

QUARTERLY RESOURCE FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS • JULY/SEPTEMBER 2022

# ELDER'S DIGEST

Tears of Joy  
in Mongolia



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COVER PHOTO: Mongolia Mission president SukHee Han, right, and a local Mongolian pastor, L. MunkhOrgil, raising a newly baptized believer out of the water as General Conference president Ted N.C. Wilson watches on Sabbath, August 27, 2022, at a youth camp on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

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# One Hundred and Forty Million Opportunities



**One** hundred and forty million babies are born every year worldwide. That's more than four births every second. If you take a breath, hold it in, and exhale, in those six seconds about twenty-five babies have just taken their first breath.

One hundred and forty million is mind-boggling.

Capitalists celebrate these 140 million annual births because each new life is another customer to boost revenue. Conversely, environmentalists are concerned by these 140 million new arrivals because each new person will further deplete precious resources.

While many capitalists are excited by the opportunity of exploitation, and many environmentalists fear the exploitation of resources, we as Seventh-day Adventists, dedicated followers of Jesus, also should be very attentive to these 140 million new lives—but for different reasons.

Actually, this number should seize our attention.

We are Adventists. Adventists believe that Jesus will return soon and, when He returns, the dead and the living, in Christ, will become immortal, imperishable, and incorruptible. This is our victory (1 Cor 15:51–55). Everyone deserves to know how they can have this victory.

Adventists know how humanity can have this victory—only through Jesus. The Bible teaches that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, ESV).

But don't miss these very important points.

Not everyone will be saved. Not all will have that victory. Not all will have eternal life.

While we celebrate that our global membership has surpassed twenty-one million, and praise God for every valuable individual, it has taken us approximately 180 years to reach that number. It's sobering that every year approximately seven times our current membership is born.

The birth rates in so-called Christian countries are declining. Most of those 140 million

babies will be born in circumstances that are ambivalent, or even hostile, to Christianity.

That's 140 million people born every year who are candidates for the kingdom of God, but most will grow up knowing nothing of Jesus, His love, His sacrifice—nothing of His first advent or His soon approaching second advent.

While many are perplexed by dwindling environmental resources, there is a tragic unawareness that the love of God is boundless. There is an abundance of grace to save each precious individual.

If we are going to fulfill the Great Commission, we obviously need to do things differently and—dare I write it—better. Our denominational growth rate is not keeping pace with the global birth rate.

What can we learn from the earliest followers of Jesus, who encountered even more daunting numbers? Acts 1:15 indicates that the total number of believers was a mere 120. They trusted the irrevocable promises of Jesus: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, ESV). “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20, ESV).

They had an experience with Jesus Christ that transformed their lives. Fishing, tax collecting, and other previous occupations were no longer the priority. They were now obsessed with sharing Jesus.

They prayed, studied the Word, sought and received the Holy Spirit, and shared resources. Everything available to them was employed for sharing the gospel—their voices, homes, meals, time, talents, and finances. Even Peter's shadow (Acts 5:14–15) and Paul's handkerchiefs (Acts 19:11–12) were used for ministry.

Dear fellow elders, deacons, and deaconesses, do those 140 million precious souls speak to your heart? What can you do to share the grace of Jesus with those who need salvation? Today, God has a role, a special purpose, for everyone—for every elder, deacon, and deaconess. The talents and resources of ordinary people, like you and me, can be used so that others may discover eternal life through Jesus. **ED**



**ANTHONY R. KENT** | General Conference Associate Ministerial Secretary



General Conference president Ted N.C. Wilson, center, and a local Mongolian pastor, L. Munkh-Orgil, raising their hands as they baptize a new believer with the assistance of Mongolia Mission president Suk Hee Han, right, on Sabbath, August 27, 2022, at a youth camp on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

# Tears of Joy as Missionary Hails Mongolian Milestone

**CELEBRATIONS WITH TED WILSON BOOST MORALE IN A REMOTE COUNTRY.**

**Tears** filled Joanne Kim's eyes as she watched the first three Mongolians get baptized and join the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mongolia in 1993.

Her eyes again filled with tears as she watched 155 Mongolians get baptized on August 27 on the thirtieth anniversary of the first church that she helped plant in Mongolia.

"As one of the pioneer missionaries who helped plant the Adventist Church in Mongolia, I remember the first baptism and many of the following ones, and I'm always tearful and joyful when we hold a baptism," said Kim, an American who attended the baptismal ceremony at a youth camp on the outskirts of Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar.

The baptisms capped August 20–27 evangelistic meetings at twenty-one sites across the remote country as General Conference president



SCAN FOR AUDIO

**“Despite the 10/40 Window setting with a very small minority of Christians in the country, God is blessing the strong work of Seventh-day Adventists to grow and proclaim the three angels’ messages.”**

**Ted Wilson**

Ted N.C. Wilson, Kim, and hundreds of other church members celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the first Adventist church plant in September 1992 with a whirlwind of activities, including visits with Mongolia’s deputy prime minister and the U.S. ambassador to Mongolia.

The anniversary celebrations also offered a welcome boost in morale for a church that has struggled amid COVID-19 restrictions and a decline in crucial financial support from abroad, church leaders said.

Wilson, making the second visit by a General Conference president to Mongolia since Robert S. Folkenberg conducted the first three baptisms in October 1993, expressed joy at seeing God’s power firsthand in Mongolia.

“What a privilege it has been to get acquainted with our people and God’s work in Mongolia and to see the increase from no members in 1992 to about 3,200 members and several institutions by 2022,” said Wilson, who led one of the twenty-one evangelistic meetings with his wife, Nancy.

“Despite the 10/40 Window setting with a very small minority of Christians in the country, God is blessing the strong work of Seventh-day Adventists to grow and proclaim the three angels’ messages,” he said by e-mail.

#### **TOUGH BEGINNINGS**

Adventists first brought the gospel to Mongolia in the 1920s, but there was no Adventist presence in the country in the post-communist days of the early 1990s, when

Kim joined fellow American missionaries Cathie (Jolly) Hartman and her husband, Brad, who had arrived earlier.

“Life was much harder back in the early 1990s,” said Kim, now education director of the Adventist Church’s Mongolia Mission.

Amid financial and other difficulties, the efforts by Kim, the Jollys, and others bore fruit with the planting of a first church with the three baptisms in 1993. Kim said that the early church, although small in size, was large in love for God and self-sacrifice. She and her husband, Jon, a dentist, hope that the 2022 anniversary celebrations help rekindle a similar spirit in the post-COVID era.

“I pray for that spirit of unity and self-sacrifice to be renewed in today’s much larger church organization,” she said in an interview. “Jon and I want to bring back the spirit of the early church from the 1990s.”

She and her husband have received approval from the Mongolia Mission to plant a new church.

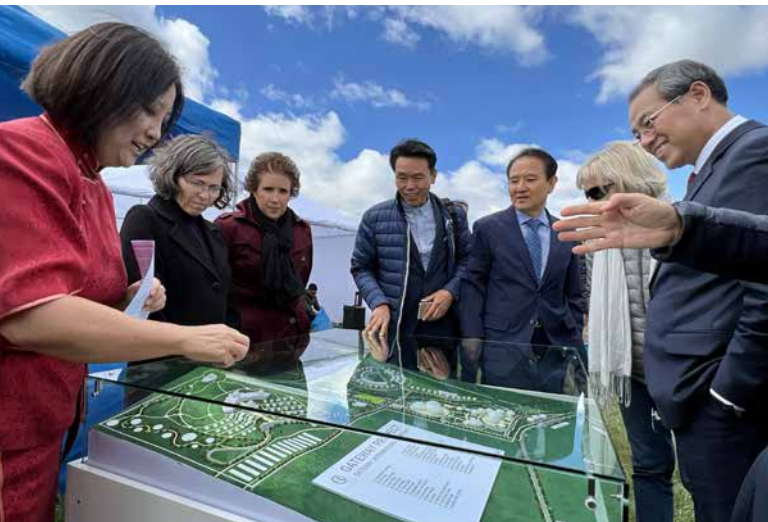
#### **BOOST IN MORALE**

The anniversary celebrations have bolstered morale, said Mongolia Mission president Suk Hee Han.

With the 155 baptisms, the Mongolian church is on target to baptize three hundred people in 2022, a sharp increase from the average of thirty baptisms per year during the COVID-19 pandemic, he said. Fifty-nine people were baptized when the first COVID restrictions were lifted in March 2022.

General Conference president Ted N.C. Wilson, left, sharing a passage from the Bible with U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia Michael S. Klecheski, right, during a meeting about religious liberty and freedom of conscience in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on August 22, 2022.





Joanne Kim, left, pioneer missionary, Gateway coordinator, and education director of the Mongolia Mission, showing plans for the Gateway project during a tour of the Gateway site located about 15 miles south of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on August 26, 2022. Pictured from left: Cathie (Jolly) Hartman, a pioneer missionary to Mongolia; Kim Boyko, chair, Uplifting Him Ministries; Jason Yoon of the Jeju Island Missionary Training Center; Yo Han Kim, president of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division; Nancy Wilson, wife of the General Conference president; and Soon Gi Kang, president of the Korean Union Conference.



General Conference president Ted N.C. Wilson, second left, and his wife, Nancy, right, touring the site of the Gateway project located about 15 miles south of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, with Cathie (Jolly) Hartman, second right, a pioneer missionary to Mongolia, and Joanne Kim, left, pioneer missionary, Gateway coordinator, and education director of the Mongolia Mission, on August 26, 2022.

## The General Conference president participated directly in the evangelistic meetings, and the Mongolia Mission gained vitality through them.

“Although worship services were held online, on YouTube, and through Zoom meetings, it was difficult for pastors and church members to meet during the pandemic,” he said in a reply to written questions. “When COVID restrictions were gradually eased in March of this year, church doors re-opened, but church members who had not met face-to-face for almost three years desperately needed an opportunity to gather and fellowship together.”

The presence of the General Conference president provided just the boost that church members needed, said Yo Han Kim, president of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, whose territory includes Mongolia, and who is

himself a former Mongolia Mission president.

“Elder Ted Wilson’s visit gave the Mongolia Mission and the Northern Asia-Pacific Division great comfort, encouragement, and strength,” he said by e-mail. “After being unable to gather in church to worship for such a long time, the members and leaders were having a very difficult time. The General Conference president participated directly in the evangelistic meetings, and the Mongolia Mission gained vitality through them.”

Further boosting morale, church leaders broke ground on a new school of theology funded by a much-appreciated 400 million won (U.S. \$300,000) donation from the Korean Union Conference,

the Adventist Church’s Sijo Press, and Korean church members, Han said. The school will be located on the sprawling campus of Gateway, which also will include Gateway International Academy, a wellness center, a vocational school, an agriculture center, and a resort and recreational center whose income will help support the educational endeavors on the campus.

### HIGH-PROFILE MEETINGS

The Gateway project was central in talks between Wilson and Mongolian Deputy Prime Minister Amarsaikhan Sainbuyan at the parliamentary building in Ulaanbaatar on August 25.

“Deputy Prime Minister Amarsaikhan Sainbuyan was so gracious and has a deep concern for the health needs of the people of Mongolia,” Wilson said. “It was our privilege to share the Gateway project with him and receive his support.”



Nancy Wilson, left, wife of the General Conference president, giving a health seminar with the assistance of a Mongolian interpreter during August 20-27, 2022, evangelistic meetings in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

**“These meetings are a fine example of Total Member Involvement where everyone is involved in helping the public and personal evangelism activities to grow.”**

Kim, who attended the meeting and is coordinator of the Gateway project, described the encounter as a significant step in the church’s relations with the authorities.

“I feel that God used Elder Wilson’s visit to initiate contacts that would have otherwise been difficult to make,” she said. “The meeting with the deputy prime minister came about in a miraculous way, and he was so receptive. We’re praying that our follow-up with this powerful leader will continue to strengthen our relationship.”

In another high-profile visit, Wilson met U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia Michael S. Klecheski to discuss, among other things, religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

“Freedom of worship is vital for a healthy democracy,” Klecheski tweeted after the August 22 meeting. “I enjoyed talking with President of the General Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church Ted Wilson and regional and local Adventist leaders about important issues for faith communities in Mongolia.”

### **TMI AND THE FUTURE**

Mongolia’s evangelistic meetings, while organized to celebrate

the thirtieth anniversary, are part of a world church initiative called Total Member Involvement (TMI) evangelism in which every church member shares Jesus with someone else. Mongolian church members reached out to friends and neighbors for Bible studies before the meetings. TMI evangelism started with evangelistic meetings led by Wilson in the metropolitan New York City area in 2013 and has spread across the globe to result in tens of thousands of baptisms in the Philippines, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Rwanda, Romania, Japan, and many other countries. TMI evangelism in Rwanda culminated in a record 110,000 baptisms in 2016.

“Christianity is not well established in Mongolia but is growing, praise be to God!” Wilson said. “These meetings are a fine example of Total Member Involvement where everyone is involved in helping the public and personal evangelism activities to grow.”

Among the other church leaders who attended the anniversary celebrations were Williams Costa, General Conference communication director, and his wife, Son-

ete; Elbert Kuhn, General Conference associate secretary for volunteer programs, and his wife, Cleidi, who served as missionaries in Mongolia for nine years; and Henry Stober, an Adventist videographer living in Sweden who chronicled the events. Also present were the executive officers of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division and a delegation from the Korean Union Conference led by union president Soon Gi Kang.

Hiroshi Yamaji, executive secretary of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, said he was encouraged by the many children and young people whom he saw at the meetings.

“They are the church now, and they will be the leaders of the Mongolia Mission in the near future,” he said by e-mail. “I saw great possibilities and hope in Mongolia.” ED

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# How to Connect and Share the Gospel with Roman Catholics

## EDITORIAL NOTE

This article is the third in the special series outlining how Seventh-day Adventists can share the Three Angels' Messages with important people groups.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

The Holy Spirit is leading millions of faithful and sincere people to Jesus and to all His biblical truth. This includes Roman Catholics. So how do we reach them? We must first acknowledge that beyond methods, equipment, or strategies, the most important thing is not what we have, but who owns us, as the conversion of people is the work of the Holy Spirit. It happened in the first century with the disciples with almost unbelievable results, and it will repeat itself in a glorious way in the last century.

The Roman Catholic Church makes the contentious and biblically questionable claim that it originated in New Testament times, with Peter as the first pope. The Roman Catholic Church applies the words of Jesus, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church. . . . And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:18–19, NKJV), to claim that the pope was given divine authority, and on that basis they take the position that the authority of the church is superior to that of the Scriptures. Alternatively, Seventh-day Adventists regard the Rock on which the church was to be built as “Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16, NKJV; see also 1 Cor 10:4).

Truth, Catholics claim, comes from the Bible being interpreted by the church and the priests, combined with the traditions of the church. The teachings of the church councils—through the centuries, the encyclicals, and other decrees of the pope—constitute their basis of truth.



**When addressing these topics, we must use lots of tact and avoid heated discussions. No one wants to be wrong or admit they hold the wrong belief.**

These are some doctrines that Seventh-day Adventists have in common with Catholics:

1. The inspiration of the Bible
2. The Trinity
3. The second coming of Christ
4. The need to obey God
5. Mary's virginity prior to the birth of Jesus (not her immaculate conception)
6. The importance of prayer

Also noteworthy is its emphasis on the sanctity of the family and the sanctity of life. There are millions of sincere Catholics whose devotional life and spirit of sacrifice towards the needy and forgotten in society is admirable. Of course, other religious denominations also make similar efforts on behalf of these people.

There are, however, several Catholic beliefs that lack biblical support, such as:

**1. Tradition is superior to the Bible:** the belief that Scripture must be interpreted by the church and placed alongside the conciliar decrees of the church to be properly understood (cf. John 5:39; 7:17; 16:7–13; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16).

**2. The immortality of the soul:** the belief that each individual has an immortal soul, indestructible and independent of the body, which leaves at the time of death to go through a cycle of heaven or hell (cf. Gen 2:7; Ps 6:5; 115:17; 146:4; Eccl 12:7; John 11:11–14; 1 Tim 6:15–16). Let us remember that the Bible uses the word “soul” 1,600 times and nev-

er mentions it as “immortal soul.” And the Bible refers to death as a sleep fifty-three times.

**3. The sanctity of Sunday:** the belief that because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day, all Christians should worship on that day (cf. Gen 2:1–3; Exod 20:8–11; Isa 66:22–23; Ezek 20:12–20; Matt 12:8; 24:20; Luke 4:16; 6:5; Acts 13:42–44; Rev 1:10).

**4. The papal succession:** the concept that Jesus gave authority to Peter, which has been transferred through the centuries to each pope as the “head” or foundation of the church (cf. Deut 32:3–4; Ps 62:1–2; 1 Cor 10:4; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 1 Pet 2:6–7).

**5. The immaculate conception:** the idea that Jesus was sinless because Mary was miraculously protected from sin by the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa 64:6; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:9–12, 23).

**6. The sacraments:** the concept that God dispenses grace through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, confession, holy communion, marriage, sacred rites, or extreme unction; Jesus is God's channel of grace to the world (cf. Rom 3:25–31; 6:14–15; Eph 2:5).

**7. The Purgatory:** the belief that individuals who do not deserve heaven, but who are not bad enough to deserve hell, suffer in an intermediate state until their sins are purged. This concept is based on the false belief in the immortality of the soul and a mistak-

en understanding of salvation (cf. Ps 6:5; 115:17; Eccl 9:5; John 11:11–14 and also Heb 4:15; Rom 3:25–26; Eph 2:8).

**8. Prayers for the dead:** the belief that prayers can influence God to deliver suffering souls from Purgatory (cf. Ps 6:5; 49:7–8; 115:17; Eccl 9:5; John 11:11–14; 1 Tim 2:6).

**9. Miracles, visions, signs and wonders:** the belief that miraculous signs authenticate, confirm, and establish the truth. The biblical position is that since Satan can counterfeit miracles, all signs must be proven by God's Word (cf. Deut 13:1–3; Isa 8:20; Matt 7:21–23; 24:24; Luke 16:31; Rev 16:13–14; 19:20).

**10. Infant baptism:** babies are baptized to cover Adam's sin, called “original sin” (cf. Matt 28:18–20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38–42).

**11. The confession:** the belief that an earthly priest is the mediator between God and man (cf. Heb 4:14–16; 1 Tim 2:5; 1 John 1:9).

When addressing these topics, we must use lots of tact and avoid heated discussions. No one wants to be wrong or admit they hold the wrong belief. That's why we can kindly dialogue by saying something like, “I understand what you say, and I'm trying to see if it coincides with what the Word of God says.”

God has not left us in the dark as to how to work with others, and that includes Catholics. Ellen G. White offers the following counsel:

“We should not, upon entering a place, build up unnecessary barriers between us and other denominations, especially the Catholics, so that they shall think we are their avowed enemies. We should

**“Decided proclamations are to be made. But in regard to this line of work, I am instructed to say to our people: Be guarded. In bearing the message, make no personal thrusts at other churches, not even the Roman Catholic Church. Angels of God see in the different denominations many who can be reached only by the greatest caution.”**

not create a prejudice in their minds unnecessarily, by making a raid upon them. . . . From that which God has shown me, a great number will be saved from among the Catholics.”<sup>1</sup>

“There should be no going out of the way to attack other denominations; for it only creates a combative spirit and closes ears and hearts to the entrance of the truth. We have our work to do, which is not to tear down but to build up. We are to repair the breach that has been made in the law of God. It is the nobler work to build up, to present the truth in its force and power and let it cut its way through prejudice and reveal error in contrast with truth.”<sup>2</sup>

“Among the Catholics there are many who are most conscientious Christians, and who walk in all the light that shines upon them, and God will work in their behalf.”<sup>3</sup>

“Decided proclamations are to be made. But in regard to this line

of work, I am instructed to say to our people: Be guarded. In bearing the message, make no personal thrusts at other churches, not even the Roman Catholic Church. Angels of God see in the different denominations many who can be reached only by the greatest caution.”<sup>4</sup>

### **REACHING ROMAN CATHOLICS**

Sharing the Word of God in an atmosphere of friendship, honesty, and simplicity has a powerful effect. Keep the following ideas in mind:

1. Catholics generally have great admiration and reverence for the Word of God, although many are unfamiliar with all of its teachings. However, there is a growing group of Evangelical Catholics who study the Bible regularly.

2. Catholics often have great internal spiritual conflicts because of their belief in salvation by works. They need the assurance of salvation in Christ (cf. 1 John 5:11–17).

3. Catholics are often willing to learn more about biblical truth, particularly prophecies. They are fascinated by topics such as Daniel 2, Matthew 24, and teachings about the life of Christ.

4. Begin your studies by establishing the authority of the Bible, move on to prophetic topics, and then lead into the topic of how we are saved. Leave topics such as the law, the Sabbath, and the change to Sunday until they have had a minimum of ten previous studies.

5. When you introduce the Sabbath, pay special attention to the fact that it is part of the commandments, the ones that Catho-

lics accept, and that it is the center of God’s law.

6. Gently guide your Catholic friends to the understanding that the Bible, not the church, is the basis of all doctrine and the foundation of all moral decisions.

7. Catholics will appreciate that you pray earnestly and sincerely on their behalf. Catholics are often avid students of the Word. Their hearts burn to learn more of the truth. They want to know the will of God. If the truth is presented with love and logic, thousands and millions of Catholics will accept it.

8. The belief in Mary the mother of Jesus, and in the apostle Peter as the rock, are rooted in the life of the faithful Catholic.

Some years ago, at the beginning of an evangelistic series in Mexico City, at the end of the meeting, a Catholic man, a high-profile politician, approached me with some biblical issues, and this is a summary of our dialogue:

Man: “I like what you preach, but I must tell you that I am a Catholic and I believe in the Virgin Mary. That is why I could never be part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

My response: “I congratulate you. Although I don’t worship her, I am also a faithful believer in the Virgin Mary. God chose her for a special ministry, just as He also called the apostle Peter to be one of His disciples. What they both did or wrote is part of the Word of God today and has helped millions.”

Man: “I thought that you Adventists did not believe in or respect Mary.”

My response: “Not only do we believe in her as a woman ‘blessed among women,’ but we faithfully follow her wise advice.”

**Catholics are often avid students of the Word. Their hearts burn to learn more of the truth. They want to know the will of God. If the truth is presented with love and logic, thousands and millions of Catholics will accept it.**

Man: "What is her advice?"

My response: "Her wise advice was, 'Whatever He says to you, do it' (John 2:5). That advice blessed everyone at a wedding party and led to the beginning of the ministry of her Son, Jesus. That same advice, applied today, continues to be a source of blessing for believers of all times. If you find something in your church that is not in accordance with the advice of Mary and what her Son taught, you must decide whom to follow."

After attending all the topics in the two weeks of meetings and hearing the Word of God and the distinctive truths from the Bible, on the last Friday he requested

baptism by immersion and to be a part of the body of Christ.

Most of our Catholic brothers and sisters are Catholics by family tradition, not so much by doctrinal conviction. They have a great respect for their church and what it teaches, without distinguishing between what God says in His Word and what the church teaches. They take it for granted that what the priest says—as God's representative—is the final word. But when they discover the pure biblical truth and are confronted with what the Bible says, without the mixture of tradition, they embrace that truth, and many become faithful Adventist Christians.

So, when you study the Bible with Roman Catholics, you can politely dialogue by saying something like, "I understand what you are saying, but I am trying to match what you are saying to me and what the Word of God says."

"None need to feel that the Catholics are beyond their reach."<sup>5</sup> ED

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Need of Earnest, Intelligent Workers," March 7, 1887, *Manuscript 14*, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White to D. T. Bourdeau, Letter 39, 1887.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), 9:241–244.

<sup>4</sup> "A Call to Service," June 22, 1901, *Manuscript 6*, 1902.

<sup>5</sup> White, *Manuscript 14*.

**Robert Costa** is an associate secretary of the Ministerial Association at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, MD, USA.


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By Seth Pierce, Ph.D.

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EDITORIAL  
NOTE

This article is the third in a four-part series on ministering to those with mental health issues.

# Ministering to Those with Fears and Worries

“And what does your anxiety do? It does not empty tomorrow, brother, of its sorrows; but, ah! it empties today of its strength.” In 1859, Baptist minister Alexander McLaren preached these words in Manchester, England. He continued, “It does not make you escape the evil, it makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes. It does not bless tomorrow, and it robs today. For every day has its own burden. We have always strength to bear the evil when it comes. We have not strength to bear the foreboding of it.”<sup>1</sup>

These words by the nineteenth-century preacher, later echoed by the more famous preacher Charles Spurgeon, are echoes of Jesus’ words two millennia before. He dedicated an entire passage of the Sermon on the Mount to the problem of anxiety. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt 6:34, ESV), He said.

Since sin entered this world, fear, worries, and anxieties have been a part of the everyday human experience. In the garden after having eaten the forbidden fruit, Adam said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid” (Gen 3:10, ESV). God knows our propensity to anxiety. Again and again, throughout the Bible, the appeal is “fear not.” But there is never any condemnation of the fear itself. On our own, we have every reason to be anxious. The



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appeal is to surrender our anxieties to God because we trust in Him. In this world, we are surrounded by threats and dangers. The natural response is to be anxious. Yet, by focusing on them, by worrying about what might happen tomorrow, we risk missing out on not only today but on so much in life.

### WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Occasional fear, worries, and anxieties are part of normal life. Many people worry about health, money, family problems, and other things. When normal everyday fears and worries are triggered, they help us to protect ourselves and focus on finding solutions. But when they become excessive, they become counterproductive. Instead of helping us solve problems, they become the problem. When that occurs, these excessive responses have become anxiety disorders we most likely need help to manage. For people with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety may pop up when it is not needed, or be a rather constant companion that becomes a distraction from living well. The symptoms can interfere with daily activities such as job performance, schoolwork, and relationships.

There are several types of anxiety disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and various phobia-related disorders. They take on many shapes and forms and may change over time. But the defining characteristic of an anxiety disorder is that it causes more pain than gain.

### WHO STRUGGLES WITH ANXIETY?

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses. Reports indicate that up to one in three at some point in life will experience an anxiety disorder.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that about three hundred million people in this world right now are

suffering from an anxiety disorder, which means they are in need of professional treatment. Many more are struggling with anxiety issues. It is safe to say that if we are not struggling ourselves, we for sure know someone who is struggling. Many struggle without showing or telling it to anyone.

As is the case with most illnesses, both genetic and environmental factors contribute to the risk of developing an anxiety disorder. The risk factors for each type of anxiety disorder vary. However, some general risk factors include:

- shyness or feeling distressed or nervous in new situations in childhood
- exposure to stressful and negative life or environmental events
- a history of anxiety or other mental disorders in biological relatives

Anxiety symptoms can be produced or aggravated by:

- some physical health conditions, such as thyroid problems or heart arrhythmia
- caffeine or other substances/medications

If you think someone may have an anxiety disorder, getting a physical examination from a health care provider may help them in diagnosing the disorder and finding the right treatment.<sup>3</sup>

### WHAT GOES ON IN THE ANXIOUS BRAIN?

Based on what we now know from brain research on anxiety, we may say that there are two main types of anxiety. The worrying kind of anxiety begins in the thinking part of the brain known as the cerebral cortex. It is the large, convoluted, gray part of the brain that makes up its outer surface, and involves our perceptions and thoughts about situations. The fear kind of anxiety begins in the deep-

er feeling part of the brain, especially the amygdala. The amygdala triggers the quick fight-or-flight-or-freeze response that is activated long before we are able to think about the perceived danger we have encountered.

Both the thinking and feeling parts of the brain are involved in all kinds of anxiety, but for our understanding of how to work with and help someone with anxiety, it is relevant to understand if it is the kind that starts with thinking and then later leads to troublesome feelings, or if it starts with intense feelings that we only later are able to start reflecting upon. If certain ideas, images, or worries trigger the anxiety, it is most likely a thinking-brain-based anxiety. If the anxiety is more sudden attacks of fear with strong physical reactions without apparent causes or which does not make much sense, it is more likely a feeling-brain-based anxiety.<sup>4</sup>

### SELF-HELP FOR THE ANXIOUS

Worries, fears, and anxieties take on exaggerated proportions when someone is suffering from an anxiety disorder. The first step in dealing with it is to acknowledge that even though the thoughts and feelings are intense, they are not helpful. And, beyond that, they are excessive and are not the whole truth about whatever situation we are facing. Often, we have to do the opposite of what anxiety tells us to do. Instead of giving in to the thoughts and feelings, we have to manage them, counter them, and push back. This is usually hard work, and that is why the anxious need social support, encouragement, and help along the way.

To build one's resilience, a healthy body will help the mind function better and be more balanced. Exercise, healthy nutrition, and optimizing for quality sleep are

## The earlier that treatment begins, the more effective it may be and the sooner and easier one may recover.

excellent places to start. Beyond that, it is important to connect. Connecting with God and with other people gives life meaning and fulfillment. The church could be and should be a place where social and spiritual connection is fostered and developed.

### TREATMENT FOR ANXIETY

Milder cases of anxiety disorders may not require professional treatment, but whenever symptoms persist and negatively affect life, treatment should be considered. The earlier that treatment begins, the more effective it may be and the sooner and easier one may recover. Unfortunately, it is common for people to struggle on their own for years before seeking treatment.

Anxiety disorders are generally treated with psychotherapy, medication, or both. There are many ways to treat anxiety, and one should work with a health care provider to choose the best available treatment option.

Psychotherapy or “talk therapy” can help people with anxiety disorders. Processing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors is necessary to come up with strategies to manage them. To be effective, psychotherapy must be directed at your specific anxieties and tailored to your needs. For thinking-brain-based anxiety disorders, the focus will often be on rewiring our thinking pathways. For feeling-brain-based anxiety disorders, the focus will often be on rewiring our feeling pathways.

Medication does not cure anxiety disorders but can help relieve

symptoms and make them more manageable. Health care providers—such as a psychiatrist, primary care provider, or sometimes a psychologist—can prescribe medication for anxiety. The most common classes of medications used to combat anxiety disorders are antidepressants that are equally effective for anxiety, specific anti-anxiety medications (such as benzodiazepines), antipsychotic medications, and beta-blockers. If someone does not experience the desired effect of one medication, or if the side effects are excessive, there are usually many other options.

Since mental disorders are complex, there is often some element of trial and error before the patient and the health care provider figure out what works best for the specific patient. Patience is therefore often necessary, so one does not give up if the first attempts do not achieve the desired outcomes.

### MINISTERING TO THOSE WITH ANXIETY

When someone is struggling with anxiety, it may be clear to them and others that they are struggling with excessive fears and worries. It does not help though, when others tell them they are exaggerating, tell them to stop it, that it is nonsense, that it is not real. And it is definitely not helpful to suggest that what they are struggling with is rooted in a spiritual problem. Every human being who suffers and struggles needs and deserves empathy and compassion. Provide consistent practical, emotional, social, and spiritual support. Let the person share with you or someone else they want to talk to about what they are experiencing. Try to understand and empathize with what it feels like to be on the inside of the head of that person. If you are a safe person to them, that may be a starting point for them to feel safer in the world.

### WHERE IS GOD FOR THE ANXIOUS?

In writing to the Philippians, the apostle Paul said, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6–7, ESV). I believe Paul knew that we humans have a propensity to be anxious about many things. In this world, on our own, we are like children who have lost their parents. On our own, we struggle with fears and worries. But we are not lost children in this world. We have a Father who cares for us and “he is actually not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27, ESV). The more “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28, ESV) in Him, the more we may have the peace that Paul pointed the Philippians towards. Then we may say with the psalmist, “he is my steadfast love and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge” (Ps 144:2, ESV). ED

<sup>1</sup> Alexander McLaren, “Anxious Care,” Sermon 21 in *Sermons Preached in Union Chapel, Manchester* (Manchester: Durnill, Palmer, 1859), 288.

<sup>2</sup> “Anxiety Disorders,” American Psychiatric Association, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/anxiety-disorders>.

<sup>3</sup> “Anxiety Disorders,” National Institute of Mental Health, accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders>.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine M. Pittman, *Rewire Your Anxious Brain: How to Use the Neuroscience of Fear to End Anxiety, Panic, and Worry* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2015).

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# Revelation: The Book of the Conquering Christ

## INTRODUCTION

Revelation is the last book of the Bible. It concludes and crowns the canon of Scripture and has been called the capstone of divine revelation and inspiration. It is the summary of the entire Bible. Practically everything in it can be traced to other Scriptures. Revelation sends us into every part of the Bible. “In the Revelation,” writes Ellen G. White, “all the books of the Bible meet and end.”<sup>1</sup>

Genesis is the prologue, and the Apocalypse the epilogue, of divine revelation. The paradise that was lost through the failure of the first Adam pictured in the first two chapters of Genesis, and the paradise regained through the Calvary conquest of the second Adam is described in the last two chapters of Revelation. Between these bookends is the long, dark night of sin, the story of redemption, and its prophetic visions focus on and lead to the dawn of eternal day.

The importance of this book is clear from the promised blessing upon those who read, hear, and obey its teachings (Rev 1:1–3), and a threatened curse upon those who add to or take from its revealed truths (Rev 22:18–19). No other book of the Bible thus begins and ends. What do we know about this book?

## I. THE AUTHORSHIP AND DATING OF THE APOCALYPSE

The writer evidently took it for granted that his readers would identify him as the only John among the disciples of Jesus. Four times he designates himself as “John,” or “His servant John,” and for another to use that name in such a manner would be akin to forgery. He also declares that he had previously borne witness concerning Christ and His life and teachings, which may refer to the Gospel and Epistles he wrote. Who besides John the apostle would dare assume that the mere mention of his name was sufficient identification of the author?

Opinions differ as to whether Revelation was written during the reign of Nero or Domitian, the latter being preferred. What is clear is that it was written in a time of persecution for which these tyrannical emperors were known. Since the persecutions by Nero were confined chiefly to the city of Rome, John’s banishment to the island of Patmos is believed to have occurred toward the end of Domitian’s reign. Both Eusebius and Jerome give the fourteenth year of his reign as the date of John’s exile, AD 96.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF THE APOCALYPSE

The correct title of the book is given in the opening sentence, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ,” and not “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” which was a title given by transla-

tors. This correct title reveals the purpose of the book. “Revelation” is the English for “Apocalypse,” the Anglicized form of the Greek *Apokalypsis*. It is a revealing or unveiling of that which has been hidden or secret. Interestingly, the title “Apocalypse” was the only name used before the eleventh century.

“The Unveiling of Jesus Christ” is the title according to the Concordant Version, which corresponds with the meaning of “Apocalypse.” The Apocalypse is more than a prophecy given by Christ; it is a revelation of Him. No other book of Scripture so completely reveals His personality, character, power, mediatorial ministry, and second advent.

The return of the conquering Christ is the ultimate goal of prophecy and is especially the focal point of all the visions of the book, which was written for the last generation. The Revelation opens with the exclamation, “Behold, He cometh” (Rev 1:7),<sup>2</sup> and closes with the promise, “Surely I come quickly” (Rev 22:20). This theme of His conquests dominates the content of the book.

The name of Jesus or its equivalent is used 137 times in the first three chapters. The Old Testament reveals Christ in promise and prophecy, the Gospels reveal Him in earthly life and ministry, and the Acts and Epistles reveal Him in the triumphs of the early church through the ministry of His personal representative, the Holy Spirit, but it takes the Apocalypse to make the unveiling complete.

## III. THE LANGUAGE OF THE APOCALYPSE

Symbolic and parabolic language is employed to conceal the predicted events from the enemies of Christ. Thus, the Apocalypse escaped the scrutiny of the Patmos prison officials and was permitted to reach its destination. Likewise, it never would have survived the period of pagan Roman persecutions, nor the centuries of papal domination through the Middle Ages without the concealment of names and events portrayed in figurative language. The divine promise concerning symbolic prophecy is that “none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand” (Dan 12:10; see also Matt 13:10–13).

## IV. A SYNOPSIS OF THE APOCALYPSE

Written in the age of Greek drama, the Apocalypse unfolds with a series of scenes that passed before John in seven visions. These seven visions are subdivided into sevens, fours, and threes. The number seven is understood to mean perfection or completeness. There are seven epistles addressed to the seven churches, each of which are divided into seven parts. The churches are symbolized by seven candlesticks, and their ministers by seven stars. The

conquering Christ is pictured as a Lamb with seven horns, symbolic of fullness of power, and with seven eyes, representing infinite wisdom and vision. There are seven angels, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues, seven thunders, seven heads, seven crowns, seven mountains, seven kings, and a sevenfold ascription of praise to God, and to the Lamb.

The seven epistles of Christ represent His own messages of love, reproof, and warning to His people during the Christian period. The seven seals emphasize the apostasies that would tarnish the church and incite persecution to the saints, and the seven trumpets symbolize great political and military movements among the nations, ending with the war of Armageddon. All three visions embrace the entire Christian era. Chapters 12 and 13 present a panoramic view of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, from its inception in heaven to the final crisis. This is followed by a symbolic representation of the last warning gospel message, called “the everlasting gospel,” followed by the two great “fully ripe” wheat and tares harvests.

Chapters 15 to 20 describe the wrath of God in the seven last plagues and the final doom of Satan and all his agencies, chief of which are the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, all of which share his fate in the lake of fire. The great prophetic drama closes with the most beautiful scene of all: a picture of the earth brought back to its original state as the eternal home of the faithful. All tears will be wiped away by the removal of the cause of all sorrow, crying, pain, and death. The conquering Christ makes all things new (Rev 21:1–5).

Revelation 22:6–21 is the epilogue or postscript of the book. The instruction is given to “seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand” (Rev 22:10). Daniel, by contrast, was told to seal his book to “the time of the end” (Dan 12:4), when its message would be understood. Daniel’s visions were to reach into the far-distant future, but those of the Apocalypse would begin to meet their fulfillment soon.

## CONCLUSION

There is an urgency about Revelation’s three-timed repeated final message, “Behold, I come quickly” (Rev 3:11; 22:7, 12; cf. Rev 22:20). The conquering Christ and the Holy Spirit join in an invitation for all to come and “take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17), and to enter the celestial glory. Will you? ED

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 585.

<sup>2</sup> All biblical quotations are from the KJV.

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## Revelation: The Conquests of the Conquering Christ

### INTRODUCTION

A careful study of Revelation reveals that God's will will ultimately prevail, that Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, of all things. It clearly shows that through faith in "the Lamb of God" we can conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil, and be victorious over any and every circumstance (see Isa 46:10). And far beyond the black and blood-red clouds that fill the valleys of Revelation soars a white mountain peak where stands Christ the Conqueror. He is portrayed as Conqueror over three dimensions: He is the Conqueror over death, the Conqueror within the church, and the Conqueror over the nations.

### I. JESUS: CONQUEROR OVER DEATH

The characteristic name for Jesus in Revelation is "the Lamb." It is used of Him in this book twenty-eight times. In Revelation 5:6, where the name is used for the first time, Christ is introduced as "a Lamb, . . . as though it had been slain."<sup>1</sup> Six hundred years before the writing of this book, Isaiah forecast that He would be wounded for our transgressions and be led as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa 53:7). But in Revelation, written as it was several decades later than Christ's death and resurrection, the Lamb, who by then had been slain, is not seen on the cross, but "in the midst of the throne" (Rev 7:17), while the eternal choirs gathered around Him proclaim, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev 5:12).

This triumphant "Lamb" is not alone. Always in Revelation He is seen, not merely in the company of heavenly beings, but also in association with His people, either moving among them in their trials or surrounded by them in His victory, sharing the power and the spoils of His conquest with them.

Right at the beginning of the book, with his usual genius for making first things first, Christ proclaims Himself to John as the Conqueror over death. "Fear not," He says, "I died, and behold I am alive forevermore" (Rev 1:17–18). But not content to enjoy His victory alone, He adds, "And I have the keys of Death . . ." (Rev 1:18). What good news for John and for every faithful Christian!

### II. CHRIST: CONQUEROR WITHIN THE CHURCH

Immediately after naming Himself

Conqueror over death, Jesus portrays Himself to John as Conqueror within the church, the One who walks among "the seven golden lampstands" that represent "the seven churches" of God (Rev 1:19–20)—that is, the church of God in every age.

Jesus knew that His church would fail of the grand ideal He held out for it. In the Apocalypse He referred to Christians who would yield to temptations of the grossest type, the "Nicolaitans" (Rev 2:15), and "Jezebel" (Rev 2:20), love that would fade (Rev 2:4), and lukewarm types whom He would "spew" out of His mouth (Rev 3:16). In Sardis, He foresaw only a few who had not "soiled their garments" (Rev 3:4); yet moving among the people He promised that these "few" would walk with Him "in white, for they are worthy" (Rev 3:4). And to every Christian in every age, He sends out the invitation, "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:21).

One of the saddest aspects of human experience has been the relative impotence—even the actual evil—of the Christian church. The Fourth Crusade, designed to pit Christians against Turks, ended with Catholics battling against their fellow Eastern Orthodox Christians. Between 1618 and 1649 a third of the population of Central Europe fell dead in a grisly religious war fought between Catholics and Protestants.

Perhaps you are suffering from something wrong within the church. Perhaps you are smarting under some injustice or hypocrisy practiced by members of the congregation of your choice. Or perhaps you have succumbed to a particularly difficult temptation yourself and are amazed at what you consider to be your own hypocrisy. Do not despair or give up! Jesus conquered every temptation that confronted Him, and He says to everyone in the church today, "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne" (Rev 3:21).

### III. CHRIST: THE CONQUEROR OVER THE NATIONS

In the Apocalypse Jesus reveals Himself not only as the Conqueror over death and the Conqueror within the church, but also the Conqueror over the nations. To anyone disturbed by the fear of a third world war, the message of Revelation 11:15–17 rings with hope. It foretells the day when the kingdoms of the world

shall become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ, when all heaven shall raise the anthem, "We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign" (Rev 11:17). The implication of the promise is clear: the Christ who one day will take His great power and rule the nations has power to conquer the nations at any moment He pleases. And Revelation 7:1–3 shows that He indeed uses this power to control the nations at the present time to protect and defend His own. Says John, "I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, *holding back the four winds of the earth,*" till the servants of God have been sealed in their foreheads.

Here is the great truth that "Behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own."<sup>2</sup> No wind that blows, no holocaust of war, can touch a single man or woman on who Christ has set His eye.

Who is to say that Christ does not, even today, possess more power than the nations! "No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper," says Isaiah 54:17. Christ protects His own when He knows it is for the best, and even should a Christian die, the Christ who holds the keys of the grave will resurrect them (1 Thess 4:15–16). And someday soon, when the time comes for every war to cease, Christ will take His great power and reign, setting up a new kingdom, which He will populate with the saints whom He has led through every vicissitude (see Dan 7:27).

### CONCLUSION

In the Apocalypse Christ invites every Christian to share His victory over sin and sinful men and tells how we may do so: "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Rev 12:11).

While it is true that Revelation is a book of angels and horsemen and terrible beasts, the most striking picture—the one on which above all we should focus our faith—is that of the conquering Christ surrounded by His conquering Christians. **ED**

<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the RSV.

<sup>2</sup> James Russell Lowell, "The Present Crisis," accessed October 13, 2022, <https://poets.org/poem/present-crisis>.

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# Revelation: The Beatitudes of the Conquering Christ

## INTRODUCTION

Through the symbols of the Apocalypse—seven angels blowing seven trumpets, a scarlet woman riding a seven-headed beast, a burning mountain plunging into the sea, locusts swarming from a bottomless pit—God has revealed the course of human history from the time of John down to our own day, tragic with disappointment, appalling with apostasy, heartless with persecution, bloody with warfare. The book of Revelation contains much of sadness and anger because life on our planet has seen so much tragedy. It is right that in Revelation 6:10 souls under the altar cry out, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long . . . ?”<sup>1</sup> for this is the cry that has ascended time and again since John recorded his visions.

How unexpected, then, in the midst of all this apocalyptic chaos, God’s wrath, dreadful things, and multiplied terror, we find beatitudes—not to mention that there are seven of them! New Testament scholar T. F. Glasson declares that “in view of the importance of the number 7 in this book . . . it may not be accidental that these new beatitudes add up to this number.”<sup>2</sup>

## I. THE NUMBER SEVEN IN REVELATION

Use of the number seven, or a sevenfold reference to anything, may be regarded as a complete account of God’s dealings with His creation. The sevenfold announcement of the imminent arrival of Jesus from heaven, for example, may be a way of motivating us to be diligent and vigilant, for in Him we have hope of life everlasting (see Rev 1:1, 3; 3:11; 22:6–7, 12, 20). Equally important are the seven beatitudes, and it appears that having seven beatitudes is not coincidental.

We normally associate beatitudes not with Revelation, but with the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–12), in which Jesus discoursed on the nature of His Father’s kingdom and those who have part in it. Besides beasts and bottomless pits, does Revelation have another side to it?

“Apocalyptic [literature],” writes Kenneth Strand, “emerges at times when dire circumstances for God’s people might well lead them to question God’s activity in their behalf, and it teaches clearly and forcefully that God is indeed still the Master of history, that He is with His people, and that He will fully vindicate them at a grand and glorious eschatological climax. Thus it is a kind of literature that is particularly suited to give comfort and hope to oppressed and downtrodden servants of God in their time

of critical need for precisely such comfort and hope.”<sup>3</sup>

## II. THE SEVEN BEATITUDES OF REVELATION

Revelation deals with the heartfelt joy that comes to those for whom worship of a gracious God is the highest duty. And it does so particularly in its seven precious beatitudes.

The word “beatitude” derives from the Latin *beatitudo*, a translation of the Greek *makarismos*, which is generally rendered “blessed,” as in Luke 6:21: “Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.” The New Testament contains forty-eight beatitudes, with Matthew having thirteen; Luke, fifteen; Paul’s epistles, seven; John, 1 Peter, and James, two; and Revelation, seven.

Within the New Testament a beatitude most often applies to those who have become citizens of the kingdom Jesus inaugurated, climaxing in His resurrection (see Matt 13:10–17; 16:13–18). New Testament beatitudes point to the divine blessing that brings genuine joy (see John 20:26–29).

The seven beatitudes of Revelation tell us that blessed or happy are (1) those who read, hear, and keep the words of the prophecy (Rev 1:3); (2) those for whom death in the Lord will one day be a form of discipleship (Rev 14:13); (3) those who remain spiritually clothed and awake, waiting to receive Him who will soon appear (Rev 16:15); (4) those who accept an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9); (5) those who experience the first resurrection and will serve as God’s priestly, royal people throughout the millennium (Rev 20:6); (6) those who obey God’s Word (Rev 22:7); and (7) those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb and have access to the new Jerusalem (Rev 22:14). What blessed assurance!

These seven beatitudes of Revelation seem not to have been randomly sprinkled throughout the book. Instead, they constitute a progression of God’s end-time redeeming mission, exhibiting a pattern that may have escaped our notice heretofore.

From this pattern we can infer that these seven beatitudes, in which are embedded God’s gracious call to be both joyful and dutiful, carry us from the present period of paradise lost (Rev 1:3) to the future period of paradise regained (Rev 22:14). In between these two realities we see a movement of a future fraught with mortal danger (Rev 12–13; cf. 14:13), the glorious advent of Jesus as King after a crisis-filled

future (Rev 16; cf. 16:15), the entrance of the saints into new Jerusalem for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9), and the millennial stay of the saints in heaven where, accorded priestly and royal status, with Christ they join in the judgment of the lost (Rev 20:6) until they are reminded that joy and duty are still realities of the ongoing present (Rev 22:7).

## CONCLUSION

The beatitudes assure us that we are not without God in the world—that regardless of how isolated and vulnerable we may feel or how intolerable our situation may appear, we need not fear. The God who controls His creation shares His unsurpassed joy with those who remain firm in faith and faithful in discipleship. These beatitudes mirror a God who has pledged to remain with us to the very end of the age. He will take us from this death-ridden world to the glorious time when death shall be no more and there will be no goodbyes!

In a little poem, George McDonald asks,

Traveller, what lies over the hill?  
Traveller, tell to me;  
I am only a child at the window-sill,  
Over I cannot see.

A verse in Richard Baxter’s hymn answers it well—

My knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim;  
But ‘tis enough that *Christ* knows all,  
And I shall be with Him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the RSV.  
<sup>2</sup> T. F. Glasson, *The Revelation of John*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 18.  
<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Strand, “Apocalyptic Prophecy and the Church—1,” *Ministry*, October 1983, 21.  
<sup>4</sup> Quoted by James Hastings, *The Great Texts of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1915), 20:55.

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## SERMON NOTES

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# Revelation: The Triumphs of the Conquering Christ

## INTRODUCTION

In Revelation we have read of trials and judgments; we have read of foes and battles; we have read of the sorrows of the righteous and triumphs of the ungodly. We ask, “Shall there be no end of these things? No end of this state of imperfection, of warfare, of unrest? No end of these vicissitudes and inversions of right and wrong, of these perpetual renewals of strife?”

The conquering Christ answers with the bright affirmative, “And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5).<sup>1</sup> The Holy City descends from the hands of its Builder and Maker, “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2). The voice of authority proclaims, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev 21:3). God is reinstated. The full realization of the prophetic name, Immanuel, God with us, is their God. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev 21:4).

And when will this new order take place? The psalmist answers, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence” (Ps 50:3). Now note the three triumphs of the Conquering Christ.

## I. THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN OF THE CONQUERING CHRIST

From Enoch’s prophecy, “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints” (Jude 1:14), to Daniel who was promised that he “will arise” to his “inheritance at the end of the days” (Dan 12:13, NKJV); from Jerusalem when Jesus promised, “I will come again” (John 14:3), to Rome when Peter looked “for new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13); from the upper room at the Lord’s Supper when the disciples were instructed that there would be no discerning the Lord’s body unless we discerned His first coming, there is no drinking His cup unless we also hear Him say, “Until I come”; from Corinth, when Paul removed any doubts about the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15), to Thessalonica, when at the eschaton there will be a glorious reunion of the saints (1 Thess 4:16–18); from the descriptive signs of His second coming vividly portrayed in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, to the comforting angels on Mount Olivet who assured the disciples that “this same Jesus” would return (Acts 1:11).

We must look forward as well as backward. We must look to Him on the

cross and on the throne (Heb 9:28). We must vividly realize that He who has once come is coming yet again. But, come when it may, it will come surely. Those who are then living will see it (Rev 1:7); and those in Christ who are in their graves will awake to see it (1 Thess 4:16).

Yet, while some “love His appearing” (2 Tim 4:8), others are terrified at the thought. The Authorized Version renders that terror as “wail” (Rev 1:7), just as a mother over a dead child or an innocent man sentenced to execution. Such will be the hopeless grief of those who remain impenitent, they cannot repress their anguish; those who once professed faith in Him, and have gone back to the world; those who speak against Christ whom once they professed to love; those whose inconsistent lives brought dishonor upon the name of Jesus; those who refused His love and stifled their consciences—all these besides the Roman soldier who thrust his spear into the Messiah’s side, may be said to have pierced Him. They will be lost! How much then should we offer this prayer: “Then, O Lord, prepare My soul for that great day; O wash me in Thy precious blood, And take my sins away.”

## II. THE TRIUMPHANT CONQUEST OF EVIL AND DEATH

The second coming of Jesus will be the execution day of sin and all that follows in its train, such as suffering and death. Sickness and weakness, feebleness of hand and step, toil and want, old age, sorrow and crying—all will depart. The book of Revelation casts the gleam of victory over the “last enemy,” death (1 Cor 15:26). John writes, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord . . . that they may rest from their labours” (Rev 14:13). But not only will they “rest from their labours,” they will rise again in a glorious resurrection, when “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54; cf. Heb 9:26–28).

Smothered by fragrant flowers and the soft cadences of music, death remains a grim reality impossible to camouflage, but “above the ruins of our lives” writes Helmut Thielicke, “strides the One who today advances the claim that He can authoritatively close the gap between God and man, that He can restore the world deranged by pain, unrighteousness and enmity against God, that He is more than a match for the awful majesty of death.”<sup>2</sup>

That man is the conquering Jesus!

## III. THE TRIUMPHANT REALITY OF A RESTORED PARADISE

John has shown how in the end Christ vindicates His cause and triumphs over

the powers of evil, whose final doom has been disclosed (Rev 20:7–14). When John penned the Apocalypse, the church was in a period of utmost danger. Jew and pagan were united in hatred of the name of Christ and were putting forth every effort to destroy those who believed in Him. James, Peter, and Paul had been executed. The fall of Jerusalem had taken place. Persecution and death were riding triumphant over everything that was marked with God’s name. Then, when God seemed to have deserted the earth, a great voice was heard out of the throne promising a new world (see Rev 21:1–5).

The magnificent hope and prediction of God’s final and decisive victory declares that the conflict is not perpetual. There is to be an end of iniquity, and the wicked are to cease from troubling. The enemies of the Lord will perish. God creates a paradise and catches up Paul to hear unspeakable words and things “eyes have not seen.” Unspeakable for such grandeur and infinite sweetness, John saw it all—beautiful new heavens and a new earth.

John’s vision was not darkened by the sad shades of sin, pain, sorrow, and death. This new world was one in which there was pleasure without pain, smiles without tears, health without sickness, joy without sorrow, life without death, and love without hate.

In this earth made new, Ellen G. White declares that “immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mystery of redeeming love. . . . Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body.”<sup>3</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Do you have a yearning for such a place? The conquering Christ has a place reserved for you (John 14:1–3). He says, “Come!” **ED**

<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the KJV, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Silence of God*, quoted in Gladys M. Hunt, *Don’t Be Afraid to Die* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 677.

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# The Joy of Obedience

**I**t was in the third grade that I learned an important lesson in obedience. We were working on math. A friend of mine showed me that in the back of the book you could find the answers to the math problems. Math not being my strong suit, I took advantage of this gold mine (why the book authors put the answers in the back is another question). I merrily wrote down the answers, looking in the back of the book frequently.

Suddenly, my third grade teacher, Mrs. Gibson, loomed over me. She bent over and said something that has stuck in my mind since that day. “Tommy,” she said, “I don’t want you to do that. You’re not that kind of boy.” It was a lesson in obedience and honesty that was burned into my heart by that experience. And honesty has been important to me ever since.

## **THE FRUIT, NOT THE ROOT**

But obedience is often misunderstood. I suppose that it arises from the legitimate desire to please our parents and stay out of trouble. “Obey and live,” you might say. Obedience was rewarded; disobedience was punished. Without careful instruction and practice, we can get the idea that we are loved if we obey and not loved if we do not.

## Understood correctly, obedience is the fruit of a loving relationship with God, not that which establishes the relationship.

This quid pro quo concept of love can easily carry over into the life of faith. Obey God's commandments and be loved. Disobey and be punished. But this is not the concept of love taught in Scripture. Always in Scripture obedience follows redemption. It is the response to God's loving action, not the cause of it. The Ten Commandments illustrate this well. While we often start in Exodus 20:3 to memorize these principles of life, the discourse actually begins in verse 1. "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me'" (Exod 20:1–3).<sup>1</sup> Before Israel could learn to obey God, it first had to have a relationship of gracious redemption with Him. This experience the Lord provided by bringing them out of Egypt with a mighty outstretched arm (Exod 3–15). It was an unforgettable experience that changed their status from slaves to free people. It fundamentally modified their conception of themselves from an oppressed underclass to the people of God.

It was in this new status that God addressed them at Sinai. The Ten Commandments addressed them as an assembled congregation, but also as individuals. In each case in the "Ten Words" the "you" is singular, stressing the individual relationship to God that the commands imply. It is not simply a whole group that is supposed

to obey. It is you, I, each and every one of us.

Just here it is important to recognize that our obedience to God in no way removes our sins. It is God who provides salvation through Christ our Lord whose death on the cross washes away our guilty debt before God. Obedience does not remove or pay for sin. It never has and never can. That is because sin is an affront to the holiness and goodness of God. It is breaking the fundamental principles that guide the moral universe. Breaking His law places a blot on our life that we cannot remove. Only Christ can remove sin (Mark 2:10; Rom 5:6–10). If we think of adding on obedience to somehow atone for sin, we add on to the sacrifice of Christ. And if you add on to Jesus, you actually subtract from Him. That is, you say by such a move that His sacrifice is not enough, that more is needed—your deeds.<sup>2</sup>

Understood correctly, obedience is the fruit of a loving relationship with God, not that which establishes the relationship. We love our children before they can ever obey. We provide for their needs, clothe them, clean them, care for them before they can ever respond with obedience. Just so, God has cared for and cleansed us as we turn toward the smile of His grace. This relationship of experiencing His love leads to the fruit of the Spirit in our life, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22–23). Paul adds, "Against such things there is no Law" (v. 23).

### WHY OBEY?

If obedience does not earn our salvation or remove our sin, then why obey? Consider a child who is cared for by loving parents. All his needs are met—food, clothing, housing, education, a loving envi-

ronment. But the child does not want to obey the reasonable rules of the household, does not want to clean his room, wash dishes, be home on time. Something is wrong. It is as though all comes in but nothing goes out. Parents do not provide for the child in order to produce obedience, but rather because he is their child and they love him. But if he does not obey he upsets the fine balance of the home relationship. Receiving but not giving produces a stunted, even broken, development of character.

This is why obedience is a necessity in Christian life (Rom 12:1–2). Without it we become centered on self, inwardly stunted and unresponsive to the needs of others around us. The grace of God is meant to change our natural inward focus toward an outward focus in service to others (John 13:34–35; Eph 2:10). Here is where true obedience resides. Consider examples from the Ten Commandments: "Do not steal" (Exod 20:15). Stealing is taking from others what rightfully belongs to them. It is the appropriation of their goods for my ends. It develops within me a selfish spirit that actually shrinks my ability to recognize and appreciate those around me. It shrinks my soul. "Do not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14). To do so breaks terribly the bond of love and commitment between husband and wife, leading to distrust, painful disappointment, deep shame, and terrible hurt.

### JUDGED BY OUR DEEDS

It is a consistent teaching of both Old and New Testaments, Moses, Jesus, Paul, John, and other Bible writers that we are saved by grace but we are judged by our deeds. "If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by

**This is why obedience is a necessity in Christian life. Without it we become centered on self, inwardly stunted and unresponsive to the needs of others around us. The grace of God is meant to change our natural inward focus toward an outward focus in service to others.**

walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it” (Deut 30:16). “For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl 12:14). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor 5:10). “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done” (Rev 22:12). “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me” (Matt 25:40).

So, this seems quite strange. We have noted the clear biblical teaching that we are saved by grace through faith apart from works. We also saw that obedience cannot atone for sin and that it is the fruit of a faith relationship with God. Then why are we judged by our deeds? Doesn’t that contradict these clear biblical teachings? The answer, surprisingly, is no, it does not contradict righteousness by faith. How so? The answer is found in biblical anthropology.

Biblical anthropology is very wholistic. We say, “You do not have a soul; you are a soul” (cf. Gen 2:7; the man became a living soul, *nephesh* in Hebrew). One of the corollaries of this biblical teaching of wholeness is the doctrine of the state of the dead.

The dead do not know anything because at death the dust returns to the earth and the breath of life returns to God (Eccl 12:7). The soul stops existing because it only exists as the combination of the dust of the ground and the breath of life from God.<sup>3</sup>

What does this have to do with “saved by grace but judged by deeds”? Just this. Since we are a whole, a unity, what is on the inside expresses itself on the outside. You do and say what you are. If I have faith in Christ in my heart, it will show itself in my deeds. Grace and faith are the root; service to others is the fruit. If there is no fruit, it is because there is something wrong with the root. Consequently, our deeds (or lack thereof) are an expression of our inward faith (or lack thereof). For this reason God judges us by our deeds.

## CONCLUSION

Obedience is the privilege of the Christian—to grow in knowledge and service for our Lord. Its sweetness is to fill our lives. “Oh how I love your Law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps 119:97). “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). “You are My friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:12). The Christian walk is meant to be a happy, cheerful life, ever growing more like our Lord, walking in His footsteps, following His example of lifting up others around us. May God work that experience in my life and yours. **ED**

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

<sup>2</sup> This was the problem described in Colossians 2.

<sup>3</sup> It is like a box constructed of wooden planks held together by nails: remove the nails, set the wooden planks to one side, and the box no longer exists, because it is a combination of the wooden planks and nails.

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# Deacons and Deaconesses in Early Adventism

> PART 2

It was stated in part 1 that in early Adventism, according to the *Ellen G. White Writings Complete Published Edition 2005*, the word “deacon(s)” was recorded fifteen times. Only four recordings related to their ministry in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church. The word “deaconess(es)” was recorded eighteen times, of which only three related to their ministry in the church. The deacons were responsible for supplying the wine—unfermented grape juice for communion. They were also responsible for encouraging members to return a faithful tithe, collecting the tithe, and turning the tithe over to the treasurer in large churches or serving as treasurer in small churches.

**Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.**

The third and final area relating to the deacons' ministry pertained to their ordination. The following statement by Arthur N. Patrick, who was the registrar at Avondale College in Australia, indicates that both deacons and deaconesses were ordained in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church.

On June 24, 1899, the Ashfield church in Sydney elected G. F. Goodman as elder. The church records tell us that he "was ordained as elder by the laying on of hands." Clearly, Adventists at the time understood the laying on of hands as effecting ordination.

Which officers were ordained to their tasks? Again the Ashfield church minutes, in two separate entries, give us the answer. At the meeting on August 10, 1895, the nominating committee rendered its report. The record notes: "immediately following the election, the officers were called to the front, where Pastors Corliss and McCullagh set apart the elder, deacons, [and] deaconesses by prayer and the laying on of hands."

On Sabbath, January 6, 1900, Elder W. C. White presided over the regular Sabbath meeting at Ashfield. The clerk's minutes note: "The previous Sabbath officers had been nominated and accepted for the current year, and today Elder White ordained and laid hands on the elders, deacon, and deaconesses."

The page from W. C. White's diary for this date confirms the Ashfield church's records: "Spoke at Ashfield. Twenty-five present.

Ordained J. Hindson Elder, Thos. Patchin Deacon, and Mrs. Brannyrane and Patchin Deaconesses."<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from this letter and the record of the church's minutes that both deacons and deaconesses were ordained in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The second and final area relating to the deaconesses' ministry in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church defines some of the duties that they performed. Ellen G. White gave this brief description of their work, as well as recommended that they be ordained, in an article she wrote in the *Review and Herald*, July 9, 1895. She stated,

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the ministers; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church.<sup>2</sup>

Based upon these sources, deacons and deaconesses were ordained in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church. Deaconesses visited the sick, looked after the young, and ministered to the necessities of the poor. It is impor-

tant to note that the deaconesses also counseled the women of the church. In a letter written to A. T. Jones in September 1902, Ellen White scolded him for "listening to the private woes of women—'When a woman comes to you with her troubles, tell her plainly to go to her sisters, to tell her troubles to the deaconesses of the church.'"<sup>3</sup>

The ordination of deaconesses was officially discontinued in 1932, according to the first *Adventist Church Manual* of 1932. It was replaced in 1990 with an induction service. However, the delegates at the 59th General Conference Session in Atlanta, Georgia, June 24–July 3, 2010, voted that deaconesses should be ordained along with deacons.<sup>4</sup> That decision is reflected in the current *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*.

The duties and responsibilities performed by the deacons and deaconesses of the early Seventh-day Adventist Church were in harmony with those carried out by their counterparts in the first-century Christian church, and they are the same for those serving in the twenty-first century. ED

<sup>1</sup> *Ellen G. White Writings*, Complete Published Edition 2005, Ellen G. White Estate Research Documents Full Text Search, s.v. "deacons" (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2006), CD-ROM.

<sup>2</sup> *Ellen G. White Writings*, s.v. "deaconesses."

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Vyhmeister, "Deaconesses in the Church," *Ministry*, September 2008, 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Adventist Review*, "Sixth Business Meeting: Proceedings (Church Manual Only)," [www.adventistreview.org/article.php?id=3510](http://www.adventistreview.org/article.php?id=3510) (accessed July 5, 2010).

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# Life Transforming Mentoring from an Elder

I vividly recall waking early that Sabbath morning. Beaming with excitement, I slowly read through my message in front of the mirror in preparation to preach my first sermon. The nominating committee had voted for me some months before to become an elder in my church, the New Winthropes Seventh-day Adventist Church. I was only sixteen years old; I knew nothing about sermon preparation. I figured a sermon was just a lengthy essay with a few shouts here and there, and I'd do well enough to be asked again. I was wrong!

My sermon title, "Jesus Is Coming," was self-explanatory. I spoke about the signs of Jesus' soon return and the need to be ready. The members' excitement and support were evident in their loud shouts of "Amen" and "Hallelujah!" Excited for the opportunity to preach God's Word, I had no idea about the theological intricacies of preparing such hermeneutics, delivering the spoken Word, and its transformative effects on human beings, but I preached. As I met the congregants of the sixty-five-member church at the door, they expressed their appreciation for such a timely reminder of Jesus' imminent return. Returning to collect some personal items from one of the benches, Elder Newton Daniel, the founder of our church, stopped me and politely asked if he could talk with me very briefly. In my two years of being in that church, I never heard anyone say no to Elder Daniel's request to speak to them, so I obliged.

A stately, impeccably dressed man, Elder Newton Daniel never came to church without his briefcase. In it were three things: a large, well-worn Bible, the current *Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, and a gift for a church member. No individual was assigned that gift without reason, and God always



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told him who should be the recipient each week. Elder Daniel cared for each member of that church in a unique, personal way. He owned a bakery and always sought to bless each one of us based on our needs. I was a teenager; I never owned a suit until I met Elder Daniel. All my friends in the church probably thought I spent vast sums of money on that suit, but he brought it to church and gave it to me discreetly, providing my first lesson in leadership integrity and confidentiality. As I sat down, he invited me to join him, and he prayed, "Our Father, thank you for calling this young man to preach the Gospel. As we talk, please allow him to retain the ideas I share with him today. I pray that you will bless him and bless us as we work together to advance your work in this part of your vineyard. Amen."

My second leadership lesson came on the Sabbath after I preached that sermon. Elder Daniel was a servant leader, and he discerned my call to ministry. He spoke with respect and affirmed my preaching. That Sabbath, he said something to me that forever transformed my philosophy of preaching. He said, "Elder Browne" (he called me "Elder," and I was not even ordained), "God called you to preach His gospel. This may be your first speaking appointment, but it will not be your last. I will guide you, and I will be praying for you. You are a good writer, but preaching the gospel goes much deeper than casual writing. When you preach the gospel, you represent an omnipotent God who is reaching out and calling a dying world through you. Preaching God's Word demands a decision from the hearer that determines eternal life or eternal damnation. Many people will hear your messages for the last time, and that makes preaching the gospel a matter of urgency."

Since that day, unless Elder Daniel was traveling, I sat with him

after each sermon, receiving life-transforming feedback. I delighted in his presence, enjoying every minute of it.

My third lesson taught me that preachers of the gospel must be readers. Although Elder Daniel had not attended university, he was well read. As I grew, he told me to listen to his sermons and observe that all he shares comes from multiple sources and vast reading. Every month he brought me a book and asked me to quote meaningful aspects from the theme in my sermons. At first, adaptation proved difficult, but he nurtured me. He offered constructive criticism, while presenting alternate ways of expressing the Word.

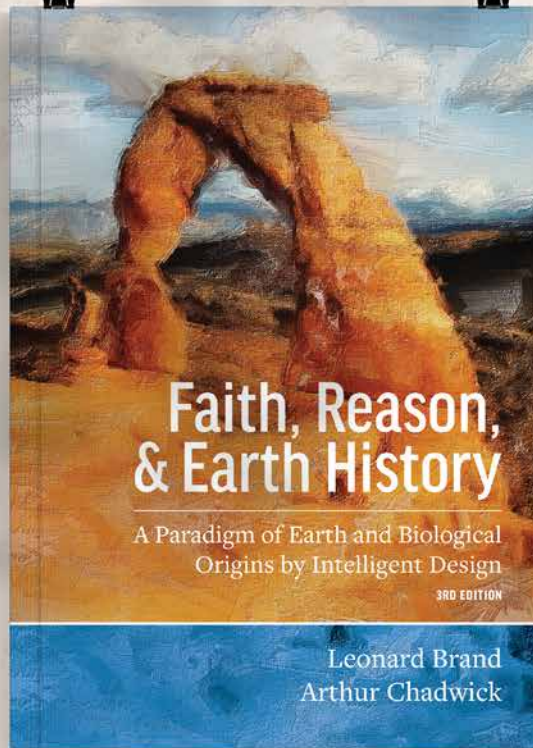
My fourth lesson stressed the importance of time, and that being a good elder is intrinsically tied to being a faithful steward. Elder Daniel modeled this lesson, arriving forty-five minutes or more before our scheduled meetings. I tried innumerable times to arrive before him, but he was always waiting patiently for me. Moreover, he never told me that giving was an essential part of leadership; he just freely gave. He gave his time, money, skills, knowledge, and full self-surrender to the Lord. Every evangelistic outreach I led, he was in attendance, offering feedback and teaching me about intonation in preaching, breaking down the narrative, and how to make a practical appeal. I remember he told me that my request must call everyone in attendance. He said some individuals would not respond unless they heard their specific call. One Sabbath, in an evangelistic meeting, due to the activities that preceded the sermon, I felt rushed to conclude the message. "Do not rush your appeal, Elder," he said. "At that stage in your sermon, when the Holy Spirit moves from the collective to the individual, speak to the ready and the uncertain."

My fifth lesson focused on mentorship and nurturing. This man of God encouraged me at every step of my ministerial growth: from a young man preaching essays to sitting and talking to youths and adults across the globe about God's love for His people, through the maze of homiletic discourses in college, seminary, university classrooms, churches, communities, and the bedside of the terminally ill. In my encounters, I continually reflected on Elder Daniel's instructions to me: "Always share the gospel as one who comes from an omnipotent God to a dying world." I have experienced the transformative power firsthand. I owe my appreciation to an old elder on a tiny Caribbean island, in a small country church who taught me my God is omnipotent. There's nothing you cannot accomplish by trusting in Him.

One day Elder Daniel invited me to meet with him. He told me he had just learned he was terminally ill but wanted me to know that he was "going to be alright." I thought he meant he would be well again, but he continued, "I have done my part for the Master. Our church is ready for your leadership." Seeing how tough it was to lead, I knew I was not ready. He emphasized that the church was growing and that I was the one whom God had placed on his heart to ask to lead. "If God's people ask you to lead, promise me that you will not say no to them. You will not stay there; God wants you to become a minister. When the time is right, go to university and study theology." He prayed with me. I cried as I left his home. I did not want the man of God to see how attached I had become to him. His words, etched deep in my mind, supplied the peace I now enjoy because God spoke powerfully through an elder. ED

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Leonard Brand and Arthur Chadwick. *Faith, Reason, and Earth History: A Paradigm of Earth and Biological Origins by Intelligent Design*. 3rd ed. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2016.



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**You** need to read *Faith, Reason, and Earth History*. More than that, you *want* to read it. Elders face many challenges in ministry, but none is greater than what Ellen G. White calls “strange forms of error, religious and philosophical combined, to expose which requires a knowledge of scientific as well as Scriptural truth.”<sup>1</sup> The supreme strange form of error among intelligent educated people—even some church members—involves rejecting the biblical record of history in favor of theories presented as scientific. Lay people generally think of this in terms of science versus faith, or creation versus evolution.

This error involves an origins story in which organisms appeared and diversified over eons of time as a result of unguided natural processes. It is a multifaceted error, so addressing it comprehensively in a single book seems an overreach. In reality, the authors—Leonard Brand and Arthur Chadwick—take on even more, making a central thesis of the idea that creationists can be and are productive participants in the scientific endeavor (p. vi). Surely that is too much! But it isn’t. In fact, this could be a major strength. Instead of trying to exhaustively refute every current materialistic origin story for this, that, and the other thing, Brand and Chadwick make a persuasive argument for an understanding of nature informed by the Bible.

More than anything else, *Faith, Reason, and Earth History* presents a biblical way of thinking about origins. This means that even those who do not grasp every scientific detail can appreciate the philosophy. *Faith, Reason, and Earth History* is understandable to science students, but also to accountants, farmers, doctors, shopkeepers, theologians, businesspeople, and people from every walk of life who are eager to rationally appreciate reality from a biblical perspective.

**More than anything else, *Faith, Reason, and Earth History* presents a biblical way of thinking about origins. This means that even those who do not grasp every scientific detail can appreciate the philosophy.**

This understanding is essential when helping young people who are being pulled away from the church and their biblical faith by materialistic views pervading secular schools and society. In other words, this is a book that elders from diverse backgrounds can use to help inform their understanding and avoid many of the pitfalls awaiting those who seek to serve congregations struggling with origins questions, and to honor our Creator effectively with a positive, sound, and rational perspective.

While its philosophy and approach to science is the most valuable contribution of *Faith, Reason, and Earth History*, it isn't just a book of big ideas uncoupled from the thrilling, fascinating, and sometimes higgledy-piggledy world of practical science. As active scientists themselves, the authors are impressively prepared to engage current scientific understandings. With his Cornell University PhD in evolutionary biology, numerous peer-reviewed scientific publications, and years as chair of the Loma Linda University Department of Earth and Biological Sciences, Leonard Brand knows what it is to be a scientist, to participate productively with scientists who have differ-

ent beliefs, and to do so in ways that build friendships and collaborations. Art Chadwick, research professor of biology and geology at Southwestern Adventist University, shares a similar academic pedigree and has led research for decades on one of the largest dinosaur bonebeds in the world.

Is this book perfect? For perfection we will have to wait until heaven, but imperfections do not detract from the fact that *Faith, Reason, and Earth History* is immensely valuable and will generously reward anyone who reads it. What might have been done better, or at least more according to my taste? While different ideas and those who embrace them are generally dealt with in a kind and factual way, there are times when the terminology used can make the logic stumble over itself. Here is an example: "Some creationists have a tendency to be sarcastic and talk down to evolutionists. Scientists are portrayed sometimes as being very stupid to believe in evolution" (p. 254). What's not to like about this? First of all, I've observed the kind of talking down mentioned here, and I'm very glad it isn't exemplified in *Faith, Reason, and Earth History*—in fact it is discouraged. The problem is that in this

example, you see "creationists" being treated as one category and "scientists" as another. That can leave some cognitive dissonance when a central thesis is that Bible-believers can be just as much scientists as anyone else. I know what they are saying, but I wish they had used more precise language—as they do when their use of "interventionism" is explained.

Possibly the biggest news about *Faith, Reason, and Earth History* is now in its third edition and free to anyone with internet access. The best place to download and read it is [www.eldersdigest.org](http://www.eldersdigest.org). There is also a Spanish version, and even short videos featuring Leonard Brand explaining important concepts.<sup>2</sup> So, there are few if any barriers to anyone benefiting from *Faith, Reason, and Earth History*. It is the best start possible on gaining a biblical understanding of creation that will allow us to serve our church more effectively—especially educated, professional young church members studying and working in secular settings. ED

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 81.

<sup>2</sup> Videos, created by Leonard Brand, explaining important concepts in *Faith, Reason, and Earth History* are available at "Faith, Reason, and Earth History," Videos, Geoscience Research Institute, accessed May 6, 2022, <https://www.grisda.org/audio-visual-media?album=6517045>.

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***Faith, Reason, and Earth History* is now in its third edition and free to anyone with internet access. For your complimentary electronic copy visit [www.eldersdigest.org](http://www.eldersdigest.org)**

“And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!’”

Revelation 5:13.<sup>1</sup>



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# Worldview through the Lens of Eternity

**Over** the last several articles, we have seen the twists and turns in the story of the universe. We have seen how God laid out a beautiful life for all His creations. He desired good for all, including you and me. But with hearts turned from God in heaven and on earth, everything changed. Our world was plunged into the darkness of sin. And so God devised a plan to rescue us from sin and its effects. Because of Christ we are given the opportunity to live a different life. But even after we have accepted Christ's desire for our lives, even as the Holy Spirit works within us to sanctify us, we still find ourselves living in a broken world. We still see tragedy when we watch or read the news. We are still horrified to hear the atrocities taking place all over the world. However, Christ's ministry is still active and alive here on earth. Because of Him we have a hope assured in His return and the re-creation of all things. Even in the face of pain and hardship, we know how the great controversy ends.

## His love can be seen in the sending of His Son to die to provide redemption for all of humanity, a death offered even for those who would not choose to believe in Him.

“For six thousand years the great controversy has been in progress; the Son of God and His heavenly messengers have been in conflict with the power of the evil one, to warn, enlighten, and save the children of men. Now all have made their decision; the wicked have fully united with Satan in his warfare against God. The time has come for God to vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law.”<sup>2</sup>

This war has been waged between Satan and God for far too long. The accusations the fallen angel leveled against God will one day soon be made plain as the lies they are. Soon the entire universe will be put to ease, having seen God’s character vindicated.

### THE VINDICATION OF GOD’S CHARACTER

Finally, after millennia of lies and deceit, there will at last come a time when everyone will acknowledge the truth of who God is—the champion of fairness and mercy, love and grace. It is Christ who will vindicate God’s character, and at last the whole universe will agree. “In the end, all will acknowledge the justice of God in exalting Christ as Lord. In this way all creation will acknowledge the character of God, which has been at the center of the great controversy, as just and faithful. Even Satan, the archenemy of Christ, will acknowledge God’s justice and bow to the supremacy of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> The truth will be made plain of who God is and who we are. Each sinner will recognize their own guilt in the light of God’s goodness and they will confess their Maker just.<sup>4</sup> It is this realization and this decla-

ration from everyone, even Satan, that will make it clear once and for all that God is who He says He is. “For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God’” (Rom 14:11; see also Phil 2:10–11; Rev 1:7).

With God’s character fully vindicated before the entire universe, His character of goodness and truth will be undeniable for the rest of eternity. Titus recognized the truthfulness of God when he wrote about “hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2). We began this series of articles with a basic assumption of the truth of God’s Word, using it as a foundation for discovering meaning and understanding. This final component of the great controversy will put a capstone of confirmation upon this assumption: God’s Word is good and faithful. In Him is all truth.

As God will be recognized for His true character, Satan, consequently, will be recognized for his character as well. Satan himself will realize what he has done and what lays before him. Ellen G. White writes, “Satan sees that his voluntary rebellion has unfitted him for heaven. He has trained his powers to war against God; the purity, peace, and harmony of heaven would be to him supreme torture. His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced. The reproach which he has endeavored to cast upon Jehovah rests wholly upon himself. And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence.”<sup>5</sup> He will recognize who

God has been the entire time: righteous, good, and above all love. All of Scripture testifies to this. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8); “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph 1:4–5); “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (Ps 107:1).

All throughout the story of the great controversy, God’s love was made evident.

*God is love.* Those are the first and the last three words of Ellen G. White’s epic Conflict of the Ages series, beginning with *Patriarchs and Prophets* and ending with *The Great Controversy*, and everything in between testifies that God’s character is love. . . . It is God’s work in the plan of salvation that manifests His righteousness and love, finally eradicating every doubt in the universe that God is indeed love and that His moral government is entirely just and above reproach.<sup>6</sup>

God’s love can be seen in the creation of the world, each intricate petal and paw a delight to His heart and declared “good.” God’s love can be seen in the fall through the freedom He offered His creations to choose to trust and love Him or believe the enticing lies of the deceiver. His love can be seen in the sending of His Son to die to provide redemption for all of humanity, a death offered even for those who would not choose to believe in Him. God’s love can be seen in the complete re-creation of the universe, demonstrating

## The truth contained in the pages of Scripture helps us make sense of ourselves and the world around us.

His benevolent heart maintained throughout the entirety of history. “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). All throughout the story, God has been demonstrating His love.

### THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE

From the time we are born, a primary task for any individual is to sort out and make sense of the world so as to best operate within it. We seek order, meaning, and understanding, because without it we struggle to successfully function. In other words, we seek to find answers to basic worldview questions. While answers can be found and determined through a variety of means, it seems to us that the one who is “the way, the truth, and the life” provides the best answers (John 14:6). Within the story of the great controversy, the answers to life’s deepest and most troubling questions are found. The truth contained in the pages of Scripture helps us make sense of ourselves and the world around us.

Questions of origin, metaphysics, and anthropology are found in our Creator: where we came from and who we are can be seen in the Garden of Eden. Questions of evil and ethics are found in the clash between God and Satan: the reason for suffering and the purpose for moral behavior can be seen in the introduction of sin into the world and God’s response to it. Questions

of epistemology and redemption are found in our Saviour: real truth as well as freedom from suffering are what Jesus offers. Questions of theology and afterlife are found in our loving Lord: answers concerning the divine and supernatural as well as mortality and immortality are bound up in who God is and what He has planned. Every question can be answered in this, the greatest epic of the universe.

This meta-narrative of the great controversy shows us that we have come from God and our destiny is to return to God. We have moved from creation to the fall to redemption and are headed towards glorious re-creation where we will forever be reunited with God. This is His plan for our lives. We were made to give God glory and to demonstrate His loving service to one another. This is His purpose for our lives. We see this clearly in Scripture. “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name” (Ps 86:9). Paul adds to this, saying, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31; see also Phil 4:4; Rev 4:11). The *Westminster Catechism* summarizes this idea when it states eloquently that “man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”<sup>7</sup> While awaiting Christ’s return and in the ages to come, we are to give God praise for who He is and what He has done in our lives from now until the day He makes all things right. “All the perplexities of life’s experience will then be made plain . . . [there] will be seen a grand, overruling, victorious purpose, a divine harmony.”<sup>8</sup>

Ellen White tells us that for all of eternity we will have signs to remind us of our story and point us back to our redemption. We will live joyfully in perfect harmony with one another and with God for all of eternity. “There we shall know

even as also we are known. There the loves and sympathies that God has planted in the soul will find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages, the sacred fellowship that binds together ‘the whole family in heaven and earth’ all are among the experiences of the hereafter.”<sup>9</sup>

God has declared that this will all be so. Here is where the great controversy will end and the rest of eternity will begin. “And He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son’” (Rev 21:6–7). ED

<sup>1</sup> All biblical quotations are from the NKJV.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 680–681.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 670–671.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 393.

<sup>5</sup> White, *The Great Controversy*, 670–671.

<sup>6</sup> John C. Peckham, “The Triumph of God’s Love,” in *God’s Character and the Last Generation*, ed. Jiří Moskala and John C. Peckham (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018), 281.

<sup>7</sup> *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 1648.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Heaven* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2003), 150.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

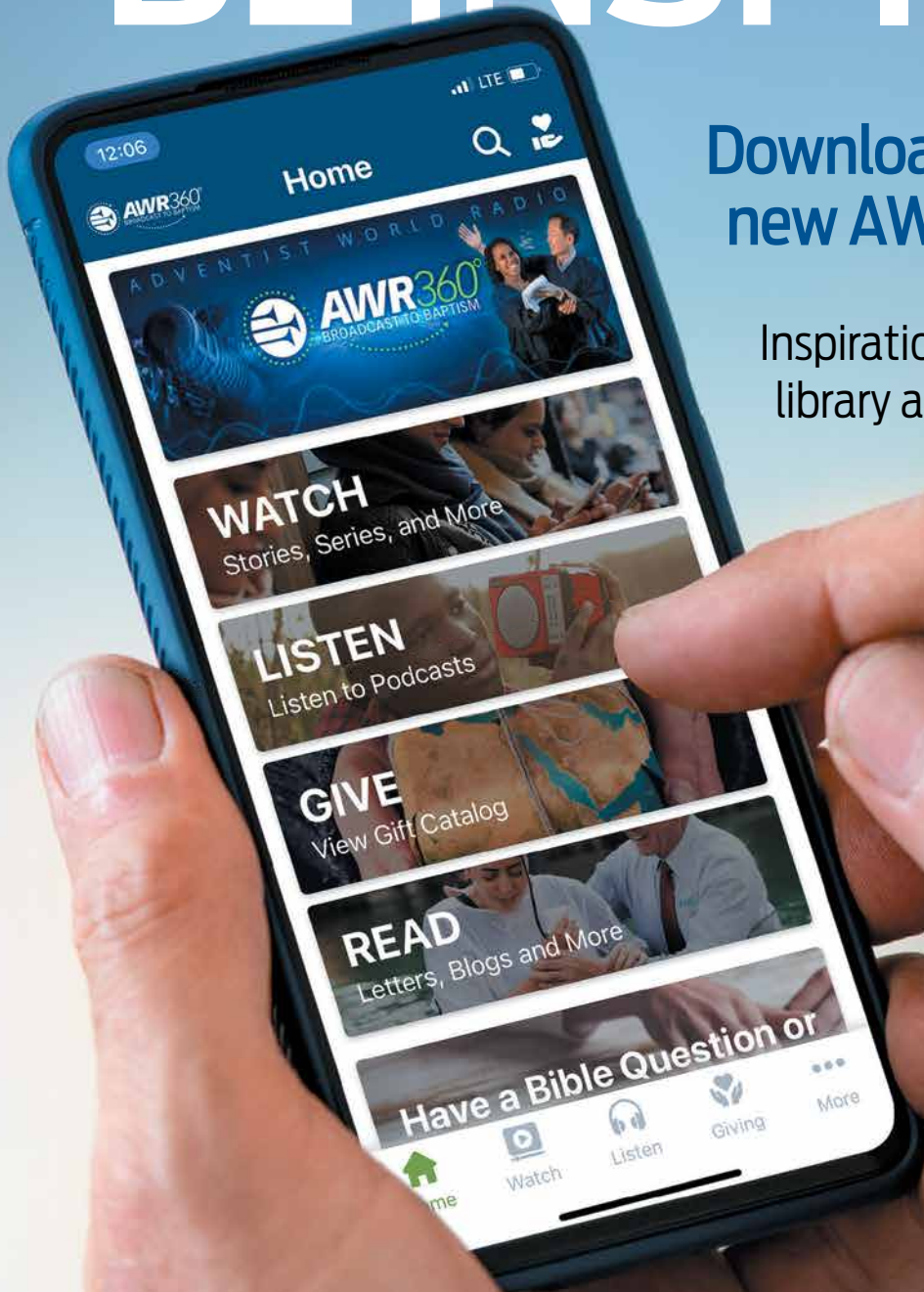
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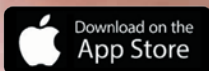
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