<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWS</th>
<th>OPINION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict over Calendar Change Splits the Adventist Church in Samoa:</strong> Turmoil among Samoan Adventist congregations grows as members opt to worship on Sundays, rather than the traditional Sabbath. The situation is serious....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possible Modification of Doctrinal Document, Challenging Trends Discussed by Leaders at Denomination's Annual Meeting:</strong> Editorial work is well under way on a new edition of the Church's doctrinal manual, &quot;28 Fundamental Beliefs.&quot; Will the new edition insist on a stringently literal interpretation of Genesis 1 &amp; 2?....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministry Supporting Victims of Clergy Abuse Opens New Facility:</strong> Men and women of charisma and self-declared faith have been preying on parishioners for centuries, later casting them adrift. On the positive side, victims benefit immensely from qualified care, and a new center, &quot;The Hope of Survivors&quot; has opened in Iowa to minister to victims of clergy abuse....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questioning Ellen White’s Understanding of Geology: “Infidelity in Disguise” or “Fidelity to Reality?” Are Ellen White's 19th-century writings on geology and the fossil record still helpful today? Ervin Taylor says the Church could do much better for Ellen White's credibility by not promoting those old articles....</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noah's Ark:</strong> There's renewed and widespread interest in Noah's Ark as a centerpiece of theme parks. Andy Hanson wonders where it's all leading.....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Management Guru and the “Brethren”:</strong> Lawrence Downing writes that for some time Adventist leaders have sought counsel from management gurus, only to declare major recommendations incompatible with denominational needs. Now the process may have begun again....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Baddeck River Interview
(Devotional): Debbonaire Kovacs has retreated to Nova Scotia in her nomadic peregrinations, and files this exclusive interview with the Baddeck River, as she learns where rivers go when they dry....

FEATURES
(available to signed-in subscribers; to register for a free, 30-day subscription, click here)

Enhancing Your Relationships: Willie and Elaine Oliver are husband-and-wife directors of GC Family Ministries and this week weigh in on “Enhancing Your Relationships,” focusing on intentional togetherness, communication, and forgiveness....

Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 27: The Song of Moses and the Lamb: In Chapter 27 of *Victory Over the Beast*, Dr. Thomsen suggests that we can and should learn the Song of Moses and the Lamb—now! Perhaps we could call this song “The Battle Hymn before Armageddon,” writes Debbonaire Kovacs....

the stark reality of their experience in creating the film, "Seventh-Gay Adventists."

**Breath of Life:** Something in the human spirit from time immemorial has delighted in the grandeur of the cosmos, from galactic expanses to the most delicate, molecular forms. Poet T.W. Humphries captures the grandeur and praises his Creator....
Conflict over Calendar Change Splits the Adventist Church in Samoa

By Milton Hook, October 15, 2013

Many Seventh-day Adventists in Samoa are now First-day Adventists. Hundreds who once worshipped on Saturdays are now regularly worshipping on Sundays. This situation has arisen because the denomination's South Pacific Division (SPD) recommended that Samoan congregations ignore the consequences of the local government’s decision to shift the International Date Line to the east of Western Samoa at the beginning of 2012 which caused every seventh day to fall on Sundays. Schism is now rife in Samoa. In order to continue worship on Saturday some members have joined a group that separated from the denomination some years ago. Others are confused or fearful of peer pressure and simply choose to stay at home. A growing group that now numbers about 300 decided to accept the new local calendar, continuing to worship on Saturdays but not uniting with the earlier schismatics. They believe it is indefensible to worship on Sundays despite the shift in the calendar. The vast majority of Samoan Adventists abroad support this latter group. A retired president of the denomination's Samoan Mission preaches at their gatherings. Some SPD leaders have become increasingly annoyed at the level of opposition to their viewpoint. They sent emails to each other urging a ban on Samoan pastors abroad from traveling to Samoa in order to preach against or persuade members against the SPD position. The allegation was that such visitors were destabilising the situation. One message spoke of pastors from Australia and New Zealand visiting their families in Samoa, working on Sundays and worshipping on Saturdays. This “must be stopped” was the request. At great expense the SPD organised meetings with Samoan pastors abroad, first in New Zealand and a short time later in Australia, seeking a written consensus of support. However, most of the pastors refused to sign. Their convictions remained steadfastly with the minority in their homeland who want to worship on the new Saturday. At the meeting in Australia a number of these pastors candidly opposed the SPD position. Courage in the face of SPD administration came from strong feelings of certainty rooted in conscience. The Samoan pastors had read a number of study papers on the Internet that argued the case for practicality; that the Sabbath should always be kept according to the local calendar wherever an individual finds himself in the world. Another meeting was scheduled for August 2, 2013, at SPD headquarters in Sydney. The Samoan church president and a member of his executive committee flew in to dialog with the SPD administrators and some Samoan pastors handpicked by the Division president. The most important outcome of the meeting was a decision to allow a small group of Samoan pastors from Australia and New Zealand to go to Samoa and discuss the issue, a reversal of the earlier effort to ban such visits. To date there is no apparent change in the resolve of the Saturday-keepers in Samoa. The reality is that, over time, their numbers are increasing. The debate is like a juggler’s bag of tricks. Mention of the Saturday Sabbath prompts some to pull out Romans 14:5. This is not helpful because neither party accepts Paul’s tolerant stance. Instead, both sides of the argument believe they are worshipping on God’s mandatory Sabbath. One side believes it occurs on what is now Sunday according to the current Samoan calendar, the position taken by the SPD. The other side has the view that the Sabbath falls on the Saturday according to the present Samoan calendar. Others describe complex arguments about the International Date Line. The only biblical demarcation line is “evening/morning.” On a round earth it is ever-changing and, relative to longitude, is usually skewed. But when this line was included in the creation story there was no mention of the spherical nature of the earth or provision for world travellers. The debate is rife with quasi-intellectualism and riddled with legalism, which is divisive and tragic. There is much to be gained by religious communities worshipping on the same day. For those who wish to worship on the seventh day of the week, the most practical approach is to consult the local calendar. The SPD leadership told Samoan Adventists to ignore the change in the local calendar in order to maintain a seven-day cycle. The SPD would not tolerate the one-off omission of one day when the Samoan government shifted the International Date Line. It is a strange anomaly that the same SPD administrators, whenever crossing the line themselves to visit America, do not keep to a personal seven-day cycle. Instead, they fall in line with the local American calendar. Early Adventist missionaries from America crossed the International Date Line to arrive in Australia in the nineteenth century and then adopted the local calendar. They reverted to the American calendar when they returned home. Precedent is not an infallible guide, but the fact remains those missionaries followed common sense. Everyone does it. The General Conference president does it when he travels the world and so do the SPD administrators. Those who wrote the study papers advocating that Samoan Adventists worship on Sunday abide by the local calendar when they travel. All Samoan Adventists who leave their homeland and cross the International Date Line to visit or settle in another country adopt the local calendar. The policy guarantees harmony. Most of the Adventists in Samoa have gone along with the SPD decision, but a minority at the time had a visceral sense that something was amiss. They felt their Adventist identity was robbed of its character. Those who had, in the past, been members of Sunday churches and converted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church were mortified because their church, in the eyes of their local community, now advocated what they once rejected as non-biblical. There is no end to this schism in the foreseeable future. It is like a nuclear reactor disaster, leaking toxic waste into the sea while church government fiddles with spin, passes the buck and waits in hope that the debate will
dissipate. Perhaps a better solution would be to allow those Adventists in Samoa who believe that Saturday is the Sabbath to worship on Saturdays. Those in Samoa who believe that Sunday is the Sabbath are allowed to worship on Sunday and could continue to do so. Choices based on individual conscience might provide the least divisive way to relate to the new local calendar. Milton Hook writes from Sydney, Australia.

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Possible Modification of Doctrinal Document, Challenging Trends Discussed by Leaders at Denomination’s Annual Meeting

By Adventist Today News Team, October 16, 2013

No final decisions were made as steps were taken this week toward possibly revising the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The document officially describes the denomination's basic doctrines and can only be changed by a General Conference (GC) Session held every five years with delegates elected by national denominational bodies in each country around the globe. The meeting which began last week is the annual council of the executive committee that governs the denomination between sessions. Today (October 15) the committee simply took the next step in a five-year process to better articulate the church’s core beliefs, using clearer—and frequently more inclusive—language. Theologians led committee members through a reading of an edited draft of all 28 Fundamental Beliefs prepared by a review committee appointed in 2011. Pastor Ben Schoun, a GC vice president who chaired the discussion, reminded delegates that the draft is “not the final copy” and urged them not to spend the afternoon debating semantics. He also encouraged committee members to conduct discussions in their regions and submit further edits by June 1, 2014. The review was launched because some delegates at the 2010 GC Session expressed a concern that the paragraph on creation was not strong enough. It came as no surprise, then, that Fundamental Belief Number 6 received the most red ink. One proposed edit to the paragraph on creation replaces, “In six days, the Lord made ...” with “In a recent, six-day creation, the Lord made ...”. Another suggested change specifies that creation took place within the span of “six literal days.” The word “literal” closes what some Adventists have claimed is an interpretive loophole that allows theistic evolution to explain the Genesis origins account. The draft reviewed by the committee also replaces the first verse of Genesis, which states, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth,” with a passage from Exodus 20, which says God created “the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.” This change reflects a fuller understanding of the original Hebrew by separating the creation of the “cosmos” (universe) from the creation of life on earth, church leaders said. Adventist theologians believe Genesis 1:1 may refer to creation in a broader sense (see Job 38:7), whereas Exodus 20:11, the draft states, “seems to restrict the creative act to what took place during the six days of creation.” The draft “doesn’t bring anything new to the belief. It just states with a firmer voice, or a more clear voice, what we have always believed,” said Dr. Artur Stele, a GC vice president who co-chaired the review and serves as director of the denomination’s Biblical Research Institute. Overall, the draft proposes changes—most of which are minor and editorial in nature—to 18 of the denomination’s 28 Fundamental Beliefs. Another propose revision is the gender-neutral language that shows up consistently throughout the draft. For example, “man and “mankind” now read “human” and “humanity.” In providing background on the new language, Stele explained, “we wanted to determine whether the suggestion was biblical or just reflecting the spirit of the day.” After a close study of Hebrew usage in the Old Testament, “you cannot conclude words such as 'man' only refer to the masculine gender.” Even in the New Testament, Stele said, inclusivity is the clear biblical intent. The original Greek word “man” was always gender-neutral until the modern era. “It means human being,” he said. The draft also seeks to clarify the denomination’s belief on marriage and family, suggesting that the phrase “a man and a woman” replace the current word “partners” to ensure that the denomination’s definition of marriage cannot apply to same-sex unions. The new version “removes any ambiguity” that could be “misused” by Adventists supporting gay, lesbian or transgender marriages. Changes to Fundamental Belief Number 23 also include removing the word “disciplinarian” when urging parents to emulate Christ’s relationship with humanity when raising their children. The draft also does away with outdated English vocabulary and usage. “Which” frequently becomes “that” and “gracious” is now used to describe God, instead of “beneficent.” Another change replaces the archaic word “fruitage” with “fruit.” Stele told the executive committee that the draft only includes proposed changes that “deepen” the statement, refrain from “elaborations of ideas already present” or present key ideas currently missing. The review group also looked for ways to clarify or condense the beliefs. Suggestions were rejected that “primarily promoted a personal agenda,” he said. The review committee will prepare a second draft of the document for the 2014 annual meeting and a decision will be made at that meeting as to whether or not to pass on the revisions for consideration at the 2015 GC Session. The annual meeting began Friday (October 11) with an observance of the 125th anniversary of the 1888 GC Session, which is remembered as a theological milestone in the history of the denomination. It was the scene of a series of doctrinal debates which served to refocus Adventist faith away from an early sectarian bent toward a more evangelical foundation in "righteousness by faith.” Cofounder Ellen G. White encouraged a new generation of younger preachers in presenting a more evangelical understanding of salvation much to the consternation of the GC officers at the time. In the aftermath she wrote her classic biography of Christ, The Desire of Ages, and the most widely-distributed of her books, Steps to Christ, which was initially issued by a major Christian publisher and not a denominational publishing housing.
"Jesus has become my sufficiency," Dr. Ganoune Diop, an Adventist theologian raised as a Muslim in his native Senegal, told the committee. He contrasted the faith of his childhood with his adult Christian belief in a Lord who died to redeem broken and sinful humanity. Diop currently serves as the denomination's representative to the United Nations. Other sermons on the same theme included one by Stele on Old Testament stories of God's mercy and grace, another by Dr. Lael Caesar, an associate editor of the *Adventist Review*, focusing on the meaning in the stories about Christ reaching out to and healing lepers, and another by a young pastor from Maine, Shawn Brace.

Back and forth themes about change, innovation and new challenges facing the denomination, as well as concern about holding onto Seventh-day Adventist traditions, were laced throughout the meeting. During an in-service education event for church administrators just prior to the meeting (with almost all of the members present), a management consultant cited by the *Wall Street Journal* as "the world's most influential business thinker," Gary Hamel urged Adventist leaders to create a climate of innovation at every level of the denomination, to facilitate experimentation as crucial to the future of the organization. "We don't worship tradition," he stated. "We worship a risen Lord."

As the committee worshiped together last Sabbath (October 12), Pastor Ted Wilson, the GC president, both affirmed the Christ-centered emphasis of the 1888 anniversary and cautioned against change that might lead to abandoning Bible teachings. "There are those inside the church and outside the church who wish to change the very beliefs we have held sacred and change the character of the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself," he warned. "People who want to turn the grace of God into something vile thus denying Jesus Himself, even though they pretend to lift up His name."

He pointed to changing social attitudes toward homosexuality. "The acquiescence to homosexuality that is pervading so many societies today is nothing more than the old immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah that is in complete opposition to God's Holy Word and, according to the Bible, will result in not receiving eternal life for those who reject God's loving and saving efforts to turn them away from sinful behavior."

Official reports also reflected the challenges and tensions operating within the denomination. Membership is over 18 million now, reported Pastor G. T. Ng, executive secretary of the GC, with 1.1 million baptisms in the last year. There are 6.6 million members in Africa, 5.8 million in Latin America and 3.4 million in Asia, where growth is rapid. There are about 2 million in North America, Europe and the South Pacific where growth is slower although remarkable compared to other denominations.

The need to generate more grassroots support for mission projects and engage young adults in the planning, funding and implementation of these projects was a key element in the report of GC Treasurer Robert Lemon. In 2012 the tithe returned in North America increased by only one percent, while in the rest of the world it increased by 4.4 percent. Giving to mission offerings increased by 6 percent in the rest of the world and declined by 2.6 percent in North America.

Lemon proposed that the special offering taken at the time of 2015 GC Session be dedicated to projects overseen by Adventists under 25 years of age. He asked that a committee made up three-quarters of members under 25 years of age select the projects. "It's time that we tell our young people that we not only trust them to do the work, but we also trust them to make decisions as to how to spend the money of the church," Lemon told the committee.

Many other items were on the agenda for the meetings which have lasted for more than two weeks. For reasons concerning which Adventist Today has received no explanation, the denomination's official news service, Adventist News Network (ANN), has not released any of the actual documents as it has in past years. A new ANN web site was rolled out just prior to these meetings which has improved graphics, but the information value of the downloadable items is significantly decreased.
Ministry Supporting Victims of Clergy Abuse Opens New Facility

By Adventist Today News Team, October 17, 2013

The Hope of Survivors, a ministry supporting victims of clergy sex abuse, opened a new facility in Bedford, Iowa, on October 1. The former Bedford Inn will serve as the ministry's administrative headquarters as well as a renewal center. After renovations are completed, there will be living space for ministry founders Steve and Samantha Nelson, a program director, and four bedrooms where couples and individuals can stay while participating in counseling.

Steve Nelson is the ministry president and a Seventh-day Adventist Pastor, while Samantha is ministry vice president and CEO. Both are Board Certified Biblical Counselors and Certified Belief Therapists. The story of their own experience with clergy abuse is told in the documentary, Call It Anything But Love!

The Hope of Survivors began in 2002 and became incorporated as a nonprofit in 2004. Because of a lack of physical infrastructure, until the acquisition of the Bedford Inn, the ministry operated by disseminating information through its website, leading training events, and supporting victims through telephone and email communication. These services will continue to be offered along with on-site counseling, though telephone services have been temporarily limited. People who wish to speak with a ministry representative should contact The Hope of Survivors via the organization's website—http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/contact.php.

Steve and Samantha Nelson offer three types of training seminars. First, “Hope & Healing” is for victims and their spouses. Second, “Trust & Truth” is a seminar for congregations and communities who are either dealing with an abusive situation or who wish to prevent such an occurrence. This seminar can also be presented in a school setting, since perpetrators can be anyone in spiritual authority, such as Bible teachers or chaplains. A third training is available for clergy and church leaders, “Faith & Fidelity.”

In addition to individual congregations, the Nelsons have presented seminars at workers' meetings for Seventh-day Adventist pastors in the North American Division and beyond. Furthermore, they have led training events for an array of denominations, not only Seventh-day Adventist congregations. According to the 2012 Annual Report, Seventh-day Adventist clients accounted for 28% of victims who reported their denominational affiliation in that year.

The Hope of Survivors also provides advocacy services when requested by clients. This is done through written or verbal communication on behalf of the victim, informing church leaders of reports of abuse that require further investigation.

The Hope of Survivors has expanded both culturally and geographically since its founding. Support services are offered in the United States in Spanish through La Esperanza de los Sobrevivientes, which is based in Crowley, Texas. The Hope of Survivors has also been incorporated as a nonprofit in Romania, and a formation process is underway in both Canada and Australia, with the possibility of an
additional branch in the United Kingdom.

Two stories serve as examples of the role The Hope of Survivors plays in the lives of victims. First, now an adult, Sandy Kirkham was a teenager when she was abused by her youth pastor. Kirkham shares:

I didn’t believe that my faith would ever be the same again. And then I found The Hope of Survivors Ministry. After speaking with Samantha Nelson on the telephone, and through her many correspondences with me, I found a friend. I found someone who cared and understood... I also felt the presence of Christ through this ministry. For the first time in 29 years, I began to believe in the possibility that I might be able to trust again and my faith could be restored.

A more recent example demonstrates the role of the ministry even when abuse is not perpetrated by clergy (all names have been changed). Dina was abused by a peer who attended the same congregation as Dina's family. When Dina's parents—Ruth and John—reported the situation to police and brought the situation to the attention of the local pastor, both the pastor and head elder responded in ways that minimized the situation and favored the other family. As the conflict escalated, John and Ruth were advised to change their phone number and to find another congregation. In response they reached out to conference, union and division leaders, but when they failed to receive the assistance they sought, the family turned to The Hope of Survivors for encouragement and guidance.

Ruth shares that “there was no one in the denomination to turn to,” so finding this ministry online was an answer to prayer. “It was a God-thing. It was life-saving.” Looking back, Ruth insists, “Victims should not be run out of their church because they report abuse.” Both Samantha Nelson and Martin Weber were instrumental in helping Ruth's family work through the emotional, spiritual and administrative dimensions of their situation. Ruth says, “It was a very dark time in our lives and The Hope of Survivors was what got us through. We weren't abandoned. We weren't alone.”

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Questioning Ellen White’s Understanding of Geology: “Infidelity in Disguise” or “Fidelity to Reality?

By Ervin Taylor October 18, 2013

The Adventist Review (AR) has again reprinted excerpts from an article listing Ellen White (EGW) as author, this time under the title “Infidelity in Disguise.” This article originally appeared in March 1879 in the Signs of the Times. Every few years, it appears that some editor at the AR decides that there is a need to explain again that EGW has spoken all that needs to be said on the topic of Genesis, geology, and Creationism.

To make sure that no one misses the point, there is often an accompanying statement that says something like “Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.” I gather that readers are supposed to take away from that statement the understanding that since she was assumed to have the “biblical gift of prophecy” her views on this topic are to be accepted without question, “on faith” as it were. EGW said it. I believe it. That ends the discussion.

Understanding what Ellen specifically had in mind when she wrote or what had been edited together from earlier material she or her assistants had assembled from other sources is beyond the scope of this brief commentary. A scholar who has looked into this says it appears that she may not have been responding to Darwinian evolution as such but primarily to ideas presented in a work entitled "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation," published in 1844.

One might reasonably conclude that maintaining the authority of EGW in the 21st-century Adventist Church continues to be one of the main concerns of the institutional Adventist press and the currently dominant administrative establishment at the GC.

That some wish, in the second decade of the 21st Century to highlight EGW’s 19th-century views on, of all things, geology, might strike some as a strange way to try to maintain the prophetic authority of someone whose principal focus throughout her lifetime was on the need for a Christian to develop deeply-felt spiritual values. Would it not be more helpful to highlight EGW’s focus on “God is Love”? Or is that too abstract?

What is gained in the 21st Century by continuing to link EGW with a totally scientifically-discredited understanding of earth and human history? This understanding was a widely held belief among conservative and evangelical wings of many Christian denominations in her day, and it would have been strange for her not to have believed it as well.

However, efforts today to endorse her views on this topic seem to be the equivalent of trying to support belief in a flat earth to support the authority of the Bible. That certainly was a belief held by the ancient Hebrews. Today, we now know that their understanding was simply wrong. But does this take anything away from the great themes that the Biblical narratives address such as our relationship with the Divine, as evaluated in terms of how we treat others?

Just as the understanding of the shape of the earth by the Hebrews was wrong, EGW’s understanding of geology was also wrong. However, certain elements of the faith tradition she helped to found have created such a mythology around her that admitting this probably is more than anyone can reasonably expect.

Perhaps the best we can hope for is that her views on this topic will come to be only of historical interest to the point that, like her views on the Shut Door and human and animal amalgamation, they can effectively die a natural death by benign neglect. Unfortunately, this process may take several hundred years.

PS. On a slightly different topic, if someone wants to take a short break from some important task and has time to waste 15 minutes of fun reading, go to the Educate Truth (sic) web site (www.educatetruth.com) and read the exchanges of views on the thread that is dealing with “The Adventist Accrediting Association to Approve LSU’s Accreditation.” That thread is currently exhibiting how conservative Adventists can’t even agree when they are dealing with this topic among themselves. (By the way, Educate Truth (sic) is Dr. Sean Pitman’s site whose main purpose is to demand that La Sierra University turn itself into a Bible college and is outraged when it refuses to do that.)
Noah's Ark currently fascinates Christian fundamentalists worldwide. It was a wooden boat that at least one expert opines was too big to survive an ocean voyage even in calm seas. However, that hasn't stopped a Dutch carpenter from constructing one, a Christian Science museum in Kentucky from asking visitors to help build one, a Hong Kong consortium from building one as a theme park attraction, or an expedition to Mt. Ararat to discover pieces of the original.

Finally, I have some questions. I invite you to comment.

The Ark Was Seaworthy

Adam Thornton in Science Splat tells the reader that the Ark “could survive the treacherous condition of a global flood…it could even handle waves that were 98 feet high!”

http://www.sciencesplat.com/NoahsArk.html

Why the Ark Couldn’t Float

by Jeremy E. writing for Think Quest argues the negative.

http://library.thinkquest.org/29178/noark.htm

Dutch Replica

Johan's Ark towers across the flat Dutch landscape and is easily visible from a nearby highway where it lies moored in the city of Dordrecht, just south of Rotterdam.


Help Build The Ark In Kentucky

“...What if we built the Ark (out of wood) today? Imagine the impact it could have on the world. What a powerful outreach to teach the world about God’s Word and the message of salvation!”
The creationist-inspired vessel forms part of a theme park near Hong Kong which was inspired by a young girl's scrawled drawing of the mammoth boat.

Wood From Noah's Ark Found

"It's not 100 percent that it is Noah's Ark, but we think it is 99.9 percent that this is it,"

The Ararat “Find” Was A Hoax.

In the late summer of 2008 ten Kurdish workers hired by Parasut, the guide used by the Chinese, are said to have planted large wood beams taken from an old structure in the Black Sea area (where the photos were originally taken) at the Mt. Ararat site.”

COMMENTS -- Andy Hanson

What interests me with regard to the Ark phenomenon is “why now?”

Could it be that the new, authoritative translation of the Hebrew word, teba reveals that the biblical Ark was built using reeds?*

Could it be that science and common sense have relegated the Ark story to mythology??

Could it be that fundamentalist faith is anchored in the Old Testament, rather than the New, where Jesus words and life are a testament to a God who loves sinners, and forgives even those who crucified him.

Could it be that fundamentalist Christians are more comfortable with a God who exacts revenge than one who advocates turning the other cheek?

Could it be that fundamentalist Christians believe that God’s hatred of human sinfulness is so great that only the sacrifice of a deity could prevent Him from destroying the living inhabitants of the earth once again?

Could it be that the profession of faith in the biblical account of a universal flood protects fundamentalists from intellectual uncertainty and emotional anxiety?

Could it be that a Noah’s Ark facsimile and/or the discovery of wood on a mountain in Turkey lends credence to the creation myths recorded in Genesis?
Could it be that questioning the historical reality of the stories in the first eleven chapters of the Torah leads inevitably to a belief in evolution and eternal damnation?

What do you think?

*Genesis 14, The New Jerusalem Bible: Make it of reeds and caulk it with pitch inside and out.

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http://www.pbs.org/safr/1207/features/noah.htm

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The Management Guru and the “Brethren”

By Lawrence Downing, October 17, 2013

I read with interest that management guru Gary Hamel has been invited by General Conference leadership to assist them and other church administrators strategic planning. This invitation brought to mind another occasion when Neal C. Wilson, then president of the General Conference, invited another management guru, Prof. Paul Cone, Ph.D., to evaluate the GC management process and offer his suggestions.

After extensive evaluation and interviews with personnel on all levels of the organization, Paul submitted his findings to President Wilson. His conclusions and recommendations included the following:

Leadership Skills: Administrators must develop and exercise the following skills: Conceptual, Analytical, Human, Management of the Conversion and Transformation Process.*

“Executive skills,” he continued, “are applied primarily to the strategic planning function where effectiveness is dependent upon: Scanning and forecasting the external environment, finding opportunities to serve (services and markets), and adapting to threats and constraints. Resource allocations which promote the mission, priorities and performance. A cohesive organization system and structures which provide synergism. Good representation and satisfaction of constituencies (good communication and performance.) A demanding but fair performance evaluation system (including independent audit). Administrative climate for growth and innovation. The human resource is the only resource which can become more valuable over time—leaders provide the climate for growth, innovation, and performance. A reputation for and an example of fairness and commitment.”

In another section, Dr. Cone addressed organizational structure.

“Changes in the environment demand changes in strategy and the organization structure. We need to mold the church into a system which is best suited to the environment. We need to study, besides Scripture and theology, management and organization which meet the needs of our environment. To be effective in a turbulent environment requires identifying the mission, organization structure change, programs which relate to specific environments, good methods and sound resource deployment.

“Every organization must not only adapt to environment change but seek renewal. All organizations go through life cycle stages and reach a declining stage unless changes (primarily leadership and organization) occur to generate renewal.”

“Although the chief aim of the church is spiritual in nature, it is God’s church—not the administrators. Church leaders are too often content with ‘business as usual’ or even superficial work. Instead of building organizations to grow, most church leaders patch up weak points, fight fires when they break out and drift in to ‘paths of least resistance.’ Sincerity or praying is not enough. Most churches waste an incredible amount of resources, especially human resources (paid and volunteer,) time (especially in committee meetings), and ineffective effort (poor or no priorities.)

Addressing the church organization levels, Prof. Cone wrote, “The administrative home for the local church should be the local conference—this might be likened to the territorial division….Functional staff should be located here—not at the region nor at headquarters.”

In addressing the matter of denominational headquarters, Paul observed, “This is the legal corporation for the denomination where top leaders serve. Their function is primarily strategic planning, but not operating. Operating administration should be left to the local conference. Functional staff should be very lean and service the needs of headquarter leaders—not the field.”

Paul’s recommendations related to the Office of the President included the following: This office “…will contain the president who will be in charge of strategic planning for the denomination, along with two or more regional vice presidents who will be responsible for liaison with the regions. This way the president’s span of control will be reduced to a workable number.
It is recommended that a Strategic Planning Committee (which is really a permanent task force…) be chaired by the president. Those on the committee should be line personnel—the regional vice presidents. This satisfies the requirement that the people who will be implementing should be involved in saying exactly what that plan should be….The purpose of this committee is to keep the work of the church coordinated and integrate, monitor performance, and make any necessary adjustments to plan or performance.”

Addressing the operational functions of the church organization, Paul made these recommendations: “The same person should never be the president and the chairman of the board, unless it is a family-owned company. Open communication in board meetings is hindered when the president is the chairman, because he is the leader of about half of the board members (in the case of the current structure, the chairman is leader for most of the board members.) When the board chairman and the chief executive (president in this case) are one and the same, it confuses two different jobs and weakens the role of its directors.”

The report contained significant other recommendations and observations that Dr. Cone presented to President Wilson and the GC committee. At the conclusion of his presentation, Paul reported the following response: “At the end, the denomination’s president stood and expressed appreciation but said, ‘You are from the corporate world, and you don’t understand that your ideas will not work in a church.’ End of conversation and of any prospect for constructive change.”

Here’s the question: Will Mr. Hamel’s presentation and the response from the GC administration be *de je vue* all over again? Time will tell.

*The quoted material comes from a 1998 *Ministry* magazine article co-authored by Downing and Dr. Cone.*

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Baddeck River Interview

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted October 16, 2013

Adventist Today: So, Baddeck River, thank you for agreeing to talk with me today!

Baddeck River: It’s my pleasure!

AT: I understand that someone who is living along your banks has made a special request for an extended Indian summer, and that so far, her request has been granted.

BR: That’s true. We’ve had one bright blue day after another. It’s only rained twice in the past three weeks.

AT: What do you think of this weather?

BR: Oh, it’s fine. I like swimming along under a sunny sky as much as the next brook. But there is a downside to it, for me. I’m getting mighty shallow. You can see that in some places my stones are showing, and a child could wade across some spots right now. But I just keep on doing what I do.

AT: And what’s that?

BR: What the Creator made me for—seeking the ocean. That’s the only goal of my entire life—find a way around, under, or through all obstacles, join with other waters, and get to the sea. Of course, along the way, I sing a lot, too—that’s one of the gifts the Creator gave me—and share my water with everything from mice to moose and from chickweed to oak trees. People, too, of course. Funny critters, people. They seem to love rivers and hate rain!

AT: Don’t worry, most of the folks around here who are enjoying this particular spell of weather also enjoy rain. They grow gardens and know they depend on it. But what happens if the dry spell were to continue?

BR: Oh, we’ve had worse dry spells. I could tell you drought stories! To be quite simple, I get pretty small around the middle. I think you humans call it “tightening the belt.” But I just keep working on the goal of my life—get to the sea. My current might get pretty slow, but it never stops completely. Unless, of course, my water gets so low that the land can surround me.

AT: Then what happens? Do you cease to exist?

BR: (chuckling to itself) Don’t you know where rivers go?

AT: (blankly) No. . .

BR: (chuckles louder) Why do you think we call it drying up? You can’t trap us. The Creator always gives us a way of escaping. We just float up to the clouds, rain down somewhere else, and try again.

AT: Doesn’t that make you nervous?

BR: No. It might not be the life I planned, but anywhere the Creator wants to send me is fine with me. I’m not too worried, though. We have a lot of waters gathered together in this spot, and we’ve been here for centuries. I doubt we’ll go away completely. Anyway, I think the rain will start again within a couple of weeks. Come back and talk with me about too much rain sometime! Now, that’s a story!
AT: Thanks, maybe I will. Your attitude is inspiring. Our time is up for now. This is Baddeck Riverbank, Nova Scotia, signing off.
**Enhancing Your Relationships**

By Willie and Elaine Oliver  
Submitted October 16, 2013

Last week, AT interviewed the Olivers, who are the directors of General Conference Family Ministries Department. We promised then that you would hear more from them. This week we present an insightful article they wrote about the care and feeding of relationships. This article speaks about marriage; however the principles are universal to all relationships that we’d like to keep close and healthy. DLK

How would you describe your family relationships? Are you calling on Jesus for strength to help you live at peace with your loved ones each day? How’s that working for you? Do you think you are winning the battle or are you simply feeling frustrated and helpless with every passing hour? What can be done to improve your relationships from what feels like failure to at least a working relationship where you are not screaming at each other at every attempt to communicate?

The American television industry of the 1980s gave the world two family-type sit-coms that proliferated in American culture and beyond: *Married with Children* and *The Cosby Show*. In *Married With Children*, Al Bundy, a shoe salesman and his wife, Peggy, a homemaker, showed their commitment to marriage and family by staying together and living with their two children despite the less-than-pleasant family life dramatized in each episode. Their staying together was good. Their highly stressful interactions were painful to watch.

On the other hand, in *The Cosby Show*, Cliff Huxtable, an obstetrician and his wife, Clair, an attorney, also showed a high level of commitment to their marriage and family, which included five very energetic and opinionated children. Despite their problem-filled lives, they modeled an underlying joy by the way they handled their relationships with grace, skill, affirmation and humor.

Which model does your family or relationships more frequently resemble?

On August 26, 2013 we (Elaine and Willie) will celebrate twenty-nine years of marriage. *Celebrate* is an accurate and fitting description for the emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual pursuits we have engaged in with each other for almost three decades. To be sure, our marriage has not been all fun and games. However, our life together has been an extraordinary and rewarding experience we would do all over again if presented with the opportunity to do so.

What we shared with you above does not guarantee a happy and rewarding marriage in the days and years ahead. For a good marriage to remain good, a husband and wife must be intentional about connecting with each other in meaningful ways each day. They must also trust God for the strength to remain committed to engaging daily with each other in humility and grace. A
rewarding marital experience is more than simply spending long years together. This kind of relationship is nurtured by daily conveying special value to each other in the little things of life. May we remind you that in marriage there are no little things?

Communication

Healthy communication is an important ingredient for developing intimacy, a necessary factor for a strong marriage relationship. Growing a stronger relationship without healthy communication is like attempting to make apple juice without apples. It is simply impossible. Once a relationship is established, healthy communication remains the principal skill to maintaining marriage intimacy. The more intimate the relationship becomes the more sensitive and humble the communication must be.

The Bible states in Proverbs 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” (NKJV)

If you are married—and this is also true for meaningful relationships with your children and other people—the quality of your relationships will be based on the quality of your communication. Couples and people in relationships who communicate frequently and tenderly experience a level of intimacy that eludes couples and others who communicate infrequently and harshly. As human beings, warm and tender feelings flow toward people who make frequent deposits in our emotional bank accounts.

The emotional bank account is like any other bank account. One can only write a check, legally, from an account that has funds. To have money in a bank account one must make regular deposits of funds into that account. If no deposits are made, no money will be available against which to write checks. The same is true of the marriage relationship and other meaningful relationships. When one communicates kindly with a person one is in relationship with—and that goes beyond mere words—one is making deposits in that person’s emotional bank account. The more deposits one makes in that person’s emotional bank account, the more emotional health that relationship will have. The opposite means a relationship that is bankrupt.

So, how are you doing with deposits in the emotional bank accounts of people you are in relationship with? Are you kind, patient, affirming, loving and forgiving on a regular basis? Or, are you more commonly sarcastic, impatient, critical, unforgiving, demanding and crude?

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is another essential element in our journey of enhancing our relationships. In Ephesians 4:30-32, the apostle Paul declares: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (NKJV)

In this New Testament passage Paul warns us against several sins of attitude and magnifies what he wrote about anger. Bitterness refers to an established resentment that poisons the entire inner person. Our spouse or another person does something we don’t like, so we harbor ill will against him or her. Bitterness leads to anger, which is the blast on the outside of the feelings on the inside. Anger and wrath invariably lead to fights or evil speaking. We would do well to meditate on David’s description of healthy Christian relationships when he declares in Psalm 133:1: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” (NKJV)

Conclusion

So then, how shall it be with our relationships? Have we each been contributing to healthier or more toxic interactions in our relationships? Can we be honest with ourselves about what we have or have not been doing to add to the distress or improvement of our relationships? Have we been trusting God to gift us with the right attitude and actions to be catalysts for more wholesome and virtuous relationships?

The more emotional deposits we make in the lives of people we are in relationship, with the stronger and healthier our relationships will be. If we learn to forgive as Jesus forgives us each day, our relationships will begin to look like what God wants for each of us today. And, if we choose to make deposits each day in the emotional bank accounts of people we are in relationship with, the results will be out of this world.

Let us purpose in our hearts to live this way today and every day and by so doing help to hasten the coming of Jesus Christ, for “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35 (NKJV)

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Elaine Oliver, MA, CFLE, an educator and counseling psychologist, is associate director of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
The Battle Hymn before Armageddon

When an army goes out to fight a battle, what kinds of troops does a general send out first? On D-day, June 6, 1944, before the invasion of the infantry, the Allied Forces first bombarded the coast of Normandy with shells from Navy battle ships; then they dropped paratroopers behind enemy lines; and finally they sent the landing troops to go ashore on the beaches. In contrast to this, the Old Testament tells the story of how King Jehoshaphat arranged the formation of his army in preparation for a battle. In front of the army went a choir, singing, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever" (2 Chronicles 20:21).

The writer of Revelation seems to have arranged his inspired version of the last conflict between Christ and Satan in a similar fashion. In the literary sequence preceding the outpouring of the seven last plagues, and before the gathering for the battle of Armageddon, there appears a choir. Its members have won the victory over the beast, and they break out in a jubilant song of victory,

"Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are Your ways, You king of saints.
Who shall not fear and glorify Your name?
For all nations shall come and worship You,
For Your judgments are manifest" (Revelation 15:3, 4).

Notice that according to the literary arrangement of the material of Revelation, the redeemed saints sing this song prior to the outpouring on the seven last plagues on planet earth. Revelation does not record the singing of this song after their safe arrival in the New Jerusalem. Rather, this song, in the literary structure of Revelation, occurs after the covenant pageants of Revelation chapters 12-14. [See chapter 3 of this series for an outline of the entire sequence of these covenant pageants portraying in a bird’s-eye view the great controversy from inception to conclusion.]

The final four pageants are –

- Pageant #4 – The 144,000 sealed saints who sing a new song appear with the Lamb on Mt. Zion.
- Pageant #5 – God’s covenant lawsuit – the three angels’ messages.
- Pageant #6 – The separation of the righteous and the wicked in the two harvests.
- Pageant #7 – The singing of the victory song over the beast, [pageant #7] is actually the introductory sanctuary scene for the sequence of the 7 last plagues.

You have probably by now in this study of Revelation noticed that John does not always arrange his material in an exact chronological sequence. For example, you’ll notice here that the 144,000
appear *prior* to the giving of the three angels’ messages. If we believe that John was inspired by the Holy Spirit, not only in the *words* he wrote, but also in *the arrangement of the literary material*, what then might the Holy Spirit try to teach us between the lines?

The new song, sung by the 144,000, is actually part of an ongoing description of God’s sealed people that began back in chapter 6:17. In answer to the question, “Who is able to stand?” when Jesus appears in His second coming, John starts writing a narrative about God’s sealed people, the 144,000 (the number signifying completeness rather than an actual precise number of an elite group, as some suppose). They have a very special relationship to the Lamb, for they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. “And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore: the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (*Revelation 7:14-17*).

Then in *Revelation 14:1-6*, we meet this group of sealed individuals again. They sing a new song which only the 144,000 could learn. “These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (*Revelation 14:5*).

Two questions come up – are we going to have two different classes of saved individuals in heaven – (1) the 144,000 sealed ones, and (2) those who have won the victory over the beast? Has one group made greater achievement in Christian living than the other group? I doubt it! Could the reason that the song by the 144,000 is placed *prior* to the victory song over the beast be that to win the victory over the beast, you must win over the spirit of Babylon, and the only way to win over Babylon is to be sealed to the Lamb, Jesus Christ?

What this means is that…

- to sing a song of victory over the beast, you must first be able to sing about the joys of knowing and following the Lamb.

- to sing about overcoming the image, name, and number of the beast, you must first be sealed by the seal of God in your forehead.

- before you can sing about the victory over the beast, you must first know the Lamb.

- you win the victory over the beast, not by fighting the beast, but by worshiping the Lamb.
Have you noticed some of the allusions in Revelation 7 to the 23rd Psalm? Could it be that Psalm 23, the Shepherd’s Psalm, contains everything that we need to win the victory over the beast?

Sing and Worship Here Now!

What could be the reason that John, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, placed these two songs in a sequence prior to the outpouring of the seven last plagues and the 2nd coming of Christ? Because of the resurrection, Christ has legally has opened paradise for all believers, who are now seated in heavenly places with Christ (Ephesians 2:6). Notice that in Ephesians 2:4-8 Paul writes about this legal transaction prior to making his classic statement on salvation – “by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). So, though we are still here on earth, we are positionally and legally seated with Christ in heavenly places. Let’s take full advantage of this new legal position of ourselves, by starting to sing these two songs now, even while we are still physically present on planet earth.

Here is a comparison of the two songs and the singers. Notice that the song of the sealed 144,000 does not have any lyrics recorded in Revelation, whereas the victory song over the beast does give the lyrics.

Notice these Scriptural comparisons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revelation 14:1-5</th>
<th>Revelation 15:1-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A song from the perspective of those who are sealed, and who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.</td>
<td>A song from the perspective of those who overcome the deceptions of the beast, and thus have won the victory over the beast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The participants: the 144,000, who have the Father’s name written on their foreheads.</td>
<td>• The participants, who have won the victory over the beast, his image, name, and number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They stand on Mt. Zion.</td>
<td>• They stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire, having harps of God and singing the song of Moses and the Lamb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Voice of many waters, sound of harpists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• they sing a new song before the throne, and before the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• they are not defiled by women (plural) - [victory over the spiritual adultery of Babylon implied]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• they follow the Lamb wherever He goes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• there no deceit in their mouth, and they are without fault before the throne of God.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Great and marvelous are Your works... Just and true are Your ways
Who shall not fear You and glorify Your name?
All nations shall come and worship You, for Your judgments have been manifested.
As already noted, since we are now already legally seated with Christ in heavenly places, (Ephesians 2:6), we should with full assurance be able to sing this song now in advance of our arrival on the sea of glass. When we have heeded the everlasting gospel, then victory is already ours now in Jesus Christ regardless of whatever adverse and trying circumstances may surround us. We win the victory over the beast by worshiping and following the Lamb. Perhaps we could call this song “the Battle Hymn before Armageddon.” When all Satan’s forces of evil unite against God and His people, we will already have learned to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb as our personal battle hymn of Armageddon. This song will sustain us as the judgments of the plagues of God are being poured out (Revelation 16). I wonder if this victory song will be in the style of “Onward, Christian Soldiers, Marching as to War,” or whether it will be more in the style of “The Lord’s My Shepherd, I shall not want,” exuding a quiet confidence in the leading of Jesus as our shepherd through all of our personal circumstances and adversities.

As you compare the lyrics of this song with the wording of the 1st angels’ message, what conclusions do you draw?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The song of Moses and song of the Lamb</th>
<th>The 1st angel’s message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord, God Almighty.”</td>
<td>Fear God and give glory to Him…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Just and true are Your ways, You king of saints”</td>
<td>Every nation, kindred tongue and people…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who shall not fear and glorify Your name?</td>
<td>Worship Him who created…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For all nations shall come and worship You,</td>
<td>The hour of His judgment has come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Your judgments are manifest”</td>
<td>(Revelation 14:6,7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Revelation 15:3, 4).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Does it appear that the lyrics of the song are based on the wording of the 1st angel’s message? Is it possible that the 1st angel’s message contains everything we need for complete victory over both Babylon and the beast?

Do you look forward to the singing of the “song of Moses and the Lamb,” the victory song when the great controversy between Christ and Satan is finally over? Rather, I should say, almost over! When the three angels’ messages have done their work in us, the war for us will be over. What remains is that we will still have a part to play in the final judgment on the wicked. You have perhaps already noticed that the judgments of God proceed from the “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven” (Revelation 15:5), and they only take place after God’s redeemed people in a judicial testimony have declared, “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are your ways…for Your judgments have been manifested” (Revelation 15:3, 4).

Does God need our permission before He can go ahead and pour out the plagues? Not really! But for the sake of vindicating His holy name, and to maintain the security of His entire cosmos, we, the redeemed saints, will render our judicial testimonies while we are still here on earth before
the judgments proceed from the heavenly temple, more specifically, from the ark of the testimony. Because we are already legally positioned in heavenly places through Christ’s covenant, our testimonies are like depositions; they are legally valid as testimonies even though we are not physically present in the courtroom. What is the purpose of this song? It is probably best summarized by Paul in Romans 3:24-26.

“…being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”

This may be news to some who may have looked forward to singing this song as we would sing the “glory song,” – “when all my labors and trials are o’er...O that will be glory, be glory for me!” where between the lines we breathe a deep sigh of relief that we finally have made it. But when you read the words to this song, there is no glory for “I, me and myself” in its lyrics. It is totally focused on God and His justice, and not on us. His justice is not a separate quality of His character apart from and in contrast with His love. Both justice and love are combined in God’s holiness, with neither trait taking ascendency over the other.

Let’s explore the roots and the meanings of this song – first from within the book of Revelation itself, and, second, from its origins in the Old Testament in the experiences of Moses and the Israelites.

The Old Testament Roots of the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb

In the Old Testament, you will find the literary and experiential roots for the Song of Moses and the Lamb. Most individuals are able to see an obvious connection between this song and the song of victory led by Miriam on the shores of the Red Sea following the Exodus from Egypt. “I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously!” (Exodus 15:1). What is not so obvious is the connection between the Song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, and the song in Deuteronomy 31 and 32.

The wilderness journey of the Israelites started with singing at the Red Sea, and the journey also closed with a song. Just prior to their entry into the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to write down the words of a song, which, according to God’s intent, was to serve as a “witness for Me against the children of Israel” (Deuteronomy 31:19). God further told Moses to “take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you” (Deuteronomy 31:26). What follows next is an entire chapter (Deuteronomy 32) devoted the lyrics of that song.

When you examine the contents of that song (Deuteronomy 32:1-43), you will discover that it basically contains God’s indictments as both plaintiff and prosecutor against His people. But at the end of this song, our Plaintiff and Prosecutor also takes on the role as Judge/Redeemer in
redeeming His people.

Here is a brief outline –

**God’s Indictment Against His People – the Trial of the Covenant People**

- **A declaration of God’s greatness and justice:** “Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect. For all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He” (Deut. 32:3).

- **The story of God’s election of Israel as His very own people:** “He found him in a desert land and in the waste land, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed Him, He kept him as the apple of His eye” (Deut. 32:9, 10).

- **A recital of the covenant blessings by God for His people:** “He made him ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields...” (Deut. 32:12-14).

- **Israel’s Apostasy:**
  1. Israel could not handle the prosperity of God’s blessing: He grew fat, thick, obese, and kicked, and forsook God (Deut. 32:15).
  2. Israel provoked God to jealousy with foreign gods: “Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you” (Deut. 32:16-19). This is spiritual adultery – the core sin of Babylon.
  3. A recital of God’s reactions of wrath against His own people. (Deut. 32:19-36).
  4. God’s challenges His people to show the superiority of their gods: “He will say, ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge?’...let them rise and help you, and be your refuge” (Deut. 32:36-38). Your idols did not deliver what you expected them to deliver.

- **God’s judgment AGAINST His people** (Deut 32:39-42). This is what you deserve!
- **God’s judgment FOR His people:** “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people” (Deuteronomy 32:43).
What you have here is God’s indictment of His own people - as prosecutor, plaintiff, and judge –
in a song written by God Himself. God then instructed Moses to teach this song to the people. I
wonder if we ought to be singing lyrics patterned after the covenant song of Deuteronomy 32.
Would we not experience both joy and pain, tears and smiles, as we in singing would declare
God’s justice in songs like “Great is Thy faithfulness” or “All the way my Savior leads me...this
my song through endless ages, Jesus led me all the way.” Such singing has a way of making our
hearts tender with the love and compassion of Jesus, that we, who deserved only condemnation,
should be the recipients of such amazing grace! And the joy we experience—will it be because
we made it, even by the skin of our teeth, or, will it be because we have solid assurance based on
our personal experience of God’s covenant faithfulness?

Singing has always been one of God’s chosen ways to embed His truth in our hearts. So if your
Christian experience has become somewhat ho-hum, and you doubt that you are really going to
make it through the final conflict, then start a daily personal program of God’s music therapy for
your life now. This not about singing special music for your church someday, but it is about
processing the events of your own life so that your personal testimony of the “the song of Moses
and the song of the Lamb” will indeed be special music that will add to the security of God’s
cosmic government.

“The Lord Jesus is making experiments on human hearts through the exhibition of His mercy
and abundant grace. He is effecting transformations so amazing that Satan, with all his
triumphant boasting, with all his confederacy of evil united against God and the laws of His
government, stands viewing them as a fortress impregnable to his sophistries and delusions.
They are to him an incomprehensible mystery.” [1]

This testimony will also become a way of telling your own STORY to others here. As even now
you start processing the events of your own past HISTORY, according to the pattern of
Deuteronomy 32, out of the events of your life you will develop a testimony, your own STORY,
of the leading of Jesus Christ in your life. “I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined to me.
He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock,
and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth – praise to our God. Many will see
it, and fear, and trust in the Lord” (Psalm 40:1-3 NKJV).

Have you ever noticed that certain hymns or songs have a way of deeply touching your heart, as
the Spirit of God accesses the deep, hidden, and even wounded parts of your life? This is God’s
way of letting such personal worship of the Lamb become His medicine for your own life now,
and for the spiritual life of your own church. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all
wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing
with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).

Life Applications
Questions to Ponder…
1. Is joyful singing about God’s faithfulness your everyday experience? Or, is this only something reserved for a special elite of God’s saved saints?

2. What is your personal response to the “everlasting gospel?” Do the words “fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him as Creator” really encompass everything that God wants from us?

3. Is it possible for Christians to have assurance of salvation now, or is such assurance only possible when we at last stand on the sea of glass?

4. As you process all the events of your personal life, especially negative adversities, are you able to see the out-working of God’s providences according to Romans 8:28? What is your personal testimony about Jesus that would add to the cosmic security of God’s government?

Text to Remember:

“Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

Truths vs. Lies:

Replace the lies or half-truths of the enemy with these truths that will set you free.

Lies or half-truths of Satan

Assurance of salvation is dangerous for the Christian because it can lead to carelessness.

Assurance of salvation is not possible this side of heaven.

Fear of losing your salvation will keep you vigilant and on your toes.

Truths of God

Assurance of salvation is God’s gift to us through the Holy Spirit.

Assurance of salvation is not about our accomplishments, but it is about the solid security found in Christ’s atonement.

There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out all fear.
Welcome to Viewpoints: Adventist Perspectives on Peace, Justice and Righteousness. Stephen Eyer and Daneen Akers are the producers/directors of the new documentary film, Seventh-Gay Adventists: A Film About Faith on the Margins (http://www.sgamovie.com). They met in English class at Pacific Union College (and later taught there) and have been married for almost fifteen years. This is their second feature documentary film. They live with their four-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Lily, in San Francisco. You can learn more about their Kickstarter campaign to raise funds for the wide release of the film by visiting http://www.sgamovie.com/kickstarter.

AToday: What led you to be interested in this film project?

Eyler: Our introduction to this intersection of faith and identity really began because we started attending a small church plant in San Francisco led by Greg and Shasta Nelson, who were formerly Adventist pastors. They created a community that met on Sabbath mornings, and although it wasn’t officially an Adventist church, word got out that if you were an Adventist on the margins in the Bay Area, this could be a spiritual home. There were a good number of gay and lesbian Adventists who started attending there because they had no other place to worship on Sabbath. We simply got to know LGBT Adventists for the first time, and our assumptions and stereotypes did not match the people we got to know and love.
Akers: Although our families go back five generations in the Adventist Church, it wasn't until Prop 8 came through California in 2008 that we finally became aware of how LGBT Adventists were being treated in the church. We eventually helped start an advocacy group called Adventists Against Prop 8. Along with a growing group of Adventists in California, we tried to make the argument that regardless of your theology about same-sex marriage, Adventists have a long tradition of believing in a very robust separation of church and state due to our eschatology and sense of being a religious minority because of our day of worship. Adventists of all people should get that we shouldn't have a religiously motivated definition of marriage in the state constitution.

The Religious Liberty department of the Pacific Union Conference was passing out bulletin inserts that had false and outrageous stereotypes about gay people. That really got to us. We had gotten to know and be known by gay and lesbian Adventists because we were going to this small church, so when we saw some of the anti-gay religious rhetoric that was going around, it lit a fire in our bellies.

Eyer: When Prop 8 passed, we were really disappointed. Daneen was eight months pregnant with our daughter at the time, and it really impacted us to think that she was going to be born into a state and church where many of our friends were not treated equally under the law or seen as people with valid relationships with God. We questioned what we should do now and realized that we needed a film. If people are going to understand this issue in a way that breaks through stereotypes and allows the conversation to move forward in a constructive way, it will only happen if people can get to know gay and lesbian Adventists in the same way that Daneen and I had.

Akers: When we started off, we were making an issue film. We had seen some truly horrific treatment of LGBT Adventists in local churches during all of the angst and rhetoric of Prop 8. Memorably, a woman who had been involved in her church for 16 years was stripped of all of her leadership roles because she had a partner. All
of her roles except for directing the handbell choir because they didn’t have anyone else qualified to lead out. But she was told she could no longer turn and face the congregation from the platform. That sort of demeaning and dehumanizing treatment that we heard over and over again made us angry. However, we did not end up making an issue film, even if that’s where we began.

After asking ourselves and some trusted LGBT friends if a straight couple could make this film, we went on a three-month road trip around the United States when our daughter was nine months old. We stopped at most of the major Adventist population centers in North America and set up story booths to just listen to people's stories. People just poured their hearts out. It was really special. We felt, *Wow, people are really trusting us with profound, deep and often painful, painful stories; we have to do them justice.*

At the same time, we were interviewing professors, pastors, psychologists, theologians—experts. We thought we were still making an issue film at that point. We thought we'd have stories, but also experts talking like in most documentaries. We look back on that as a research phase of the film. Almost nothing that we shot during that trip is in the film, but it was really important for us as we were delving into all of this.

Talking to the conservative theologians really helped us realize that good, earnest, thoughtful people do disagree about their theological paradigms, but there's a lot we can do to listen better and stop talking at or about a particular demographic instead of letting them share their own stories. So we moved gradually into what the film is now, which is simply three stories. It is intentionally minimal in our editorial presence—there's no narrator, no soundtrack, no titles. It's just three people sharing their lives.
**Eyer:** It's been a privilege to get to know the gay Adventist community, to be stewards of their stories, and have the opportunity to take these stories on the road. It started with the story booths, listening to similar themes come up in stories over and over again. There is enormous sacrifice and often harm done when people cannot be authentic for fear of utter and total rejection. Almost everybody attempted suicide at some point, or at least thought about it seriously. You can't hear that and not do something about it. To me this has become a justice issue.

**Akers:** This film has never made sense on paper from a rational or financial standpoint. It's been a deep call. We felt these stories must be told.

**AToday:** How many film screenings have you done now?

**Akers:** Our first big screening was in Loma Linda in February 2012. Our first major festival premiere was in April of that year. Between festivals, church screenings and community screenings, we've done around 75 screenings. We estimate some 14,000 people have seen the film. To travel with the film, we had to give up having an apartment to make it possible, which meant that we spent a full year on the road traveling with our daughter to screenings (she’s now almost five and actually loves traveling.)

**AToday:** How have audiences generally responded to the film? What impact do you hope the film has on viewers?
Eyer: It's a remarkable experience to see people with very different perspectives come together, watch a film, and be able to have a conversation about it in a constructive way. That happened over and over. At the screening in Lincoln, NE, Chris Blake—a professor at Union College who moderated the discussion—joked that it was ironic a bunch of Adventists were able to create a sacred space in a theater of all places. But that's really what has happened. We've seen it be really powerful for people to get the chance to step inside the lives and perspectives of people they usually know little about. It's absolutely transformative, and that process of creating these sacred listening spaces all over the US, Canada and Australia has been one of my favorite parts of this entire project.

Akers: Even though there have been multiple times when we weren't sure how to make the next rent payment, we knew these stories had to be shared with the world because that culture of silence had to be broken. I feel like that's happened. I feel like we've accomplished what we set out to do, which was start a conversation through the lens of real people and real stories. When we talk after screenings, we make it clear that we're not interested in theological unity; I don't think it exists—like you're never going to have political unity—but we do think it's vital that people take the time to listen to each other's stories. So in our screenings we talk about a listening space, knowing that you're not going to agree with every aspect of someone’s life, but taking the time to experience their life a little bit and understanding that they actually have a relationship with God. That experience of bringing people with such diverse viewpoints together in conversation has been truly remarkable.

Compared with online venues, there is something different when we show up and connect with people in person. Whether or not we are in 100 percent agreement with each other, it is a profoundly healing, reconciling space.

And we just witnessed powerful shifts that have happened especially in the most conservative places. The screenings I was most scared of have been some of my favorites. There is such a distinct “before and after.” The people who hosted the screening in Keene, TX, were long-time residents of the community. They had been Adventist teachers for many years, and they said,
“We're tired of our gay kids killing themselves.” They've known several gay and lesbian young people who have committed suicide, and they finally said, “We don't care what flack we take for doing this; something is going to have to change. We must start talking about this.”

At the end of the screening, one woman stood up and said, “I grew up Adventist, went to Adventist schools, but I haven't gone to an Adventist church in 30 years since I realized I was a lesbian. I miss the church so much, but I know I'll never be able to go back.” A pastor in the back piped up and said, “You're welcome at our church.” And then other people started inviting her to their Sabbath School or their home and apologizing for how she’d been treated.

**AToday:** You talked about unity not being required to be loving. Why is this an important distinction for you?

**Akers:** There was an article in *The Atlantic* recently that perfectly describes what I've seen happening in the Adventist church.[1] Even conservative Christians everywhere are just really shifting. They're tired of being known as anti- this or that instead of being known for what they're actually for. I love Brian McLaren's quote, “Jesus didn't say, 'They'll know you are my disciples by your firm stance on divisive social topics.'” I think a lot of Christians are tired of these culture war fights. They want to have loving places where everyone is welcome. That doesn't mean everyone is theologically in the same place, but that's okay. They're really tired of these fights that tend to degrade and reject other people. They want to actually be about the priorities that God seems to have.

One conservative person wrote an open letter to me on *Spectrum.* At the end, he said, “You're winning. How are you going to treat those who disagree? How are those who win this going to treat those who still disagree?” I think that's a really profound question. I think it's tempting to “other” those who have “othered,” or to disown those who have disowned or hate those who hate. We turn around and do the same thing we're working against.
I really do hope the film fosters more love and more compassion for everyone, not just those who are on the margins, although that is obviously where we must start. I think this was the spirit at our screenings that so many people from the left, right, and middle responded positively too, and I hope that continues in our DVD stage too. The reason why this topic is often so contentious in religious spaces is because people are scared of what they don’t know, and they’re scared of change. Most people are simply reacting out of fear, and when we can move to love we can stop being scared of people who are different from us. Perfect love casts out fear.

**AToday**: One of the strengths of the screenings is the group conversation afterward. When people watch the DVD at home, they’ll miss this aspect.

**Eyer**: Yes, we're somewhat mourning the end of this phase of the screenings. We've done some small screenings, and they can also be very meaningful, although it’s not quite the same as watching quirky Adventist humor on the big screen with 200 other people!

**Akers**: We are going to film a small group discussion that will be on the DVD that we hope will be a helpful model and share some of the interesting things that aren’t necessarily in the film.

Our premise is that it is people in the pews who make change with these issues. It's not a top-down thing. It's people engaging a story with their heart, saying, “I don't know what to do with my theology. Maybe I don't have to figure it out right now, but I can see that person is seeking Christ like I am.” The church is not modeling how to have these conversations authentically and actually with the people directly implicated by our current policies and attitudes.

The people in the film, the way they respond to the church and their families, helps move us all into a better place. They're really good models. They show that people can have meaningful relationships without 100 percent agreement. Of course we do this on a million other topics. We have hugely divergent theologies around creation, women's ordination, divorce and remarriage, the nature of Christ (Are you pre-lapsarian or post-lapsarian?), or atonement theory—really big theological questions. And we really have a big discrepancy around how we treat homosexuals and heterosexuals who don’t match the policy on paper. Our policy is still that if you get divorced for any other reason than your spouse committed adultery, you're not supposed to get remarried. But of course heterosexuals do. Technically they’re “living in sin,” but we don't
require them to leave their families and break up their homes before we allow them to be part of our church.

Because the vast majority of us are heterosexuals, even if we're not divorced, we can understand why one might be divorced. Likely we've felt tempted by divorce, so it doesn't feel so foreign and “other,” whereas if you're a heterosexual, you don't at all understand what it's like to be homosexual. And you really don't know what it's like to be transgendered if you're cisgendered. This is one thing you can point a finger at and there's no finger pointing back at you if you're a straight, cisgendered person. So I think we've found comfort in something that requires other people to change, instead of stepping into unconditional love, which requires us to change.

I do not agree with the vast majority of media portrayals of all Christians being bigots when it comes to this, at least that is not my experience. I think most people are really wrestling to know how to respond, given their understanding of scripture and the people in their lives whose life and witness are challenging that understanding.

The film has become a movement about listening, sharing and stepping into unconditional love without caveats or performance clauses, even if we don't always agree.

The one other big item I’d like for Christians to change is the current mantra of “Love the sinner, but hate the sin.” I have a problem with that line that is so often used just to dismiss and judge people. Having heard from those on the receiving end of that line, I can tell you that it’s only felt as hate. That line and “Go and sin no more” are the two things that LGBT people are likely to hear from Christians. It's ironic that in a story all about why nobody should throw a stone because nobody is without sin, we identify as being Jesus—the sinless one—in that story. It's God who says, “Go and sin no more.” Many sincere Christians do not read that story and assume that adultery and committed, monogamous same-sex relationships are at all similar, but even if one does, I think it bears emphasizing that it is God who says, “Go and sin no more.” There are no humans around to even witness that moment. It's a private moment between that woman and Jesus, yet we've identified as the God character in that story, not the woman or the people throwing stones. It’s rather telling!
Today: Your Kickstarter campaign, which ends the evening of Oct 27, is raising a lot of money. Depending how much is raised, what are some of the special features you plan to add to the DVD/Blu-ray release?

Akers: We met our initial goal in less than four days, which was pretty amazing. And we're working on stretch goals now. The next major one will help us get it on iTunes, and the one after that will help us share the film and resource kits with Adventist universities.

Eyer: Since we've already met our basic goal, we are scheduling a Q&A as well as an intro to cover some of the most common questions that we've received during the screenings so people will have something if they want to watch in a small group setting. We're really hoping that the film can empower others to create these spaces of thoughtful conversation. Daneen is working on a discussion guide. We're going to include some deleted scenes, some that are pretty humorous.

Not only are we making DVDs and Blu-rays, we're making a digital version of the film too, which will mean that anyone in the world can download the film directly from our website, iTunes, Netflix, and other digital platforms soon. There are lots of places this film will finally be able to reach, and we've reached our goal to add six languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Russian, possibly Dutch, and maybe more as online versions in the future).
It’s both exciting and a bit frightening to see something we’ve been working on for more than four years be at this stage. We know these stories are going to impact a lot more people, and we’re hopeful about that. Seeing the enthusiastic response to the DVD fundraising campaign has helped affirm what we’ve been feeling this past year and a half screening the film—there is a huge desire to have this conversation in an honest way with real stories. And people are ready.

Breath of Life

October 16, 2013 - By T.W. Humphries

Breath of life so divine,
Breath of life so refined,
God of heaven, God of the cosmos.
God who created the land and sea,
And put the sun into its place,
For you and me.
God who heard Abraham's cry!
God who heard the beautiful song spring forth,
Breath of life yes you are,
Breath of life forevermore.
Breath of life so divine,
you breathed us into existence with the twinkling of your eye,
Hosanna to you in the highest!
For you are the glorious one!
you who created the spiders web,
you who created the spring and the autumn,
you who created snow so white,
you who created summers bright!
Glory be to you in the highest O God.
For you are our glorious maker.
The bedrock of the world, we see,
The Divine inspiration of our glee.
Impart in us a Holy spirit,
That will not recoil,
From anything that you might put to us.
The trail of life is long,
The heritage that we have is strong,
Because of you, we hear your name,
We call above in Heaven's name.
The bedrock is the bedrock will,
Continue ever still.
Glory be to you in the highest O God!
The rock the monument, the One above!
Thanks we say to you O God,
For giving us a special place,
As torchbearers of your spirit,
From the past to the future.
We love you still evermore.