God’s anger is a difficult subject that we must come to terms with.

The issue of God’s wrath has become somewhat controversial within the Adventist Church in recent years. The Bible speaks repeatedly of God’s wrath. Psalm 2:5 says, for example, that God “rebukes [the kings of the earth] in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath” (NIV). ** God said to Jeremiah, “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it”’ (25:15).

Revelation echoes the same theme in the New Testament. In the most vivid description of God’s wrath anywhere in the Bible, it says that those who accept the mark of the beast will “drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger” (14:10, NASB). And Paul spoke several times about God’s wrath in both Romans 1 and 2:

- “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the
  * Marvin Moore is the Editor of Signs of the Times®, whose editorial offices are in Nampa, Idaho.

** Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations in this article are taken from the New International Version.
in verse 8: “For those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.” Again, the words “there will be wrath and anger” are in the future tense, suggesting that the wrath and anger will be manifested at Christ’s second coming.

Passive Wrath. The active model of God’s wrath has prevailed exclusively within the Adventist Church throughout most of our history. The passive wrath model, however, gained a small but resolute following during the last three decades of the 20th century. This model proposes that God’s wrath is primarily exercised by His abandonment of evil to the natural outworking of its own destructiveness.

This is where Romans 1 is particularly relevant. Paul said that “the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness” (vs. 18). This verse could be interpreted to support the active wrath model. However, Paul wrote in the present tense—“the wrath of God is being revealed”—and there’s scant evidence of God’s active intervention in the lives of evil people at that time in history. Furthermore, several other statements Paul made in chapter 1 suggest that the passive wrath model is what he had in mind:

• “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another” (vs. 24).
• “Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts,” and they “received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (vss. 26, 27).
• “[God] gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done” (vs. 28).

These verses support the passive wrath model, because they state that God simply gives sinful people over to the natural outworking of their sins, letting nature take its course.

No Wrath. This is actually a common theme of those who propose the passive wrath model, often arguing the passive wrath model in no wrath terms, claiming that anger is contrary to God’s character of love.

If the idea of “no wrath” is excluded from the passive wrath model, God’s wrath is both active and passive. Romans 1 makes it clear that God’s wrath is passive at times. In fact, the proponents of the passive wrath model are close to being contradictory when they suggest that this is the exclusive way God expresses His wrath. The incidents of His active intervention to put down evil in the past and that He will do so again in the future.

Anger, Force, and God’s Love

Several years ago as editor of the Signs of the Times® I received a letter to the editor that illustrates the objection many proponents of the passive and no wrath models have to the idea that God’s wrath can also be active. This letter was in response to an article about Armageddon:

“I believe the view presented pictures God as arbitrary, vengeful, and severe, using His power to put down evil—the very characteristics that Satan attributes to God but that are actually characteristics of Satan himself. I do not believe that in the end God will finally resort to force to put down evil.”

This raises a significant question: How does the idea of God’s wrath—especially the concept of His active wrath—square with the primary attribute of God’s character, which is love?

We can safely begin by saying that any teaching about God’s ultimate dealing with sin and sinners must be consistent with His love. The problem for us humans is how to bring together everything we know about God without creating unacceptable contradictions. How should love respond to evil? Does love always sit back and wait for evil to resolve itself, or does love at times intervene actively to prevent evil from carrying out its harmful designs?

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It should be evident that active intervention may be the most loving thing that a loving being—divine or human—can do. A couple stories illustrate this point well.

The first is about a family in
We all want an angry God from time to time. The cry, "Where was God when...?" is a plea for an angry God. If we can feel anger over the little bit of abuse humans perpetrate against one another that we observe, how must God feel, who sees all the abuse that ever has happened and ever will happen?

which the father sexually abuses his daughter. One day he goes into the girl’s bedroom, and a few minutes later the mother hears the daughter crying out, “No, Daddy, no! Please, Daddy, stop!” So the mother goes to an adjoining room, kneels down, and prays for God to intervene.

In the second story, the teenage daughter of a farmer gets pregnant, but she hesitates to tell her parents because she fears that her father will kill her. Finally, however, it becomes impossible to hide the evidence, so before her father guesses the problem, she approaches him on the porch of their cabin. When he learns that she’s going to have a baby, he attacks her violently. In the midst of her screams, the door bursts open. The girl’s mother leaps out, points a rifle at her husband, and shouts, “You strike my daughter one more time, and you’re a dead man!”

Which mother showed the most love for her daughter—the one who prayed passively or the one who intervened actively? The answer is obvious. In the face of severe abuse, active intervention is the most loving thing that a loving being can do. Not to do so would be unloving.

Those who favor the no-wrath concept argue that God doesn’t become angry. This is what the correspondent who wrote to Signs of the Times® apparently believed. This view, however, involves a fundamental misunderstanding of anger, namely, that it’s always bad.

Unfortunately, many Christians have grown up with the idea that anger is bad. I can recall as a child being told that anger was bad, but “righteous indignation” was OK. Nobody ever defined righteous indignation, but plain old anger was always bad. And the proponents of the passive model of God’s wrath argue that, just as hot is the opposite of cold and light is the opposite of dark, so love is the opposite of anger and therefore anger is sinful, which is why a loving God will never become angry.

But what feeling would you experience if you saw a mother beating her five-year-old child with a piece of garden hose? Name the feeling you’d have if you saw a father hold the lighted end of a cigarette against his son’s bare skin. Or how about the parents who keep a child tied to the bedpost or locked in a dark closet day after day for weeks on end, wallowing in its own excrement. These are extreme examples, to be sure, but they do happen. So what feeling did you get when you read about these examples of abuse?

Anger is our normal human response to injustice, and it’s also a very loving response. It is bad only when we respond to it inappropriately, such as when we lose our tempers.

God never loses His temper, but His anger—His wrath—is a very appropriate and a very loving divine response to injustice. We all want an angry God from time to time. The cry, “Where was God when...?” is a plea for an angry God. If we can feel anger over the little bit of abuse humans perpetrate against one another that we observe, how must God feel, who sees all the abuse that ever has happened and ever will happen?

I have a friend who believes that anger is contrary to God’s character of love, so I asked him one day how he would feel if an intruder were to break into his house and rape one of his teen-age daughters. He said, “Murderous.” Then I asked him how he would want God to feel. He thought a moment, and then he said, “Murderous.”

A number of years ago, my wife and I visited the World War II concentration camp in Dachau, Germany. We felt profound anger as we saw how Hitler treated Jews and other “undesirables.” That was an entirely appropriate response.

Those who propose that God doesn’t become angry are rightly concerned to avoid compromising His mercy. But mercy and justice need each other. Justice without mercy results in tyranny, abuse, and torture. But so does mercy without justice, for mercy without justice allows evil people to take charge, as in the case of the mother who prayed instead of intervening with force to protect her daughter. Justice that refuses to intervene to protect the victims of abuse is very unmerciful.

But should anger intervene with force? Our Signs correspondent said No, claiming that force is a characteristic of Satan. The stories of the two mothers, however, help us to understand that sometimes forceful intervention against evil is the most moral and the most loving thing we can do.

My correspondent at Signs said that force is a characteristic of Satan. It’s true, of course, that Satan uses force—to impose suffering, not to prevent it. Often, Satan uses force to
get people to obey him. This God will never do. All who obey Him must do so by choice.

But does God ever use force? Is force ever an appropriate response for any loving being? Yes. Force is simply the exercise of power to bring about a desired result, and situations do exist in which it’s absolutely essential that good people exercise force in order to prevent horrible evil from gaining control and creating chaos and suffering.

In the presence of intolerable evil, force is also an entirely appropriate response from a loving God. The Bible says that when Lucifer and his angels chose to rebel against God’s law of love in heaven, Michael and His army of angels cast them out. That was force—God using His power to expel rebellion and evil from heaven. And the Bible teaches that an all-wise God will eventually exercise the same force to expel rebellion from the entire universe.

The Final Destruction of the Wicked

What about God’s wrath in the final destruction of the wicked that’s described so graphically in Revelation? Those who argue for God’s passive wrath exclusively point out, correctly, that Revelation is highly symbolic. However, it doesn’t follow that everything in Revelation is symbolic. Certainly the image of Christ riding a white horse at His second coming is symbolic. This is simply a way of stating the literal truth that His second coming will be a time of war. And war is always an act of violent intervention. The images of birds eating the flesh of the wicked and of beasts being thrown into a lake of fire are highly symbolic, but the idea behind these images—that Christ will destroy evil and evil people with force at His second coming—is very literal.

Proponents of the passive and no-wrath models are quite horrified at the suggestion that God will exercise His active wrath in the final punishment and destruction of the wicked. I suspect this is because they consider all anger to be bad. But when we consider anger an appropriate response to evil and injustice, then it makes perfect sense for a loving God to be active as well as passive in dealing with it. And the biblical teaching about the final punishment of the wicked in the lake of fire is simply a picture—symbolic, perhaps, but true in a very real sense—of God intervening actively to put an end to evil.

Let’s consider the prospect of God truly refusing to intervene with force to destroy the wicked, allowing their eternal demise to be simply the natural outworking of their choice to be evil. To do that, God would have to place them in a world all by themselves long enough for them to become extinct through degeneration, disease, and the reign of “tooth and claw.” They would suffer a miserable, prolonged, pathetic extinction. When we have a dog or cat with a painful terminal illness, in mercy we ask the veterinarian to “put it to sleep.” In the same way, God’s forceful destruction of the wicked is a merciful alternative to truly allowing nature to take its course.

A common explanation suggested by those who support the passive model of God’s wrath is that, rather than God Himself bringing fire down on the wicked, they’ll be destroyed by the revelation of His glory in the final judgment. But to absolve God of the responsibility for the death of the wicked by saying “He will just unveil His glory” hardly gets Him off the hook. Imagine for a moment that I have a laser beam in my forehead that will kill people if I take my hat off in their presence. If I ever did that and were hauled into court for murder, what do you think the judge and jury would say to my plea that “I didn’t kill anyone; I just took off my hat”?

If it’s within my power not take off my hat, then I’m responsible for those who die when I take it off, even if I didn’t strike them.

The Bible’s description of the final destruction of the wicked—fire coming down from God out of heaven—sounds like a releasing of the forces of nature that heretofore God has held in check. That’s pretty violent! A proponent of the passive model of God’s wrath might argue that God won’t personally destroy the wicked in the lake of fire; He will simply release the forces of nature. That’s like saying that I’m not responsible if my pit bull attacks and injures you because all I did was let go of the leash. I hardly think a judge would acquit me on that basis. If it’s within my power to restrain the dog, then I’m responsible for the consequences when I let it go. Similarly, if it’s within God’s power to restrain the forces of nature, then it’s hardly an argument in favor of the passive model of His wrath to say that the destruction of...
Is God vengeful? No—which means He isn’t spiteful.

Is He severe? If by severe we mean “malicious,” No, but if we mean “strict,” Yes. God is always strict in dealing with evil.

The life of every creature is ultimately in God’s hands. Therefore, when the time comes that the wicked are permanently destroyed, God will be responsible for their death, and whether He takes personal action to make that happen or merely allows it to happen is irrelevant.

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The life of every creature is ultimately in God’s hands. Therefore, when the time comes that the wicked are permanently destroyed, God will be responsible for their death, and whether He takes personal action to make that happen or merely allows it to happen is irrelevant. His justice is the reason that He will not only allow it to happen but will actually initiate its happening. And in the long-range scheme of things, that tragic event will be the most merciful thing a loving God could do!

Implications for the Atonement

The idea that God doesn’t become angry—that He doesn’t experience wrath—has major implications for understanding Christ’s atonement for sin. In order to explain the problem, we need to consider a couple of theological explanations for why Jesus died.

One explanation is called the “substitutionary model” of the atonement. The substitutionary model is based on the very biblical concept that the punishment for sin is death. However, a loving God didn’t want to see His children die, so He devised a plan whereby Jesus would take the guilt of their sins upon Himself and suffer God’s punishment in their place. His death would substitute for theirs. This would meet the demands of God’s justice for the death of the sinner and give His erring children another opportunity to accept Him and allow His Spirit to control their lives. This model is strongly supported by both the Old and New Testaments.

The sacrificial system described in Leviticus is an excellent example of the substitutionary model of the atonement. When a person sinned, he was instructed to bring a lamb, a goat, or a bullock to the altar of sacrifice, confess his sins over it, and kill it in the presence of the priest. The priest would then sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial victim either on the altar or on the curtain inside the tabernacle. The Bible says that “in this way the priest will make atonement for the man’s sin, and he will be forgiven” (Lev. 4:26). The conclusion seems inescapable that the animal took the sinner’s guilt symbolically upon itself, died in the sinner’s stead, and released the sinner from both the guilt for his sin and its punishment. It would be difficult to find a more obvious illustration of sacrificial substitution.

Isaiah 53 applied this concept to the suffering Servant, that is, the Messiah: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. . . . For the transgression of my people he was stricken. . . . The Lord [made] his life a guilt offering, . . . [He] . . . was numbered with the transgressors. . . . For he bore the sin of many” (Isa. 53:5, 8, 10, 12).

It’s impossible to miss the concept in these verses that the suffering Servant took upon Himself both the guilt of human sin and its punishment. And there’s an obvious use in verse 10 of the language of the Old Testament sacrificial system: “The Lord [made] his life a guilt offering.”

The King James Version says, “Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin,” and the New American Standard Bible says, “He would render Himself as a guilt offering.”

Several New Testament passages affirm the concept of sacrificial substitution. One of the best is Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ ”

The tree is a reference to Christ’s cross, by which Paul obviously means His death on the cross. And notice that Paul said that Christ became a curse for us, and by His death Christ “redeemed us from the curse of the law.” That’s clear substitutionary language.
The concept of substitutionary sacrifice is also evident in Ephesians 5:2, where Paul said that “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul said, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” And Peter said that “Christ suffered for you,” and “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:21, 24).

There’s no question that the Bible teaches sacrificial substitution in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Moral Influence Model of the Atonement

According to the moral influence theory of the atonement, Christ didn’t die as a substitute for sinners. His death on the cross was simply a demonstration of God’s supreme love for human beings. Seeing this profound example of love, sinful people will be influenced to respond by seeking His forgiveness.

There’s no question that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was a marvelous demonstration of God’s love for the human race. Many texts in the New Testament attest to that. One of the best known and best loved is John 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Ephesians 5:2, quoted earlier, also declares clearly that Christ’s death on the cross demonstrated His love for us: “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” The idea of the cross as a demonstration of God’s love for lost sinners is so pervasive in the New Testament that it hardly needs further corroboration.

So what is to be made of these two theories of the atonement? It would be impossible for any one model of the atonement to encompass all that Christ’s death on the cross accomplished. Human analogies are too limited for that. Our best understanding of the atonement is provided by examining the strengths of each model (including several not considered here). The moral influence model helps us to understand the great love that God and Christ have for human beings and the great drawing power of their love. The substitutionary model helps us understand something of God’s justice, the importance of His law, and the seriousness of sin in His sight.

The problem with the moral influence theory is in what it denies rather than in what it affirms. As pointed out earlier, the moral influence theory denies that Christ died as a substitute for human sin. It claims that God didn’t need satisfaction for His justice. The law didn’t demand a penalty that had to be paid. Christ’s death was exclusively for the purpose of drawing human beings to Himself in love. And that creates a major problem.

But what does this have to do with God’s wrath? The issue can be summed up in one simple question: What did Christ suffer on the cross? According to the substitutionary model of the atonement, by His death on the cross Jesus paid the price for human sin. And the price of human sin is to suffer the wrath of God that He will exercise against the wicked in the second death.

So did Christ suffer God’s active wrath or His passive wrath on the cross? Certainly, He suffered God’s passive wrath—God’s abandonment of sinners to the results of their sins. Jesus cried, “‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matt. 27:46). That’s passive wrath.

Did God take an active hand in the death of His Son? The Bible isn’t so clear on that. However, if God took a hand at all in removing life from His Son on Calvary, that would be active wrath. If wrath is God’s punishment for sin, and if sinners will suffer God’s active wrath at the time of the second death, then it would certainly be consistent for God to have taken an active role in the death of His Son on the cross.

If Jesus didn’t suffer God’s wrath for sin on the cross in any sense, then the substitutionary model of the atonement makes no sense, and we’re left with the moral influence model. Jesus’ death was a demonstration of God’s love for His children and nothing more. But this would make about as much sense as a father jumping off a high bridge and drowning in the river below to show his son how much he loved him. If the son had fallen into the river, then the father’s jumping off the bridge to save him would truly be a demonstration of his love for his son. But jumping for no good reason would be a demonstration of the father’s foolishness, not his love.

At the very least, Christ suffered God’s passive wrath on the cross and very likely His active wrath as well.

The wrath of God that Paul spoke of in Romans 1 was largely God’s passive wrath. But in Romans 2 he clearly had in mind God’s active wrath at the end of the age, because in verse 5 he said, “Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath.” That’s an eschatological statement. Again, in verse 8 he said, “For those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.”

God does have wrath, and this quality is perfectly in harmony with His character of love. Indeed, if He didn’t experience anger over all the pain and suffering He observes in our world, He’d be like my cat, which can observe all manner of abuse going on around it—and sleep through it all. I don’t want a God like that!
How do Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy address some of the puzzling questions that inquiring minds ask about Eden and the new earth?

In the original earth as it was created and in the new earth, was there and will there be no decay and no death of animals or plants? Do all living things live forever in a perfect world? To attempt to answer this question may seem arrogant or presumptuous. In fact it would be, since we haven’t been there and have been given very little information on the subject.

Instead, this will not attempt to answer the question so much as to clarify the issues so there will be less likelihood of settling for superficial answers. A survey of biblical and Ellen G. White accounts of the original creation and the re-created new earth, as commonly understood, helps to evaluate whether common ideas about paradise are actually supported by these sources.

Some of these accounts may not be meant to be taken as literally as they are often interpreted. For example, Isaiah 11:6-9 was actually part of a prophecy of the fall and restoration of Israel and uses a lot of figurative language. However, utilizing the most conservative reading of these texts, even if they were not meant that conservatively, will strengthen, rather than weaken, this evaluation.

One danger to avoid is the acceptance of a new idea or approach just because it is new and tantalizing. The other danger just as necessary to avoid is the persistent, unquestioning acceptance of an old idea just because it has been around so long.

In another article, I suggested that the best way for Scripture and science to interact is for science to challenge us to consider new ideas and then let Scripture be the standard to help us evaluate those ideas. This article will offer scientific information suggesting a variety of options that can be compared with what God has said about the original creation and the new earth. It could be argued that equal weight should be given to science and revelation and be willing to recognize that science can show us that revelation is wrong.

The more experience I have in science and the more Jesus becomes real to me, however, the more naive that approach appears. For instance, our experience with death has been limited to one ecological system that involves death for every creature. Our ability to analyze the issues scientifically is limited to that one ecological system. We can suggest some of the implications of a different system, but we have no ability to determine whether or not God could make such a system work.

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The Revealed Information About Paradise

The following quotations are often cited by Adventists who comment on this question:

“[T]he fair earth, as it came from the Creator’s hand, bore no blight of decay or shadow of the curse.”

“As they witnessed in drooping flower and falling leaf the first signs of decay, Adam and his companion mourned more deeply than men now mourn over their dead. The death of the frail, delicate flowers

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was indeed a cause of sorrow; but when the goodly trees cast off their leaves, the scene brought vividly to mind the stern fact that death is the portion of every living thing.”

“I saw another field full of all kinds of flowers [on the new earth], and as I plucked them, I cried out, ‘They will never fade.’ Next I saw a field of tall grass, most glorious to behold; it was living green and had a reflection of silver and gold, as it waved proudly to the glory of King Jesus. Then we entered a field full of all kinds of beasts—the lion, the lamb, the leopard, and the wolf, all together in perfect union. We passed through the midst of them, and they followed on peaceably after.”

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play with the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy one another for food.”

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4, NIV).

“Pain cannot exist in the atmosphere of heaven. There will be no more tears, no funeral trains, no badges of mourning.”

Several specific conditions in paradise are described above: (1) Several mammals are listed that will not hurt one another or us. (2) Poisonous snakes will not harm us. (3) Lions will eat vegetable matter. (4) Animals will not destroy one another for food. (5) Serpents will eat dust. (6) There will be no pain or tears. (7) Flowers will not fade. (8) There will be no decay.

These observations are sometimes interpreted to mean that no creatures or plants will ever die in the new earth, and that there will not even be any decay of vegetable matter. Is this conclusion the only one consistent with the brief prophetic comments?

Three possible implications of this issue will be addressed in this article: (1) Will there be a decay process that recycles nutrients? (2) Will no animals at all be eaten, or might this apply only to higher animals? (3) Will mammals and other animals not only be free from predation, but also live forever?

If the new earth will be a re-creation of the original earth and its biological realm as it was before sin, then it is fair to compare our biological world with the biblical statements about the new earth and evaluate the implications of the changes that may have occurred as the result of sin. It is also assumed that God did not completely overhaul the nature of life after sin.

Decay

What became of apple cores in Eden? It does not seem reasonable to suggest that they accumulated and lasted forever. Do the statements indicating no decay in Eden refer to the decay involved in recycling nutrients, or is that trying to make them mean much more than was intended? In Patriarchs and Prophets the first signs of decay are given as falling leaf and drooping flower, indicating changes in the plant world, and these were the beginning of the spread of death to things that did not previously die.
The falling leaves reminded Adam and Eve that they too would die. Does the use of the term decay in these references and others like them refer to the bacterial breakdown and recycling of organic refuse (apple cores, fallen twigs, dung), or is this more likely a general reference to the intrusion of death and suffering into the creation? Perhaps we tend to read our specific, technical definitions into words that were used with a more general meaning.

If we interpret the statements discussing decay as referring to the specific process of bacterial recycling, this has a number of implications that should not be ignored. The original diet of human beings included fruit and grain. All fruit begins with flowers, and the flower petals die and fall off to make room for the fruit. Then, after the fruit is eaten, there is usually some waste part of the fruit that is not edible. An analogous process is involved in the growth and eating of grain.

If “flowers never fading” means that each individual flower will last forever, then there could never be any fruit or grain. If flower petals do fall, they will need to be recycled, or they will accumulate indefinitely. There likely would be other organic waste matter as well. Will nobody ever accidentally break a twig from a tree? Or will there be twigs that need to be recycled? Today, trees lose small twigs and lower branches as the tree grows. All trees also make new leaves to replace old ones. Deciduous trees do this each year, but conifers are continuously replacing needles with new ones. Did this begin only after sin, or did trees always have a renewal process as conifers have? The same process occurs with animal hair (including human hair). Did animal hair never wear out in Eden, or were animals made to renew their fur coats periodically? What became of the old hair? Did every cell in the human body live forever, or were there continual renewal processes, as is presently true, with replacement of old cells and phagocytes that remove damaged cells?

Dung beetles have a life cycle centered on the recycling of dung. They form balls of dung that they bury in the ground, and then they lay their eggs in them. There are countless types of insects that live by recycling dung, dead wood, dead organisms, or other types of organic waste. Either they were designed for that function, or those adaptations have developed (evolved) since sin.

The Limits to Predation

The biblical statements indicating that mammals will not eat one another are certainly consistent with an absence of pain and suffering. Mammals and birds give indication of fear, pain, and suffering associated with predation. Also, those mammals and birds that have long-lasting pair bonds sometimes show evidence of a sense of loss after a mate or a parent dies. Does this mean that no animals ever will eat one another? What about bats and anteaters, which have very specialized adaptations for catching and eating insects? Will they still eat insects? Did they eat insects in the Garden of Eden; or were they originally quite different, and have their insect-eating adaptations developed (evolved) since sin?

One way to examine this question is to consider the highest level of life that can be eaten by other organisms without results that are evil in a moral sense: without causing pain and suffering.

What is it about death by being eaten that is evil? Since eating fruit was a part of God’s original plan for

| Human beings | highest level of intelligence; spiritual nature |
| Mammals | intelligent behavior; some with strong bonds to mother or mate (love); some act as if they have some ability to perceive death |
| Birds | much more instinctive (automatic) behavior than mammals, but more intelligent than reptiles; some have bonds to a specific mate |
| Reptiles, Amphibians | more intelligent than fish, but without bonds to other specific individuals (love); no concept of death |
| Fish | vertebrates, but with largely instinctive behavior |
| Invertebrates | organisms with power of movement, but no intelligent thought regarding pain or fear |
| Sessile Animals | invertebrates that do not move around, having no sense of pain or death |
| Plants | sessile organisms; no brain or sense organs |
| Fruits | periodically renewed resource; produced in excess |
An important question that still remains is: How much change is required to develop, from the created animals, the vertebrate predators that exist now? It is often assumed that this requires a lot of anatomical changes, but that is not necessarily true for many vertebrates. Possibly the change to a predatory lifestyle involved largely behavioral changes, with limited anatomical change.

us, it must be all right to eat some types of living tissue. The question is, What feature defines the limit of what can be eaten without introducing evil into nature? Animals move and plants generally do not: Is the ability to move the dividing line? Probably not, since some plants have at least some parts that move, and it seems as if it would take more than movement to define the limit of what can be eaten. If a bat eats an insect, is it a morally evil action, or were insects designed to fill a role in nature equivalent to mobile plants? Insects and other invertebrates will instinctively try to escape from predators, but this does not mean they understand death, or that they do not have any sense of what death means as if it would take more than movement to define the limit of what can be eaten. If a bat eats an insect, is it a morally evil action, or were insects designed to fill a role in nature equivalent to mobile plants? Insects and other invertebrates will instinctively try to escape from predators, but this does not mean they understand death, or that they do not have any sense of what death means. However, the killing and eating of reptiles by other animals is still difficult to reconcile with a perfect creation, and all of the examples mentioned in the Scripture texts quoted above are mammals. Perhaps mammals were created with behavioral controls that prevented them from attacking one another, and these controls broke down as the result of sin.

If insects were subject to predation in Eden, where, between insects and mammals, was the limit of predation? The specific animals that are listed in the revealed descriptions of paradise are mammals, except for the statement that “one animal was not to destroy another animal for food.” In this statement was the word animal used in the precise zoological sense of animals as compared to plants? Or was the common layman’s use of the word animal to mean “mammal” closer to what she had in mind?

Some birds also have strong pair bonds, and according to Konrad Lorenz, some even react to the death of a mate in much the same way as a human would. Reptiles, amphibians, and fish are much more instinctive in their behavior, so perhaps their death does not have the moral sig-

ificant of that of intelligent, warm-blooded animals. However, the killing and eating of reptiles by other animals is still difficult to reconcile with a world of peace and love.

Some of the possible options are:
1. Only plants could be eaten; no animals were ever eaten, including invertebrates. Animals that are specialized for eating insects, like anteaters and bats and spiders, have developed those adaptations since sin; baleen whales have also developed their baleen structures and the rest of their filter-feeding mechanism; all filter-feeding invertebrate animals (a filter that catches food items, including other animals, out of the water) have changed from their original structure to become filter-feeders. Insect-eating plants, such as the pitcher plant and Venus fly trap, have also evolved those adaptations since sin.
2. Insects and other invertebrates were part of the food chain, along with plants. No vertebrate animals were ever eaten by other animals. Behavior patterns that maintained this limit of predation began to break down after sin, along with human predation on animals. If invertebrates were originally a source of food for other animals, this eliminates the need to evolve all the filter-feeding and other mechanisms involved in the eating of invertebrates.

An important question that still remains is: How much change is required to develop, from the created animals, the vertebrate predators that exist now? It is often assumed that this requires a lot of anatomical changes, but that is not necessarily true for many vertebrates. Possibly the change to a predatory lifestyle involved largely behavioral changes, with limited anatomical change. A common objection to this idea is the observation that in mammals, there is considerable difference between the digestive systems of carnivores and herbivores. It is sometimes claimed that this difference between carni-
The issue of the limits of death in paradise needs to be considered in its own right, aside from the question of predation.

Some individuals believe that on the new earth, if we are about to accidentally step on an ant, an angel will be sure to move the ant aside. Surely angels are capable of being that alert, but is that really the way it will be?

Vore and herbivore digestive tracts would have to have developed since the beginning of sin. Closer inspection doesn’t seem to support this conclusion. Mammals can be grouped roughly into four categories, based on what they eat:

a. Grass leaves
b. Fruit, roots, fungi, seeds, invertebrates, occasional meat

c. Carrion
d. Mostly live animals

The big difference in digestive tracts is between group a and b, not between b and c, or between c and d. The herbivores in group a (cow family, deer family, and rabbits and hares, one rodent subfamily, etc.) have specialized features for dealing with the indigestible plant cell walls in grass and leaves. These features include longer intestines, and generally some type of fermentation system in which bacteria and protozoa break down the plant material into substances that mammals can use as an energy source. Some also chew the cud—chew and swallow the products from the fermentation chamber—including the cow family, deer family, and rabbits and hares. Perhaps the animals in groups b to d were originally all vegetarian (but not grass-eaters), and those that were anatomically capable of changing to meat eating made the change. The shearing and stabbing teeth of carnivores have perhaps been accentuated by natural selection, but their original function was the dismantling of fruit, etc. Some mammals that eat very little meat have large and powerful canine teeth. Also pet African lions and other carnivores have been raised on vegetarian diets and remained healthy—carnivores don’t necessarily need meat.

3. This option is like the last one, but includes some lower vertebrates on the menu. Perhaps cold-blooded vertebrates could be eaten by other animals in Eden—at least those types that do not exhibit any parental care or other bonding-like behaviors. And perhaps the carrion feeders like vultures have always been the garbage clean-up crew.

Death

The issue of the limits of death in paradise needs to be considered in its own right, aside from the question of predation. Some individuals believe that on the new earth, if we are about to accidentally step on an ant, an angel will be sure to move the ant aside. Surely angels are capable of being that alert, but is that really the way it will be? The discussion under the subject of predation is also pertinent here, in the sense that death has a different significance for invertebrates than it has for thinking, loving mammals. But other issues are involved as well. What does the tree of life mean for humans? We will need to eat of the tree of life in order to live forever. Patriarchs and Prophets says, “In order to possess an endless existence, man must continue to partake of the tree of life. Deprived of this, his vitality would gradually diminish until life should become extinct.” Is the tree of life just symbolic, or does it have some real function?

My favorite hypothesis is that the fruit of the tree of life contains a set of as-yet-unknown vitamins that activate a renewal or replacement mechanism in the cells of our bodies that prevents aging.

What about mice, lizards, and blue jays—do they live forever without eating from the tree of life? Perhaps the mice and other small animals gather from around the world periodically to eat from the tree of life, but that doesn’t seem highly probable. Was there an alternate source of the “tree of life vitamins” for non-human animals? Otherwise it would seem quite inconsistent that humans would have to eat from the tree of life, but other animals would live forever without doing so. On the other hand, another possibility is that humanity’s relationship to the tree of life is different from that of other animals, for the same reason that humanity has to use intelligence to accomplish many things that other animals do instinctively. If that is true, then perhaps humans need the tree of life, but other (non-rational, non-spiritual) animals live forever without the tree of life.

There are other implications, as well, if animals were originally intended to live forever. If that were true, then either the universe would have to expand forever, exponentially, so the excess animals could be moved to new homes, or else reproduction would have to stop when the earth was adequately supplied with animals. Of course this problem exists for humans no matter how other animal populations were controlled. If humans had not sinned, at some point human reproduction would have to have stopped unless the universe is forever
expanding.

The most direct statement pertinent to this question is this: "It was the first time he [Adam] had ever witnessed death, and he knew that had he been obedient to God, there would have been no death of man or beast." 11 It would be helpful if we had been given a definition of just what was meant here by beast. Did it mean domestic animals, mammals, or what? The part of the statement that says he had not witnessed death does not necessarily mean that no death of lower animals ever occurred down in their nests or burrows, and if Adam had not become subject to death he might have had quite a different perspective on the death of an insect or even a mouse.

Some of the options for the limits of death are:

1. Not only was there no predation, but no animals ever died. No insects will ever get accidentally stepped on, and even mice live forever.

2. Humans and other vertebrate animals (at least the higher, warm-blooded vertebrates) live forever. Plants and invertebrates all have a genetically determined life span (as is currently true), after which they die and are replaced by new offspring.

3. Humans (in addition to heavenly beings) live forever, and they do so because they eat from the tree of life. Higher vertebrates (perhaps all vertebrates) are not subject to predation, but all plants and most non-human animals have a genetically defined life span (as is currently true) and then quietly die and are recycled. Some mammals—and perhaps all—do not die. Carefully designed behavioral mechanisms limit predation to animals that do not suffer because of being killed, and death is limited to animals that do not understand the meaning of life and death. Synchrony in length of life within any given species reduces or eliminates the emotional pain of an animal losing a mate. Population control mechanisms are highly efficient and prevent overpopulation.

4. As in number 3, but all non-human animals are subject to death. They live out their genetically programmed lifecycle, then quietly die and are recycled.

Weighing the Possibilities
What do Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy tell us about these options, at least if we accept the more conservative interpretations?

1. The following hypotheses, favored by many Christians, are consistent with a literal reading of what has been revealed, but may not be required by the prophetic writings unless we read something between the lines that is not truly there or insist on a literal meaning that may have never been intended by the authors. There seems to be no bibli-cal reason to accept these hypotheses. The term decay can readily be understood as meaning the gradual degenerative effects of sin, not bacterial recycling. Ellen White’s exclamation upon being shown flowers in the new earth that “They will never fade” 12 doesn’t sound like a theological revelation, but rather more like a spontaneous reaction to the beauty before her.

• There was literally no decay, and thus there were no animal wastes, no organism ever died, and each flower, plant, leaf, twig, and mosquito lived forever.

• Only plants could be eaten; no animals were ever eaten, including invertebrates. Insect-eating plants and animals that are specialized for eating invertebrates, like anteaters and bats, spiders, and filter feeders, have developed those adaptations since sin.

• Not only was there no predation, but no animals ever died. No insects will ever get accidentally stepped on, and even mice live forever.

2. The following hypotheses are not clearly refuted by even the most conservative, literal reading of the prophetic writings. We can only judge them according to our subjective concepts of what is morally evil about death and/or predation at various levels of life.

• There was generally no decay, but there were biological mechanisms to care for the occasional fallen twig or leaf or flower.

• The flower-to-fruit cycle, the replacement of leaves and hair, the production of animal wastes, the continual replacement of old or damaged cells in organisms (including scavenging of these cells by other cells designed to do so), and the recycling of these were normal processes in Eden. After sin began to affect the Earth, there was a gradual loss of strength, soundness, health, or beauty; trees began to lose more leaves than the normal replacement, and perhaps flowers began to wilt and look ugly before falling off to make way for fruit. Or, perhaps, the statements about fading flowers means that there will always be beautiful flowers, not that each individual flower will last forever.

• Insects and other invertebrates were part of the food chain, along with plants. No vertebrate animals were ever eaten by other animals. Behavior patterns that maintained this limit of predation began to break down after sin, along with human predation on animals.

• Some lower vertebrates, in addition to the invertebrates, were eaten by other animals—at least those that do not exhibit any parental care or other bonding-like behaviors. And, perhaps, the carrion feeders like vultures have always been the garbage clean-up crew.

• Humans and other vertebrate
The Book of Revelation comprises some of the most important—yet difficult—reading in the Bible.

Ten keys should aid the interpreter of Revelation in coming to terms with its unique nature: (1) the genre of the book; (2) the purpose of the book; (3) the structure of the book; (4) the roots of Revelation in Old Testament theology and prophecy; (5) the essential unity of the book; (6) the ethical dualism of the book, especially in the Great Controversy theme; (7) the important theological themes; (8) the book’s sanctuary emphasis; (9) the distinctions between the symbolic and the literal, with particular attention to numerology; and (10) the message of Christ, as opposed to a schematization of history.

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REFERENCES
4. Early Writings, p. 18.
5. Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 68.
11. Ibid., p. 68.
12. Early Writings, p. 18.

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3. The following hypotheses do not seem to be compatible with at least some Scripture and/or Spirit of Prophecy, at least with our common understandings of relevant statements. It may be that such statements were always meant metaphorically rather than literally, but this is a matter for literary analysis. This exercise has considered the question from the viewpoint of science while assuming a basically literal meaning.

- Scripture has nothing to say on this issue.
- All nonhuman animals, including the higher mammals, are subject to death in a perfect world.

We cannot realistically expect to know answers to these questions until we get to heaven, and it is not important for us to have those answers. The benefit of this discussion is that it may help us avoid making claims not supported by careful study of the writings of God’s prophets. Perhaps the tentative conclusions reached here will also stimulate biblical scholars to analyze the pertinent texts in further ways that will project yet more light on the subject.

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Ten keys should aid the interpreter of Revelation in coming to terms with its unique nature: (1) the genre of the book; (2) the purpose of the book; (3) the structure of the book; (4) the roots of Revelation in Old Testament theology and prophecy; (5) the essential unity of the book; (6) the ethical dualism of the book, especially in the Great Controversy theme; (7) the important theological themes; (8) the book’s sanctuary emphasis; (9) the distinctions between the symbolic and the literal, with particular attention to numerology; and (10) the message of Christ, as opposed to a schematization of history.
To say Revelation is a prophecy, however, is to tell only part of the story. It is a very special kind of prophecy. Not only is it the only book of the New Testament that deals almost exclusively with the future, but it is also the most thoroughgoing example of biblical apocalyptic prophecy. It is the book from which the genre “apocalypse” takes its name.

1. The Genre of Revelation

Revelation claims to be a prophecy. In its prologue, a blessing is pronounced upon the one who takes to heart the words of “this prophecy” (1:3). Again, in the epilogue, a similar saying is pronounced by Jesus Himself: “Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book” (22:7). An angel tells John in 22:10, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book.” This same angel apparently regards John as among the prophets, because he speaks in verse 9 of “your brothers the prophets.” And Revelation is called a prophecy twice more in 22:18, 19.

To say Revelation is a prophecy, however, is to tell only part of the story. It is a very special kind of prophecy. Not only is it the only book of the New Testament that deals almost exclusively with the future, but it is also the most thoroughgoing example of biblical apocalyptic prophecy. It is the book from which the genre “apocalypse” takes its name. Though it was not the first apocalyptic work, it is the most characteristic and well known of all. The very first word of the book is apokalypsis, meaning an unveiling, uncovering, or revealing of something previously hidden. From this word we get the name Revelation. Many things that were previously hidden regarding the future are now revealed in this book.

Revelation also has elements of an epistle. Following the preamble in 1:1-3, there is a typical introduction in verses 4 and 5, following a style similar to that of the Pauline epistles. First, the name of the writer is given, followed by the identification of the addressees. Finally, there is a salutation, wishing grace and peace to the recipients from the triune Deity. In the subsequent vision of 1:9-3:22, seven letters are dictated by the glorified Christ to John, to be sent to the seven churches named in 1:11. Each of these letters, in turn, follows a slightly modified epistle form in which the recipients are named before the author identifies Himself. Instead of a salutation at the beginning, Jesus moves directly to the point: “I know your deeds,” but ends with an individual appeal and promise to each church. The book itself also ends with a close composed of appeals and promises and a final benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen” (22:21).

The genre of Revelation, complex as it may be, nevertheless offers us some keys for its interpretation in harmony with the function of each aspect of the genre. As a prophecy, it can be expected to speak prophetically, bringing a message direct from God. This is the substance of the first three verses of the book, assuring us that the message is from God, sent via His own appointed channels of revelation, and that there is a blessing in properly receiving it.

John designates it as “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (1:2), signifying that it carries the twofold witness that ensures its authority and veracity. We cannot afford to neglect it. Many today prefer not to consider its claims to prophetic authenticity as valid. Yet it has stood the test of time, and we ignore its claims to our own detriment. We will never be able to interpret the book correctly if we begin by denying the claims it makes to speak prophetically.

Second, the nature of its prophetic character is explicitly oriented toward the future. It represents that aspect of prophecy that reveals things to come. If Revelation is not accepted as actually foretelling the future, one will see only a feeble attempt at prophecy after the fact, which makes it a book of history that has little relevance for later generations.

Third, because Revelation is apocalyptic prophecy, we need to recognize that it differs in a number of significant ways from classical prophecy. Its primary purpose is not to deal with local, contemporary issues, but with the sovereignty of God in history and His broad, historical plan for the redemption of His covenant people and final judgment on their enemies. Apocalyptic is known for its cosmic sweep and emphasis on end time, among other things. This means we should not look for a narrow, local fulfillment of its visions, but should see the broad outlines of history from the time of John until the return of Christ to render judgment on sin and sinners, gather His covenant people, and establish His eternal kingdom. All history is moving toward this end and should be seen from this perspective. The great controversy between Christ and Satan is a major theme of Revelation, and a striking ethical dualism is apparent. The symbolism is extensive and composite, challenging us to understand it at a figurative level, but one
consistent with established biblical criteria and practice.

Finally, the epistolary aspects of the genre remind us that, as with other New Testament epistles, there is both a theological and a hortative purpose to the book. The theological elements serve as a foundation for the hortative elements. The appeal is very personal.

2. The Purpose of Revelation

The Book of Revelation has both an explicit and an implicit purpose. The explicit purpose is clearly stated in the very first verse of the book: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.”

According to this verse, God gave to Jesus a revelation to pass along to His servants to show them what must soon take place. This explicit purpose makes plain the future orientation of the prophetic contents of this book. At the same time, it conveys a sense of the imminence of coming events, for it states that these events “must soon take place.” Verse three adds that those who take to heart the words of this prophecy are blessed “because the time is near.” This clause, “the time is near,” is expressed again in 22:10.

In 4:1, at the beginning of the section of the book often considered historical in focus, John is invited by Christ, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” Again the future is a key aspect of the prophecies of the book. The sense of imminence is also conveyed explicitly and repeatedly, keeping expectation alive in readers’ minds. At the end of the book, the recipients are told three times by Jesus Himself, “I am coming soon!” (22:7, 12, 20).

Besides this explicit purpose of revealing the future as imminent expectation, an implicit purpose seems to coincide in the repeated calls for endurance and faithfulness on the part of the readers and hearers. Apocalyptic prophecy is given to meet the needs of those facing adversity. The precise nature of the adversity faced by the readers of Revelation has been debated by scholars, but there is little question that the book seems to have been written especially for those facing difficult times, including persecution. Jesus appeals to believers to hold fast till He comes, even unto death, so they will not lose their crown of life (2:10, 25; 3:11). There are further calls for patience and faithfulness on the part of the saints who face the persecuting beast in 13:10; 14:12. Many promises are made to those who overcome, despite obstacles, by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. This suggests the hortative purpose of the book, to encourage those facing trials and persecutions to be faithful until the end, in light of God’s sovereignty, the victory of the Lamb, and the promises of coming vindication and reward for the saints and judgment on their enemies.

3. The Structure of Revelation

Though there is little scholarly consensus on the overall structure of Revelation, most agree on a few key structural elements for any careful study of the book.

Probably the most important structural element is the division of the book into two main parts, one emphasizing primarily salvation-historical events and the other emphasizing primarily eschatological events. Most scholars divide the book between chapters 11 and 12. However, a number of Seventh-day Adventist scholars follow Kenneth Strand’s chiastic structure, which places the division between chapters 14 and 15. In reality, chapters 12-14 constitute a unit containing a mix of both historical and eschatological events, making it difficult to assign it exclusively to either section. Chapters 12-14 could be called the Great Controversy vision, which points all the way back to the beginning of rebellion in heaven and points forward to the glorified redeemed standing victorious with the Lamb on Mt. Zion. In any case, chapters 1-11 fall in the historical section and chapters 15-22 in the eschatological section. Contents of these sections must be interpreted accordingly. The visions of chapters 1-11 deal primarily with events that would occur between John’s day and the Second Coming, while the visions of chapters 15-22 deal primarily with events that take place at the end time and beyond. Since the historical visions generally cover events up to the end time, obviously there will be eschatological events found at the end of those visions in particular. It is hazardous for the interpreter to stray from this structural guideline.

A second important structural element is the explicit use of groups of seven throughout the book: seven letters, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Some authors have attempted to structure the whole
John's prophecies are rooted in the Old Testament prophecies, particularly those of the major and apocalyptic prophets. Revelation cannot be understood apart from its constant references to the Old Testament. Yet even here one must exercise caution, for John does not merely transfer Old Testament concepts to Revelation; he transforms them for his own purposes.

book according to groups of seven, but this may be going beyond the self-evident, although evidence for some others has been frequently cited. The explicit groups of seven form literary units that should be held together. Each of these literary units has an introduction that, except the first, reveals events taking place in the heavenly sanctuary while the events of the respective groups of seven are taking place on earth. These introductions cover the whole period represented by the respective groups, not just its beginning. Taken together with their introductions, they cover most of the Book of Revelation, leaving only the prologue, chapters 12-14, chapters 17-22, and the epilogue unaccounted for. If chapters 12-14 constitute a unit, as noted above, then only chapters 17-22 remain to be structured. Various proposals have been made, none of which is decisive. But we can know that they deal with final events and the judgment on God's enemies and the final reward of the saints.

Other important structural features include the prologue and epilogue, which include an epistolary introduction and conclusion and manifest remarkable similarities; recurring parallel themes and symbols that tie the book together as a unit; possible chiasms; and recapitulation of the historical visions, each covering the period from John's day to the Second Coming, in different ways, for different purposes.

4. The Relation of Revelation to the Old Testament

No other book of the New Testament draws on the Old Testament as heavily as does the Book of Revelation. Unless one appreciates this fact, one cannot fully grasp the meaning of the book. John is heavily indebted to the Old Testament for much of the theology, vocabulary, and symbolism of Revelation, although it is always Christologically informed. This is not to suggest that John did not receive his messages in visions, as he claims. Rather he saw things remarkably similar to those shown to Old Testament prophets and found it convenient to describe them by utilizing familiar Old Testament language and thought forms brought forcibly back to mind by his own visions. The extent of this indebtedness has been shown well in the significant work by Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible.*

John's prophecies are rooted in the Old Testament prophecies, particularly those of the major and apocalyptic prophets. Revelation cannot be understood apart from its constant references to the Old Testament. Yet even here one must exercise caution, for John does not merely transfer Old Testament concepts to Revelation; he transforms them for his own purposes.

Interestingly, there are no direct quotations, or even citations, of the Old Testament in Revelation, only backgrounds to which John seems to allude indirectly. These Old Testament backgrounds can be evaluated fairly objectively following a methodology established by Jon Paulien. Based on verbal, thematic, and structural parallels, he suggests ways of evaluating the certainty with which texts may be deemed to function as allusive backgrounds in Revelation.

5. The Unity of Revelation

In the early 20th century, a few proposals disputed the unity of the Book of Revelation. Most scholars today, however, agree on its unity. The complexity of the structure, interconnected as it is, is one of the compelling arguments for its unity.

One portion of the Book of Revelation is frequently interpretable by recourse to another, simply by cross-referencing the imagery or language. For example, the mention of the beast that comes up from the abyss in 11:7 and the great city spiritually called Sodom and Egypt in verse 8 may seem somewhat obscure in that context until one compares the language with chapter 17, where the great city and the beast that comes up from the abyss are more fully described and explained. Many similar examples exist throughout the book. Thus, the unity of Revelation permits it to interpret itself in many areas, supplemented, of course, by Old Testament allusive backgrounds, guided by verbal, thematic, and structural parallels to various Old Testament texts and contexts.

6. The Ethical Dualism of Revelation

One of the prominent characteristics of Johannine literature is its ethical dualism. This is no less characteristic of Revelation than it is of John's Gospel or his Epistles.

Ethical dualism refers to the clear and essential contrast between good and evil, no matter in what ways it is manifest or characterized. In Reveala-
tion this dualism appears in the Great Controversy motif, centered in chapter 12. It begins with the war in heaven between Michael and the dragon, and continues in the struggle on earth between the dragon-beast, including his heads and horns (earthly civil powers that accomplish his purposes), and the pure woman and her offspring, first the male Child (the messianic Lamb Himself), then the rest of her offspring. The pure woman is also shown in contrast to a great harlot, a religio-political power reigning over the kings of the earth and responsible for the blood of the saints and prophets. The symbol of the pure woman, in the end time age, is transformed into the bride of the Lamb by whose blood her children have overcome the dragon. The two women are also depicted as two cities in Revelation: The harlot is the great city variously characterized as Sodom, Egypt, and Babylon; while the bride is the Holy City, the new Jerusalem. The dragon, the beast (from the sea), and the false prophet (the beast from the earth) seem to form a triumvirate on earth (16:13) that constitutes a counterpart of the heavenly Trinity.

This ethical dualism is far-reaching in Revelation. There is little room for any middle ground. Most things belong to either one camp or the other. Any rational being, at least, cannot be neutral. One may be temporarily identified with the wrong camp (e.g., 2:2, 9, 13, 20; 3:9; 18:4), but one belongs innately to one or the other. The reader or hearer of the book can quickly identify which is the right side to be on and what needs to be done to be on that side. Once the two sides are clearly identified, it remains for the reader to choose which side to be identified with and to be faithful to that decision until the end.

7. Important Theological Themes in Revelation

The Book of Revelation is primarily concerned with a few theological issues: (1) God’s sovereignty, (2) God’s justice, (3) the process of salvation, (4) the role of Christ in salvation history, (5) the role of the church in God’s salvific plan, (6) the role of revelation and prophecy in communicating what is essential for salvation, (7) the role of personal decision in preparation for the judgment. These issues are closely intertwined in the book.

One cannot truly understand the issue of God’s justice independently of His sovereignty. He is sovereign because He is Creator of all things (4:11). He is before all else, greater and more powerful than all else, wiser than all else, and holier than all else (1:8; 4:8; 6:10; 15:3, 4). No one can question the infinite wisdom of His judgments, because He sees the end from the beginning and judges righteously. When He has completed His judgments, He is declared just and true in light of the equity with which He judges. Then He sets up His eternal kingdom, free from all unrighteousness.

Another reason for the proclamation of His justice, or righteousness, is that He has provided salvation as a free gift to the believer through the blood of Christ, the Lamb. The process of salvation is described at several points in the book, beginning in 1:5, 6. It is clear that it centers on the figure of the Lamb, making it Christologically oriented. The Christology of Revelation is extensive, particularly in the variety of titles and functions given to Christ in the book. Besides His function as sacrificial Lamb, Christ also functions as the promised Child of the woman (12:4, 5), as Lord of the church (1:10–3:22), as Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary and the One who effects the covenant (5:6–11:19), as Judge of the nations (6:16, 17; 14:10; 19:11–15), as returning Son of man (14:14–16; 22:7, 12, 20) and conquering King of kings and Lord of lords (17:14; 19:16), and finally, as Shepherd of His redeemed people (7:17) and the One who shares with God the worship of the redeemed hosts on the throne of the universe (22:3), among other things.

The people of God, or the church, also play a significant role in salvation history. This becomes evident from the very beginning, where the glorified Son of man is revealed to John as walking in the midst of seven golden candlesticks, which represent the churches, and as holding in His right hand seven stars, which represent the angels, or spiritual leaders, of the churches. The messages that Christ delivers to the churches make their role abundantly clear. The churches, and the spiritual leaders of the churches, are the designated recipients of the message of Christ to His people. It is within the churches that Christ and His Spirit work for the salvation of His elect. That the whole book is addressed to God’s people in the context of the
Blessings and promises are offered as incentives to accept the messages of the book and prepare for an eternal dwelling with God in a re-created heaven and earth, where sin, pain, sorrow, and death are no more. The path may be strewn with hardships, suffering, even death, but the one who overcomes and endures to the end will receive the crown of life.

The extent of these references and the interconnections among them make it unreasonable to consider interpreting the Book apart from the centrality of the sanctuary theme, particularly the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary from the Cross to the Second Coming. Much more attention needs to be given to this aspect of the theology of the book than has generally been done.

8. The Sanctuary in Revelation
Another of the important keys to understanding the Book of Revelation is a realization of the extent to which the sanctuary functions as a framework for the work of Christ in our salvation. On one level, John repeatedly mentions the temple as well as various articles of sanctuary furnishings, like seven lamps burning before the throne (4:5), golden bowls full of incense (5:8) and golden censers full of incense (8:3-5), unidentified altars (6:9; 11:1; 16:7), the golden altar before the throne (8:3, 5; 9:13), and the ark of the covenant (11:19). There are also individuals who are designated as priests, and some who seem to be dressed and function like priests. On a second level, John refers to the performance of some of the sanctuary rituals (8:3-6). The repeated reference to the Lamb and the blood of the Lamb is itself explicit sanctuary imagery. On a third level, careful research has shown that the Book of Revelation seems to follow the cycle of annual feasts associated with the Hebrew cultus.

The whole book is designated a revelation and a book of prophecy, as well as the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:1-3). This is not merely a designation of genre, but a theological assertion regarding the essential connection between communication of objective truth from God and the process of salvation. The expression, “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus,” which reappears throughout the book, is rooted in the legal concept of the twofold witness as essential for establishing truth. This is made more graphic in the case of God’s two witnesses in chapter 11, who prophesy for 1260 prophetic days and are martyred for their witness in the Great City. The two witnesses represent the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, or the witness of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles in the Old and New Testaments. All revelation is in harmony. Jesus Himself initiates the prophetic witness to the churches in Revelation. And He is called the Faithful and True Witness (3:14), as well as the Word of God (19:13). The revelation itself is in fact the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1). At the same time, Christ speaks to His churches by His Spirit (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), and 5:6 shows the intimate relation that exists between Christ and the Spirit, so that it would be a mistake to overlook the important role of the Holy Spirit in the prophetic revelation of God to His people. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (19:10).

As readers of the book respond to the prophetic witness calling them to salvation and steadfast faithfulness, they become prepared for the coming judgment. Everything in Revelation is to be understood in light of this impending judgment. The sense of imminence and urgency is everywhere communicated, from the very first verses (1:2, 3) to the very last verses (22:6, 7, 10, 12, 20). Appeals to respond are also found repeatedly in the book, from 1:3 to 22:17. Blessings and promises are offered as incentives to accept the messages of the book and prepare for an eternal dwelling with God in a re-created heaven and earth, where sin, pain, sorrow, and death are no more. The path may be strewn with hardships, suffering, even death, but the one who overcomes and endures to the end will receive the crown of life. This inheritance is worth every sacrifice. The redeemed will dwell with God and He with them.

9. Symbolism and Numerology in Revelation
The Book of Revelation is replete with symbolism and numerology. Extensive symbolism is one of the characteristics of apocalyptic. Numerology is also frequently used in apocalyptic, because numbers may have symbolic value. The symbolic value of a number does not necessarily mean it has no literal value. Some numbers are purely symbolic, while others seem to have a literal value, though perhaps also carrying some symbolic value. The key is to know when something is to be taken...
literally and when symbolically. This is no easy task.

Richard Davidson has suggested what may be a valuable insight into solving this problem in the Book of Revelation, at least with reference to sanctuary imagery, which comprises a significant part of the book. It has to do with the eschatological substructure of New Testament typology. He notes that “in the time of the church the earthly antitypes in the spiritual kingdom of grace find a spiritual (nonliteral), partial (nonfinal), and universal (nongeographical/ethnic) fulfillment, since they are spiritually (but not literally) related to Christ in the heavenlies. Thus, we should expect that when sanctuary/temple imagery in Revelation is applied to an earthly setting in the time of the church, there will be a spiritual and not literal interpretation, since the temple is a spiritual one here on earth.”

Conversely, he observes that “during the time of the church, the earthly spiritual kingdom is overarched by the literal rule of Christ in the heavenlies. Consistent with this New Testament perspective, the sanctuary typology of Revelation, when focused upon the heavenly sanctuary, partakes of the same modality as the presence of Christ, that is, a literal antitypical fulfillment.”

If this system of interpretation is consistently followed, many problems seem to be resolved in deciding what should be taken literally and what symbolically. Nonetheless, numbers still may have symbolic value, even in heavenly scenes that would be otherwise literally interpreted according to the above method. To determine what various numbers stand for requires careful cross-referencing of Scripture.

Traditionally, three has often been considered the number of God, or unity, while four has been considered the number of earth, or creation, but this is largely without biblical precedent. The numbers three and four have no clear symbolic meaning in Scripture, though some would suggest that symbolic meanings may be inferred from the emphasis given in various texts. John Davis argues that seven is the only number that can be clearly shown to have a symbolic use in Scripture. Seven, the sum of three plus four, represents completeness or perfection throughout Scripture, and is the most important number in Revelation. Ten is a number used primarily as a factor in multiplication, to create large round numbers. It appears as a unit in Revelation only in the 10 horns, with respect to which the number may have more literal than symbolic value. If it has any symbolic value, it is probably as a factor in multiplication, representing a basic mathematical unit of general nature. Twelve, incidentally the product of three and four, is widely understood to be the kingdom number, though this is inferential only, used as it is for the people of God who make up the kingdom, represented by the 12 tribes in the time of Israel and the 12 apostles in the time of the church. The numbers one thousand, ten thousand, and multiples thereof are generally used in Revelation to signify very large numbers, not exact figures.

The primary basis for interpreting either symbolism or numerology in Revelation is from within Scripture. Doing a concordance study is very useful, but one should focus particularly on those passages in which the image or number seems to have a symbolic value in the context. One may also learn what certain symbols or numbers represented in extrabiblical literature, but should exercise caution in allowing such information to outweigh or contravene the biblical evidence. Kenneth Strand has made some very practical suggestions for interpreting the symbolism within Revelation, to which the student of Revelation is referred.

Some readers of Revelation believe John was writing about events taking place in his own day, as well as events in the very near future. These interpreters ignore John’s own claims about what he is recording and why. They fail to accept John’s claim that he received visionary revelations from God that pertain exclusively to the future, especially to the time pertaining to the end-time judgment and the setting up of Christ’s eternal kingdom.

10. The Message of Christ in Revelation

Reserved for last is probably the most important key to interpreting Revelation. One needs to begin from the right assumptions. What is it that the book is trying to communicate? Some readers of Revelation believe John was writing about events taking place in his own day, as well as events in the very near future. These interpreters ignore John’s own claims about what he is recording and why. They fail to accept John’s claim that he received visionary revelations from God that pertain exclusively to the future, especially to the time pertaining to the end-time judgment and the setting up of Christ’s eternal kingdom. They see only the beginning of Christian history, but not the middle or the end. Nor do they see the message of Christ to His people in every age.

Other readers believe John is
writing only about the final events of history and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. They fail to see that John includes much historical activity before he gets to the end: seven churches, six seals, six trumpets, during which events continue on Earth. It is only in the days when the seventh trumpet sounds that the mystery of God is finished (10:7). These futurist interpreters see the end of Christian salvation history, but not its beginning or its struggle through the long ages that intervene before the end. Nor do they see the message of Christ for His people in every period.

Still other readers believe John is writing primarily about history, setting forth a detailed scheme of history by which we can reconstruct the past and predict yet future events if we will but decode the symbols correctly. The results are a vast diversity of opinions about the meaning of the many symbols and the resulting reconstructions of history past, present, and future. These historicist interpreters may be correct in seeing a rough outline of history afforded by the prophecies of Revelation, but they are often overzealous in attempting to define every detail of the symbolism in their scheme of history, resulting in speculative confusion and a tendency to keep changing the interpretation as extended time makes old interpretations invalid. Such a focus on history draws away the reader’s attention from the main message of the text, which would have been of spiritual benefit and blessing if applied as intended.

Even those idealist readers who, wrongly, believe Revelation is not about history—either past, present, or future—risk missing the true message of Christ to the reader by losing the perspective of the message, which is rooted in and tied to the progress of Christian salvation history.

Only a balanced approach to the interpretation of the book, keeping in mind the true object of the revelation, will yield satisfactory results. The revelation was given not only for John or for the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, but for God’s servants (1:1), who would live in the interim before the final judgment, to prepare them for the coming events. It was not preserved in the canon of Scripture as a history textbook, but as a message from Christ to His people, with the object of preparing them spiritually for what would lie ahead. Unless one reads the book with the intention of discerning this message from Christ, he or she has missed the most important content of the book. What happened in the past serves only as a witness to the trustworthiness of the revelations concerning the future. What will happen in the future is only a promise, dimly understood, of what we may expect, depending on the choices we make in the present. It is to our present choices that the book constantly appeals.

The most meaningful part of the book for our experience is the letters of Christ to seven churches. Here Christ speaks personally to every individual in every age. The seven churches represent the complete cross-section of the church in every age, as well as the various experiences that any individual Christian may have at any given time. That this is true may be seen from the injunction, repeated seven times: “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22 NRSV). The appeal is individual, and the message to each church is applied to all churches.

If one takes a similar approach to each of the visions of Revelation, seeking for the personal message from Christ to the reader, understood within the historical context to which the vision pertains and in light of the development of events described in the vision, with a view to personal application and present decision making, the blessing of 1:3 and 22:7 will accrue to the reader. That should be the goal of the study of the Book of Revelation. That alone will prepare the reader for what yet lies ahead.

REFERENCES

1 All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.
3 Hans K. LaRondelle, How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible (Sarasota, Fla.: First Impressions, 1997).
6 Ibid., p. 111.
The Associate Editor’s Desk

Mel Gibson’s film *The Passion of the Christ* has been shown in cinemas around the world. The film, based on the life of Christ, has been glorified and vilified, debated and debunked. Leon Wieseltier, the editor of *The New Republic*, said *The Passion* is “a repulsive, masochistic fantasy” while a fictional conspiracy theory implicating a major world religion, the Catholic Church, is described as “a compelling blend of history and page-turning suspense.”

**The Plot**

This “page-turner” begins with the murder of a French museum curator who was involved in the Priory of Sion—a secret society whose members, it is claimed, included Leonardo da Vinci. Sophie, a French cryptologist, and the victim’s granddaughter, and Robert Langdon, a scholarly Harvard professor, are commissioned to decipher a cryptic message left by the curator before his death. In solving the enigmatic riddle, they are stunned to discover a trail of clues hidden in the paintings of da Vinci. They leave Paris for England one step ahead of the police—and of a character named Silas, a mad albino monk who works for Opus Dei, a Roman Catholic organization, and who will stop at nothing to prevent them from finding the Holy Grail, which is at the center of this mystery novel. In the course of the story, the reader is confronted with a barrage of codes, puzzles, mysteries, and conspiracies. When Sophie and Robert finally solve the code, they discover that the Holy Grail was not the cup Jesus Christ allegedly used at the Last Supper but the body of Mary Magdalene. She was the vessel that held the blood of Jesus Christ in her womb while bearing His child.

**The Priory of Sion**

The book makes two initial claims that are not supported by history. On page one, the book claims as fact: (1) the Priory of Sion is a real European secret society; and (2) in 1975, Paris’s Bibliothèque Nationale discovered parchments known as Les Dossiers Secrets, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Sandro Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci.

The Priory of Sion was supposedly founded in Jerusalem in 1099 by a crusading French king named Godefroi de Bouillon. Its purpose, according to the author, Dan Brown, was to preserve a great secret that had been handed down from generation to generation of Godefroi’s ancestors since the time of Christ. Hidden documents buried beneath the ruins of the temple in Jerusalem allegedly corroborated this secret.

And the great secret they supposedly sheltered was Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene, which resulted in a daughter named Sarah. Jesus’ bloodline supposedly continued through the Merovingian dynasty of French kings and survives even today. The Priory of Sion exists, Brown claims, to keep a watchful eye over the descendants of Jesus and Mary and wait for the perfect moment to reveal the secret to the world.

The facts are that in the 1950s, a man by the name of Pierre Plantard began promoting himself in Catholic circles as the Merovingian pretender to the throne of France. In 1956, Plantard and others created a society named the Priory of Sion, a right-wing political action group. Plantard’s hoax was actually exposed in a series of French books and a BBC documentary in 1996, but this news—fortunately for Dan Brown—has not reached too many of his readers. Plantard turned out to be an anti-Semite with a criminal record for fraud, while the real Priory of Sion is a little splinter social group founded half a century ago. Thus the most important strand in the central plot of *The Da Vinci Code* is a total hoax.

**Christian History Under Attack**

*The Da Vinci Code* portrays Christianity—and specifically the
Catholic Church—as the real villain of the story. The many outrageous and false claims scattered throughout the book include:

1. Not the canonical Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John but the Gnostic gospels are the earliest gospels. The book’s fictional historian, Sir Leigh Teabing, claims that more than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament and that only four were chosen. The rest, many of which, he claims, were earlier than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were suppressed.

In fact, there are only about 35 extant non-canonical gospels, and there is general agreement among scholars of all persuasions that the canonical Gospels were written in the first century A.D., while the non-canonical gospels, also called Gnostic gospels, come from the second and third century A.D. Gnosticism, from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge,” was an early Christian heresy in the second and third centuries that sought to combine Christianity with various ancient philosophical systems from Greece, Persia, and India. Gnostics claimed to have secret knowledge from and philosophical systems from Greece, which contained books like the gospels of Thomas, New Testament. They produced about Jesus not contained in the to have secret knowledge from and Persia, and India. Gnostics claimed philosophical systems from Greece, Christianity with various ancient centuries that sought to combine tian heresy in the second and third century A.D. Gnosticism, “knowledge,” was an early Christian heresy in the second and third century A.D. Gnosticism, from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge,” was an early Christian heresy in the second and third centuries that sought to combine Christianity with various ancient philosophical systems from Greece, Persia, and India. Gnostics claimed to have secret knowledge from and about Jesus not contained in the New Testament. They produced books like the gospels of Thomas, Philip, and Mary, which contained sayings of Jesus and stories about His life not contained in the canonical Gospels. In rewriting the life of Christ, Dan Brown relies heavily on the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary. The historical record, however, clearly indicates that the Gnostic gospels were written no earlier than the late second or early third centuries. Nevertheless, in *The Da Vinci Code*, these books are portrayed as the real gospels.

2. Jesus was considered by His followers as a mortal prophet. He was deified by the Roman emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

The historical fact is that Jesus was worshiped as God from the first century on. In the New Testament, Jesus is called God a number of times (John 20:28; Phil. 2:5, 6; Titus 2:13), and He repeatedly accepted the worship of human beings (Matt. 14:33; 28:9; John 9:38). The Council of Nicea in 325 did not deify Jesus; it merely formalized and clarified the first-century belief that Jesus was God in human flesh. New Testament scholar Darrell L. Bock says, “The deity of Jesus was not a creation of a fourth century vote or council but is based on the teaching of the four Gospels and the other New Testament books. These four canonical Gospels are rooted in apostolic tradition, and they were firmly established as the defining texts of the Christian Church by the end of the second century, if not earlier.”

The fictional Sir Leigh Teabing’s claim that the vote at Nicea was a close one’ is also pure fiction. The vote to affirm Christ’s divinity was a landslide: only two of the 318 bishops dissented.

3. Teabing claims that “Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burnt.”

There is not a shred of historical evidence for this claim. Though the complete New Testament canon with the 27 books we have today was not accepted by all the churches until the middle of the fourth century, most of the New Testament books were accepted as Scripture in the second century A.D., 200 years before Constantine. Second Peter 3:16 already refers to Paul’s letters as Scripture; and the church fathers in the second century (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus) quote from 24 of the 27 books of the New Testament, indicating that by that time the New Testament canon had by and large been established. Thus, if most of the books of the New Testament were already widely used 200 years before Constantine, how could the emperor have invented or altered them? The topic of the canon did not even come up at the Council of Nicea.

4. Brown’s scholarly protagonist Teabing claims that Jesus must have been married because he was a Jew, and that he secretly married Mary Magdalene because, according to Gnostic writings, Jesus kissed Mary on the mouth and the disciples were jealous of their special relationship.

To support his first assertion, Teabing says that, according to Jewish custom, every man had to get married. Celibacy, he claims, was condemned; therefore, Jesus, as a good Jew, must have been married. There is no historical evidence that Jesus was married, nor is it correct to say that all Jews had to marry. The Essenes, a Jewish sect in the first century, were largely celibate. The Jewish historian Josephus commends the Essenes for their lifestyle and says, “There are about four thousand men that live in this way, and neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants.” As far as we know, John the Baptist was also not married. There is no reason to assume that Jesus could not have remained celibate, considering the mission He had to fulfill. Jesus’ own teaching in Matthew 19:12: “‘There are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it’” (NKJV) appears to be based on His commitment to His
mission and bachelorhood.

The second claim that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene is pure speculation. Since the New Testament provides absolutely no support for this assertion, Teabing must again resort to later Gnostic writings, particularly the Gospel of Philip (late third century A.D.). Teabing reads from the Gospel of Philip as if the text were clear and unambiguous, “And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalen. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on the mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval.” The relevant portion is in fact fairly sketchy. The fragment from the Gospel of Philip reads, “And the companion of the . . . Mary Magdalen . . . Her more than . . . the disciples . . . kiss her . . . on her . . .” (63:33-36). Teabing makes a romantic relationship out of this passage, though the text could also be a reference to the holy kiss, a chaste kiss of fellowship, mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:20. But even if this is a reference to a romantic relationship between Jesus and Mary, it is the invention of a third-century Gnostic writer and not a historical fact based on evidence.

Other historically inaccurate statements in the book include the claims that the Jews worshiped Yahweh and His feminine counterpart, the Shekinah, in Solomon’s temple through the services of sacred prostitution; that thousands of secret documents disprove key points of Christianity; that the Dead Sea Scrolls speak of Christ’s ministry in very human terms; and that “the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda—to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base.”

The Relevance of The Da Vinci Code

Attempts to undermine the Christian tradition—to show that it is a fraud with no basis in history or reason—are not new. The Da Vinci Code is doing it on a popular level. For the past 20 years, a similar attempt on a scholarly level has been taking place in America through the Jesus Seminars. The Jesus Seminar is a group of New Testament scholars. The original 200 have dwindled to less than half that number, who focus on the sayings of Jesus within the four Gospels to determine the probability of His actually having said the things attributed to Him.

After discussing a statement of Jesus, they vote with different colored beads as to the probability that Jesus actually said what the Gospels claim He said. A red bead means Jesus undoubtedly said it; pink means He probably said it; gray means He did not say it, but the ideas are close to His own; and black means He did not say it and the saying represents a later tradition.

“T"heir voting conclusions: Over 80 percent of the statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are, by voting consensus, either gray or black. This means that only 20 percent of Jesus’ statements are likely to have been spoken by Him.”

The Jesus Seminar is a scholarly attempt to replace the canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—with a speculative document known as Q (from the German word Quelle—“source”) and the second-century Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. Like the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary in The Da Vinci Code, the Gospel of Thomas is regarded as carrying more authentic traditions than the canonical Gospels. The Da Vinci Code and the Jesus Seminars, one popular and the other scholarly, are a concerted effort by the enemy of all righteousness to attack the very foundation of Christianity—the salvation history as recorded in the four Gospels.

Conclusion

Since The Da Vinci Code was published in 2003, more than 30 million copies have been sold in 40 languages. Because many Christians are biblically and historically illiterate, they will be easily led astray by the fictional Sir Leigh Teabing’s “scholarly pronouncements” about Christ, Mary Magdalen, and the history of Christianity. Through The Da Vinci Code the esoteric teaching of Gnosticism has become mainstream, and many readers will not recognize the blatant inaccuracies put forward as buried truths.

The Priory of Sion is a hoax; that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalen is fiction; that He had a daughter is fiction; that the French Merovingian kings are the descendants of Jesus is fiction; that the Gnostic gospels were written before the canonical Gospels is fiction; and that Jesus was not recognized as divine until the Council of Nicea in 325 is fiction. Fiction is defined as “something feigned, invented, or imagined, a made-up story.”

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3 Jeffrey Ayers, Library Journal (February 1, 2003).
6 Josephus, Antiquities, 18.1.5.20, 21.
The best place to go for accounts of Jesus is and always has been the Bible. Recently though, a spate of so-called scholarship has been questioning not only the accuracy of the scriptural record about Jesus in particular, but also the integrity of the biblical witness as a whole. Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* and the National Geographic Society’s publication of the long lost *Gospel of Judas* reflect both the diversity and subtle nature of such criticism. One purports to be a “fact-based” novel; the other, high-browed scholarship that eschews any notion of fabrication.

Novels rarely inspire controversy, but when they do, it’s not the story itself that generates the stir; it’s the ideas behind the story. Narrative can itself that generates the stir; it’s the notion of fabrication. Browed scholarship that eschews any “fact-based” novel; the other, high-

How Not to Get Lost When Reading the Lost Gospels

The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book,” says hero Robert Langdon in *The Da Vinci Code*.1

The book asserts further that the pagan emperor Constantine edited the Scriptures to make Jesus appear divine. Though thousands of documents already existed chronicling Jesus’ mortal life, Constantine had the New Testament writings edited and embellished in order to make Jesus appear godlike: The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned, and Jesus’ humanity thus suppressed.

According to *The Da Vinci Code*, these suppressed and subsequently lost gospels tell us the truth about Jesus as a “mere man.” Fortunately for historians, some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. These lost gospels highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, supposedly clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed an agenda to promote Jesus’ divinity and use His influence to solidify their own power base.2

Of course, *Time* and *Newsweek* reports of the actual find of one of these lost gospels, the *Gospel of Judas*—a crumbling Coptic papyrus, 13 sheets, in more than 1,000 fragments, written on both sides, found in an Egyptian desert cave in the 1970s, passed from one antiquities dealer to another, sold for $1 million, now being restored and translated—only adds authenticity to Brown’s fiction, not only to assertions of conspiracy but also to questions about the biblical record.3 No matter the science and scholarship of piecing together crumbling fragments and filling in the gaps like a great jigsaw puzzle, the evident story line is as controversial as *The Da Vinci Code*. Judas was really Jesus’ best friend whom Jesus asked to betray Him in order to free His spirit from its fleshly prison. Somebody had to betray Jesus. In the end, Judas was a victim of a design bigger than himself. It’s another one of those “everything-you-know-is-wrong” thrill rides.

People gravitate toward conspiracies. And in an age when the volume of available information vastly exceeds the quality of education, it is easy to become confused or skeptical about where truth lies, to believe conspiracy conjectures. It is easy, too, to look for and find someone or something that will substantiate what you want to believe is true. Inaccurate information can be both deadly and self-affirming. People tend to look for versions of Jesus (and spirituality) that reinforce the one they already have.

Historical scholarship points out that these gospels only repeat what the Gnostics a hundred years after Christ were claiming to have found in the canonical Gospels.4 The lost gospels say more about the group that produced them than about the facts of Jesus’ life and death or even the understanding of the earliest followers.5 They are a product of their time. A.D. 150 was a heyday for quasi-Christians who postulated a higher God above the God of the Old Testament and tried to reinterpret Christianity from a Gnostic perspective—an ancient form of the New Age Movement. Even scholars who deny the unique authority of the Christian Scriptures readily admit that the canonical Gospels provide the historically closest glimpse of Jesus. Those familiar with this subject also observe that there are thousands of biblical manuscripts or copies of manuscripts that date as far back as the second century—exponentially more than for most...
other historical documents. The correct assumption is that the originals appeared in the first century within 20 years of Christ’s death, extending through the writing of John’s Gospel somewhere in the A.D. 90s.

When dealing with translations, it is impossible to avoid some variance, especially when working with ancient languages. Those familiar with existing translations of the Bible, however, know that the differences among them are minor. The same body of Scripture has been used for almost 2,000 years. One would be hard-pressed to find a single book with so many contributors that is as coherent and consistent as the Bible. The Da Vinci Code’s assertion that humanity has never had a definitive version of Scripture is pure fiction.

The best place to go for accounts of Jesus is and always has been the Bible. In The Da Vinci Code, the author and characters rarely reference the Bible (the same with media reports on the Gospel of Judas). Yet, for serious seekers, Scripture is a “must read.” Perhaps instead of asking whether everything that’s been taught about Jesus is a lie, it might be best to ask, What if what He said about Himself is true? To answer this question, the best place to start is not The Da Vinci Code, but the best seller that has withstood the test of time.

But our generation seems to be mirroring that of the second century’s quest for the mystery without the restraints of Scripture. Rather it wanted to reinterpret Scripture, to adjust it to its own liking. They wanted to reinterpret Scripture from their Gnostic perspective. All the old questions—the original questions sharply debated at the beginning of Christianity—are being reopened—the nature of Christ (His person and work), His death, and His resurrection. And there is an agenda. It is the rejection of Christian faith as a historically unified set of core beliefs that reflects the most major and central points of the New Testament. It is an increasingly secular and godless world that seems bent on returning to pagan views of spirituality.

It is here that Brown’s novel essentially reflects a culture wanting to remake Christianity after a New Age model in which spirituality is linked neither to Scripture nor Scripture’s God, let alone Scripture’s Jesus. Movies and fiction have become the benign educator of choice in our media-happy society. With it most are more likely to seek theological clarity and their views of Jesus from friends, family, experiences and even media input than from diving into biblical texts.

The tragedy in all this is that most of those who are turning to fiction, movies, or friends are confused about the Bible. They read their novels, enter the theaters, draw from their peers essentially as biblical illiterates. Because of it, millions are vulnerable to the seductive religious arguments and agendas they propose. It is within such a vacuum of biblical knowledge and understanding that new concepts such as those proposed by The Da Vinci Code or Gospel of Judas gain a foothold in the minds and hearts of readers.

Perhaps Scripture should come with a warning, much like the “fact” statements that preface Brown’s novel. Readers should be cautioned that the Bible is not easy. It does not offer a quick fix, nor is there a code for deciphering it. Rather, the Bible is mysterious and its key figure, Jesus, is likewise mysterious at times. We understand that while penned by people, Scripture is divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:21). We understand, too, that such revelations of the Spirit are “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:13, 14). At bottom they unequivocally point to Jesus—and ultimately to His substitutionary death (John 5:39). Ultimately, knowing who Jesus is demands a view from above in which the Father through the Spirit reveals truth to our very human hearts and minds (Matt. 16:13-20). Jesus is the real code breaker and the real code to overcoming a great conspiracy to ruin our world. But such revelation today takes a high view of Scripture, or at least heartfelt honest exposure to Scripture in which we are both familiar with it and open to it. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17, NIV). It’s easy to get lost when reading these authentic Gospels because it demands a surrender of reason and heart and life unlike any other sacred text. It calls for the willingness to see one’s true self and need in light of the biblical witness. It calls for faith that allows the biblical record literally to transform us by the renewing of our mind.

The best place to go for accounts about Jesus is and always has been the Bible. Where are you turning in your quest for Jesus and spiritual answers?

REFERENCES
2 Ibid., p. 317.
4 Gates, p. 49.
5 Van Biema, p. 51.
Lately, coal samples with conventional ages ranging 65 to 350 million years have been subjected to Carbon-14 dating. Surprisingly, each sample tested showed an age falling in the relatively young age range of 30 to 40 thousand years irrespective of their greatly differing conventional coal ages. Evolutionary scientists would have expected these coal samples to be Carbon-14 dead and thus to have registered no age.

One wonders whether the dinosaur soft tissue would yield results similar to the coal samples were the dinosaur tissue tested by Carbon-14. In other words, would the organic dinosaur samples all register ages in the thousands of years? This would be in striking contrast with their alleged evolutionary ages of 68 million years.

Historic Statement on Creation by the GC Executive Committee

Every Adventist needs to know about and be conversant with the “Response to an Affirmation of Creation,” published on page 11 of the NAD Edition of the Adventist Review (August 2005), one of the most significant statements voted by the General Conference Executive Committee because it stands for God-honoring truth.

After three years (2002-2004) of church-sponsored International Faith and Science conferences, the General Conference Executive Committee voted to reaffirm, now in explicit terms, the historic position of the Adventist Church on the doctrine of Creation and the Flood. This permits the witness of the church to the world to shine more clearly and convincingly regarding Creation.

Four new terms appear for the first time in a voted Adventist document on Creation. Three of the four relate to Creation: “recent, literal,” and “the historicity of Genesis 1–11.”

For Creationists, this opens up new ways of interpreting the age and decay rates of animals. Can soft tissue actually remain pliable for 68 million years in fossils? Or does this discovery possibly point to the need for a more recent and rapid burial and preservation of this dinosaur?

Soft Tissue Recently Found in Dinosaur Thigh Bone

In a jaw-dropping discovery reported in the summer of 2005, paleontologists Mary H. Schweitzer, Jack Horner, et al. located soft tissue and vessels preserved in hind limb elements of a Tyrannosaurus rex. The specimen lay entombed at the base of Hell Creek Formation, Montana, where other dinosaurs have been excavated. The authors interpret the bone as resting in well-sorted sandstone of estuarine origin. This means that the dinosaur was buried under aquatic conditions in sediment formed in a location where a river meets a sea. Although not establishing the biblical flood, the aquatic deposition of this dinosaur is interesting because circumstances similar to this would be expected in a flood of global proportions.

Most importantly, the scientists identified, as described in their own words, “pliable soft-tissue blood vessels . . . still retaining their flexibility, resilience, original hollow nature, and three-dimensionality.”

Because Schweitzer dates this specimen as originating in the upper Mesozoic portion of the geologic column, and therefore about 68 million years old as reckoned by evolutionary theory, she considers this discovery to be “totally shocking,” because soft tissue is not considered to be a possibility in such old fossils. Her technician soaked the fragments in a weak acid solution, which revealed the elastic vessels. The team also found round red microstructures inside the blood vessels that looked like red blood cells. Remarkably, several of the vessels were so elastic—like rubber bands—that they rebounded when repeatedly stretched by the technician.

For Creationists, this opens up new ways of interpreting the age and decay rates of animals. Can soft tissue actually remain pliable for 68 million years in fossils? Or does this discovery possibly point to the need for a more recent and rapid burial and preservation of this dinosaur?
recent, historical Creation—without which the authority of Scripture, the Sabbath, the atonement, and other essential truths, are undermined.  

Adventists can be deeply grateful for the moving of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the “Response to an Affirmation of Creation,” and for leaders in step with the Spirit. It is now essential that cordial, open, respectful dialogue and research regarding origins continue with vigor and enthusiasm among the entire Adventist family.

Nature Testifies to Its Creator: The March of the Penguins

In discussing faith and science, it seems important not only to consider the evidence of correspondence between the two realms, but also to consider the beauty of nature itself and how nature still speaks of the goodness of God.  

If you have not seen it, by all means watch The March of the Penguins, a DVD documentary concerning Antarctic Emperor penguins. These flightless birds walk 70 miles to breeding grounds in order to raise their fuzzy chicks. In fierce blizzard conditions the devoted parents alternately trek back to the ocean for food. Their heroic behavior represents a stunning display of God’s wisdom and faithfulness in providing these creatures with sufficient strength and instinctual wisdom to survive successfully in the harshest conditions found on this planet. If God equips the penguins in such a way, how much more will He provide wisdom and direction in our lives (Matt. 6:30; Prov. 4:11).

Esthetically, the sleek, long, thin orange stripe on the black bill of the adult Emperor penguin matches the orange area shading into white just behind its black eye areas. This must be an example of intentional color coordination by an Artist who originally selected these color relationships, thereby illustrating His love and sense of the beautiful. “His work is perfect” (Deut. 32:4, KJV).

REFERENCES

2 Ibid., p. 1,995.
5 Ibid., p. 1,954.
It’s a situation that resonates with the theme of Jesus’ parable of the foolish rich man who determined to tear down his storage barns and build ever bigger ones (Luke 12:16-21). There is one significant difference: the contents of the rich man’s barns actually had some value; by and large, the contents of our basements and garages (and rented storage areas), are often valueless. It’s just that we can’t seem to bring ourselves to part with all that stuff.

There is no use pointing fingers: everyone is subject to this influence of acquisitiveness. We all have our pet (and sometimes secret) strain of materialism. My grandmother, an immigrant to the United States during World War I, was one of the most ascetic Christians I’ve ever known personally. She came from Sweden during a time when fully one-quarter of the population of her mother country had left. Drought, unemployment, and poverty were so bad that in desperation, people were making bread out of sawdust. My grandmother’s lifetime was utter simplicity.

Yet when she died in 1979, the family found, packed in boxes, enough brand-new bath towels and other bathroom linens to stock a small hotel. And she wasn’t just some dotty septuagenarian who had lost her faculties. The acquisition of what would normally be considered evidence of wealth was unimportant to her, but for some obscure reason she just couldn’t pass up a beautiful set of bath towels in the department store—especially if they were on sale.

For some this out-of-control consumerism that has become so characteristic of our times has exploded into all new, exponential proportions. It is clearly apparent that there are those who judge others by what they own.

In a mind-bending essay entitled “The Death of Adam,” Pulitzer Prize-winning author Marlynne Robinson writes, “People spend a great deal of money for the advantages of being perceived to have spent a great deal of money. These advantages are diminished continuously by the change of styles either toward or away from the thing they have bought, which make it either commonplace or passé.”

And this, of course, makes it all the
more important to buy yet more.

It’s only fair to observe that not everyone has seemingly been caught up in all this acquisitiveness. Not everyone is a collector of vintage cars or limited edition ceramic figurines or autographed sports memorabilia.

But consumerism has added some creative implements to its toolbox. For many the acquisition of things has been thrown over for the acquisition of experiences that are equally as expensive. There are those who may not own a thing in this world, but they have bungee jumped in the Andes, run with the bulls in Pamplona, kissed the Blarney Stone in Ireland, climbed Mt. Kilamanjaro, attended a Super Bowl, mushed a dogsled to the South Pole, had their picture taken in front of the Taj Mahal . . .

Advertisers, as the shrewd students of human nature that they are, have picked up on this. “Many commercials are more concerned to attach a sense of lifestyle and experience to the product being sold than to give details about the product itself.”

The fact is, however, that at some inevitable point we will all face Ma Joad’s dilemma: When it’s time to leave this home of our generations, we’ll be able to take precious little with us.

“Precious little”: there’s a thought-provoking expression! When it comes down to it, what we hold most precious will most likely be little, at least in the material sense.

Jesus Himself said it best: “How do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?” (Matt. 16:26, NLT). And this from someone who had “nowhere to lay His head” (8:20, NKJV).

A few years ago the lyrics of a popular song described a dying card player who offers his listener some advice: “Every gambler knows that the secret to surviving is knowing what to throw away and knowing what to keep.”

Jesus is no gambler, but He says basically the same thing—and He’s not talking about mere surviving.

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