

quarterly resource for local church elders † april/june 2006

ELDER'S DIGEST

A CHURCH
FILLED WITH THE
HOLY SPIRIT

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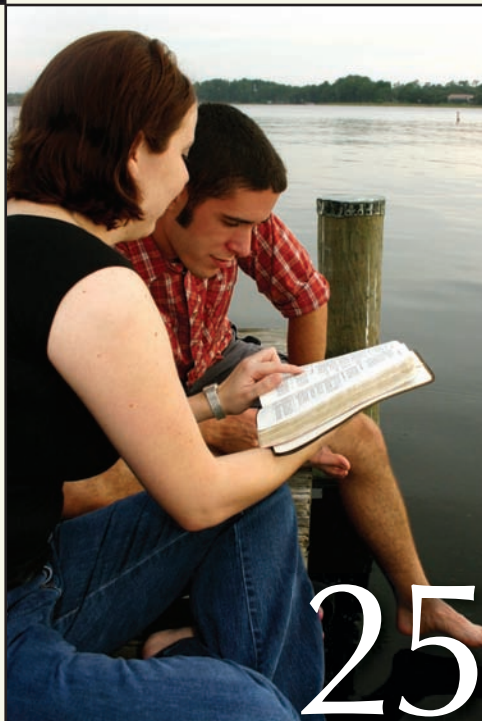
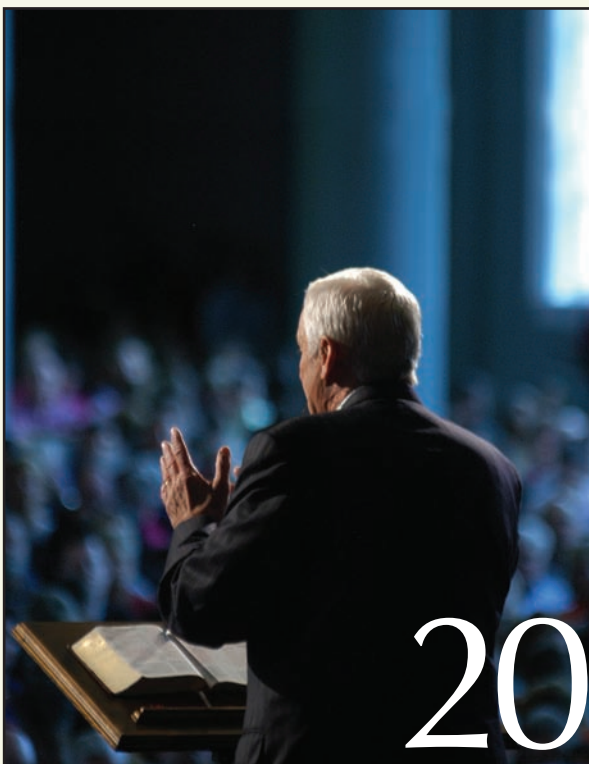
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The church was born to grow

To work for the Church is a privilege, but to participate in its growth should be our great priority. When I say “growth of the church,” I mean its financial, geographical, spiritual, cognitive, and numeric development. It is good to see a church growing in a healthy and balanced way. When this happens, the church has more financial means, more established congregations, and happier members who participate in soul-winning for Christ. God wants to see His church grow.

So why do some churches grow while others don’t? I believe that ministers, local leaders, and members expect growth. What is the best method or strategy for church growth? Is there a miraculous methodology or formula that can be applied to make a church explode in growth? Motivated by this desire, some look for growing churches to learn what they are doing, what strategies they are using. In this passionate search for a “magic method,” the basic principles that produce such growth go unnoticed.

In today’s world of Christian religions, many churches employ different methods and styles. Some focus on the use of a more contemporary and technological liturgy. Others attract people through their charismatic worship services. Small-group worship is popular with some, while others try to maintain their traditional programs while dreaming about church growth.

What is surprising is that while some churches use good methods, they do not grow. This leads us to conclude that methods and strategies alone cannot bring about church growth. To copy a model that is working well in one place does not guarantee that it will work in another.

In the book *Natural Church Development*, Christian Schwarz considers that however we may imitate a particular church model, we should study many churches to discover in all of them the universal principles relevant to growth. A model is a concept that shows one church, somewhere in the world, that has experienced positive growth. A principle is something that can be applied to all churches everywhere.

The key words for the church of the 21st century are “healthy church,” not “church growth.” It is not only focusing on the growth need or utilizing different methods that will make the church grow by itself. When a church is healthy, it grows naturally in all areas in a balanced manner. The question we should be asking is not “What makes a church grow?” but “What is preventing it from being healthy?” In God’s sight, this church was born to grow, and He gave all that was needed for growth to happen.

Is your church growing? Remember that if a church is healthy, it will surely grow.

Jonas Arrais
General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary





Interview with James Cress

James A. Cress, who serves as Ministerial Association Secretary for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, considers himself a pastor *on loan* to the General Conference. Along with his wife, Sharon M. Cress, who serves as Associate Ministerial Secretary for pastoral spouses and families, Jim has served the Adventist church as pastor, evangelist, departmental director, and instructor in evangelistic methods and preaching. He graduated from Southern Missionary College with a B.A. in Theology and received a M.Div. degree from the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, and a D.Min. degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. He has authored three books: *Common Sense Ministry*; *You Can Keep Them If You Care*; and *More Common Sense Ministry*, and is currently completing the manuscript for *The Essentials*. His most satisfying work, however, is pastoring a local congregation, along with encouraging and motivating other pastors to excellence in ministry.

James A. Cress responded to questions posed by Jonas Arrais, editor of *Elder's Digest* magazine.

Elder's Digest: How do you see and evaluate the work and influence of the church elders around the world?

James Cress: Local church elders provide first-line pastoral care to most Seventh-day Adventist members around the globe. When pastors have multiple church responsibilities, the first contact of spiritual care in many instances is the elder, who provides essential care and nurture on behalf of the pastor.

ED: In your opinion, what do pastors expect of/from elders?

JC: Every pastor should be able to depend upon elders for the following: A deep love for God and for God's people; deep loyalty to the church organization and its doctrinal teachings; willingness to serve as an extension of pastoral leadership in service to the members; eagerness to reach out to the lost to bring them into a saving relationship with Jesus; and support to the membership for the decisions of the pastoral leadership and church board. It is appropriate to discuss, and even to disagree, when items are being considered. But when decisions are made, the elder is expected to act in accordance with the decision and not to continue dissent that would divide the church family.

ED: What do church members expect from elders?

JC: Every member should be able to depend upon elders for "example leadership," especially in challenging, difficult situations. Anyone can be a leader in easy times. True leadership is exhibited when things are difficult. Other qualities include: Spiritual maturity in belief, behavior, business, and burden for souls; loyalty to the church organization and its doctrinal teachings and support of pastoral and conference leadership, and a message from God when it is time for preaching.

ED: Church elders also expect things from their pastors. Could you mention some of them?

JC: Elders should expect the following from their pastors: Long-range planning and coordination for the entire district to see that the needs of the church are cared for by the elders; pulpit planning

for schedules and sermon topic coordination for consistent feeding of balanced spiritual food; support for decisions which must be implemented in the pastor's absence; and an example of pastoral care in nurturing the members, evangelizing the lost, and administering God's work.

ED: In what ways can lay leaders be most helpful to pastors?

JC: Visiting the members; coordinating outreach in the community; administering the church program; promoting and coordinating conference/union programs; and resolving conflicts among the membership.

ED: How can pastors and elders build a strong working relationship?

JC: By spending time together in prayer, planning, dialogue, evaluation, and "two-by-two" team activities.

ED: What should elders do if they simply cannot support the pastor who has been assigned to their church by the conference?

JC: Resign. It is a gospel mandate that followers must follow if they ever intend to be leaders who lead. Of course, elders should speak to conference leadership if they have real concerns. But ultimately, elders are responsible for supporting the appointed leadership or quietly removing themselves from a conflict situation.

ED: Since we have so many young members in our denomination, when should they be considered for the elected office of elder?

JC: As quickly as possible. Never forget that God's work has always moved forward at the initiative and spiritual lead-

ership of young people. Most of the disciples were very young when Jesus called them. In fact, His total earthly ministry was completed by the time He was 33 years of age. Giants of faith through the years have been young people—Samuel, David, Rhoda, Mark, Ellen White, etc.

ED: What can an individual do who hopes to serve as an elder?

JC: Prepare. Love and serve God’s people. Work diligently to reach the lost for Christ. Learn everything possible about the doctrines, organizational structure, and business of the church. Study the *Elder’s Handbook* and utilize the Elder’s Certification resources. Pray for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and ask God to impress the other church members with the same sense of your calling that you have. A call to leadership is only valid when there are three distinct components: (1) The deep personal sense of God’s calling; (2) the capabilities sufficient to do the task; and (3) the recognition of these spiritual and capability factors by fellow church members. If one of the three components is missing, there is no valid call.

ED: In your opinion, what are the symptoms of an unmotivated elder, and how can a pastor change this condition?

JC: An unmotivated elder may struggle to hold onto a “church office” rather than trying to fulfill a specific mission of service. The pastor can either “bury them” in as nice a funeral service as possible or train and equip them for gospel-fulfilling leadership!

ED: In many places, women are doing wonderful work as elders, but in some countries, there is resistance to the idea of a woman performing this ecclesiasti-

cal function. Could you elaborate a bit on this?

JC: First, the church must relax about this matter. In those areas where it is culturally offensive for a woman to be elected as an elder, the matter should not be agitated. In those places where it is not culturally offensive, women should be utilized to the greatest extent possible. And that “culturally offensive” criteria must be based on the entire culture of the community, not on the isolated opinions of a few bigoted individuals. The church must always be different from the world. Galatians 3:27 states that “in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, we are all one!” This clearly informs the church that when Jesus is best honored, there are no prejudicial distinctions made on the basis of race, social status, or gender. Jesus demonstrated these same three principles when He invited the Samaritan woman with a bad reputation to be the first public evangelist He commissioned. Jesus crossed all three cultural barriers—race, social status, and gender—in that one invitation, and the results were remarkably successful for the gospel.

ED: Preaching is an important function for church elders. What advice would you give to an elder who does not have enough time and material to prepare a sermon?

JC: *Elder’s Guide* for worship planning. Better to say something which is well-planned and balanced from a reliable resource than to merely fill time with something that is not worthy or competently prepared. Also, practice. Preach the message aloud to your mirror, or to your pet dog, or to the trees. Your presentation in the public pulpit will improve with every practice session.

ED: The evangelistic church program for this quincentennial is named “Tell the World.” How can local leaders be involved in this program with their church members?

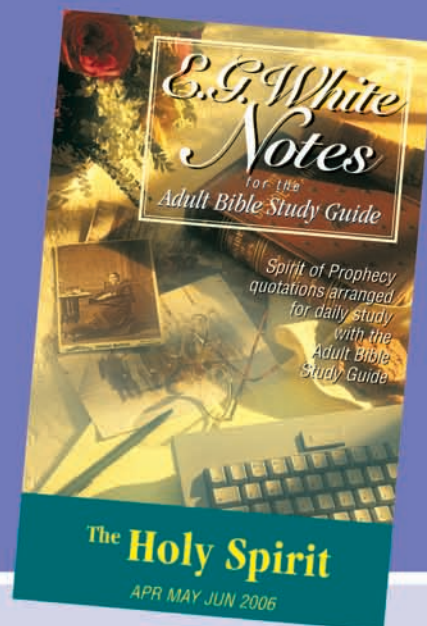
JC: Give unstinting support to the purpose of the Great Commission—to reach the lost for Jesus. Conduct an evangelistic activity of some kind every quarter of the year. Present gospel invitation calls at the conclusion of every sermon and every church service. Take another member along “two-by-two” on every spiritual contact—fellowship, protection, and training!

ED: Unfortunately, about 35 percent of newly-baptized members leave the church. What can church elders do to minimize this problem?

JC: This is an unfortunate misperception based on the manner in which we publish statistics. When we calculate apostasies as a percent of accessions, it appears very large—35 percent. When we calculate apostasies as a percent of total membership, it appears very small. Of course we need to be concerned about apostasy and do everything possible to minimize loss, but we defeat our purpose by reporting apostasies as a percentage of accessions.

ED: Could you leave us with a final message for our church elders?

JC: Never forget that you are part of Jesus’ team. He is our leader. His Holy Spirit is our equipper. His Heavenly Father is our Heavenly Father, and we are all working together for the soon return of His kingdom. He has promised to be with each of us individually and all of us collectively until He returns to usher us into His glorious eternal home. ^{ED}



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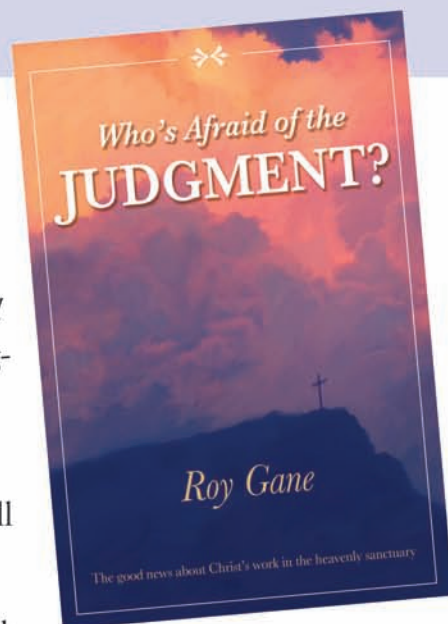
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Tips for better public speaking

Be natural

The first and most important tip about how to improve the presentation of your sermon is, be natural. No technique can surpass the importance of being natural. Learn, improve, progress, but when you speak, be yourself.

Express yourself with clarity

Pronounce the words correctly. As you speak each word with accuracy, your expressions will be enhanced and the message will be better understood by the listeners. Practice exercises to improve your diction: experiment reading in a loud voice, placing your finger or a pencil between your teeth and speak as clearly as possible.

Speak with resolution

Use the voice at an appropriate volume to your surroundings. Always speak with enthusiasm and sincerity, for if you don't demonstrate that you believe in what you say, the people who are listening will show far less interest in your talk.

Vary the pace

Do not speak too fast, because people might have difficulty understanding what you say. And don't speak too slow, because you may sound monotonous and tiresome. Alternate the pace of your speech; this will help to keep people's attention. Practice at home, recording your lecture and then listening to it. This way you will be able to evaluate and improve the rhythm of the presentation.

Pay attention to the language

Use appropriate vocabulary. Avoid vulgar terms, slang, or banal words. You should also be careful when using unknown words. Pronounce them only when strictly necessary and try to explain their meaning. If you are speaking at a public conference, avoid Adventist jargon and terms that the non-churched may not understand.

Use correct grammar

Common grammatical errors may hurt your presentation and even damage your influence. Be careful with verb agreement and the correct pronunciation of words. Try to read good books and observe how each author builds sentences. Reading is one of the best ways to learn how to speak correctly.

Practice good posture

Do not put your hands in your pockets or behind your back while you speak. Keep your arm free and avoid excessive gestures. It is preferable not to gesture than to gesture too much. Distribute your body weight on both legs and avoid leaning on one leg only. Also, do not move around too much. Move around only when you are emphasizing an interesting point. Do not simulate arrogance or humbleness. Be coherent with your facial expressions: smile when appropriate and do not talk about happiness with a gloomy face. Also, avoid reading long passages in public. ^{ED}

God has woven music into the very fabric of His creation. When He made all things, “the morning stars sang together and the angels shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). The book of Revelation portrays heaven as a place of ceaseless praise, with songs of adoration to God and the Lamb resounding from all (Rev. 4:9-11; 5:9-13; 7:10-12; 12:10-12; 14:1-3; 15:2-4; 19:1-8).

Because God made humans in His image, we share a love and appreciation for music with all His created beings. In fact, music can touch and move us with a power that goes beyond words or most other types of communication. At its purest and best, music lifts us into the very presence of God, where angels and unfallen beings worship Him in song.

But sin has cast blight over the Creation. The divine image has been marred and almost obliterated; in all aspects this world and God’s gifts come to us with a mixture of good and evil. Music is not morally and spiritually neutral. Some music may

the throne; and as the echo of the angels’ song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven’s communion begins on earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise.”²

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe and preach that Jesus is coming again soon. In our worldwide proclamation of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12, we call all people to accept the everlasting gospel, to worship God the Creator, and to prepare to meet our soon-returning Lord. We challenge all to choose the good and not the bad, to “say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12, 13).

We believe that the gospel impacts all areas of life. We therefore hold that, given the vast potential of music for good or ill, we

A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST **PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC**

move us to the most exalted human experience; some may be used by the prince of evil to debase and degrade us, to stir up lust, passion, despair, anger, and hatred.

The Lord’s messenger, Ellen G. White, continually counsels us to raise our sights in music. She tells us, “Music, when not abused, is a great blessing; but when it is put to a wrong use, it is a terrible curse.” “Rightly employed, [music] is a precious gift of God, designed to uplift the thoughts to high and noble themes, to inspire and elevate the soul.”¹

Of the power of song, she writes: “It is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth. How often to the soul hard-pressed and ready to despair, memory recalls some word of God’s—the long-forgotten burden of a childhood song—and temptations lose their power, life takes on new meaning and new purpose, and courage and gladness are imparted to other souls! . . . As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer. . . . As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir ‘round about



cannot be indifferent to it. While realizing that tastes in music vary greatly from individual to individual, we believe that the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White suggest principles that can inform our choices.

In this document, the phrase “sacred music”—sometimes referred to as religious music—designates music that focuses on God and on biblical and Christian themes. In most cases, it is music composed and intended for worship services, evangelistic meetings, or private devotions and may be both vocal and instrumental music. However, not all sacred/religious music may be acceptable for an Adventist. Sacred music should not evoke secular associations or invite conformity to worldly behavioral patterns of thinking or acting.

“Secular music” is music composed for settings other than the worship service or private devotion. It speaks to the common issues of life and basic human emotions. It comes out of our very being, expressing the human spirit’s reaction to life, love, and the world in which the Lord has placed us. It can be morally uplifting or degrading. Although it does not directly praise and adore God, nevertheless, it could have a legitimate place in the life of the Christian. In its selection the principles discussed in this document should be followed.

PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE CHRISTIAN

The music that Christians enjoy should be regulated by the following principles:

1. All music the Christian listens to, performs, or composes, whether sacred or secular, will glorify God: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). This is the overriding biblical principle. Anything that cannot meet this high standard will weaken our experience with the Lord.
2. All music the Christian listens to, performs, or composes, whether sacred or secular, should be the noblest and the best: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is right, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil 4:8). As followers of Jesus Christ who hope and expect to join the heavenly choirs, we view life on this earth as a preparation for, and foretaste of, the life to come.

On these two foundations—glorifying God in all things and choosing the noblest and the best—depend the other principles listed below for the selection of music by Christians.

3. It is characterized by quality, balance, appropriateness, and authenticity. Music fosters our spiritual, psychological, and social sensitivity, and our intellectual growth.

4. It appeals to both the intellect and the emotions and impacts the body in a positive way. It is wholistic.

5. Music reveals creativity in that it draws from quality melodies. If harmonized, it uses harmonies in an interesting and artistic way and employs rhythm that complements them.

6. Vocal music employs lyrics that positively stimulate intellectual abilities as well as our emotions and our will power. Good lyrics are creative, rich in content, and of good composition. They focus on the positive and reflect moral values; they educate and uplift; and they correspond with sound biblical theology.

7. Musical and lyrical elements should work together harmoniously to influence thinking and behavior in harmony with biblical values.

8. It maintains a judicious balance of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional elements.

9. We should recognize and acknowledge the contribution of different cultures in worshiping God. Musical forms and instruments vary greatly in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family, and music drawn from one culture may sound strange to someone from a different culture.³

Seventh-day Adventist music-making means to choose the best and, above all, to draw close to our Creator and Lord and glorify Him. Let us rise to the challenge of a viable alternative musical vision and, as part of our wholistic and prophetic message, make a unique Adventist musical contribution as a witness to the world regarding a people awaiting Christ’s soon coming. ^{ED}

• “It [music] is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth.” Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 168.

• Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 1, p. 497. She also states that in the future, “just before the close of probation,” “there will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit never reveals itself in such methods, in such a bedlam of noise. This is an invention of Satan to cover up his ingenious methods for making of none effect the pure, sincere, elevating, ennobling, sanctifying truth for this time” (*Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 36).

1. *Education*, p. 167.

2. *Education*, p. 168.

3. We acknowledge that in some cultures harmonies are not as important as in other cultures.

This is an official action of the GC Executive Committee taken during 2004 GC Annual Council. Please share this information with members of your church.

A CHURCH FILLED WITH THE HOLY



What happened at Pentecost (Acts 2) cannot stay only in history's pages. The powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, with its extraordinary results, may still be repeated today. Times have changed and so have customs, but the God who operated through the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem is the same God who operates today. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem is circumstantial to the moment it happened, but the results pointed out in Acts 2:42-47, may be experienced by today's church.

Doctrinal strength. *"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings."* A church filled with the Holy Spirit does not follow men's doctrines or human traditions, but it takes the Word of God seriously; it clings to eternal truths. When the church deviates from the Bible, it easily falls into legalism. Some believers begin to act against the church with criticism and accusations. Others, taken by emotionalism, run after dreams, visions, and new doctrines or interpretations. Ellen White wrote: "It is not a conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian because he manifests spiritual ecstasy under extraordinary circumstances. Holiness is not rapture."¹ Someone said, "Revival without the apostolic doctrine is human agitation, it is fire without heat, it is a shot without a bullet, it is a thunder without rain, it is a tree without roots and fruits, and it is useless effort."

Deep communion. *"And they devoted themselves . . . in the fellowship . . . in the breaking of bread . . . and all who believed were together."* A church filled with the Holy Spirit knows what it means to have only one soul, to be united in thought and have the communion of the Holy Spirit. In a church like this, quarrels cease, dissension and discord disappear, forgiveness is practiced,

SPIRIT

The worship service of a church revived by the Holy Spirit becomes a moment of pleasure and power in the presence of the Lord.

BY ERICO TADEU XAVIER

wounds are cured, and relationships are restored. There's no room for divisions. By the act of the Holy Spirit, the wall comes down. When "oil runs down" (Ps. 133), the brethren live in unity.

Perseverance in prayer. *"And persevering . . . in prayers."* The disciples remained in the upper room for 10 days in prayer and communion with God. Pentecost came and they kept praying. Throughout the book of Acts, we see the church always in prayer. All the problems of the primitive church were solved through prayer. The believers depended on their communion with God. They prayed at the election of Mathias (Acts 1:23, 24); they prayed when electing the deacons (Acts 6:1-7); they prayed for the Holy Spirit (1:14; 2:1; 4:31; 8:15); they prayed for the sick (Acts 9:40; 28:8); and when persecuted, they appealed to prayer (Acts 12:1-12; 16:24-26). Someone said: "When Elijah prayed, fire came from Heaven; when Paul prayed, the prison collapsed; when the apostolic church prayed, the ground shook; when Jesus prayed, the dead rose; when we pray, people die." How many prayers are empty, without color, without life? We need to learn how to pray like the men and women of the Bible.

Fear of God. *"And fear came upon every soul."* We live in a world where God's things are mocked; they are the subject of jokes. God's name is used in vain. Unfortunately, many believers have lost their fear of God; many play with God. We do not respect God, and this lack of rever-

ence can be seen even by the style of some music performed in church. The attire of some who profess faith is shameful and disrespectful. The lack of fear has taken many to restaurants after Sabbath's worship service. Adultery and fornication among the church members today are almost normal. A revival is needed in the Lord's church, a revival that produces holiness. "Strive for . . . holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:40).

The presence of the extraordinary. *"And many wonders and signs were done through the apostles."* Miracles happen throughout the book of Acts: Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3); Philip in Samaria (Acts 8); Peter in Joppa (Acts 9); and Paul in Malta (Acts 28) are some examples. Signs and wonders were not forgotten in the past. Today's church may witness these wonders. Ellen White prophesied, "Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers!"² If today we don't witness more signs and wonders, it is probably because we are not involved in the proclamation of the gospel or because we don't believe in God's power.

Help to the needy. *"And all who believe . . . had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and dis-*

tributed them to all, as any had need." The apostolic church gives us an extraordinary example of love in practice. Practical love became so real that the book of Acts tells us that "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34). Each believer cared about helping the needy, feeding the hungry, dressing the naked, and building homes for the homeless; it wasn't a job exclusively for ADRA. The presence of the Holy Spirit made the apostolic church a caring church. A good example was Barnabas. The Bible talks about him, saying: "Barnabas . . . sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37). A church filled with the Holy Spirit cares for the needy and helps them.

Present in God's house. *"And day by day, attending the temple together."* The worship service of a church, revived by the Holy Spirit, becomes a moment of pleasure and power in the presence of the Lord. The believer does not complain about fatigue or weariness. The watch is forgotten. The revived believers come to church early. The church trembles with the congregational singing. Sinners are attracted and converted. Going to the house of the Lord is a reason for joy (Psalms 122:1).

Joy and simplicity of heart. *" . . . they partook of food with glad and generous hearts . . ."* A church filled with the Holy Spirit is a church filled with joy. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It is impres-

sive that even when the apostles were persecuted and imprisoned, they did not lose their joy (Acts 5:40-42; 16:22-25); the disciples overflowed with joy (13:52). The joy of those first disciples was probably very contagious. Nothing could take from their hearts “the joy of the Lord.” They understood that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).

Praise to God. “. . . praising God . . .” Praise is the result of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that inspires perfect praise. Joy and praise are features of a church filled with the Holy Spirit. Wherever there is praise, there is no room for murmur and complaint. A church guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit does not sing for entertainment or to please tastes and preferences, but to praise the Lord. The purpose of praise and worship is not to demonstrate talents or for personal promotion; it exists solely to praise and exalt the Great and Sovereign God.

Sympathy with the non-convert. “. . . having favor with all the people . . .” The way the believers lived aroused the curiosity of the people who saw in them something different. There was love among them. They lived in peace. They were not legalists. They were not reserved, cold, or indifferent. They were happy and nice. They were “the good perfume of Christ.” The church lifestyle made a strong impact on the community. The community was attracted by the good example and lifestyle of the church members. The church was not converted by the world, the world was converted by the testimony of the church! How we need this kind of testimony today!

Numeric growth. “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who

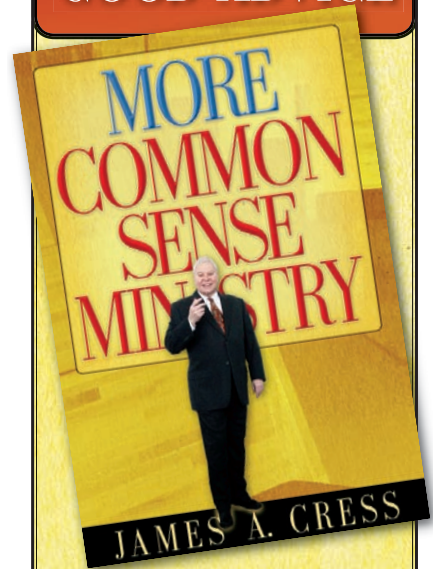
were being saved.” It is the life testimony that makes the church grow. The testimony of the primitive church was not only through words but through lives. The church was well fed. And a well-fed church produces fruit. Wherever there is growth in quality, God gives growth in quantity. The book of Acts gives us an impressive picture of the growth of the apostolic church. The first group was comprised of 120 people (Acts 1:15). Soon, 3,000 more were baptized, just in one day (Acts 2:41); and then the number grew to 5,000 (Acts 4:4). Afterwards, a multitude joined the church (Acts 5:14); a little later, the number of disciples was multiplied (Acts 6:17). Thus the gospel was spread beyond Jerusalem, through Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:13), and finally to the entire world (Acts 16:5).

A church filled with the Holy Spirit is committed to God’s Word and His mission. It is a church that attracted multitudes to Christ. The apostolic church experienced a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the results were extraordinary. Today’s church will be able to experience the same power and contemplate the same results! The God of the apostolic church is the same God of the last days’ church. ^{ED}

1. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51.
2. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

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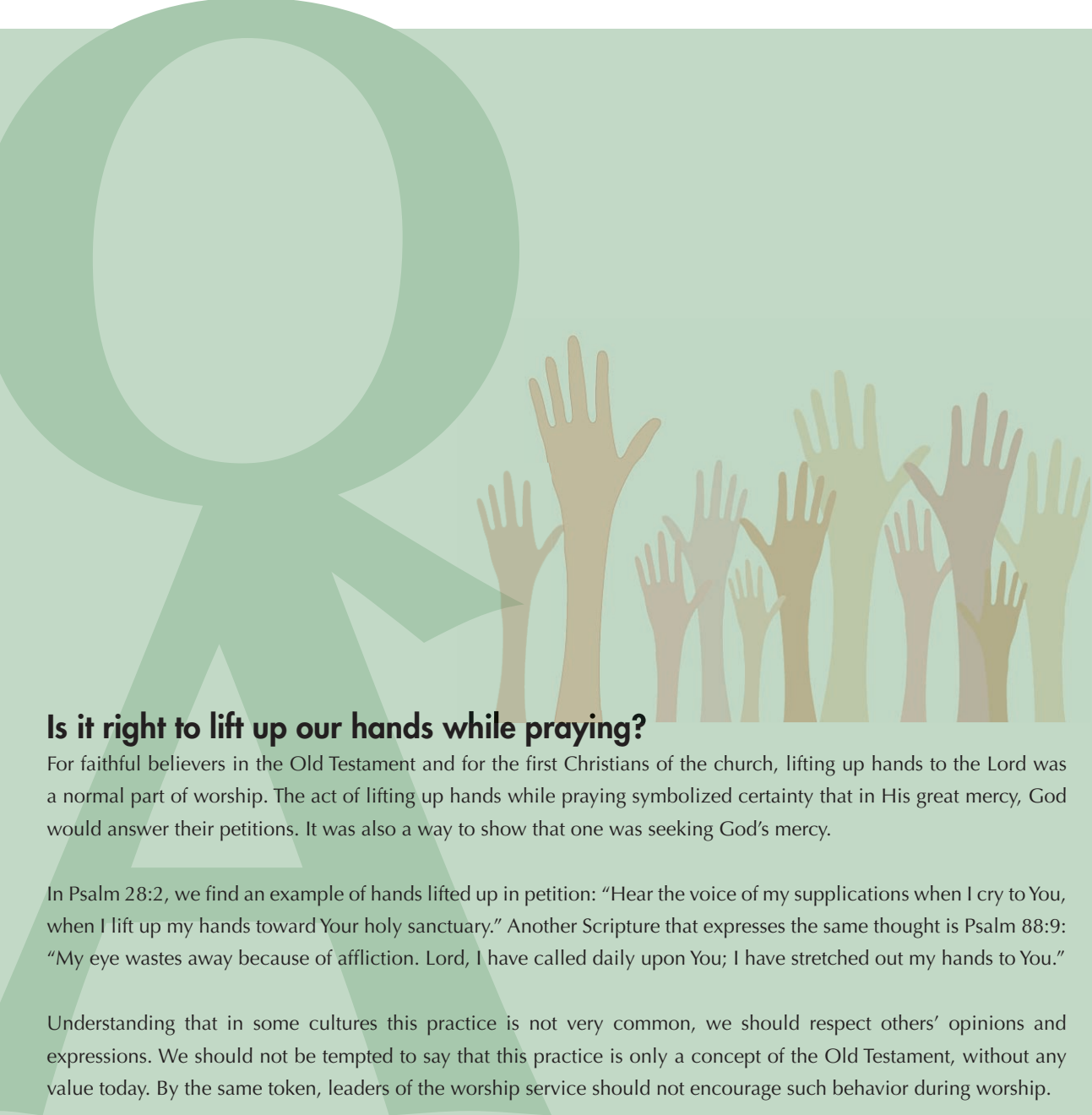
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Is it right to lift up our hands while praying?

For faithful believers in the Old Testament and for the first Christians of the church, lifting up hands to the Lord was a normal part of worship. The act of lifting up hands while praying symbolized certainty that in His great mercy, God would answer their petitions. It was also a way to show that one was seeking God’s mercy.

In Psalm 28:2, we find an example of hands lifted up in petition: “Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary.” Another Scripture that expresses the same thought is Psalm 88:9: “My eye wastes away because of affliction. Lord, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You.”

Understanding that in some cultures this practice is not very common, we should respect others’ opinions and expressions. We should not be tempted to say that this practice is only a concept of the Old Testament, without any value today. By the same token, leaders of the worship service should not encourage such behavior during worship.

The act of lifting up hands during prayer may be a personal or spontaneous initiative of the members at the moment of communing with or praising God. Thus, we should not see it as merely an emotional new phenomenon or initiative. This expression may actually be an attitude of solemn and deep devotion. Moreover, it is supported by biblical examples.

How should we resolve the conflicts created by music in the church?

Throughout modern church history, music has been a topic of discussion and controversy. At times, things get combative. Satan’s plan is to keep God’s people out of balance and out of focus. Throughout the years, music has been an area of his choosing to raise barriers between God’s people. Why? Because music is a powerful and efficient means of expression. And personal tastes in music vary so widely that this subject is extremely subjective.

Concerned about providing its members with some guidelines on this subject, the General Conference has prepared a document about the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of music. Important themes are approached, such as: the musician, the music, the lyrics, congregational praise, musical instruments, musical production, music in evangelism, and other aspects of music. We advise every church board to read and study the article on pages 8 and 9, *A Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music*, prepared by the General Conference. ^{ED}



Daniel 5

The Message on the Wall

INTRODUCTION

What is the greatest mistake one can make? What is the most foolish of all decisions? The greatest mistake we can make in life is not learning from our past mistakes. The most foolish of all decisions is deciding to ignore God's warnings, to repeatedly violate our conscience by rejecting God's advice and turning our backs on His instructions.

Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, had many opportunities to serve God. He could have learned from his grandfather, who dedicated his life to the true God, or from the prophet Daniel, who had lived in Babylon for 70 years, witnessing to the truth. The light of truth shone on Belshazzar, but he rejected it. A judgment day was approaching much faster than he could imagine.

I. BELSHAZZAR'S LAST NIGHT

A. Read Daniel 5:1-4. Belshazzar prepared a great banquet, became drunk, and desecrated the sacred vessels. This deed provoked God's judgment on Babylon. In Israel, the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem were to be used in worship services to the true God.

1. It was blasphemy to desecrate the sacred vessels by filling them with intoxicating wine. The king had crossed the line between his power and God's power. The judgment was about to take place.

2. Many people today have lived as Belshazzar lived. Jesus alerts us to the fact that we are living in a solemn time of caution, vigilance, and prayer (Luke 21:34-36).

II. DIVINE INTERVENTION: THE MESSAGE ON THE WALL

A. Read Daniel 5:5-17. At the very moment that the sacred vessels were desecrated, the finger of a man's hand appeared, writing on the

palace wall. The king was shocked; his countenance changed. He was overcome with fear. His whole body trembled nervously; he was terrified. He knew something was wrong, but he wasn't sure what it was. What tragic event was foreshadowed by the writing on the wall? The judgment day for Belshazzar had arrived.

B. Once more, Daniel was asked to interpret the writing. He had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dreams many years before. He had served Babylon as a statesman for 70 years. His reputation as an upright public servant was well known. His wisdom in political affairs had repeatedly influenced the nation. Despite that, Belshazzar, with his mind benumbed by alcohol, tried to humiliate Daniel, suggesting that he was simply a Jewish captive.

C. In a desperate attempt to understand the mysterious writing on the wall, Belshazzar offered to reward Daniel if he could explain the meaning of those strange words. Daniel said: "Let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation."

1. Daniel did not allow himself to be bribed. His services were not for sale. His only motive was to serve God. His only ambition was to honor the kingdom of God. Daniel took the opportunity to review God's attempts to save Babylon. Throughout the history of Babylon, God gave the Babylonians repeated opportunities to learn His will.

2. In many different ways, God knocked at the door of Babylon. All those opportunities were now quickly drawing to the end. The door of mercy that had been open for 70 years was about to close. The Babylonians had hardened their hearts, and there was little that God could do except to leave them to their own selfish desires.

III. THE GREATEST MISTAKE IN LIFE

A. What was Belshazzar's mistake? Read Daniel 5:22.

1. Although he knew God, he did not submit himself to the divine power. Belshazzar knew what was right, but he did not do it! He turned his back to the light God had given him. He chose darkness instead of light.

2. The human condition is even worse when a person chooses to sin (James 4:17).

a) Babylon's sin was great because the Babylonians openly rebelled against God, even when they knew what God wanted them to do.

b) Today, our world is following the same path as the Babylonians. People are discovering God's plan for their lives, but they still reject His ways.

3. This was the writing on the wall that determined God's judgment on Babylon: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN" (Dan. 5:26-28). Here is Daniel's interpretation:


a) MENE: God has numbered your kingdom and finished it.

b) TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances and were found wanting.

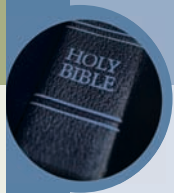
c) PERES: Your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

IV. CONCLUSION

There is a last night for everyone and everything on earth. There is an invisible line that we cannot cross without suffering the consequences. Judgment will come once more for society.

Why should you make the same tragic mistake as Belshazzar? Do not delay. Commit your life to God today! 

Contributed by the South American Division



Daniel 6

Protected from the Lions

INTRODUCTION

When our will conflicts with God's will and we choose His will instead of ours, our dedication to Him deepens. Christian character is developed when faith is tried. God frequently allows us to go through trials to enable us to grow.

Throughout his life, Daniel faced many temptations. When he resisted temptation through God's power, his faith increased. The story of Daniel in the lion's den is well known. It contains lessons about courage for all of us.

I. INTRIGUE AT THE PALACE

A. Read Daniel 6:1-9. God blessed Daniel's faithfulness. Daniel's diplomatic work was extended for 70 years. He served under several kings in two different empires. Daniel's life illustrates the biblical principle, "Those who honor Me I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30).

B. Daniel's colleagues envied his position. Their envy led them to lie, and the lie provoked an order to kill Daniel. Envy of Daniel's position, the Medo-Persian politicians resorted to a plot of lies. When nourished in the heart, sin develops roots and produces bad fruit.

There was no evidence to incriminate Daniel. He was upright in all his behavior. His enemies thought that the only way to "get" him would be through his relationship with God, by attacking his faith.

C. Daniel prayed three times a day. His life was of full communion with God. This made a difference in everything. That was the reason he was successful in all things.

1. They created a decree by which no one should make requests to any other divinity or person but to King Darius.

2. The final test for Daniel dealt with the question of true and false worship. It pitted lies against truth.

II. DANIEL'S UNYIELDING FAITH

A. Prayer was the constant source of power that helped Daniel maintain his close relationship with God. Prayer is a line of communication between the Christian and heaven.

1. Darius violated his own conscience. He knew that he was condemning an innocent man, yet he recognized that Daniel followed the true God. (Read Daniel 6:16.)

2. Feeling guilty, he remained awake and apprehensive all night in the palace. Unresolved guilt creates anxiety and illness.

B. By knowing that we have done what is right, we will remain calm in the storms of life. Daniel felt at peace in the lion's den, while Darius was very tense in the palace.

C. Early in the morning, arriving at the entrance of the lion's den, the king discovered that Daniel had miraculously been saved.

D. Daniel gave honor and glory to God for his deliverance by saying: "My God sent His angels and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you" (Dan. 6:22).

III. CONCLUSION

A. Daniel's experience shows that God is ready to help us in moments of crisis.

1. He does not allow us to suffer trials beyond what we are able to endure, but He gives us strength to overcome.


2. Satan's power to crush us is stronger than our ability to resist. Were we left alone, we

would be impotent. But strengthened by the power of God, we will be victorious.

3. Philippians 4:13 gives us a clear promise that God gives us strength to overcome all difficulties.

B. Darius, a pagan king, rendered honor to the God of Daniel. (Read Dan. 6:26, 27.) The word "steadfast" means "immovable," "faithful," "loyal," someone you can count on. God never forsakes us. When the lions of temptation roar, He is there to shut their mouths. When the devil tries to exterminate us, He is there to deliver us. Final deliverance will take place at the Second Coming of Christ.

C. At the close of this world's history, God will also manifest Himself to deliver His faithful children. (Read Rev. 19:11-19.) Described as a powerful conqueror running through the halls of Heaven and as a general leading the heavenly hosts, Jesus is revealed as our most powerful Deliverer. He is "faithful and true." He fulfills His word. At the last stroke of the end-time clock, He will deliver His children. In a vision, Daniel observed that last deliverance. He foresaw the day when all evil would at last be destroyed and the kingdom of God would rule forever.

For God, there are no impossibilities. He delights in delivering us. The same God who promised to deliver this planet from the dominion of evil, also promises to deliver you and me, today, from the dominion of evil. The same God who will restore this planet to its original purpose, wishes to restore our lives today. We can praise God today, for He is our powerful Deliverer. 

Contributed by the South American Division.

The Longest Prediction of History

INTRODUCTION

Daniel's prophecies outline history in advance. They cover the same periods of time under different perspectives; they cover the same ground more than once. In Daniel 7, the kingdom of God is under attack. Cruel earthly rulers try to dominate the world.

A religious political power, a strange combination of church and state, establishes its authority with supremacy. The Law of God, the fundamental of His government, is changed by this new power that pretends to be the world leader. Human traditions substitute for biblical truth. Church councils substitute the Scriptures as the final authority in religious matters. An earthly religious power tries to establish the kingdom of God on Earth in its own great plan.

In Daniel 8, God makes His final move to put everything in order. He takes charge. The truth, thrown to the ground, is restored. In sincere and honest prayer, God's people confess their sin. They repent from their rebellion against His purposes. They are forgiven by His grace, transformed by His love, and renewed by His power. Kneeling before His heavenly throne, they seek Him and they renounce everything. God's final judgment call inspires them to an even deeper spiritual experience.

I. THE VISION OF THE RAM AND THE GOAT

Daniel's vision focuses on the final judgment in Heaven. It also moves our attention to the sanctuary. Two symbolic animals are described in chapter 8: A ram (Dan. 8:3, 4) and a goat (Dan. 8:5). Both the ram and the goat were animals from the sanctuary. They were

used specially in the service on the last day of the Jewish year, the Atonement Day. These symbolic animals point to the future and to the end of sin. They tell us about a day when the universe will be cleansed and the human race will once more be in harmony with God.

A. Who does the ram represent? (Dan. 8:20). The Medes and Persians reigned from 539 B.C. to 331 B.C. Under the government of Cyrus the Great, the Persian empire became the dominant power, fulfilling the prophecy that the higher of the two horns would ascend last.

B. Who does the goat represent? (Dan. 8:21). Alexander the Great, the first king of Greece, adjusted himself appropriately to each detail of this prophecy. When he died at age 33, his four generals divided the kingdom among themselves.

II. THE GROWTH OF THE LITTLE HORN

A. Daniel describes a power that would follow Greece (Dan. 8:9). The power of the little horn grew in two directions. It moved geographically, attacking all armies in its way. This power grew to the South, East, and to Palestine. Pagan Rome defeated Greece and rapidly expanded its empire to the entire Mediterranean region. Rome became the most feared power of the world. However, the power described here is not merely satisfied with a political empire. The political phase of Rome gave way to the religious phase. It extended itself to Heaven to defy even God's government.

How much power did the little horn want (Dan. 8:11)? "Prince of the Host" is another name for Jesus Christ. This earthly religious power pretended to be equal to the Lord of Heaven and the place of God's sanctuary "was overthrown." Earthly priests substituted for Jesus, our Heavenly High Priest.

Any system that fixes our attention on earthly temples, built by human beings, is directing our attention in the wrong direction. Heaven invites us to focus on the true sanctuary, where our real High Priest lives for us.

The power of the little horn cast to the ground the truth about Jesus as our real High Priest in the Heavenly sanctuary (Dan. 8:12).

What question is asked in Daniel 8:13, and what answer is given in Daniel 8:14? In the Bible, a day means a day. But when we use the symbolic language of Daniel and Revelation, a prophetic day equals a literal year. That's why the 2,300 prophetic days equal 2,300 literal years (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6). The prophecy of the 2,300 days is the longest one in the Bible (Dan. 8:17, 26). It takes us to the end of time.

The Bible describes two sanctuaries, one built by Moses on Earth, and the other built by God in heaven. God gave Moses instructions about the earthly sanctuary (Exod. 25:8). Everything about the earthly sanctuary represented Jesus. The lamb dying on the courtyard represented Jesus as our sacrifice. The priest ministering in the holy place represented Jesus, our Priest in the heavenly sanctuary offering forgiveness, mercy, and power for a new life. The High Priest entering the most holy place, standing in front of God's Law, in the presence of God in the atonement day, represented Jesus our High Priest and His faithful work of judgment to end sin forever.

The Day of Atonement symbolizes God's plan to purify or cleanse the universe from sin. Some individuals will be purified by fire. They cling to their sins; they do not want to abandon them. Hardened by the rebellion against God, they refuse to surrender themselves to Him. In

the presence of the Holy God, sin is a combustible material. Our God is a consuming fire for sin wherever it is found (Heb. 12:29).

Other people will be purified by the blood of Jesus. Today He invites us to accept His mercy. Today He wants to forgive our sins. Today He wants to change lives. Today He longs for us to respond to the love that flows from the old rugged cross, where the Savior of the world, with hands stained by blood, was nailed on the cross and died for us.

III. UNDERSTANDING THE VISION OF THE 2,300 DAYS (DAN. 9:23-27)

Daniel was instructed by Gabriel to “consider the word” and “understand the vision.” We could ask, “What word? What vision?” The answer is obvious. Gabriel is talking about the vision (in the previous chapter) that Daniel had not understood—the vision of the 2,300 days. “What subject?” The purification of the sanctuary in the final judgment of Earth at the end time. Gabriel’s explanation does two things: (1) It explains the parts of the vision that were not explained in the vision of chapter 8, and (2) it answers Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9.

A. The time set apart for the people of Israel (Dan. 9:24). In the Hebrew language, the Word “determine” means “to cut out.” The 70 weeks, applicable to the people of Daniel’s day, were “cut out” of the 2,300 days (literal years), taking us to the period of time generally known as the “end time.”

Considering that a prophetic day equals a literal year, 70 weeks equals 70 x 7 days, or 490 prophetic days, or 490 literal years.

B. The beginning of the prophecy (Dan. 9:25). The whole prophecy starts with the order to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. This decree was

made by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, in 457 B.C. (read Ezra 7:13-28). This decree, one of three decrees that allowed the nation of Israel to return from captivity to their native land, is significant because it not only allowed them to take their possessions with them, but also gave them the freedom to worship the true God, reestablishing Israel as a community of worshippers.

C. Christ, the center of the prophecy (Dan. 9:26). The main theme of this prophecy is Jesus Christ. The prophecy carefully narrates events in the life of Christ before they happen. The word “Messiah” means “the anointed.” Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit in His baptism (see Matt. 3:16; Acts 10:37, 38).

Note: If we advance 483 years from 457 B.C., we reach 27 A.D. (if there is no zero year). In 27 A.D., Jesus Christ was baptized and anointed with the Holy Spirit, as the prophecy predicted (see Luke 3:1-3). Jesus is the Messiah. He is not a falsification; He came at the right time. He was baptized at the right time. And He was crucified at the right time.

Jesus would be killed, but not for His own cause. He died for us. Sixty-nine weeks equals 7 x 69, or 483 prophetic days, or 483 literal years. In the middle of the last prophetic week of this prophecy, Christ would be crucified. The 69 prophetic weeks (483 years), ended in 27 A.D. Since the decree of Artaxerxes was issued in the fall of 457 B.C., we come to the autumn of 34 A.D.


Three-and-one-half years from the fall of 27 A.D. takes us to the spring of 31 A.D. The prophecy of Daniel was accurately fulfilled! Christ was crucified at the right time. Jesus, our Passover, was crucified for us. He shed His blood for us. He provided mercy and forgive-

ness for us. God’s mercy to the Jewish nation was extended. For three-and-one-half more years, God appealed to His people. In the fall of 34 A.D., the apostle Stephen made a final appeal for the Jewish nation to repent. The Jewish leaders not only rejected the appeal, they also stoned Stephen. With Stephen’s death, the gospel went to the Gentiles. Individual Jews may still be saved, but now God operates through a new “Israel,” the Church of Christ. The church, the body of Christ, is also His bride. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood of believers of the New Testament (1 Peter 2:9).

The first portion of our prophecy, the 490 years, is applied to Christ’s first coming. It reveals a loving Savior who came right on time. If the first 490 years of the 2,300 years end in 34 A.D., this leaves 1,810 remaining years.

IV. CONCLUSION

From 34 A.D., 1,810 years take us to the year 1844 A.D. In 1844, God’s great clock of time set the hour. Since 1844, we have been living in the judgment time, the end time. The destiny of the entire human race will soon be determined.

In 1844, God invited His faithful people to adore Him as the true God and surrender themselves to Him. Now God chooses those who would be His last representatives on earth to give a final warning message to the world. 

Contributed by the South American Division.



Daniel 10-12

The Glorious Encounter with God

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 10 presents Daniel praying fervently for the deliverance of his people. He is a symbol, or example, of God's people in the end time. His anguish for Israel's deliverance from pagan captivity is also a symbol of God's people in the end time, waiting for their final deliverance from this sinful world.

I. TIME TO OPEN THE HEART TO GOD

No problem is too difficult for God. There is no trouble too great for Him to untangle. There is no suffering too complicated for Him to cure. Today you may be feeling exceptional personal pain. You may be emotionally demolished. Your life may be devastated. Your wounds may seem incurable. Open your heart to Jesus. Tell Him about all these sorrows. He is a specialist in curing broken hearts. He is a master in building palaces from the ruins in our lives. Why don't you bow your head right now and invite Him to be your Doctor?

The evening news constantly reminds us that we live in a world that's out of control. From the human point of view, one word summarizes the future—uncertainty. For tens of thousands of people, the future is extremely foggy.

In chapter 11, the great truths of Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 9 are repeated. He then amplifies those first chapters, giving us once more the assurance that God has not forsaken this planet's rebellion. He is still in control. This world is still in His hands. The future is certain. Our destiny is secure. Our Pilot is taking us home!

II. THE BOOK OF DANIEL ENDS WITH VICTORY

God's Word triumphs! God's people triumph! God's purposes triumph! Satan and hell's hosts

are defeated. All history moves to a great climax. The entire human race is being thrown to a final destiny. There is nothing anyone can do to stop it. Soon the universe will be free from the ruins of sin. Soon the unjust will be destroyed. Soon there will be no more sickness, sadness, or death. Soon songs of joy and rejoicing will resound through the universe. Soon time will extend itself to eternity. Daniel 12 is an open door for the New World.

A. Just as the three Hebrew young men entered into the flames but were personally protected by Jesus, so God's people will "enter the flames" and go through a time of trouble at the end of time. But God will not forget them; He will reward them for their faithfulness.

The glorious event happens at the end of probation (Dan. 12:1b). It occurs in a miraculous way (Matt. 16:27; 24:30, 31).

B. Jesus' second coming will be the most spectacular event in the history of the world. As lightning shines from east to west, so will His coming fill the sky (Matt. 24:27). Every eye will see (Rev. 1:7), every ear will hear (1 Thess. 4:16). The Earth will tremble before the powerful glory of His coming.

III. THE FOCUS OF WISE PEOPLE

Wise people will have made the most intelligent choice of their lives. Instead of living for themselves, they have chosen to live to bless others. They have spent their lives sharing His love. Whatever their occupation, they are sensitive to the needs of those around them.

A. The focus of the book of Daniel is the "end time." The stories of Daniel reveal faith, courage, and perseverance in face of difficulties and challenges. Daniel's prophecies reveal the great prophetic events in God's plan, showing that He is still in control.

Just before Jesus' coming, the book of Daniel will be revealed; thousands of people will

study Daniel's prophecies in preparation for the soon return of Christ. Knowledge of the events at the end time and final days of the earth, knowledge of God's strategies about the end time and Satan's deceptions in the last days, will be clarified through the prophecies of Daniel. The book of Daniel has been disclosed. We are living in the end time.

B. Many people have a renewed interest in studying Daniel's prophecies. Each prophecy is an indicator of the return of our Lord. Each one predicts the return of Christ as the end of all history. Daniel 2 ends with the kingdom of Christ—the Stone—destroying all evil empires. Daniel 7 ends with God putting things in order during the final judgment of the Earth. God's integrity is revealed in the judgment. Mercy and justice meet at the judgment. Daniel 8 reaches the climax with the final restoration of the truth in Jesus' coming. The entire universe is clean, and sin is defeated. God's truth triumphs. In Daniel 11 and 12, God's people—persecuted, opposed, and oppressed—are delivered.

IV. CONCLUSION

The book of Daniel gratifyingly reveals an all-powerful, all-wise, and almighty God, whose words, people, and purposes will finally be victorious.

We are on the victorious side. We may turn our eyes from life's problems to the promises of His Word. We may, by faith, see a better world where life's problems will end. One day we will enter in the joy of His eternal presence and experience the happiness for which we were created.

Wouldn't you like to dedicate your life today to Christ who has the world in His hands? ^{ED}

Contributed by the South American Division.

Seventh-day Adventist Global Tobacco Control Summit

IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE 13TH WORLD CONFERENCE ON TOBACCO OR HEALTH

Date: July 14-16, 2006
Location: Washington, DC

Who should attend: *Adventist church leaders and members who have experience and expertise in tobacco control and treatment.*

The North American Division, in partnership with the General Conference, Loma Linda University and Versacare will sponsor this weekend event to increase awareness of current tobacco control needs, and provide networking for Seventh-day Adventist leaders who may be attending the World Conference on Tobacco or Health.

The weekend will provide a setting for:

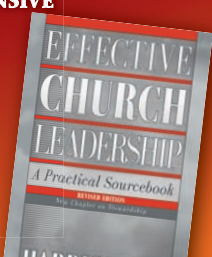
1. Discussion of current global tobacco issues for the purpose of creating awareness and making recommendations to Seventh-day Adventist church leadership.
2. Demonstrate how Adventist members, pastors and others are responding to opportunities in tobacco control leadership.
3. Review the current programs and materials available from the Adventist church for individuals who want to quit smoking.
4. Honor those who have provided pioneering efforts and historical context of their impact on our church and community.
5. Provide a forum for thoughtful planning for the future of the Adventist church mission and training of leaders to address the global tobacco epidemic

Registration: Register for the Adventist Tobacco Global Summit weekend online, www.plusline.org/events or by calling 800-732-7587. For more information, including transportation, accommodations and all other questions, go to PlusLine.org. **Urgent Registration Information:** Register for the 13th World Conference on Tobacco or Health, go online at www.13thwctoh.org. For best rates, register before April 1, 2006.

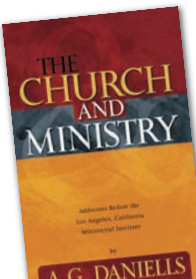
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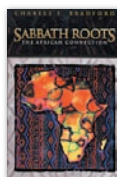
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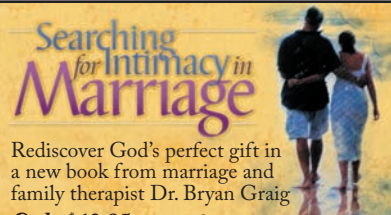
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PREACHING WITH POWER

BY Edward Heppenstall

The Summoning Note

A sermon fails unless it carries something of a summons from the eternal God. It must possess the note of summons to the will, to the entire being. This sense of claim is borne of God's work in the preacher himself, God actively probing *me*, challenging *me*, calling on *me* for a decision, and asking *me* to get others to make the same kind of decision.


Many sermons lack this summoning note. They are mere Sabbath assignments, a task to be done, with little or no sense of claim felt by the people. Such sermons cannot edify or confirm the truth. Does God ever come to a man or a woman without making a claim or a demand upon him? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" is the personal claim of God for a personal response.

It is said of Whitefield's preaching that each person in his audience felt as though the message were intended for him alone. This is what makes Billy Graham's preaching so convincing. We may object to his music, his vehemence, his hell-fire preaching; nevertheless, he comes with a tremendous sense of personal claim upon the hearts of his hearers. This is one of the great reasons why men and women by the tens of thousands flock to hear him. It is not all due to good publicity and backing.

The fact remains that in our preaching, too much of this eternal claim is lacking. All too often, one gets the impression that the preacher is merely sitting back and talking about God, doctrine, and a host of other related topics; whereas

in effective preaching, we become inescapably aware that God is talking to us, asking questions and expecting answers; He offers us the salvation we desperately need.

Such preaching is grounded on the intimate awareness of another. Isaiah's impassioned plea for righteousness sprang from his sense of an eternal fellowship and holiness. All the prophets felt the same way. Christian preaching must be rooted in the persuasive faith and piercing conviction that in the message of the everlasting gospel, which we are preaching next Sabbath morning, lies the sole hope of salvation for mankind.

If the preacher is going to preach with power, he must change some of his perspectives and attitudes. If he regards the truth and realities of Adventism as just so many ideas to study and preach about, he cannot help having an attitude of detachment from people. The irresistible commitment in favor of truth will be absent, and the sense of claim will be blurred. If, on the other hand, the preacher is moved not by mere intellectual arguments but by a spirit of real concern for others; if he is primarily interested not in *making* a good case but in *finding* a good cause; if he aspires not simply to spread ideas *about* truth but to make decisions *for* truth; if he hungers and thirsts for righteousness and for the establishment of the kingdom of God in the hearts of his hearers, then he cannot help preaching with his overwhelming sense of claim. It will be heard and felt in his voice. 

Edward Heppenstall

Former professor at Andrews University.

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A GOD WHO JUDGES

Dr. L. D. Raelly

God's judgment upon His chosen people illustrates both His justice and His fairness. God does not distinguish between the heathen and the chosen, the religious and the secular. He is Judge of them all. Paul expresses this well when he says, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). Indeed, God holds His chosen people accountable, as Peter points out: "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17).

God's judgment on Judah came in the form of Babylonian captivity in 606 B.C. Daniel says: "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand with part of the vessels of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessel into the treasure house

of his god" (Dan. 1:1, 2). The chronicler of Israel further confirms God's judgment over His chosen race when he declares that Nebuchadnezzar carried the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon (2 Chron. 36:16, 17).

The reasons for God's judgment over His people are clear (2 Chron. 36:14-16; 2 Kings 24:1-3): (1) Priests, kings, and the

people sinned against God in adopting the customs of the contemporary communities; (2) God's people deserted His temple; (3) they defied His messengers; and (4) they rejected His messages.

The chronicler further asserts that because of the reasons enumerated above, "the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of

the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of the sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand" (2 Chron. 36:16, 17).

Note that the judgment of Yahweh was extensive: (1) It affected the entire community: people, priests, and king; (2) it affected the house of God and its vessels; (3) as the house of worship perished, so did the worshipers; and (4) as the worshipers were carried into Babylon, so were the instruments of worship.

The chronicler confirms that these remained in Babylon until "the reign of the kingdom of Persia" (2 Chron. 36:18-20). Habakkuk supplements the chronicler's list of the causes of God's judgments over Jerusalem with the following additions (Hab. 1:4): (1) The law was ignored; (2) justice was perverted and did not prevail; and (3) wretchedness overtook righteousness.

To Habakkuk's appeal for divine intervention in the fast-deteriorating society of Jerusalem, God responded, "I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. . . . They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. . . . Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over and offend, imputing this his power unto his god" (Hab. 1:6-11).

Judgment as Daniel sees

While Nebuchadnezzar was of the opinion that his god Nebu brought about his

victory over Judah and the resulting captivity of the Israelites, Daniel and other prophets make the bold declaration that it was God's will that brought about judgment over apostate Judah. God hands Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar. Even in this judgment, the question that is foremost in God's mind and in the ministry of Daniel is: How shall Judah relate to God's judgment? Will they reject their perverse ways and forsake their sin and return to the true God? Will they seek in God their redemption and strength, their freedom and dignity as God's chosen people? The book of Daniel contends that only God deserves worship—not Nebu, not any emperor, not any human system. God is the supreme judge over all nations, Jew or Gentile.

This truth is vividly taught in the book of Daniel, as the prophet narrates God's dealings with the mighty monarchs of Babylon and Medo-Persia.

1. Consider the dream of Daniel 2. The succession of one kingdom after another, and the human system giving way to the establishment of God's kingdom is a lesson in history that God rules and God judges. He gives power to whom He wills. He is in control.

2. In chapters 3 and 6, Daniel presents to us the God who redeems. When His faithful servants become prey to the selfish arrogance of human potentates or to the jealousy of individuals who refuse to acknowledge the grace and power of God, God intervenes. The stories of the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lions' den illustrate that God reverses human verdicts and passes judgment on human actions.

3. In chapter 4, the Lord of judgment rises to magnanimity as He mingles justice

with mercy. In spite of the truth revealed to him that he is what he is because of God's providence, the Babylonian monarch explodes in self-exaltation and defies God. "Is not this great Babylon," says Nebuchadnezzar, "that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30). Note that this defiant statement against Yahweh's prerogative to judge and remove kings at will was made after God had revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the course of history and his limited role in it. But the king chose to defy God's Word and ignore God's dealings in human affairs. Then came God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar: "While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the fields: they shall make thee to eat grass like oxen, and seven times¹ shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:31, 32).

God's judgment of Nebuchadnezzar was both instructive and corrective, just like His judgment on Judah. Nebuchadnezzar learned well, for he testifies, "And at the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou? . . .

Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the king of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan. 4:34-37).

The proud worshiper of Nebu bowed low before the God of judgment. Ellen G. White comments, "The once proud monarch has become a humble child of God; . . . He who had defied and blasphemed the God of heaven now acknowledged the power of the Most High and earnestly sought to promote the fear of Jehovah and the happiness of his subjects."²

4. God as judge is seen again in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar. Here the punishment was not corrective but punitive. In the midst of reveling calculated to defy God and dishonor Him, judgment came in the form of handwriting on the wall. Daniel rebuked the drunken king; "But [thou] hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; . . . and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Dan. 5:23). The prophet's rebuke was followed by an announcement of the divine judgment: "Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:28). That very night, even as Belshazzar defied God, God's judgment indicted Babylon, and history moved on to Medo-Persia.

Since the sell-out in Eden, the God of judgment had been numbering the kingdoms of this world, and indeed the kingdom of Satan, until He would give the rulership of the entire creation to its rightful owner—Jesus Christ. Under this scheme, kingdoms have reigned and kingdoms have waned. As the prophet

Ezekiel declared, God would "overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is; and I will give it to him" (Ezek. 21:27).

5. In chapters 7 and 8, Daniel shows how God would judge both the secular and false religious powers of this world. Chapter 7 predicts the activities of the little horn—a religious power of immense power and pretense. This little horn earned itself Yahweh's adverse judgment because of its rebellious activities (Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:10-12):

- Making war with the saints and prevailing against them.
- Speaking great words against the Most High.
- Attempting to change items of the laws of Yahweh.
- Reaching to and casting down some of the host of heaven.
- Magnifying itself even to the prince of the host.
- Meddling with Christ's mediatorial ministry.
- Casting down the sanctuary and thereby abrogating its ministry.
- Casting down the truth to the ground.

These activities prompted God to sit in judgment over the little horn (Dan. 7:9-11, 21-26). The reason for the judgment is twofold: to examine the activities of the little horn and to exonerate the saints from the accusation of the little horn. The saints, exonerated by the God of judgment, will receive the kingdom, wrested

from the enemy. "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and all dominion shall serve and obey him" (Dan. 7:27). Jesus reaffirmed this truth when He declared, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Thus the God who judges is the God who will establish the kingdom of righteousness. It is He who deserves our worship and allegiance: in our allegiance and commitment to Him, we find our redemption and eternal security; when all is done and the righteous will have received the kingdom from their God, they shall declare, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou kings of saints. Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou art holy: For all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev. 15:3, 4). ^{ED}

1. Seven times means seven years. "For seven years Nebuchadnezzar was an astonishment to all his subjects; for seven years he was humbled before all the world." (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 520).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 521.

This article is excerpted and adapted from the practical resource, *The God of Daniel*, by Dr. L. D. Raelly. The entire book is available for purchase at <www.ministerialassociation.com>.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Armando Juarez



God had great expectations when He created man, a being who would reflect His own image and likeness and who would eventually fill the void created by the angels that united in Lucifer's rebellion.¹ But sin transformed God's plans for the human race. This event, though painful for God, would not prevent Him from accomplishing His plans, even if He had to modify them. Saint Augustine said, "The glory of God was to transform curses into blessings." That's what happened to man: what was going to be a terrible curse for the human race, God transformed into one of the greatest blessings given to the intelligent beings of the universe, sons and daughters of God (1 John 2:21). Although sin brought death, pain, and suffering, God drew up the plan of salvation to restore the human race, not to a pre-Edenic position, but to a more exalted one, than even the angels being participants of the divine nature (1 Peter 1:4).

This plan of redemption was revealed to our first parents when they received the first promise. It was passed on to the patriarchs. God said to Abraham, "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The revelation of this plan became more evident when God ordered the sanctuary to be built in the midst of His chosen people. The Israelites didn't fulfill God's plan to become a blessing to the nations despite the many opportunities God gave them. When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son to this world to fulfill His plan of redemption, but again the chosen people ignored their mission when they rejected Jesus and crucified Him (John 1:11). So Jesus declared to the unbelieving leaders of the Jews, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43).

God called the church to carry out the mission rejected by the Jewish people. It is through the Christian church that God will accomplish His plan of redemption. But how vast is this mission and what does it entail?

The redemptive mission of the church

The apostle Peter wrote that the Church has been called to "proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). The church has a redemptive mission with two dimensions. The first dimension is the outward or evangelistic mission, which consists of preaching the gospel to the entire world (Matt. 28:18-20). The second dimension is internal renewal. It consists of restoring in the believer

the image or character of Christ. Both dimensions of the mission are equally important. While the evangelism works in favor of the human being, renewal works within the human being. The former saves the individual from the kingdom of sin, the latter rescues him from the power of sin; Both dimensions of the mission complement each other; if one is left out or neglected, the redemptive process remains incomplete. Let us consider more closely each of these dimensions.

The redemptive evangelistic mission

The external or evangelistic mission of the church entails announcing the Gospel to the whole world. It obeys the commission given by our Lord to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). To reach this goal, the Church must fulfill its mission from different perspectives suggested in the Scriptures themselves: biological, geographical, sociological, and religious. We'll also mention the reasons for focusing on them from different angles.

The biological perspective. The divine order is to preach the Gospel "to all creatures." To reach this goal, the Church's efforts must be directed toward every individual, including each biological phase: childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, and old age. The Church's efforts must be focused on all phases of biological growth, without neglecting any of them. The Gospel must reach every "creature."

The sociological perspective. Another interpretation of "to every creature" is to consider all social classes (low/middle/high). Usually the Church directs its efforts at the low and middle classes, but very little work has been done with marginalized groups (beggars, drug addicts,

AIDS victims, prostitutes, etc.). This perspective helps us to be more conscious about other social classes. We must reach every one of them.

The geographical perspective. The Lord traced a territorial advance program from a geographical perspective. His commission was “go into all the world” and “be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The idea in the verse is an expansive territorial advance. Therefore, the evangelistic mission must be accomplished with a geographical perspective.

The religious perspective. The Scriptures divide the world into two parts: the Jews (worshippers of the true God) and the Gentiles (the pagans or worshippers of the other gods). The Lord gave the command to work for the Jews (the lost sheep of Israel) and for the Gentiles or people who professed other beliefs. We have the same mission today. Work on behalf of the Christians (the lost sheep of spiritual Israel) and the other world religions. In order to fulfill the mission, we must consider all world religions: Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and many others. Within Christianity we have the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, many Protestant churches, and other branches (sometimes known as religious groups) that grow out of these churches.

The Church’s duty is to develop strategies to preach the Gospel and convert people according to the type of religion they profess. Only then can we fulfill in its entirety the divine commission to preach “to the Gentiles.” After having considered the evangelistic mission, we’ll discuss the redemptive and restorative mission of the Church.

The redemptive and restorative mission of the Church

The purpose for preaching the Gospel is reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). This is accomplished when man accepts the Gospel (Rom. 5:1). At that time, the internal or restorative mission is initiated. This process includes the redeeming one, which has three phases; justification, sanctification, and glorification. When the believer accepts, he is justified; this gives him the right to heaven. Then, throughout his life, he must go through the process of sanctification that will take place when the Lord appears at His Second Coming. The believer will be transformed into the glorious image of Christ, because the objective of the internal or restorative mission is to reach “holiness, likeness to God.”²

The mission of the church

The restorative mission includes the entire life and being of the believer. God wants to restore His image in us. He wants all to come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the “fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). Man’s redemption, therefore, must reach all biological phases of his existence from birth to the grave: childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, and old age. Concerning the restorative mission during the man’s entire life, the Scriptures teach that this has a wholistic nature, not dualistic, because the human being is a soul. The human being has three spheres in which he manifests his existence: body, mind, and spirit. In other words, the individual can function and express himself in those three levels or spheres. These must be kept in holiness until Jesus comes (1 Thess. 5:23). Also, the human being is a social entity, and thus the social aspect is an additional level which the human being must cultivate.

Jesus’ development is a model which we should follow so that these words may also apply to us: “And Jesus increased in wisdom [mental] and stature [physical] and in favor with God [spiritual] and men [social]” (Luke 2:52).

God wants His children’s development to be multidimensional. Therefore, the restorative mission of the Church must encompass the three levels: physical, spiritual, and social. Thus far we have presented God’s mission for the Christian Church in general, but what is the role played by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in this redemptive mission of the Church?

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

We believe that God called the Adventist Church not only to preach the gospel to the non-Christian world, but to call attention to the mostly-forgotten truths that are part of the Gospel: Sabbath observance, Christ’s second coming, Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, man’s wholistic nature, state of the dead, health reform, and other truths that we believe, which are part of what we call the three angels’ message (Rev. 14). Our message is not exclusively for non-Christian nations, but also for Christian groups that disobey or ignore the truths previously listed. This is the great challenge before us. ^{ED}

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Pacific Press, 1981), page 1096.
2. Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 16.

Armando Juarez

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IS THERE A WORSHIP SERVICE OR A PROGRAM IN YOUR CHURCH?

Judson Castro Perez

Have you ever thought about this question? What kind of meeting is there in your church? How would you classify the different meetings of your congregation? You may even be thinking, What difference does it make? After all, your last words before leaving church are usually, "In our next program we will have something very special." What's wrong with this? Everything!

Let me first explain that I have nothing against a special worship service. I believe that as a spiritual leader, you are interested in improving the quality of the meetings in your church. As a pastor for 20 years, I have promoted spiritual events in a variety of structures, and I still believe that this is valid. But it took me a long time to discover that before I do anything in church, I need to answer the question: Will it be a worship service or a program? If the answer is a worship service, go ahead! If it is a program, give up!



“WHEN HUMAN BEINGS SING WITH THE SPIRIT AND THE UNDERSTANDING, HEAVENLY MUSICIANS TAKE UP THE STRAIN, AND JOIN IN THE SONG OF THANKSGIVING.”

A worship service is not a program

If you think of church meetings as programs, it's time to reevaluate your concepts, because a worship service is definitely not a program. Until this concept is completely accepted by the leadership and understood by church members, nothing will satisfy the basic needs of your congregation.

This article will attempt to show some of the characteristics of the true worship service in the biblical-Christian context. Among these, three are fundamental in adoration: (1) The worship service is an answer to God's revelation; (2) the worship service, as an answer to God's revelation, is a gift from God; and (3) the worship service is a corporate activity.

The worship service is an answer to God's revelation

In a program, the focus is on people. After all, people are your target audience. Everything is done for their benefit and satisfaction. In a worship service, it's different. In the service of adoration, the focus is on God. He is the target of our praise and everything is done for His satisfaction.

To plan a worship service around people may cause fatal consequences, because everything we can produce is imperfect and offensive to God. The fact that God refused Cain's offering teaches us that worship has a theological meaning (Gen. 4:3-5). It is not what human beings like, but what God wants. The worship service should be in harmony with a theology of divine practices. That way, it becomes an answer to God's revelation.

The challenge of adoration lies in replacing what God has indicated by what men want.¹ When this is avoided, everything changes. The Word of God is converted into a source of research. It becomes easier to offer an acceptable worship service.

Thus, the purpose of adoration is not to take any kind of personal advantage, but to worship God. “The main purpose of adoration is to give glory to God and not to men; God must come first, otherwise only men will be exalted.”² Men's exaltation comes as a result of incorrect worship.

The worship service, as an answer to God's revelation, is a gift from God

As you plan a program, people's ideas are fundamental. In the worship service, it's different. Human ideas are subsidiary; God's orientations are a priority. We depend completely on Him in planning an appropriate worship service.

This concept is based on the fact that God is the

Creator, and we are the created. We were created in His image and called to worship Him (Gen. 1:27, 31). Our complete happiness can only be found in the adoration of our Creator. This need for the divine is a gift. Someone rightly said that “men build churches, go to churches, and share formal acts of adoration because there is a thirst for the divine that moves them and does not let them be.”³

Adoration is imperative. It is more than an isolated act during the week; it should be a lifestyle. It is the continual reminder that God is the Creator and we are His creation. Thus, a life of adoration is the wisest choice a person can make.



The worship service is a corporate activity

In a conventional program, people become the center of attention. People are key to the success of the program. The unexpected absence of one person could be catastrophic. The worship service is different. The worship service is essentially a corporate activity, not an act of isolated individuals, but of the entire church (Ps. 22:25).

Just as a priest existed to offer a sacrifice, churches exist to provide a place for corporate adoration. The priesthood of believers is also exercised during the worship service (1 Peter 2:5-9).

The Christian's private adoration is based upon his union with Christ. "To be in Christ" means to be incorporated in "His body," which is "His church" that adores Him and is obedient to Him. Therefore, private adoration is based on corporate worship.

Ellen White enlarged on this concept when she affirmed, "When human beings sing with the Spirit and the understanding, heavenly musicians take up the strain, and join in the song of thanksgiving."⁴


Conclusion

There is a big difference between programs and worship services. One has nothing to do with the other. While in one the human element is valued, in the other only God is exalted.

When someone offers a worship service to God, they should consider at least three

aspects: (1) the Christian worship service is an answer to a personal revelation of God, an answer to what God has done; (2) the Christian worship service, as an answer, is a gift from God; this is why we were created; and (3) the Christian worship service is a corporate event. In God's eyes all believers are equally important and all are priests.

When planning a church service and considering these aspects, our concept of adoration changes. Each part of the service is considered sacred in God's temple and deserves attention and care.⁵ If the church service is prepared with this spirit, there will be no need to promote the preacher, the musician, or the special guests because the elements of the service itself will be attractive enough.

True adoration pleases God. Next time you go to church, remember that it doesn't matter if the service makes you only happy; if it makes you more like Jesus, people will know you were with Him.⁶ 

1. Héctor E. Ramal Quispe "The Theology and Practice of Adoration" from classnotes.
2. D. E. W. Harrison, *Ways of Worship*, page 33.
3. Willard L. Sperry, *Reality in Worship*, page 60.
4. E. G. White, *Evangelism*, page 504.
5. Quispe, *Ibid*.
6. Harrison, *Ibid*.

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Keeping the Commandments

We applaud the renewed interest in God's commandments as evidenced by the upcoming, first-ever "Ten Commandment Day" and its sponsors' keen interest in godly living, spiritual renewal, and the challenge of turning hearts and minds toward our eternal God and His unchanging law. As longtime advocates of a grace-motivated observance of the entire Decalogue by born-again Christians, Adventists can and should enthusiastically affirm those who are now standing up for God's law in the midst of a world that appears to ignore it.

This renewed emphasis on the moral law of God stands in welcome contrast to the messages all-too-frequently heard in some pulpits, which give distinct impressions that Christians can safely ignore the requirements of the Ten Commandments because they have all been "nailed to the cross" and are no longer of importance to followers of Jesus. At the same time, those of us who have labored in this field for some time can and should humbly offer a few crucial observations to this growing movement of sincere believers who share our deep concern for the role of faith and Christian influence in culture. "What would Jesus do?" is still the most helpful guideline as we communicate to

our secular society the clear mandates of God's eternal law. All other observations grow out of this conviction.

Emulate rather than legislate. Jesus didn't lobby the Roman Senate for legislation requiring observance of the commandments by citizen and subject alike—and not because He believed the world at the turn of the last millennium wasn't truly decadent and in need of the moral law. Jesus did, however, frequently invite people everywhere to follow Him, to emulate His perfect observance of the commandments through a life of abiding trust in His heavenly Father.

Repose rather than impose. No one held the law of God in higher esteem than Jesus. He consistently kept the law and taught others to do the same. To those who sought to nullify the Ten Commandments, our Lord underscored their unchanging verity. For those who mistakenly believed that law-keeping was a means of salvation, He described his Messianic mission as laying down His life for the sins of the whole world, including scrupulous law keepers.

To those who had turned the law into a tiresome list of do's and don'ts, Christ said in clear, liberating tones, "Come unto me and you will find rest for your souls." He taught that the Sabbath of the Decalogue was for *celebrating* God's salvation, not *earning* it. His spiritual rest was about reposing by faith in God's grace through His appointed, perfect, paschal Lamb. Never once did Christ dismiss or diminish the law, and not once did He seek to impose it on others. His kingdom, He

proclaimed, was one of grace, truth, and the awesome freedom to choose.

Show rather than tell. Jesus didn't print up bumper stickers so His disciples could "share their faith." He wasn't bashful about the law; it's just that the Creator knew best how to win back His wayward creatures. The integrity of His faithful life of obedience to His Father's will made ordinary people want to follow Him, not a petition drive, not a lapel pin, not a two-ton monument in a public building, and not a national holiday. Jesus "walked the walk"! And His relatively few words on this subject had power and authority precisely because they were consistent with His example. When He encouraged others to thoughtfully observe God's law, He had already shown them how by the way He lived His life.

Shine rather than whine. Our Savior didn't moralistically whine about the moral decline of the world around Him or the evils of a secular government. He didn't join the picket lines, He didn't form a political action committee, and He didn't rally the troops to decry the decay of culture. In fact, He directed His most severe critiques of culture at the very folks who should have been most positively influencing culture but who, in attitude and action, appeared to have conformed to the spirit of this world instead. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Influence, is a matter of shining, not whining.

Motivate with love rather than with law. Better than any of us, Jesus understood

that law is a terrible motivator. "If you love me," Jesus said, "you will want to keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Love is the great motivator in our lives and the great transformer of culture. Not law. Not guilt. Not shame. Not rhetoric. Not slogans. Just love!

It is ironic that the zeal of our advocacy for something inherently holy and just and good (Romans 7:12) could easily turn into just another form of legalism and defeat the very purpose for which we strive unless we look to Jesus' example. If we insist that people who claim no connection with Christ must nevertheless observe the Ten Commandments, we end up advocating legalism, a form of godliness without the power of a living relationship with God, wrought by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. ^{ED}

James A. Cress

Ministerial Association Secretary

Seeing God at His Very Best

Understanding the Character of God



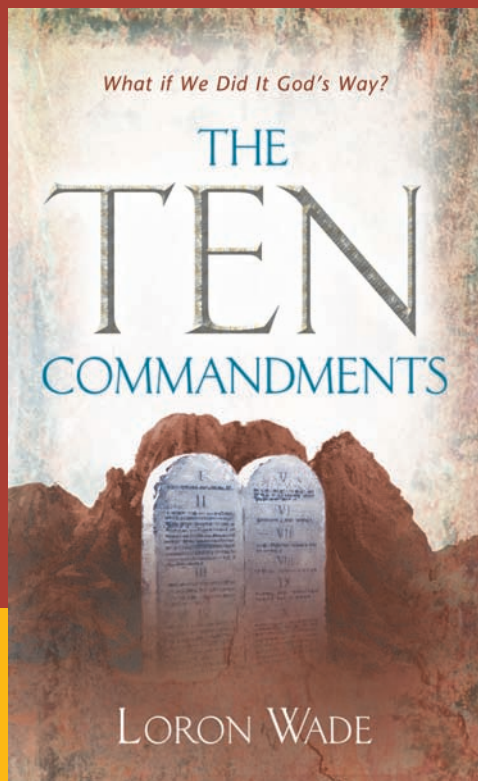
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