has been entirely funded by the GC.

Committee members were also told that at its annual meeting in the fall it will likely be asked to authorize an increase in the budget for the denomination's official television network, the Hope Channel. It "will require approximately $8 million more than is currently budgeted for the network to continue providing current satellite coverage through 2020," ANN reported. Adventist Today could not determine if this means an additional $8 million a year over the eight years or an additional $1 million per year on an eight-year contract. It is proposed that the amount be paid for from the $102 million in "extraordinary tithe" that the GC received in 2007.

The committee also received a report on the external audit of the GC, presented by the auditing firm Maner Costerisan and Ellis. In the past the committee has agreed "that it would be impractical to try to consolidate financial information from all the world divisions and [GC] institutions," ANN stated, but one committee member asked "why financial information from the separate audited statements of the church's 13 world divisions wasn't available." Lemon responded that his staff is working on a 10-year comprehensive report to be released at the time of the committee's annual meeting in the fall of 2013.

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Going Forward?

Submitted: Apr 19, 2013

By Andy Hanson

Andy Nash, writing in the Adventist Review of March 21, 2013, opines, "While relationships will always factor into any church member’s experience, a new study suggests a shifting landscape in which more and more people are leaving the Adventist Church primarily because they've changed their beliefs."

http://www.adventistreview.org/?issue=2013-1508

BEYOND BELIEF chronicles the experiences of respondents like this one:

“The tipping point came when I realized we couldn’t expect our sons to tell us the truth if we were modeling a lack of integrity by being active members of a church they knew we no longer believed...We did not leave because we were in any way hurt, angry, bitter, or disgruntled. We left with great grief and great loss, and we left because the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to us so compellingly that we know we could not dishonor Him by remaining in a system that does not know who He really is or what He really did.”

Ted Wilson’s inaugural speech created this “tipping point” for many church members. What follows is an excerpt from that speech, my comments, and a letter I received from a former Adventist from Ted NC Wilson’s Milestone Address to General Conference Delegates July 3, 2010, entitled “Go Forward.”


Go forward, not backward...Do not succumb to the mistaken idea, gaining support even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of accepting worship or evangelistic outreach methods merely because they are new and “trendy.” We must be vigilant to test all things according to the supreme authority of God’s Word and the counsel with which we have been blessed in the writings of Ellen G. White. Don’t reach out to movements or megachurch centers outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church which promise you spiritual success based on faulty theology. Stay away from non-biblical spiritual disciplines or methods of spiritual formation that are rooted in mysticism such as contemplative prayer, centering prayer, and the emerging church movement in which they are promoted. Look WITHIN the Seventh-day Adventist Church to humble pastors, evangelists, Biblical scholars, leaders, and departmental directors who can provide evangelistic methods and programs that are based on solid Biblical principles and “The Great Controversy Theme.”

Go forward, not backward! Use Christ-centered, Bible-based worship and music practices in church services. While we understand that worship services and cultures vary throughout the world, don’t go backwards into confusing pagan settings where music and worship become so focused on emotion and experience that you lose the central focus on the Word of God. All worship, however simple or complex should do one thing and one thing only: lift up Christ and put down self. Worship methods that lift up performance and self should be replaced with a simple and sweet reflection of a Christ-centered, Biblical approach. To define it too closely is impossible but when you read in Scripture of the holiness of God’s presence the Holy Spirit will help you to know
what is right and what is wrong.

Go forward, not backward! Stand for truth though the heavens fall. \textbf{Don't succumb to fanatical or loose theology that wrests God's Word from the pillars of Biblical truth and the landmark beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.} Don't be swayed with every little whim of “new” theology or complicated time chart purporting to carefully explain unusual or obscure concepts that have little to do with our overall theology and mission. \textbf{The historic Biblical beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will not be moved.} The Biblical foundation will stand secure to the end of time. Listen to what we are told in Selected Messages, Book 1, pages 207–208, “What influence is it that would lead men at this stage of our history to work in an underhand, powerful way to tear down the foundation of our faith—the foundation that was laid at the beginning of our work by prayerful study of the Word and by revelation?…We are God’s commandment-keeping people…every phase of heresy has been brought to bear upon us, to becloud our minds regarding the teaching of the Word—especially concerning the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the message of Heaven for these last days, as given by the angels of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation. Messages of every order and kind have been urged upon Seventh-day Adventists, to take the place of the truth which, point by point, has been sought out by prayerful study, and testified to by the miracle–working power of the Lord. But the waymarks which have made us what we are, are to be preserved, and they will be preserved, as God has signified through His Word and the testimony of His Spirit. He calls upon us to hold firmly, with the grip of faith, to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority.”

Go forward, not backward! Stand firm for God’s Word as it is literally read and understood. Of course, we must always humbly recognize that we are finite, fallen creatures observing the works of an infinite omnipotent God. There are things in both of God’s two great books of nature and Scripture that we do not fully comprehend. In fact, we are told that the sacrifice of Jesus will be “the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.” But that which the Lord in His mercy has given to us in clear language to be taken as fact simply because He said so must not be shrouded in skepticism. \textbf{Don’t go backwards to misinterpret the first eleven chapters of Genesis or other areas of Scripture as allegorical or merely symbolic.} As just this week we have once again affirmed in an overwhelming manner, the Seventh-day Adventist Church both teaches and believes in the biblical record of creation which took place recently; in six literal, consecutive, contiguous 24 hour days. The Seventh-day Adventist Church will never change its stand or belief in that foundational doctrine. If God did not create this world in six literal days and then blessed the Sabbath day, why are we worshipping Him today on this seventh-day Sabbath as SEVENTH-DAY Adventists? To misunderstand or to misinterpret this doctrine is to deny God’s Word and to deny the very purpose of the Seventh-day Adventist movement as the remnant church of God called to proclaim the three angels’ messages with Holy Spirit power. Don’t go backwards to atheistic or theistic evolution, go forward to the prophetic understanding that \textbf{loyalty to God, the Creator and Redeemer, will be seen in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as the distinguishing characteristic of God’s people} in the very end of time. Seventh-day Adventist Church members, \textbf{hold your leaders, pastors, local churches, educators, institutions, and administrative organizations accountable to the highest standards of belief based on a literal understanding of Scripture.} Utilize wonderful resources such as the Biblical Research Institute’s new book on hermeneutics that helps us know the correct way to interpret the Scriptures.

Again we read in Selected Messages, Book 1, on p. 170, \textit{“We must be careful lest we misinterpret the Scriptures. The plain teachings of the Word of God are not to be so spiritualized that the reality is lost sight of. Do not overstrain the meaning of sentences in the Bible in an effort to bring forth something odd in order to please the fancy. Take the Scriptures as they read.”}

\textbf{MY COMMENTS relate specifically to my bolded sections of this speech}

The idea that Adventists are advised to “look WITHIN” the church for “solid Biblical principles” is a call for theological conformity and unquestioning loyalty.
Ted has this thing about music. Just ask the musicians who play guitars and perform with recorded backup. Here he insinuates that anything but piano and organ music and hymns that are “simple and sweet” are not Christ-centered or reflect a “biblical approach” to worship.

The notion that “historical Biblical beliefs...will not be moved” is a statement that would be anathema to the founders of Adventism. They proudly proclaimed their commitment to “Present Truth.”

Belief in the literal six contiguous, twenty-four hour creation account is ludicrous on its face. Jewish scholars and linguists consider it a poetic statement of origins, Christian scholars point to its obvious prescientific orientation regarding the universe, historians point out that great civilizations existed prior to Usher’s establishment of the time of creation, and scientists of all stripes, can discover no illuminating scientific relevance in the biblical creation accounts.

The notion that the “seventh-day-Sabbath” is a distinguishing characteristic of “God’s people” has no biblical basis (Ted seems unacquainted with Mathew 25: 31–46.) as is his claim that the present is “the very end of time”.

The notion that the laity should hold those people and institutions affiliated with Adventism to “the highest standards of belief based on a literal understanding of Scripture” is to officially license pharisaical witch-hunting.

The use of this quote from Ellen White not to “misinterpret the Scriptures” implies that Adventists must accept the church’s authoritarian decree of infallibility.

A LETTER REQUESTING REMOVAL OF MEMBERSHIP

The following is a copy of a letter I received from a former church member.

Dear Church Clerk, I wish to quietly withdraw my name from the official Seventh-day Adventist Church member list. Over the years I have in prayerful consideration and grief, struggled over my personal beliefs becoming more and more incompatible with the official beliefs of the SDA church. Ted N.C. Wilson’s General Conference speech gave me the clarity that I needed to end that struggle. My continued SDA membership would be a misrepresentation of a member of the Adventist Church would be disrespectful and wrong. I must therefore with deep regret, in good and clear conscience, disassociate myself from the Seventh-day Adventist church.

I am unable to accept the Biblical literalist’s view that the earth is flat and that slavery is not an objectionable practice. I am not being facetious here. According to Wilson, church members must believe in the absolute literal interpretation of the Bible. His edict that “we accept Scripture as it reads” cannot allow an individual who is in disagreement with the official creed to be a member “in good standing”. Since I have no desire to be officially “purged,” I choose to make a dignified goodbye as a member who believes there is still truth to be learned.

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Adventist Today

Going Forward?

Submitted: Apr 19, 2013

By Andy Hanson

Andy Nash, writing in the Adventist Review of March 21, 2013, opines, “While relationships will always factor into any church member’s experience, a new study suggests a shifting landscape in which more and more people are leaving the Adventist Church primarily because they’ve changed their beliefs.”

http://www.adventistreview.org/?issue=2013-1508

BEYOND BELIEF chronicles the experiences of respondents like this one:

“The tipping point came when I realized we couldn’t expect our sons to tell us the truth if we were modeling a lack of integrity by being active members of a church they knew we no longer believed…We did not leave because we were in any way hurt, angry, bitter, or disgruntled. We left with great grief and great loss, and we left because the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to us so compellingly that we know we could not dishonor Him by remaining in a system that does not know who He really is or what He really did.”

Ted Wilson’s inaugural speech created this “tipping point” for many church members. What follows is an excerpt from that speech, my comments, and a letter I received from a former Adventist

from Ted NC Wilson’s Milestone Address to General Conference Delegates July 3, 2010, entitled “Go Forward.”


Go forward, not backward…Do not succumb to the mistaken idea, gaining support even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of accepting worship or evangelistic outreach methods merely because they are new and “trendy.” We must be vigilant to test all things according to the supreme authority of God’s Word and the counsel with which we have been blessed in the writings of Ellen G. White. Don’t reach out to movements or megachurch centers outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church which promise you spiritual success based on faulty theology. Stay away from non-biblical spiritual disciplines or methods of spiritual formation that are rooted in mysticism such as contemplative prayer, centering prayer, and the emerging church movement in which they are promoted. Look WITHIN the Seventh-day Adventist Church to humble pastors, evangelists, Biblical scholars, leaders, and departmental directors who can provide evangelistic methods and programs that are based on solid Biblical principles and “The Great Controversy Theme.”

Go forward, not backward! Use Christ-centered, Bible-based worship and music practices in church services. While we understand that worship services and cultures vary throughout the world, don’t go backwards into confusing pagan settings where music and worship become so focused on emotion and experience that you lose the central focus on the Word of God. All worship, however simple or complex should do one thing and one thing only: lift up Christ and put down self. Worship methods that lift up performance and self should be replaced with a simple and sweet reflection of a Christ-centered, Biblical approach. To define it too closely is impossible but when you read in Scripture of the holiness of God’s presence the Holy Spirit will help you to know
what is right and what is wrong.

Go forward, not backward! Stand for truth though the heavens fall. Don't succumb to fanatical or loose theology that wrests God's Word from the pillars of Biblical truth and the landmark beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Don't be swayed with every little whim of “new” theology or complicated time chart purporting to carefully explain unusual or obscure concepts that have little to do with our overall theology and mission. The historic Biblical beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will not be moved. The Biblical foundation will stand secure to the end of time. Listen to what we are told in Selected Messages, Book 1, pages 207–208, “What influence is it that would lead men at this stage of our history to work in an underhand, powerful way to tear down the foundation of our faith—the foundation that was laid at the beginning of our work by prayerful study of the Word and by revelation?...We are God's commandment-keeping people...every phase of heresy has been brought to bear upon us, to becloud our minds regarding the teaching of the Word—especially concerning the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the message of Heaven for these last days, as given by the angels of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation. Messages of every order and kind have been urged upon Seventh-day Adventists, to take the place of the truth which, point by point, has been sought out by prayerful study, and testified to by the miracle--working power of the Lord. But the waymarks which have made us what we are, are to be preserved, and they will be preserved, as God has signified through His Word and the testimony of His Spirit. He calls upon us to hold firmly, with the grip of faith, to the fundamental principles that are based upon unquestionable authority.”

Go forward, not backward! Stand firm for God’s Word as it is literally read and understood. Of course, we must always humbly recognize that we are finite, fallen creatures observing the works of an infinite omnipotent God. There are things in both of God’s two great books of nature and Scripture that we do not fully comprehend. In fact, we are told that the sacrifice of Jesus will be “the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.” But that which the Lord in His mercy has given to us in clear language to be taken as fact simply because He said so must not be shrouded in skepticism. Don’t go backwards to misinterpret the first eleven chapters of Genesis or other areas of Scripture as allegorical or merely symbolic. As just this week we have once again affirmed in an overwhelming manner, the Seventh-day Adventist Church both teaches and believes in the biblical record of creation which took place recently; in six literal, consecutive, contiguous 24 hour days. The Seventh-day Adventist Church will never change its stand or belief in that foundational doctrine. If God did not create this world in six literal days and then blessed the Sabbath day, why are we worshipping Him today on this seventh-day Sabbath as SEVENTH-DAY Adventists? To misunderstand or to misinterpret this doctrine is to deny God’s Word and to deny the very purpose of the Seventh-day Adventist movement as the remnant church of God called to proclaim the three angels’ messages with Holy Spirit power. Don’t go backwards to atheistic or theistic evolution, go forward to the prophetic understanding that loyalty to God, the Creator and Redeemer, will be seen in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as the distinguishing characteristic of God’s people in the very end of time. Seventh-day Adventist Church members, hold your leaders, pastors, local churches, educators, institutions, and administrative organizations accountable to the highest standards of belief based on a literal understanding of Scripture. Utilize wonderful resources such as the Biblical Research Institute’s new book on hermeneutics that helps us know the correct way to interpret the Scriptures.

Again we read in Selected Messages, Book 1, on p. 170, “We must be careful lest we misinterpret the Scriptures. The plain teachings of the Word of God are not to be so spiritualized that the reality is lost sight of. Do not overstrain the meaning of sentences in the Bible in an effort to bring forth something odd in order to please the fancy. Take the Scriptures as they read.”

MY COMMENTS relate specifically to my bolded sections of this speech

The idea that Adventists are advised to “look WITHIN” the church for “solid Biblical principles” is a call for theological conformity and unquestioning loyalty.
Ted has this thing about music. Just ask the musicians who play guitars and perform with recorded backup. Here he insinuates that anything but piano and organ music and hymns that are “simple and sweet” are not Christ-centered or reflect a “biblical approach” to worship.

The notion that “historical Biblical beliefs...will not be moved” is a statement that would be anathema to the founders of Adventism. They proudly proclaimed their commitment to “Present Truth.”

Belief in the literal six contiguous, twenty-four hour creation account is ludicrous on its face. Jewish scholars and linguists consider it a poetic statement of origins, Christian scholars point to its obvious prescientific orientation regarding the universe, historians point out that great civilizations existed prior to Usher’s establishment of the time of creation, and scientists of all stripes, can discover no illuminating scientific relevance in the biblical creation accounts.

The notion that the “seventh-day-Sabbath” is a distinguishing characteristic of “God’s people” has no biblical basis (Ted seems unacquainted with Mathew 25: 31–46.) as is his claim that the present is “the very end of time”.

The notion that the laity should hold those people and institutions affiliated with Adventism to “the highest standards of belief based on a literal understanding of Scripture” is to officially license pharisaical witch-hunting.

The use of this quote from Ellen White not to “misinterpret the Scriptures” implies that Adventists must accept the church’s authoritarian decree of infallibility.

A LETTER REQUESTING REMOVAL OF MEMBERSHIP

The following is a copy of a letter I received from a former church member.

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Dr. David Wilbur: Power and Illusion: Religion and Human Need. Part 10

Submitted: Apr 18, 2013

By Ervin Taylor

This is Part 10 of the summary of Dr. David Wilbur’s book. It should be emphasized that all of the text in this series of blogs in bold font in the body of the text of the chapter summary has been kindly provided by Dr. Wilbur. If there are any of my own comments, they will follow in regular type.

Summary for Chapter 9: Religion and Health

The relationship between religion and health has become of considerable interest in recent years, generating thousands of articles in the medical literature.

Difficulties of Studying the Health-Related Effects of Religion

The validation of medical interventions most reliably depends on providing them randomly to part of a population and seeing how the treated population varies from the untreated “controls.”

This is not an option for religious belief which for many people is a significant part of a life history. An exception may be some religious behaviors such as remote intercessory prayer for the healing of an unaware third party and such studies have been done. There are good reasons to think that powerful belief systems do affect human health even though it is hard to confidently study and quantitate this.

Well-Being and Believing

Religious participation is on the average associated with a greater sense of well-being and less depression and anxiety. Religious people who treat their relationships with other people as sacred may also on average have more successful relationships.

Mortality and Morbidity

Multiple studies have found a consistent reduction in overall mortality for those who regularly attend public religious services. An effect of religiosity on progression of cancer hasn’t been seen in similar studies.

Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists expect their members to avoid alcohol and tobacco and both groups have better survival and less cancer compared with population norms.
**Habit Modification/Addiction Control**

Belief in a higher power is an important part of the ideology of Alcoholics Anonymous which has been the most widely utilized approach to addiction control, though alternatives exist. One review suggests that addiction control is better for those with increased religiosity and/or practicing meditation.

**Healing**

Prayers or entreaties for supernatural healing have been common to many religious traditions and certainly predated Christianity in the Mediterranean world. People often take any evidence of such healing as proof of the truth of the involved religious system.

Several factors (other than divine intervention) may explain the widespread belief in such healings. These include the self-limiting nature of certain human illnesses and the unpredictable courses of other serious illnesses. Some of our afflictions are psychosomatic and emotional changes may alter their expression—a distinct possibility for many religions. Placebos are also powerful interventions for at least symptom control and prayer may function as a placebo for believing patients. Additionally one must note the human tendency to remember unusual events (possible healings) and forget common events (failure of prayer for healing).

**Intercessory Prayer**

Prayer is the most common form of complementary and alternative medicine use reported in a Harvard study. Prayer by one party asking for a benefit for a third party is called intercessory prayer and its effects can be studied as a blinded scientific experiment if that third party is unaware of its happening.

In the nineteenth century Francis Galton looked for retrospective objective evidence of the benefits of various kinds of prayer without any positive results. More recently multiple–blinded prospective trials of intercessory prayer have been reported. Several meta–analyses of these trials have appeared in the medical literature, most recently in 2009, all failing to find clear evidence of prayer’s benefit.

At an individual and personal level prayer is still much in use and a source of hope for true believers.

**Summary**

Religious participation is associated with better physical and mental health. Religions are unique aggregations of beliefs and behaviors and it is nearly impossible to isolate the effects of a particular part of this system. It remains unclear whether an educated person with a healthy lifestyle, good socialization and at least middle class financial resources would be benefited by adding a religious belief system to his repertoire. Lots of people think he would be benefited so the question will still be studied.
Authority and Fear vs Service and Love

Submitted: Apr 11, 2013

By Don Watson

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus shares a cornerstone principle of all our day-to-day relationships. "But Jesus called them unto him, and said, 'You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and those who are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant.'" Matthew 20:25-26

Interesting concept. Rarely practiced by those of us who say we follow Jesus. Whether it is one of your employees, one of your children, your spouse, your neighbor, a fellow church member, or the kids that you coach on your soccer team, Jesus calls us to use service rather than authority as the basis for all our relationships. As sons and daughters of God, we mirror Jesus Himself – the Servant of servants.

But down deep inside, I think we believe that God operates on the basis of authority. He says "Thou shalt not" and expects us to obey or suffer the consequences. In our minds, authority and fear are the ways God ultimately gets what He wants. After all, He has the thunderbolts – not to speak of hell – hence, pretty much a monopoly on the fear and authority market. So it’s no wonder that many believe authority, intimidation, and fear SHOULD be the way we operate. We have come to believe that authority and fear are not merely beneficial but necessary to accomplish what we feel is righteous or important to the success of the church, community, home, or workplace. In fact, isn’t it true that we believe the level of authority we possess enables us to accomplish more good or be more successful, because there are more people under our power and subject to our authority – a huge factor why so many of us seek out recognition and promotion. And when we get these promotions this is what our leadership all too often looks like.

An employee is late for work – we write them up (intimidation and fear). You sit comfortably on the couch supervising your curious one-year-old. He is about to grab one of your expensive Lladro figurines on the book shelf. You sternly bark out, “No!” He grabs the cat's tail – “No!” He finds a small piece of cookie on the floor – again, "No!" In a church board meeting it is obvious that the youth department is heading in a direction that is completely in opposition to church board policies, so we let them know that their request is against policy and cannot be granted. You bench your quarterback after he goes for a “hail Mary” instead of faking a pass then executing a draw. Or your wife buys something you don’t approve of, so you close out her charge account for 6 months to teach her a lesson.

If you think about it, even our harsh, impatient words to a coworker or family member is “missing the mark” and reverting to authority rather than service. I’m not saying that discipline is never appropriate, but the intent of everything we do should be to help and serve every person we meet or do life with. Wanting to control others to accomplish our own purposes goes so far beyond our mere actions. It reaches to our deepest motives. Eliminating
control from our relationships is not hard; it is not difficult, it is IMPOSSIBLE! We know we are right, they are out of line and we have the power and authority to correct them, make them change, or eliminate them. Consider Jesus, the Son of God, King of the Universe, having all the power of divinity at His disposal, yet He allowed Pilate to scourge Him, Caiaphas, the High Priest to falsely accuse Him, Judas to betray Him and Roman Soldiers to crucify Him. When Simon, the Pharisee, was judging and condemning Mary, Jesus could have publicly exposed and humiliated Him, but instead Jesus SERVED Him, and helped Him to see Mary’s value in the sight of Heaven. That’s always God’s purpose – to bring about our change and obedience because it will benefit us – not because He will hurt us. God is always about our happiness, NOT His reputation. In short, God is never about God, God is always about US! But like I said, “It is impossible for us to duplicate this kind of unselfishness. It is impossible to root out control and intimidation from the way we relate to the people around us. But Jesus did and Jesus will come inside of you and live His perfect resurrected life IN YOU! All you have to do is ask Him to show you the areas in your life where you seek to control and rule over others and then ask Him to serve these people through you instead.

For instance: I’d like to suggest that Jesus is calling us to serve our little children, patiently, explaining why the thing we ask of them is for THEIR good and THEIR happiness. Rather than controlling them, get down there and play with them. Rather than intimidating them by barking out our boundaries, take the time to explain the benefits of staying inside the fence. Be their servant. It should never be about our authority or them proving their love and loyalty to us. Never should the words come out of our mouths, “Because I said so!” God always wants us to know obedience is about us and the abundant life He wants to give to us. But remember, this is not difficult, it is impossible. So ask Jesus to come inside you and serve your little children.

Jesus is calling us to serve our co-workers, employees, and bosses. Never should the principle of authority enter into our dealings with each other. Pleasing your boss because he has power or control over you will adulterate your relationship. Find out what your boss needs to serve the people in his department or business and then serve him – join him to help him serve others. If you are the boss, then operate totally on the principle of service to your employees. Spend time with them. Show them why what you’re asking will be a means to bless and serve others. It is the only way to truly create a team where everyone seeks to serve each other and their customers. If you utilize fear and imposed accountability, employees may seem to cooperate while you’re watching or monitoring, but when you’re not there, when you’re not looking, they will do exactly as they please. If you take the time, in relationship, to discover together how you as a church or corporation or family can best serve each other and others, the entire organization will serve whether anyone is looking or not. But remember this is not difficult, it is impossible. So ask Jesus to come inside you and serve the people you work with through you.

If someone refuses to cooperate, you may need to terminate their employment, but you can do so without any threats. The two of you have a different approach to customer service. You can truly wish your employee well as they pursue their career someplace that will fit their philosophy. Even in termination you are serving your employee.

Or you may discover that your employee may not have the skills to serve effectively where they are at. They may realize they can’t do the job well, but are afraid because of your power to fire them and remove their only source of support for their family. But instead of exercising power to eliminate them, be their servant. You might want to move them or train them so they can be successful. But everything you do is for their good, but NEVER to establish your authority or power over them. Just like Jesus, everything is about others! Just keep asking Jesus to serve others through you.

What would happen as a nation if America’s foreign policy was directed at serving other nations instead of punishing them, forcing them, or destroying them. What if soldiers invaded problem nations to serve them instead of to conquer or subjugate them? Certainly, there would still be casualties, but like Jesus, those casualties would result in salvation and a more lasting peace than violence has ever accomplished. Gandhi discovered it and
changed India. Martin Luther King Jr. implemented it and changed America forever. Was it expensive? Very! But it was worth the sacrifice. Jesus, of course, WAS love – He WAS love and service – and His love and service changed the entire human race. We are redeemed! We are saved! So now, He calls us NOT to establish our authority over anyone, but to serve them in love. I challenge you to explore with your own personal relationship with Jesus, how you can exercise love and serve people, rather than exercise authority in order to control them. Then ask Him to do it THROUGH YOU!

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Thinking about Church

Submitted: Apr 10, 2013
By Lawrence Downing

For the past couple of weeks I’ve given thought to questions about church: What is church? What is its purpose? In more specific terms, what is the Adventist Church and what is its purpose? A contributing event that prompted the transference from thought to paper was the news that Ryan Bell is no longer pastor of the Hollywood church, the parish where I began my pastoral ministry.

These questions were first prompted by the numerous brouhahas that have recently erupted within the Adventist Church. Examples are the young earth/old earth debate, women’s ordination and the “rebellion” within the ranks evidenced by the choice two Union Conferences made to reject the strong statements from GC leaders to follow the guidelines relating to the ordination of women. To this mix one can add the admonition from GC personnel to avoid dabbling in biblical higher criticism and the call from this same group for revival and reformation within the Adventist Church. The repeated calls for revival and reformation lead one to conclude that the prompters accept a priori that the Adventist Church is somnambulant or worse, and has strayed from a path that it must once more regain. Which leads me again to ask: what is the Church and why does a Church exist? If it were a matter only of definition, a quick look at a dictionary will provide answers. However, a dictionary does not answer the “whats” and “whys.”

In seeking answers to the “what’s” and “whys,” of church, the theological track leads one direction. “The True Church exists to ‘finish the work.’” The Church, in this scenario, proclaims the Three Angels’ Message that culminates in the Second Coming. There is another track that I’ll call, for lack of a better term, the social direction. Those who prescribe to this scenario understand the Church to be a group of diverse people who are bound together by a common experience or shared goal. There are, I believe, especially among the under-30 group, more Adventists who are on board the sociological band wagon than those who hoist the theological banner.

An observer of the American Adventist Church will note that in the past couple of decades there has been a significant shift in how people view and practice church. Today the brand loyalty that once held people secure in the Church has markedly diminished. Doctrine does not have the power and influence it once possessed. People are more apt to go where their needs are addressed and met than to a church that can “prove” its beliefs are right and true. This component views the Church as the medium, not the message. The Church is a vehicle, a tool, that
has no more inherent value than any other tool. The more adaptable and effective the tool proves in meeting a need, the higher the value. On the obverse, when the tool proves ineffective, it will be discarded; its place taken by another.

When compared to previous generations, Adventists today are far less committed to specific beliefs or doctrines than they are to finding a church where they feel comfortable and where they find people they like and can relate to. This is a significant shift that has been largely ignored by the Church hierarchy. One should not conclude that the Church has become a social club. Not at all! What we find is that the social aspects of a Church have taken precedence over statements of belief. The shift in priority has resulted in a more inclusive attitude on the part of Church members and a less judgmental stance. The post-modernism bent may be labeled the culprit or celebrated as a welcome wind of change. Whichever it is, there is abundant evidence that the people who sit in the pews today have a far different read on life than Adventists of previous generations.

The “Good Old Days,” when the Adventist glori ed that he could prove Adventists right and the others wrong, who took pride that his Church was the True Church, are gone forever and are not recoverable. The seismic shift brings consternation and anger to a still influential segment within the Church. There exists among Adventists a group that pounces upon those who do not come up to the mark they have established. There are Adventists who are certain that the Church is defective if it does not proclaim, in their voice, their Truth. For them, the Church is God’s ark of safety; his shelter from the stormy doctrinal errors that abound. Church, for them, is synonymous with the salvation vehicle. It is difficult, if not impossible, for this mind-set to accept the proposition that a church is a group of people who decide to meet together to sing, pray, plan and think, and nothing more. Which brings us back to the questions we started with: What is church? What is its purpose?

Scripture, especially the Older Testament, offers few clues and fewer specifics as to the purpose and function of a local congregation. We do find in the writings of St. Paul instructions to believers that give guidance to how believers are to act and what behaviors they are to avoid. We are hard pressed to find instructions that enable us to create a church structure or practice. Inferences? Yes. Specifics? Few. This lack of direct biblical teaching on how a church is to function creates a dilemma. Who is/has the final word on what church is and its purpose? The answers are as diverse as the number of church entities, and these groups now number in the tens of thousands. What we can do is accept that people’s understanding of church has changed from what it was three decades ago and will continue to evolve. If the Adventist Church is unwilling to accept those who do not follow a once-accepted church-governance model, the revolving door will continue to turn and the steady stream of young people now leaving the church will increase, and older ones will join the throng. Sad and unnecessary! Where is it written that the Church is responsible to hold people to a specific belief system? Why does an organization, on whatever level, feel the need to define belief and in practice enforce those on others?

Individuals chose to be with Jesus because he provides them a safe place where they can be themselves. Yes, he challenged destructive behavior and he did call men and women to follow him. What he did not do is reject and isolate those who decided otherwise. If people left his presence, it was their decision, not his. Should his followers today evidence such wisdom, understanding and compassion? Perhaps one day…. And what would the Church look like if this were its modus operandi? How would the Church define its purpose? The guardian of “truth” or a vehicle of that offers welcome and care? The abode of the “pure” or a beacon of hope for those who seek? These
questions, and others like them, await answers.

________________________Join in the discussion:

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Holy Reading

Submitted: Apr 17, 2013

By Debbonnaire Kovacs

I remember the first time I was exposed to “Lectio Divina.” I met with a small group where an experienced facilitator was going to teach us this ancient method of reading and responding to Scripture. I was curious and a little cautious. First, we were asked to sit in silence, inviting the Holy Spirit’s presence and guidance. Then, together, we read a passage—a psalm, I believe, though I don’t recall which one. One person read aloud as the others followed along. We were asked to contemplate what the passage seemed to be saying and what it might have meant to its original hearers/readers. What did God say?

Next, a different person read the passage aloud again. This time we were asked to contemplate what the passage meant to us personally. What is God saying to me?

A third time, someone read the passage aloud. This time we were asked how the passage might touch or change our lives. What might the result be?

A fourth person read the passage, and we were asked to consider what our response might be. What shall I say to God?

Several people expressed amazement and delight at the blessings they received with this new way of reading the Bible. I was a little bewildered. Isn’t this the way everyone reads Scripture? I mean, I wasn’t familiar with these particular four questions, but from very early childhood I’ve been taught that the Bible is a love letter from God to me personally, and beginning in grade school I learned to consider context, what the writer meant and for whom. As I grew to adulthood, I learned how to compare historical and present meaning. Always, I’ve understood that the main purpose of Scripture is to shape my life as I respond to God through it. Passages have meant different things to me at different times in my life. I believe that’s what the term “living Word” means.

So you can imagine my surprise when I learned that there are conservative Christians, Adventist and not, who criticize, even fear Lectio Divina. The concern I’ve seen most often expressed is that we are somehow seeking “extra-biblical experience,” or that we actually think the Bible will speak to us, personally. Ummm, yeah….! I should hope so!

This week’s chapter of The Monastery of the Heart is entitled “Prayerful Reading.” Chittister says,

Benedictine prayer is not simply ceaseless recitation of scripture passages and psalmic verse. It is the beginning of a lifelong conversation with God. To deepen that conversation, to give it flow and substance, meaning and heart, the Benedictine is to read the scriptures and holy books, reflect on them deeply, and respond to them consciously and personally until, at long last, we come to radiate the meaning of them for all the world to see.
Here is a similar passage from a writer with whom most of us are more familiar:

*We cannot obtain wisdom without earnest attention and prayerful study. Some portions of Scripture are indeed too plain to be misunderstood, but there are others whose meaning does not lie on the surface to be seen at a glance. Scripture must be compared with scripture. There must be careful research and prayerful reflection. And such study will be richly repaid. As the miner discovers veins of precious metal concealed beneath the surface of the earth, so will he who perseveringly searches the word of God as for hid treasure find truths of the greatest value, which are concealed from the view of the careless seeker. The words of inspiration, pondered in the heart, will be as streams flowing from the fountain of life.*

*Never should the Bible be studied without prayer. Before opening its pages we should ask for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and it will be given. When Nathanael came to Jesus, the Saviour exclaimed, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael said, "Whence knowest Thou me?" Jesus answered, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." John 1:47, 48. And Jesus will see us also in the secret places of prayer if we will seek Him for light that we may know what is truth. Angels from the world of light will be with those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance.* [Steps to Christ, pp. 90–91]
Decoding Revelation: Know the Encoder

Submitted: Apr 17, 2013
By Ervin Thomsen

Chapter 2

About 60 years ago a popular bestseller by the title How to Win Friends and Influence People appeared. While not endorsing all the principles in this book (some may border on manipulation of people), it nevertheless contained much valuable material on how to establish mutually positive and satisfying relationships with others. The author spoke about the tremendous power of affirming words. But are those the kind of words you find in the three angels’ messages? Would you be able to attract people to our wonderful God by using words such as…

loud voice…fear…judgment…wine of wrath…fallen…fornication…
indignation…wrath of God…fire…brimstone…smoke…torment…no rest day or night…

When was the last time you used this Scripture passage for family worship? Now, if the book of Revelation is a trustworthy “revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1), then why did John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit use language like this? If you give people the ‘straight’ message by using such expressions, how many would you attract to Christ?

The fact is, Revelation was not written to non-believers, but to Christians, because Christians who knew the Scriptures [the Old Testament] would therein have the tools to decode this book. Any Roman citizen who might stumble across a manuscript of this book would consider it as pure nonsense and gobbledy-gook. To make sense of Revelation you must first decode it, and the best decoders are those who personally know the Encoder, Jesus Christ, and have a living relationship with Him through their prior understanding of the Scriptures. And remember, decoding does not mean diluting. Decoding is what enables you to give these messages in their full strength, authenticated by the integrity of your own life.

Decoding the book of Revelation

Here are some common-sense methods to help you decode in a responsible way the symbols of the three angels’ messages and apply them to your own life.

The primary decoding principle: the person of Jesus Christ. In the Scripture passage of 2 Peter 1:19, you will find the core principle for understanding prophecy. “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your heart” (KJV). So what is the purpose of prophecy? To guide us to the “day dawn” [the 2nd coming of Jesus] “that the day star [Jesus Christ] arise in our hearts.” ‘Prophecy’ does not always mean a forecasting of the future; its primary meaning is the faithful transmission of God’s truth in order that we may come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Of what value is the knowledge of future events, if you do not know Jesus as Savior? Though there are mysteries galore in the book of Revelation, yet through a painstaking and patient study of the Scriptures, comparing text with text, you can start
a most reliable decoding process as you focus on the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ. Scholars refer to this as the Christo-centric principle. Discern in every symbol its relationship to the Savior and His plan of redemption as revealed in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. To repeat our earlier railway terminology, it is not enough to know the timetable—you must also know the Conductor. Ellen White noted that while the “third angel's message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and this truth must be brought before the world; but the great Center of attraction, Jesus Christ, must not be left out of the third angel's message.” [1] The ultimate qualification of a decoder is to be a born-again worshiping believer. The best decoders are those who personally know the Encoder, Jesus Christ.

One vital principle of decoding is to bring Jesus Christ out of “hiding” in the Spirit-inspired text. He is always there, but He is not always readily visible [remember the walk of the disciples to Emmaus]. When you study Revelation, always seek to discover the connection of every symbol, event, and phrase to the person of Jesus Christ. Some years ago I visited the beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, and the porter at the hotel offered this piece of advice as I prepared to go sightseeing in a city where it is so easy to get lost: “If you ever become disoriented, just look up and find the statue of Christ, the Corcovado, situated on a mountain high above the city. Always use this as your reference point, and then it will be easy for you to find your way should you become lost.” As you heed this advice in studying Revelation, you will not be lost in the maze of all the symbols, words, events, beasts, angels, et cetera.

Let Scripture interpret Scripture. While it may be tempting to match news headlines with Bible texts, rely rather on patiently comparing Scripture with Scripture. Let the Old Testament interpret the New Testament. The book of Revelation is saturated with allusions to the Old Testament—some have counted more than 470 such allusions. An allusion is not a direct quote, but rather a subtle hint to some Old Testament event, person, or symbol—Jezebel, Balaam, prophet, Euphrates, Babylon—just to name a few. Someone has stated that “the New Testament is in the Old concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New revealed.” For any symbol found in Revelation, discover first its Old Testament roots, and the meanings revealed therein, often made evident through its historical context. Then let these original meanings be the interpretive keys to unlock the symbols of Revelation. Studying the various comparisons between the symbols can be of inestimable value as you look for the contrasts between Babylon and Jerusalem; the two trinities (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit versus dragon, beast, and false prophet), the Lamb and the beast, heaven and earth, and many others.

How would the original audience of readers (and listeners) of Revelation have understood this book? What was the intent of the author? John was also a pastor. What were his pastoral concerns for his parishioners? What were the conditions in the church and in the world at that time? Ask yourself—how might Christians in the first centuries after Christ’s resurrection have understood the book of Revelation? Many of the prophecies, for which we see specific fulfillments by looking in the rearview mirror of past history, had not yet been fulfilled. Is it possible that these early Christians saw concepts in Scripture that we do not see as readily today? How might they have interpreted Revelation in light of their contemporary world and in light of their own personal experiences? Is it possible that such symbols as Babylon and the beast may have had different applications for them than they do for us today? [2]
Get the big picture of Revelation. You have heard the saying, “I can’t see the forest because of the trees.” It is entirely possible to become so focused on the numerous details of the book that we fail to see the big picture found in both the earthly and heavenly dimensions of Revelation. In my past study of Revelation, I would often focus on drawing parallels (often stretched ones) between historical events and the text of Revelation. This is how I failed to see the heavenly dimensions made very plain in this book. When you focus primarily on impending events (time of trouble, the plagues, the trumpets, et cetera) you may experience a great deal anxiety. Focus primarily on the heavenly dimensions in this book, and you will experience hope.

Visualize yourself as a worshiper joining with the other worshipers in the heavenly courtroom. Become a participant in the multiple scenes set in heaven’s open courtroom, the sanctuary, where you view God’s behind-the-scenes initiatives that will bringing the great controversy to a just and righteous completion. This will give you immense courage as you discover that “though the wrong is oft so strong. God is the Ruler yet.” May this be to you the motivation to come “boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). This how you may gain renewed encouragement that God is indeed in charge of the last steps of the journey to our heavenly home, and we are almost there.

Note the BIGGER picture of the presence of Jesus. To assure them of the continuing presence of Jesus, John utilized material from much of the Old and New Testaments. But not once did he ever quote Scripture directly; rather he employed allusions – hints that would direct the readers and the listeners to Bible passages, events, symbols, sanctuary and temple services (material they were already familiar with because of their Jewish culture). As they read and listened to such allusions, the Holy Spirit would enable them by faith to re-imagine through the power of sanctified imagination, the significance of this material for their present lives now. So when, for instance, these believers would hear about Babylon, or Jezebel, or Euphrates, or the false prophet, they could experience Spirit-directed “aha” moments, causing them to exclaim, “so this is what Jesus meant!” or “this is what God had in mind.” As they read about fire coming down from heaven (Revelation 13) they could re-imagine both the tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost and also the fire falling from heaven at Mt. Carmel in response to Elijah’s prayer.

Through such bigger pictures, John as a caring pastor would direct his parishioners to the unseen, but nevertheless real world, where Jesus is now reigning in glory. This would be in full accord with Paul’s counsel about the identity of believers being legally secure by being seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:7; 2:6). As John, through the inspiration of Jesus Himself, would give them glimpses of Jesus receiving worship in heaven’s open courtroom (Revelation 5), no doubt they would have had their “aha” moments recalling Paul’s words, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-3).

Discern the “literary structure” of the Revelation as you see the relationship of the individual parts of Revelation 14:6-12 to the larger whole of the book of Revelation as well as to the rest of scripture. The book of Revelation is not a seemingly haphazard collection of bits and pieces of Biblical material; there is a definite order and progression in the development of its various
themes. In one literary outline of Revelation by Dr. Douglas Waterhouse, Ph.D, (see Appendix 1), you will notice the prominence of the number “seven.” Someone has suggested that Revelation might be understood as a play for a theater, where there are seven acts, each containing seven scenes. Notice how each sequence of sevens is first introduced by a sanctuary scene. Be cautious, however, in trying to arrange all the material in Revelation into exact chronological timelines of past, current, and future historical events on earth. Often it will only work by a tweaking of the text or by a tweaking of historical event. Focus rather on the progression of the great themes of God’s activity in the great controversy between good and evil as it nears its final culmination in the enthronement and ultimately in the rulership of Jesus Christ as Kings of kings and Lord of lords.

_Beware of super-literalism_ which often imposes an interpretative strait-jacket on expressions that have deeper meanings. At His trial, the accusers of Jesus insisted on a super-literal interpretation of Jesus’ words (“destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up,” John 2:19-24), and thus accused Him of plotting to destroy the Jerusalem temple, when in reality He had spoken in advance of His own crucifixion. While not everything is literal, yet everything is real—it points to realities from God’s perspective.

_The “transparency overlays” in Revelation._ This may be rather new paradigm for understanding Revelation. The study of Revelation can sometimes be like looking at what we might term the “transparency-overlays” as found in some anatomy textbooks, showing the multiple systems of the human body—skeletal, circulatory, digestive, neurological, et cetera. If you would gain a complete understanding of the workings of the human body, you must study all the systems of the body and their inter-relatedness to one another. Likewise, to understand Revelation, you must look “outside the box” (without discarding what is in the box of the prophetic-historical material) at other transparency-overlays. These overlays are found in the history of Israel, the Exodus, the Babylonian exile, the sanctuary and its services, the Old Testament festivals, and much, much more Biblical material. Let these “overlays” of meaning (and often there are multiple layers) become the foundation for looking more intently than ever before at the meaning of Revelation, which asks these questions: How can this exalt Jesus Christ? What are we to do about it? How can this change our lives? As you do so, you will also gain a renewed appreciation for the sufficiency and completeness of Christ’s redemptive work for your every need.

The purpose of this kind of study is not for one layer of meaning to replace another, but rather to arrive at a more complete understanding of God’s ways for our lives than we have ever seen before. Thus, when you come across any experiential applications for the “beast” or “Babylon,” remember that these are not substitutes for the historical applications, but they are rather amplifications together with all the other systems [layers] of Biblical material in order to unearth all the possible truths from the mines of the Holy Scriptures. _Looking at the book of Revelation through as many ‘transparency overlays’ as possible will yield rich results._

Here then is a summary of the methodology of this kind of study:

**Methodology of Study –**

Utilize the “transparency overlays.”
1. Discover first the “building blocks” of Old Testament and other Biblical material on which the Bible passage is built [the Biblical material layer].
2. Discern, where possible, how the Bible writers originally used this passage (or symbol etc.) and with what intent [the original meaning layer].
3. Look for verifiable historical applications as found in recorded history, both Biblical and secular [the prophetic-historical layer].
4. What are the experiential applications of this passage as recorded in the lives of the people as found in Bible history? And how are we to live in light of all of the above? [The experiential layer]

Look at the three angels’ messages as God’s prescriptions for your own sin-disease. These messages are not just evangelistic messages for others, but they are about God’s diagnosis and prescriptions for our own sin-disease. In order to win the victory over the beast and to develop immunity to Satan’s last-day deceptions, it is a must to take the entirety of the three angels’ messages as God’s medicine for your life today. These messages contain everything you need in order overcome all the power of the enemy. To be an overcomer is far more dependent on discovering and living out your personal identity in Christ rather than on your ability to identify “Babylon” and the “beast” in other persons, organizations, and movements.

Lay aside expectations of total uniformity in all our conclusions. There is in the scriptures such a vast field of unexplored material, that even when we think we have discovered some gem of truth, we will expect others to see it, and appreciate it, just like we did. Do not hold others captive by your expectations that they will always be in agreement with your conclusions. Ellen White wrote, “We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light.” [3]

Personal Attitudes Facilitating the Study of Revelation

Decoding does not mean diluting. Responsible decoding enables you to give the three angels’ messages in their full strength, because you have first sought to understand the original purposes and the audiences for whom they were written.

Beware of sensationalism. Avoid studying Revelation from the perspective that the book is primarily a timetable to alert us to the next events on God’s prophetic timetable for this world. As I through the years have preached on prophecy, I have discovered the alluring appeal of rumors and late-breaking sensational news, all purporting to proclaim, this is it! In my early years of ministry, I would often fall for such rumors and news reports and include them in my preaching. On some occasions, I later had to change the content of my sermons, because the rumors or news were not verifiable or had not come to pass. Of course, there was instant excitement among church members, which only lasted as long as the rumors persisted.

Ellen White addressed this phenomenon, noting that “it is not excitement we wish to create, but deep, earnest consideration, that those who hear shall do solid work, real, sound, genuine work that will be enduring as eternity. We hunger not for excitement, for the sensational; the less we
have of this, the better. The calm, earnest reasoning from the Scriptures is precious and fruitful. Here is the secret of success, in preaching a living personal Saviour in so simple and earnest a manner that the people may be able to lay hold by faith of the power of the Word of life.” [4] Are we to put our heads in the sand, ostrich-style, and ignore current events? Of course not! Jesus Himself invited His disciples to draw lessons from current events. When the collapse of tower of Siloam killed eighteen individuals, Jesus urged His followers to consider this event as a serious motivation for repentance, lest they also perish (Luke 13:4). At this juncture, let me ask you, in what ways have the events of 9-11 permanently and significantly changed your own life?

**Approach the Scriptures with an open mindset** as you recall Paul’s words “Now I know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12). All our knowledge is incomplete and partial, for we do not know it all. The study of Revelation can often be compared to an archaeological dig where we patiently sift through various layers of Biblical material to uncover hidden treasure. Do not ever come to the conclusion that your current understanding of a text in any way exhausts any further meaning of the text. “The Bible has a fullness, a strength, a depth of meaning, that is inexhaustible.” [5]

As we take advantage of the gift of prophecy to our church, let us sanely use the writings of Ellen G. White. Do not consider that any comment by her on the book of Revelation, or the rest of the Bible, in any way exhausts with finality the meaning of the text.

In a “Statement of Present Understanding,” issued in February 1983, leaders of the General Conference made several clarifying statements regarding the role of the writings of Ellen G. White as an aid to understanding Scripture. Here are a few of these.

“We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture. . . .

_We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White. . . .

_We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.” [6]

Accordingly, when you in this book read quotations from Ellen White, do not consider such as “proof statements,” but rather as illumination and amplification of what is already found in the text with a particular emphasis on the practical applications of the text to personal living.

“There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation. We are living in perilous times, and it does not become us to accept anything claimed to be truth without examining it thoroughly; neither can we afford to reject anything that bears the fruits of the Spirit of God; but we should be teachable, meek and lowly of heart. There are those who oppose everything that is not in accordance with their own ideas, and by so doing they endanger their eternal interest as verily as did the Jewish nation in their rejection of Christ.” [7]

“Do you ask, what shall I do to be saved? You must lay your preconceived opinions, your
hereditary and cultivated ideas, at the door of investigation. If you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, but accept the light given. Open mind and heart that you may behold wondrous things out of God's word.”

Jesus has promised His personal blessings on those who study the book of Revelation. “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3). The primary application you will pursue is the enrichment of your personal relationship with Jesus Christ—a relationship that can stand no matter how the historical details of the future may unfold. To intimately know Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God is the best way to overcome the beast. Learn to hear the voice of the Shepherd, for His sheep hear His voice (John 10:27).

You may consider Revelation...

- as a revelation of the person of Jesus Christ,
- as an inspired theological poem, written to bring encouragement to persecuted and discouraged believers, living not only in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, but also every Christian who has had to face personal disappointment and disillusion as they asked, where is Jesus now in my particular set of painful circumstances?
- as an exquisite work of art produced by a close friend of Jesus, the apostle John, whom Jesus loved, who with masterful strokes of his brush took colors from the palette of Old Testament material and produced a masterpiece whose beauty exceeds the sum of its individual parts.
- as a work of literature in which the author brings together as allusion (no quotes, but only hints) of salvation-history materials (the sanctuary, the temple and its services, Old Testament events, et cetera) in new and stunning ways that exalt Jesus Christ supremely, showing God’s sovereignty in the great cosmic conflict between good and evil.
- as a film documentary utilizing hundreds of clips from Old Testament people, places, and events. This documentary has the distinct advantage of showing not just historical and political events on earth, but it also reveals heaven’s initiatives and participation in events where God works all things together for good to those who love Him.
- as an art gallery where you can take the painful pictures of your life and replace them with pictures where Jesus is always present (truth). Learn to follow the Lamb wherever He leads, and Jesus will even now start drying your tears. Since John never quotes, but only uses allusions, it might be helpful to consider such allusions as Spirit-inspired impressionism of heavenly realities. Thus we see things not only as they are, but as apprehended in the context of our own personal experiences.
- as a musical composition designed especially for believers, where we can now join in the songs flowing through heaven’s open doors, to rise above all the sour notes and discordant harmonies of this present world.
- Above all, look for and join in the triumphant songs of joy and worship. The anticipation of the coming rule of Christ is what sustained the early Christians as they engaged in
worship, not as religious entertainment, but as a settling into the security of their identity in Jesus Christ. This is not all doom and gloom. This book is not a journey into the night, but a journey through the night until the day dawn of Christ’s glorious appearing.

The book of Revelation may sometimes appear as a haphazard collection of seemingly tangled and unconnected threads from all over the Scriptures. But as you look at Revelation as a theological poem that reveals Jesus in new and stunning ways, you will come face to face with the supremacy, sufficiency, and sovereignty of Jesus in all life’s circumstances. Similarly, if your own life, far too often, appears like a confused collection of tangled threads from painful trials, unmanageable circumstances, and deep, but hidden wounds, then remember that Jesus personally wants to untangle the threads of your life.

**Tangled Threads**

_The thread of your life is all tangled and knots?_
_There's nothing you can do?_
_You've tried and you cannot unravel the thread?_
_Another must do it for you._

_The Lord will unravel your tangled thread,_
_He knows every knot,_
_He knows where the end is hidden away from you._
_Only One can do it for you._

_Let Jesus unravel your tangled thread,_
_He knows 'tis too hard for you._
_The harder you try, the tighter it gets._
_Oh, let Jesus do it for you!_

_He never will take it out of your hand;_
_The offer must come from you._
_Oh, hand it to Him, and let Him begin,_
_To straighten it out for you._

—Author unknown

When you follow these above-mentioned decoding principles, you will indeed find that Jesus Christ will become to you the great center of attraction in the three angels’ messages, as you give Him permission to untangle the twisted threads of your own life.

**Life Applications**

**Questions to Ponder**

What has been your personal methodology for your own study of the book of Revelation? What have been the results (both positive and negative) in your own life?

Have you ever experienced disappointment and discouragement in your pursuit of certain sensational news about upcoming prophetic events, particularly events that did not come to pass? What were the long-range outcomes in your own life? in the lives of others?

Do you consider that your present knowledge of the book of Revelation is adequate preparation to face any future crisis as you prepare for the coming of Jesus? If not, why not?
Text to Remember

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3).

Truths versus Lies

You can develop immunity to Satan’s deceptions by replacing Satan’s lies with God’s truths.

“Through Your precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:104, 105).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satan’s lies or half-truths</th>
<th>God’s truths</th>
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<tr>
<td>To be ready for the coming crisis must thoroughly know the exact sequence of last-day events.</td>
<td>I must personally know Jesus Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with my current understanding of the Book of Revelation.</td>
<td>I always want to grow by letting the Lord stretch me as He did to the early Advent believers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The book of Revelation is very confusing to me; therefore, I leave its interpretation to some good preachers that I like.</td>
<td>Though the book of Revelation may sometimes appear confusing, yet I trust that God will speak to me as I pursue its study, for He has promised to do so.</td>
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Write out any lies or half-truths you have personally believed. Write out other Bible truths to replace any previously held lies or half-truths.

[2] In their study of Revelation, there are commentators who also look at Revelation also as a pastoral letter, written by Jesus Himself and put into writing by John, and addressed to 1st and 2nd century Christians facing immense discouragement because of tribulation. I think specifically about Joy in Our Weakness – A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation[1] by Marva Dawn ((Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002). and Eugene Peterson’s Reversed Thunder – The Revelation of John & the Praying Imagination. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). Rather than trying to calendarize end-time events, these two books exalt the Lordship of Christ for disappointed believers in the 1st century AD, as they expose the workings of the forces of evil, and offer hope to those who suffer evil and injustices until such are finally defeated.
Appendix 1 (to Chapter 2, Decoding Revelation)

Submitted: Apr 17, 2013
By Ervin Thomsen

As various commentators have studied in-depth the book of Revelation, many have made outlines of the literary structure of the book as they understand it. Every one of these outlines adds a richness of various perspectives to the study of this book, for no one sees everything in exactly the same light.

The symbols of the Book of Revelation are all rooted in material rich in imagery from the Old Testament such as historical events, persons, feasts, the tabernacle/temple and its services, etc. In order to understand the meaning of any symbol, we must first examine its Old Testament roots. The Book of Revelation is like a play for the theater, consisting of SEVEN ACTS, with each ACT having SEVEN SCENES. Each ACT is introduced by a SCENE from the sanctuary or temple. Take special note of the contrasts between the righteous and the wicked in SCENE 6 of every one of the Seven Acts.

Here are Dr. Waterhouse’s own recent comments about the significance and meaning of this outline. [1]

THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Introductory Preface: God meets us where we are. Thus is shown God's condescension. He reveals Himself in terms of our own cultural milieu so that we may better understand Him. Spiritual truths, as presented in Scripture, frequently are illustrated by what we find familiar in our earthly surroundings, --the purpose being to illustrate the unknown by the known. Christ effectively used parables that drew upon the scenes of life, or from the book of nature, to secure the attention of His listeners and to guide the lost back to the fold of God. In similar vein, the apostle Paul compared striving for the crown of life with a competitive athletic race, a contest in foot racing well known to his readers (1 Cor 9:24-25; 2 Tim 4:7-8).

Pertinent to the present discussion is Paul's use of the figure of the amphitheater: "God has exhibited us ... [so that] we have become a theater-show [a theatron] to the world, to angels and to men" (1 Cor 4:9, RSV). What the apostle is saying is that Christians are being exhibited on a figurative cosmic "stage," that fronts a vast audience both on earth and in the heavenly sphere. In Paul's day the amphitheater, -- designed with surprisingly excellent acoustics --, was a 'major structure found within just about every major Hellenistic town. The amphitheater's stage scenery, which served as a setting for each separate theatrical Act, customarily was painted on a large panel held by wooden frames. The separate panels were placed one in front of the other. This arrangement made it possible for the sequential background scenery to be changed with each dramatic Act, by simply pulling one frame away and revealing the next. This is of special interest because the literary expression to Revelation's message is that of presenting a cosmic drama of the ages. Superimposed on Revelation's embracing opening and closing literary structure, -- that of a letter (1:4-6; 22:21) --, is an internal structure that conforms to that of a stage drama. Revelation readily divides itself into seven Acts, each Act having in turn seven Scenes.
The separate stage furnishings, -- serving as background props for each separate Act --, are based on sanctuary emblems taken bodily from the Temple and the Tabernacle ministry. The prologue to the seven Acts contains an initial announcement (corresponding to the initial appearance of a herald in the amphitheater) that identifies the "star" of the drama - namely, Jesus Christ (1:7). The "sponsor" of the action throughout is "the Lord God" (1:8). The epilogue contains the imprimatur of the Lord Himself, and His Spirit-that rested upon John (22:6-20). The four characteristic features of the Book's stage-drama are given a detailed explanation within the enumerated points below:

(1) **The sevenfold drama pattern:** The key to a proper understanding Revelation's overarching structure is to realize that there is an all-embracing sevenfold pattern. The number seven symbolizes completeness or finality. Accordingly, there are seven Acts: **Act I** (the seven letters; 2:1-3:22); **Act II** (the seven seals; 6:1-8:1); **Act III** (the seven trumpets; 8:7-11:18); **Act V** (the seven censer-bowls; 16:2-21). However, rather than using seven items, the seven Scenes in each of the other respective Acts IV, VI, VII, have their seven divisions based on a different criteria. In these later Acts, John signalizes each change of Scene with the use of introductory Greek words meaning to "see" or "show," - each time indicating that John is seeing or is being shown something new. The use of this introduction to a new Scene is accomplished with absolute precision. A certain redundancy does occur at 12:1,3; 21:9-10, but they are of a complementary nature.

(2) **Revelation is in a Sanctuary-setting:** There is a different background stage setting for each individual Act. Each stage setting significantly is supplied from the various paraphernalia of Tabernacle and Temple, such as High Priest and Lampstands serving as a backdrop for **Act I** (1:12-13); the Altar of Incense for **Act III** (8:3); the Ark of the Covenant for **Act IV** (11:19), and so forth (see below #3). All these retain their spiritual and cosmic significance as found in the Old Testament. This means that the whole Book of Revelation is to be understood in terms set-off within a Sanctuary environment. In summary, the Scenes of each Act not only unfolds within the contextual milieu of the Sanctuary, but are also to be interpreted in terms of the meaning supplied by Temple/Tabernacle imagery.

(3) **The furnishing from the Sanctuary as used in each Act:** After an opening Prologue, the first major division opens with **Act I** [the Church on earth: 1:9--3:22]. The Sanctuary background for the Scenes that follow (--set forth as the stage setting --) presents the Church's High Priest (Jesus), walking in the midst of His Lampstands, holding in His hand the seven "messengers [angelos] of the seven churches" (1:9-20). It is important to realize that this stage
scenery stays in place as a continuous and remaining backdrop for each of the seven letters. Hence, the letter to Laodicea (the seventh Scene: 3:14-21) is to be understood in the context of the Risen Christ continuing His walking in the midst of His churches. With constant diligence, our High Priest is there, ready to impart the holy oil that will keep each of the Lamps lighted within a darkened world.

The Sanctuary background for Act II [the Pre-advent Judgment: 4:1-8:1] finds John transported into the First Apartment of the heavenly Sanctuary. From that vantage point he looks through the "open door" (cf 1 Kgs 6:31) into what is transpiring within the Most Holy Place (4:1 - 5:14). Seen by John are momentous events that take place before God's throne (a throne that is represented in the earthly Sanctuary by the Mercy Seat [Num 7:89; Isa 37:16; 1 Sam 4:4]). The events within the Holy of Holies, beheld by John, continue to remain as the contextual setting during the opening of each of the seven seals. The Sanctuary setting for the drama of Act III [trumpet warnings: 8:2-11:18] is a view of seven angels; each holding their trumpets in obeisance. They stand next to the Altar of Incense where intercessory ministration is taking place (8:2-4). This means that God's mercy will continue to linger during all the upcoming Scenes of sounding trumpets; soundings that give warning for men to repent (9:20-21). The sudden, abrupt change in the use of the Altar's censer, as its contents are cast down to earth (8:5), points to a deeper reason why the trumpets are sounding. For the trumpets warn of secondary applications in the future, when the casting down of censer bowls will bring plague-retributions upon those who have been duly warned (cf 16:1). It needs remembering here that the mediating Altar, whose mediation is abruptly put to an end, serves as background scenery to each and every one of the seven trumpets. When the final seventh trumpet blows the Altar and what happens to it is still there, looming in the background, giving meaning to the warning note that is then sounded.

The setting for Act IV [the salvation of the Church: 11:19-15:4] is the Ark of the Covenant that is now, during all of Act IV, seen revealed within the heavenly Sanctuary (11:19).

The setting for Act V [plagues upon an apostate world: 15:5-16:21] presents the heavenly Sanctuary filled with smoke from God's Glory. The Glory-cloud serves as an obstacle that prevents prayers from entering the Lord's Temple during the outpouring of the seven plagues (cf 15:8 with Lam 3:43). Having previously been ministering upon the Altar of Incense, seven censer-bowls are respectively handed over to seven plague-angels. A commanding voice in the Temple tells the angels to pour the contents of the seven vial-plagues upon the earth (15:5-16:1).

Act VI [the doom of Babylon: 17:1-20:3] is set-off by the angel responsible for the 6th plague. He issues forth from the heavenly Sanctuary in order to show John the judgment-sentence upon the Great Harlot Babylon (17: 1- 2). This means that Act VI takes place exclusively during the time frame of the sixth plague. The angel who shows John the negative judgment-sentence upon Babylon is the same angel who later shows John the positive judgment-sentence upon the New Jerusalem (21:9). The setting for Act VII [the throne of judgment and the Church Triumphant: 20:4-10] presents the redeemed Church enthroned and reigning with Christ during the millennium. The resurrection of the righteous, including the martyrs, will result in the gathering of all "Israel" upon the stage. They are given authority to render judgment (20:4), a
function of kings and priests (cf 1:6; 5:10). Following the millennium rule, Satan and his hosts are loosed from the Abyss to war against the camp of the saints. The final battle of the antichristian forces ("Gog and Magog") of this world against the Church ends with the destruction of the wicked in the Lake of Fire (20:4-10). The Church Triumphant reigning with Christ is privileged to observe the successive pageants presented in the seven Scenes of this Act.

(4) **The sixth Scene of every Act always breaks into two contemporaneous parts.** This means that the sixth Scene of every Act always provides two contemporaneous views of what is happening to the wicked, on the one hand, and what is happening at the very same time to the righteous, on the other hand. In **Scene 6 of Act I** (3:7-14), the **wicked** are viewed bowing down at the feet of the Philadelphians (3:9) while at the same time the **righteous** are kept from the hour of trial (3:10). In **Scene 6 of Act II** (6:12--7:17), the **living wicked** are brought to view during the arrival of the Second Advent. They are portrayed, in chapter 6, experiencing the seven cosmic catastrophes brought upon them by the wrath of the Lamb (6:12-17). Meanwhile, -- at the very same time --, the **living righteous** (7:1-8), in chapter 7, are presented as being numbered and sealed, preserving them from death. This formation of the remnant 144,000 results in the bringing to view of an innumerable multitude clothed in white robes of victory (7:9-17). Many commentators falsely interpret chapter 7 as "an interlude." But this is a serious misunderstanding. Chapter 7 is simply supplying "the other side of the coin," representing that which is happening to the righteous during the exact same time that the wicked are going through their experience featured in chapter 6. In **Act III** the 6th Scene (9:13 - 11:14) reveals how the wicked will be affected when the four angels are unbound from their position of restraining the River Euphrates. The fixing of their time of release, down to the precise hour, emphasizes the truth that the visitation of the 6th Trumpet had been prepared in the divine foreknowledge. Vast forces of two hundred million horsemen are brought to view, emissaries of Satan. The army is girded with the weapons of the Lake of Fire that bring death in their wake (9:13-21). As for the **righteous**, they learn from a mighty angel, with an open little scroll, that the end of the prophetic time periods has taking place. Led by the Pillar of Cloud, that surrounds the mighty angel, they are in an Exodus-movement that is initiated because they are free from a bondage that had lasted for three-and-a-half-times. The spiritual understanding of the Sanctuary is restored. God's two Witnesses, in the spirit of "Elijah" and "Moses," lead Israel out, away from a fallen tenth part of the city of Babylon (10: 1 - 11: 14). It again needs pointing out that chapters 10 and 11 do not represent an "interlude." Rather, these two chapters center on how the righteous are affected when the 6th Trumpet sounds. Chapters 10 and 11 are not to be separated from a proper understanding of the 6th Trumpet. **Act IV**
the 6th Scene (14:14-20) brings the righteous first to view. They are represented as a ripened grain field at the end-time hour of reaping. With His sharp sickle, one like the Son of Man ingathers the harvest of the saints (14:14-16). Concurrently, at the same time, the wicked also are at the ready for harvesting. They are represented as the ripe vintage-harvest of earth whose clusters are gathered in by an angel. The ripe grapes are thrown into the wine press of the wrath of God (14:17-20). Act V the 6th Scene (16:12-16) shows the results of the sixth plague. The personified River Euphrates, upon whom the Harlot Babylon sits, is smitten and dries up. The River's waters, consisting of peoples and multitudes, withdraw their support from the emblem of Satan's kingdom. From the mouths of the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet miracle-working spirits gather the wicked again into their fold in order to prepare for battle "on the great day of God the Almighty" (16:12-14). Concurrently the righteous are warned to be alert, ready for the Coming of the Lord. None are to be spiritually asleep when all the world is assembling at a place called Armageddon (16:15-16). In Scene 6 (19:19-21) of Act VI the wicked armies of the Beast and the kings of the earth gather to war against the Word of God. The Word, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, arrives on a white horse with His army (19:19). The forces of the heavenly righteous bring a victorious conclusion to the battle. The Beast and the False Prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire (19:20-21).

In Act VII the 6th Scene (21:22-27) presents the righteous within the City of God, in the pervading Presence of God's Glory (21:22-26). In sharp antithetical contrast, the wicked, known for their abominations and falsehoods, are to be forever excluded from entering heaven. Their names were not found written in "the Lamb's book of life" (21:27).

THE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The codex, a manuscript volume that became the forerunner to our modern book, was not invented until the 1st century A.D. Consequently, during Biblical times, Scripture was found in a scroll form, traditionally written on lambskin leather (vellum). In order to gain access to a particular passage of interest, a given-scroll had to be unrolled; -- a sometime troublesome prospect if the scroll was lengthy. To make unrolling more convenient, a Biblical work would be bisected into two scrolls of somewhat equal size. In keeping with this standing tradition, Revelation divides into two separate parts: (1) "eschatology that pertains to the Church" and (2) "eschatology that pertains to the World." 15:5 is the turning point that marks the beginning of the second division. An over-arching unity of the two divisions is achieved, - -under inspiration --, by having the second scroll possess a paralleling r--- "mirror reflection" (in its structure) to the first scroll. Such an all-embracing pattern forms a framework that binds the Book of Revelation into a compositional unity. If anything is removed or added, the literary structure
would be destroyed. The paralleling, in reverse order, of the visions from
the first division with the visions of the second division is termed a
chiasmus; --a structure that is "chiastic."

**The relationship between the two halves of Revelation**
Between the prologue in the beginning (1: 1-8) and the epilogue at the end
(22:6-21) there are 8 sections, 4 to each division. Acts I through IV are
enclosed within the first scroll while Acts V through VII are found in the
second scroll. The end section of Act VII forms an 8th part. This is in
keeping with the axiom found in the following quote: "an eighth but it
belongs to the seven" (17: 11 ).

*We may detail the chiasmus of Revelation as follows:*

**Act I** (the Church in the present earth [1:9-3:22]) is in correspondence with
the end section of **Act VII** (the Church in the new earth [22:6-21]).

**Act II** (the Investigative Judgment [4:1-8:1]) is in correspondence with the
first section of **Act VII** (the Executive Judgment [21:9-22:5]).

**Act III** (trumpet warnings directed to a Church in tribulation [8:2-11:18]) is
in correspondence with **Act V** (vial plagues directed to a World in agony
[15:5-16:21]).

**Act IV** (the Church, -- Christ's Kingdom --, is saved [11:19-15:4]) is in
correspondence with **Act VI** (the World, -- Satan's kingdom --, is lost [17:1-
20:3]).

Dr. Douglas Waterhouse    7/12/12

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**UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION:**
**AN OUTLINE OF THE LITERARY FORM OF REVELATION**

by

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I. The Title of the Apocalypse (1:1-3)
A. The infallible succession of the gift of prophecy (1:1-2)
B. The first (of seven) covenant seal (1:3)

II. Salutation to the Seven Churches (1:4-6)
A. Opening benediction: invocation to the Trinity (1:4-5a)
B. Doxology (1:5b-6)

III. Prologue (1:7,8) Two Voices
A. First Voice (herald): announcement of the Star and theme of the Drama (1:7)
B. Second voice (Lord God): the imprimatur of the living God given as "Sponsor" of the action throughout (1:8)

IV. ACT I: THE CHURCH ON EARTH (1:9-3:22)

The Sanctuary Setting: The Church's High Priest in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (1:9-20)

B. The letters to the seven churches (2:1-3:22)
   - SCENE 1: (1) The Passionless Church (Laodicia) (2:1-7)
   - SCENE 2: (2) The Persecuted Church (Smyrna) (2:8-11)
   - SCENE 3: (3) The Tolerant Church (Pergamum) (2:12-17)
   - SCENE 4: The Compromising Church (Thyatira) (2:18-29)
     4. You tolerate Jezebel (2:20)
     5. Jezebel is given "time" to repent (2:21)
     6. Jezebel will be thrown on a sickbed (2:22)
     7. Finally Jezebel's daughters will be smitten dead (2:23)
   - SCENE 5: The Dead Church (Sardis) (3:1-6)
   - SCENE 6: The Missionary Church (Philadelphia) (3:7-13)
     a. The view of the wicked: They bow down at your feet (3:9)
     b. The view of the righteous: Kept from the hour of trial (3:10)
   - SCENE 7: The Arrogant Church (Laodicea) (3:14-22)

V. ACT II: THE CHURCH FACES JUDGMENT (4:1-8:1)

A. The Sanctuary Setting: A view through the "open door" into the Most holy place.
   The throne of God (4:1-8a); a song of praise from the witnesses of both heaven and earth (4:8b-11); the sealed book and the Lion/Lamb (5:1-7); hymns (5:8-14).
   The Eschatological Covenant Lawsuit.
   Call to the witnesses to give ear to the proceedings
   The witnesses from earth: the twenty-four priests (4:4)
   The witnesses from heaven: the four cherubim-seraphim (4:6b-8)
   Introduction of the case at issue by the Divine Judge and Prosecutor (5:1-7)
   A recital of the benevolent acts of the suzerain (5:8-14)

B. The opening of the seven seals (6:1-8:1)
   The judgement indictment: the appearance of four horses (6:1-8)
SCENE 1: (1) The rider on the white horse who inflicts the white judgment of victorious conquest (6:1-2)

SCENE 2: (2) The rider on the red horse who inflicts the red judgment of slaughter (6:3-4)

SCENE 3: (3) The rider on the black horse who inflicts the black judgment of famine (6:5-6)

SCENE 4: (4) The rider on the pale horse who inflicts the judgment of death (6:7-8)
(5) The rider also brings the judgment of slaughter
(6) The rider also brings the judgment of famine
(7) The rider also brings his companion the Grave (6:8)

SCENE 5: The cry of the martyrs: "How long must we wait for the final retribution?" (6:9-11)
The judgment sentence: The release of the four judgment horses (6:12-7:17)

SCENE 6: The final eschatological events (6:12-7:17)
a. The view of the wicked: cosmic catastrophes accompany the wrath of the Lamb (6:12-17)
b. The view of the righteous: a sealing of the living saints (7:1-8). The release of the judgment verdict brings to view an innumerable multitude who are clothed in white robes of victory (7:9-17).

After the judgment is finished (8:1) A new creation

SCENE 7: Silence in heaven (8:1)

VI. ACT III: THE EXODUS OF ISRAEL FROM BABYLON (8:7-11:18)
A. The Sanctuary Setting: The seven sanctuary trumpets (8:2); (1) the first view of the mediating altar of incense (8:3-4); (2) the second view when the mediating work of the altar has ceased (8:5-6)
B. The sounding of the seven trumpets (8:7-11:18) Plagues of mercy and warning upon the "great city" Babylon to prepare the way for the Exodus-movement (8:7-9:21)

SCENE 1: (1) A scourge upon the earth of hail and fire (8:7)

SCENE 2: (2) A scourge upon the sea - a burning mountain sinks (8:8-9)

SCENE 3: (3) A scourge upon the rivers and fountains of water - a star falls from heaven to earth as a polluting agent (8:10-11)

SCENE 4: (4) A scourge upon the sun - heavenly bodies are partially darkened (8:12)
(5) A woe to follow in the fifth trumpet
(6) A woe to follow in the sixth trumpet
(7) A woe to follow in the seventh trumpet (8:13)
The "ninth plague" of darkness (9:1-12)

SCENE 5 (woe 1) A scourge of darkness - the falling star descends to the pit of the abyss; a plague of locust results. The locust have tails like scorpions. The saints place the sealing mark over their Goshen homes (9:1-12).
The "tenth plague" of death or deliverance (9:13-11:14)

SCENE 6 (woe 2): A scourge upon the great river Euphrates - the four angels appear (9:13-11:14)
a. The view of the wicked: The unbinding of the four angels. An underworld army of two hundred million horsemen come forth. They are girded with the weapons of the Lake of
Fire & they bring death in their wake (9:13-21).
b. The view of the righteous: They are in an Exodus-movement. They are led by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The Archangel gives the little book at the end of prophetic time. The period of bondage in the "great city" Babylon had been three and a half times (times of the Gentiles). God's two witnesses, in the spirit of Elijah and Moses, lead Israel out from Egypt, which forms the first tenth part of the city Babylon (10:1-11:14).

- **SCENE 7** (woe 3): The mystery of God is finished (10:7); Christ goes forth to claim His everlasting Kingdom (11:15-18).

VII. ACT IV: THE SALVATION OF JERUSALEM (11:19-15:4)
A. The Sanctuary Setting: The Ark of God's Covenant becomes visible (11:19)
B. The showing of seven pageants (12:1-15:4)

- **SCENE 1**: The wilderness experience of the pure woman (chapter 12)
  (1) A celestial woman pregnant with a male child (12:1-2)
  (2) A celestial, seven-headed dragon, descends to earth (12:3-4)
  (3) Christ ascends to heaven; the woman flees to wilderness (12:5-6)
  (4) The dragon turns his anger against the woman in the wilderness (12:7-17)
- **SCENE 2**: The wounded beast with seven heads arising from sea (13:1-10)
  (5) Babylon arises from the sea (13:1-10)
- **SCENE 3**: Support is given to Babylon by the beast arising from the earth (13:11-18)
  (6) The false Elijah makes an image to the beast who has been wounded (13:11-18)
- **SCENE 4**: The fate of the saved: the Lamb with the 144,000 upon Mount Zion (14:1-5)
  (7) The judgment sentence upon the true Elijah (14:1-5)
- **SCENE 5**: The challenging cry preparatory for conflict (14:6-13)
  a. The challenge for the wicked. Announcement of doom to Babylon. The angel sounding with the gospel message is joined by a second and then a third angel who swell the sounding cry; the latter two proclaim an ever deepening punishment for a Babylon who rejects the gospel proclamation (14:6-11)
  b. The challenge for the righteous. The second covenant seal (a special resurrection for the saints who die during the sounding-cry of the three angels) (14:12-13)
- **SCENE 6**: The harvest of the saved (14:14-20)
  a. The view of the righteous: The grain-field, ripened by the former and latter rain, is harvested by the Son of Man on a white cloud (14:14-16)
  b. The view of the wicked: The ripe vintage-harvest is thrown into the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God. The wine-press is trod outside the great city Jerusalem; blood fills the length of the Holy Land (14:17-20)
- **SCENE 7**: The saved upon the sea of glass; they sing the victory song of Moses and the Lamb (14:1-4)

VIII. ACT V: THE FINAL EXODUS FROM A WORLD IN AGONY (15:5-16:21)
A. The Sanctuary Setting: The Shekinah fills the Sanctuary with glory; no one can
enter the temple; the censer-bowl is removed from off the altar of incense (15:5-16:1)
B. The pouring out of the seven censer-bowls (16:2-21)
Judgment-plagues upon a fallen Babylon; the saints move through the wilderness toward the Red Sea (16:2-11)

- **SCENE 1**: (1) A scourge upon the earth - boils on men (16:2)
- **SCENE 2**: (2) A scourge upon the sea - blood (16:3)
- **SCENE 3**: (3) A scourge upon rivers and fountains of waters - blood (16:4-7)
  (4) The angel of water cries approval (16:5-6)
  (5) The altar cries approval (16:7)
- **SCENE 4**: (6) A scourge upon the sun - burning heat (16:8-9)
  (7) The wicked cry a curse against God (16:9)
  *Darkness intervenes to save Israel from Pharaoh's hosts (16:10-11)*
- **SCENE 5**: A scourge of darkness upon the throne of the beast (16:10-11)
  The Red Sea delivers Israel but destroys her enemies (16:12-16)
- **SCENE 6**: A scourge upon the great river Euphrates - the parting of the waters (16:12-16)
  a. The view of the wicked: Babylon is breached; demoniac spirits take control (16:12-14)
  b. The view of the righteous: The third covenant seal (the announced second advent of Christ). The saints assemble at Megiddo for the final battle of the Holy Land (16:15,16)
- **SCENE 7**: "It is done" - the atmosphere is consumed; Babylon falls to the conquering kings from the east (16:17-21)

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**IX. ACT VI: THE DOOM OF BABYLON (17:1-20:3)**
A. The Sanctuary Setting: An angel issuing from the Sanctuary which no man can enter (17:1-2)
B. The unfolding of the seven plagues (17:3-20:3)

- **SCENE 1**: The wilderness experience of the harlot (17:3-5)
  (1) An underworld harlot pregnant with the blood of the saints (17:3-6)
- **SCENE 2**: The wounded beast with seven heads (17:6-18)
  (2) An underworld, seven-headed dragon, ascends to earth (17:7-18)
- **SCENE 3**: Support is taken away from Babylon (18:1-19:10)
  (3) Christ descends to earth; the harlot flees to the wilderness (18:1-3)
  (the fourth Archangel)
  (4) God turns His anger against the harlot-queen Jezebel who rules over the earth (18:4-8)
  (5) Babylon sinks into the sea (18:9-24)
  (6) The true Elijah makes an image to the Lamb who has been wounded; the fourth covenant seal (invitation to the marri supper) (19:1-10)
- **SCENE 4**: The fate of the wicked: smitten by the "rod of iron" (19:11-16)
  (7) The judgment-sentence against the false Elijah (by the Living Word of God on a white horse) (19:11-16)
**SCENE 5:** The challenging cry preparatory for conflict; the battle taunt by the angel standing in the sun (19:17-18)

**SCENE 6:** The destruction of the lost (19:19-21)
   a. The view of the wicked: The armies of the beast gather to fight the battle of Megiddo against the Word of God on the white horse (19:19)
   b. The view of the righteous: Victory over the beast and the false Elijah who are cast into the Lake of Fire (19:20-21)

**SCENE 7:** The defeated foe thrown bound back into the abyss (20:1-3)

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**X. ACT VII: THE CHURCH IN THE MILLENNIUM (20:4-22:5)**

A. The Sanctuary Setting: The church enthroned with Christ (20:4-6). The church, now reigning with Christ, is privileged to observe from the stage itself the final stages of the Acts.

   It is the fifth covenant seal (the first resurrection) that gathers all Israel upon the stage (20:4).

   Following a millennium of rule, Satan and his hosts are loosed from the abyss and the battle of Megiddo is continued until all the wicked are cast into the Lake of Fire (20:7-10)

B. The fulfilling of God's sevenfold plan (20:11-22:5)

   **SCENE 1:** (1) The old heaven and the old earth pass away (20:11)
   **SCENE 2:** (2) The last Judgment - the sentence is meted out upon the resurrected dead (20:12-15)
   **SCENE 3:** (3) The new heaven and new earth - no more sea (21:1)
   **SCENE 4:** (4) The New Jerusalem adorned as a Bride (21:2-8)
      (5) A great voice from the throne accepts the Bride (21:3-4)
      (6) The voice again speaks, announcing a new creation (21:5a)
      (7) The command to write: the stipulations on who will be welcomed as guests to the eschatological wedding (21:5b-8)
   **SCENE 5:** Measuring the great city Jerusalem (21:9-21)
   **SCENE 6:** The city's illumination (21:22-27)
      a. The view of the righteous: In God's presence there is no night (21:22-26)
      b. The view of the wicked: Forever excluded from Jerusalem (21:27)
   **SCENE 7:** The city's source of life (22:1-5)

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**XI. EPILOGUE: IMPRIMATURS ON THE BOOK (22:6-20)**

A. The infallible succession of the gift of prophecy (22:6)
B. The sixth covenant seal (22:7)
C. The imprimatur is that of the living God (22:8-9)
D. Closing instruction by Gabriel (22:10-15) Christ is quoted
   (1) The distinction drawn (22:10-11)
   (2) The Star and theme of the Drama (22:12-13)
   (3) Reward for the righteous: the seventh covenant seal (22:14)
   (4) Reward for the wicked: excluded from the Kingdom (22:15)
E. THE INVITATION GIVEN BY MICHAEL (22:16-20)

**XII. CLOSING Benediction (22:2)**
Notes:
[1] e-mail from Dr, Waterhouse, Ph.D., March 25, 2013.