

All down through history Bible prophecy has sparked new religious movements. Why so many interpretations? In this volume Angel Rodríguez brings the latest scholarship to bear on the time prophecies of Daniel, Revelation, and Matthew 24.

Apocalyptic prophecies can be confusing. What do all those symbols mean? When are prophecies conditional? Why does God need a judgment if He already knows? Why are we saved by faith but judged by works? What is "the daily"? The author provides new information on the year-day principle, on the decree that began the 490-year prophecy, and other topics. His insights will help the reader to unlock the secrets of the great end-time prophecies of the Bible. The final chapter of the book shows how we can be sure to have a part in God's glorious future as we near the end of history.

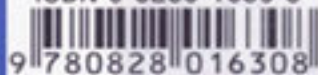
Angel Manuel Rodríguez, Th.D., is associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Born in Puerto Rico, he has served as president of Antillian College and academic vice president of Southwestern Adventist University. He is a member of the American Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion. This is his tenth book.



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THE 8 GREATEST END-TIME
PROPHECIES IN THE BIBLE

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INTRODUCTION

The uncertainty of the future often produces fear and disorientation in many lives. The ancients attempted to deal with such existential anguish by developing methods to predict the future or to avert suspected future evils. They sought to find ways to control the unknown in order to enjoy the present. Yet the future has remained elusive.

We debate whether history has a particular purpose or not—whether it is heading toward a specific goal (what the Greeks called *telos*, or end). But even those who tend to believe that human history has purpose are still not clear about the nature of that *telos*. Probably the best known theory of the future is a form of the theory of evolution that holds that we come from the womb of nature heading toward fullness of being. But even here the nature of that perfect development remains unknown to us.

The Bible provides a vision of the future that has filled the lives of millions with inexpressible hope and expectation. The God who created and who acted on our behalf in human history through the ministry of Jesus and His saving death on the cross is about to consummate His work of salvation in a way and magnitude that the most fertile imagination cannot begin to fathom. It is particularly through *apocalyptic prophecies* that God has revealed to us some details of His loving plan for the human race.

CHARACTERISTICS OF APOCALYPTIC PROPHECIES

The term *apocalyptic* comes from the name of the book of Revelation (*apokalupsis*, “disclosure, revelation”) and designates prophetic writings written in the same style as Revelation or that convey a similar message or theology. We find in the Bible different types of literature, all of them inspired by God. Some biblical writers used stories or narrated the way the Lord led His people in the past in order to

strengthen the faith of their contemporaries (e.g., 1, 2 Kings). Others communicated their messages through sermons in the form of poetry (e.g., Isaiah 40-66), songs (e.g., Psalms), wisdom sayings (e.g., Proverbs), or letters (e.g., Romans). But Daniel and Revelation stand apart from those in the complexity of the images and language used to receive and communicate the divine revelation. Let us explore some of the basic characteristics of apocalyptic prophecies.

1. Use of Visions and Dreams: God used visions and dreams to reveal His message to His prophets (Gen. 28:12-21; 1 Kings 22:19), but more often they simply heard His voice speaking to them (Jer. 1:4). In the books of Daniel and Revelation, though, visions, and in a few cases dreams, took central stage as the primary means of divine revelation. The Holy Spirit took the two prophets beyond the common world to a reality that escaped their full comprehension. This mode of revelation emphasized the fact that what the prophets received was of a transcendental nature not accessible to any other individual. The stress on visions also indicated that the communication was a private one between God and those of His servants empowered by the Spirit to receive it. They were God's chosen agencies to function as mediators of a divine message. Since at times supernatural manifestations accompanied the vision, it validated the revelation's divine origin in the eyes of those around the prophets, sometimes even instilling fear in them (e.g., Dan. 10:7).

2. Abundant Use of Symbolic Language and Images: This is obviously one of the most basic differences between prophecy in general and apocalyptic prophecy in particular. Almost every scene in a vision contains strange symbolic images and language: a winged lion, a flying goat with a prominent horn, a dragon with 10 horns and seven heads, the seal of God, etc. In some cases the images are almost bizarre and difficult to understand (e.g., "And out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword" [Rev. 1:16; cf.

Rev. 8:3-5]). It prompts us to explore the reason for such widespread use of symbolism in apocalyptic prophecies. God probably employed them for several possible reasons.

First, verbal, visual, and many other types of *symbols are part of our daily life* as we seek to communicate with each other. For instance, a sound is a symbol whose meaning is usually determined by its connection with other sounds. The sound "dr" is meaningless by itself, but when we add another sound to it, such as "ess," we immediately find significance in it because it conveys a particular idea—namely "dress." Symbols surround us, and we use them almost unconsciously. The Lord was using a human structure of communication in order to reach us with His message.

Second, *a symbol challenges us to think*. The more prominent or dramatic the symbol is the more curious we tend to become as we feel our need to understand it. Therefore, a symbol stimulates us to search for the meaning being communicated through it. God used apocalyptic symbolism to challenge us to spend time with His Word, to explore its meaning, and to understand the message that He placed there for us.

Third, *symbols sometimes emphasize the importance of the message they try to communicate*. It seems that the more unusual the symbol is the more vital the message it seeks to express. What He intended to say was so important that He did not want us to overlook it and, therefore, underlined it by using a variety of symbols. Apocalyptic symbols have as their purpose emphasizing the significance and urgency of what God presented through them.

Fourth, symbols not only reveal something, but also *conceal meaning*. It is necessary for the reader to decode the symbol in order to understand the message. In English-speaking countries the word "dress" is meaningful because the community or culture associates a particular idea with it. But for a French-speaking person "dress" is just a sound. For those outside the group the symbol could be meaningless or could even express a different idea (e.g., "red" in English des-

ignates a color; while “red” in Spanish designates a fishing tool [English, “net”]). God used many symbols that were common in the time of the biblical writers but in some cases invested them with meanings known only to the community of believers. In this way He protected them from attack by enemies whose identity was concealed within the symbols. Because symbols could reveal and conceal at the same time, it is important to interpret them in light of the biblical text. It is there that we find the meaning that God Himself attached to them.

3. *Unconditional Nature of Apocalyptic Prophecy:* Many biblical prophecies have a conditional nature.* That is to say, their fulfillment depended to a large extent on the human response to the prophetic message. This is understandable if we remind ourselves that the prophets functioned within the covenant established by God with Israel. His plans for them were directly related to their covenant faithfulness. Therefore, how they reacted to the covenant relationship made their fulfillment conditional. Of course, sometimes the prophets proclaimed unconditional prophecies as, for instance, the role of Cyrus in bringing to an end the exile of the Israelites (Isa. 44:28; 45:1-6). The unconditional nature of this prophecy rests on God’s foreknowledge and sovereignty. Apocalyptic prophecies describe God’s universal plan for the human race and His people, and therefore they are unconditional. The sovereign Lord of history, He leads it, without violating human choice or free will, to a particular goal, namely, the establishment of His eternal kingdom on earth. Consequently, apocalyptic prophecy has an element of determinism based on the fact that God’s plan will triumph in spite of any opposition.

Hence, we find nothing conditional in Daniel’s announcement of the coming of the Messiah during the 70 prophetic weeks or in the prophetic announcement of the four world kingdoms to be followed by the kingdom of God. Neither is the prophecy of the final judgment conditional nor the destruction of God’s enemies or the salvation of the holy ones.

The Lord has determined that those events will take place, because He is the Lord of history.

4. *Centrality of the Cosmic Conflict:* The concept of the struggle between good and evil, or great controversy, runs throughout the Bible as one of its unifying theological topics. Scripture often describes God as a warrior fighting against the enemies of His people and bringing salvation to them by delivering them from some oppressive power. This topic becomes a central one in apocalyptic prophecies and develops along universal lines rather than national ones. Nations may fight against each other in their search for supremacy. One power after another rises to play its role in the arena of human history as either God’s instrument or that of the enemy. But apocalyptic emphasizes their willful and irrational attack against God and His people and the need for Him to overcome such forces by bringing eternal and permanent deliverance to His people. He does that through the Messiah.

Apocalyptic prophecy is fundamentally messianic prophecy in that God fulfills His plan through the work of the Messiah who as king defeats the enemy and establishes God’s kingdom on earth. The great controversy concerns the efforts of the Messiah on behalf of God’s people. He is the decisive figure, the Deliverer whose coming and ministry of sacrifice and mediation Scripture predicts with amazing precision and detail (Dan. 9:25-27). The centrality of the cosmic conflict in apocalyptic prophecy rests on the fact that the Messiah Prince is the one facing the forces of evil, defeating them, and bringing in everlasting righteousness by atoning for the world’s sins (verse 24).

It is also important to realize that apocalyptic prophecy places special emphasis on the final aspects of the great controversy and on Christ’s ministry on our behalf. Such prophecies describe not only what God is achieving throughout history but especially focus on what will take place when Christ’s ministry concludes at the close of the cosmic con-

flict. In other words, the message is for the time of the end (e.g., Dan. 8:17, 19).

* See William G. Johnsson, "Conditionality in Biblical Prophecy With Particular Reference to Apocalyptic," in Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), pp. 259-287.

1

INTERPRETING APOCALYPTIC PROPHECIES

The prophets repeatedly testify that they received their messages from God. John explicitly describes his book as "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servant what must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1). Such prophecies did not originate in some religious community that, oppressed by its enemies, sought to escape to an idealized but unreal world of peace and tranquillity where their enemies would be no more. Rather, their divine source invested such apocalyptic prophecies with their authority, challenging us to study and apply them to our personal lives.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

To study apocalyptic prophecies properly we must carefully use correct principles of interpretation. How is that to be done? We must begin with the Bible itself and whatever it may have to say about how to interpret apocalyptic prophecy. Fortunately, the biblical text does provide valuable principles that guide our interpretation, thus reducing the danger of human speculation. We will list some of the most important principles for interpreting apocalyptic prophecy.

1. Communion With God: While this may sound more like personal spiritual preparation than a principle of interpretation, it is an indispensable element for a proper understanding of apocalyptic prophecy. When Nebuchadnezzar forgot his dream, Daniel and his companions prayed to God who then revealed the dream and *its interpretation* to Daniel

(Dan. 2:18, 19). Confused by the prophecy of the 2300 evenings and mornings, Daniel studied the Scriptures and prayed for light. An angel came and said to him, “As soon as you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you” (Dan. 9:23).

Communion with God through prayer and the study of the Scriptures is indispensable, because only the One who gave us the prophecy can provide us the correct interpretation. We must strive to understand “spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:13), and this requires that we get in deep touch with the source of divine wisdom. Paul adds: “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (verse 14). In the apocalyptic book of Daniel we find the prophet both studying for himself as well as asking God to give him the proper interpretation of the prophecies. He is an excellent example for those of us living in the time of the end.

2. Historical Perspective: As we interpret apocalyptic prophecies it is necessary to understand the point of view or perspective of the prophecy itself. What is it that the prophecy is trying to accomplish? Is the prophet writing only to his contemporaries, or does the prophecy address future generations? How do we know or how can we find out? In answering those questions we should remember that the Bible acts as its own interpreter. We must allow the biblical text to provide its own answer.

Daniel was usually confused after receiving or even while experiencing a vision and was unable to understand them (e.g., Dan. 8:15, 27). Instead of speculating about their possible meaning, he requested help from the angel interpreter who provided for both him and for us the proper way of reading those prophecies (Dan. 7:16). The angel revealed to him that they contained God’s plan for the human race from the time of the prophet to the time of the end (cf. Dan. 2 and 7).

In Daniel 2, at the beginning of the interpretation, the prophet told the king, “You are that head of gold” (Dan. 2:38), and at the end he added, “The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people” (verse 44). We find the same pattern in Daniel 7: “The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever” (Dan. 7:17, 18). In other words, apocalyptic prophecies cover the whole span of history from the prophet’s time to when God finally establishes His kingdom on earth. This is what we have called the historicist method of interpretation. The prophecies were not only about what was happening during the lifetime of Daniel or John, but also what would occur at the end. They described God’s plan from the period of the prophet to the consummation of salvation at the end of the great controversy. This particular historical perspective is indispensable for properly interpreting apocalyptic prophecies.

3. Visionary Circles: Apocalyptic visions are self-contained units with their own particular message. It would be wrong to read Daniel 8 just as the continuation of Daniel 7. The text itself informs us that Daniel 7 opens and closes a vision and that Daniel 8 is thus a new vision with its interpretation extending to chapter 9. We have here two visionary circles. The same principle is also at work in Daniel 2 and Daniel 10-12.

In the book of Revelation we find several visionary circles, some of them organized into a pattern of sevens (e.g., seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues), or around the theme of the great conflict between good and evil (Rev. 12-14). Because they are units in themselves, we should not read them sequentially. Mixing the visionary circles and interpreting them as a single long chain of events leading to the end distorts and confuses the message of each individual unit.

4. Use of Recapitulation: Closely related to the previous one, this principle points to the connections between the different circles of visions. Even though each vision is a self-contained unit, they are related to each other in several ways. A study of the different visionary circles usually helps the interpreter to understand the particular purpose of the new vision through the use of the principle of recapitulation. By recapitulation we mean, first, that the visions cover the same historical period, that is to say, they move from the time of the prophet to that of the end. We saw this already with respect to Daniel 2 and 7. In both cases each vision took us from the time of Daniel to the end under the symbol of four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God. We have in those chapters two parallel accounts of the same historical period. Second, through recapitulation the parallel account adds new information not found in the first visionary circle of Daniel 2. Daniel 7 has richer symbolism, particularly with respect to the fourth beast and its little horn. When we compare the different visions and study their parallels we gain a more complete picture of God's plan for the human race and His people.

Third, often the visionary circles provide a different perspective for the same historical period. For instance, the message to the seven churches reveal God's concern for His people throughout the history of the church (Rev. 2; 3), but the seven trumpets portray His historical judgments on sinful humanity during the same historical period. They both move from the beginning of the Christian era to the time of the end (Rev. 8-11). As we study the visions we look not only for the parallels but also for the different perspective that each one offers and for any further development of themes already present in previous visions.

5. Symbols: We should interpret symbols by their use in the Bible, thus avoiding dangerous speculations and unsound personal opinions. Apocalyptic prophecies often provide the meaning of some of the symbols used, but at other

times the vision will offer no explanation. Therefore, it is important, first, to pay particular attention to the context of a symbol within a vision. In Revelation 17:1 the great prostitute "sits on many waters," but the passage does not inform us what the "many waters" symbolizes. By paying special attention to the context we realize that verse 15 gives us an important clue: "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages."

Second, if the context does not explain the symbol, we must study its use elsewhere in the Bible. Usually we will find more than one usage or meaning for a symbol. One must select the one that seems to fit better the context of the particular apocalyptic prophecy. We should be able to justify our preference by explaining how the context appears to support it. Deciphering symbols is one of the most risky aspects of dealing with apocalyptic prophecies, and the interpreter must always be open to corrections based on a growing understanding of a symbol.

6. Historical Fulfillment: How can we identify the historical fulfillment of an apocalyptic prophecy? In order to answer that question we should keep in mind that apocalyptic prophecy provides a general outline of God's plans for the human race and not a detailed map of all events to take place in human history. The interpretation the angel interpreter gave to Daniel offers an excellent guide when searching for the fulfillment of those sections of the prophecies in which Scripture does not clearly provide a meaning. The Bible itself interprets the four empires in Daniel 2 and 7, and they provide the foundation that will assist us to identify the fourth kingdom, its subsequent division, and the little horn image.

We should also keep in mind that the history of the interpretation of apocalyptic prophecies shows that only their fulfillment helped us understand them better. Until then Bible students found themselves struggling with contradictory interpretations or expectations, but after a prophecy met its completion a more unified interpretation would

begin to emerge. Therefore, we should be very careful when interpreting prophecies whose fulfillment still awaits the future. We, as Adventists, have been blessed with the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White, through whom God confirmed the historical fulfillment of many apocalyptic prophecies. She has also provided for us an outline of the future completion of some apocalyptic prophecies. But even here we must focus on what is clear and not on what remains uncertain. Sometimes people have employed her to support strange and bizarre interpretations and even to fix approximate dates for Christ's return. Those are inappropriate ways to use her writings.

7. Year-Day Principle: Apocalyptic prophecies often include references to specific prophetic periods. In those cases the term day represents or stands for a year. The Old Testament uses the term days as an idiom for year more than 850 times. For instance, 1 Samuel 27:7 declares that "David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months," but in Hebrew it says "days and four months." In 1 Samuel 29:3 we find the phrase "over a year," which in Hebrew is "these days or these years," possibly meaning "a year or two." This usage of the term days for years "may have originated in the notion of the return of the individual days of a year in the following year, so that the 'days (of the year)' could represent the year itself."¹ The sabbatical laws employ the name of a day, the Sabbath, to refer to a whole year (Lev. 25:2), and in the law of jubilee God said to the Israelites that "to you the days of the seven sabbaths of years shall be forty-nine years" (see verse 8). The same idea appears in the prophecies of judgment in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 (cf. Gen. 6:3).

The Hebrew mind employed the terms day and year interchangeably. Therefore, the Lord used what was natural to the Israelites to express symbolically long prophetic time periods. We will later show that the prophetic periods mentioned in Daniel 8 and 9 contextually require that we interpret them by the year-day principle.²

8. Christ as the Center: Christ should be at the very center of any interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy, because all of them focus on His person, sacrifice, and current ministry in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf. Every interpretation should answer the question How does it testify about or point to Jesus? Daniel clearly shows that his prophecies centered on the person and work of the Messiah. In Daniel 7 the Messiah is the Son of man; in 8 He is the priest; and in 9 the sacrificial victim. The rest of the book portrays Him as the prince of the covenant who stands for His people and fights against their enemies. The book of Revelation depicts Him as the high priest working on behalf of His church (Rev. 1:13), the lamb (Rev. 5:6), and the mediator in the holy and Most Holy places (Rev. 8:3, 4; 11:19). He is also the child who defeated the dragon; the Saviour of His people who was victorious over the serpent (Rev. 12:4-6, 10, 11); the lamb slain from the creation of the world (Rev. 13:8); and the one who dwells on Mount Zion and protects His people (Rev. 14:1). Christ is the King of kings who overcomes and punishes all His end-time enemies (Rev. 15-19) and the divine warrior (Rev. 19:11-20:15). John saw Him dwelling with His people in a world fully restored to perfect harmony with God (Rev. 22:3-5). The books of Daniel and Revelation concentrate on Him as the exalted Lord who mediates for us in heaven. The moment He finishes that work the cosmic conflict will come to an end. It is that glorious moment that the apocalyptic prophecies anticipate with expectation and great joy.

¹ Ernst Jenni, "Yom Day," in Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub., 1997), vol. 2, p. 536.

² William Shea provides more information on the biblical foundation of the year-day principle in *Selected Studies in Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982), pp. 56-93.

2

DANIEL 2 AND 7: THE ABCs OF APOCALYPTIC PROPHECIES

Daniel 2 and 7 seem to constitute the backbone of apocalyptic prophecy by introducing its nature, purpose, and main religious concepts. Therefore, a study of the two chapters will provide us the interpretational keys to unlock other apocalyptic prophecies in the Bible. As we shall see, the latter all seem to follow the broad prophetic outline found in Daniel 2 and particularly in Daniel 7. A comparison of the two chapters reveals similarities as well as differences, suggesting that chapter 7 develops what chapter 2 first reveals. Although the symbolism is quite different, it is clear that the message is fundamentally the same.

PARALLELISM

An examination of Daniel 2 and 7 discloses some significant parallels between those two chapters and suggests that they both deal with the same subject matter. The most obvious similarity is the pattern of four earthly kingdoms (Dan. 2:37-40; 7:17) followed by the kingdom of God (Dan. 2:44; 7:27). Both prophecies portray the third kingdom as receiving special authority (Dan. 2:39, it “will rule over the whole earth”; Dan. 7:6, “it was given authority to rule”) and describe the fourth kingdom in more detail than any of the others (Dan. 2:40-43; 7:7, 19-23). Each employs the symbol of “iron” to depict the fourth kingdom as a particularly destructive power (Dan. 2:40; 7:7). And each vision ends with

the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, thus bringing all human kingdoms to an end (Dan. 2:44, 45; 7:14, 27). The fifth kingdom differs from the earthly ones in that God establishes it Himself and it will remain forever (Dan. 2:44, 45; 7:27). Since the vision ends with a description of the same glorious event—the bursting of God’s kingdom into human history—it is obvious that the different symbols representing the four previous kingdoms designate the same historical kingdoms in both chapters. Therefore, the parallels point to the use of recapitulation in Daniel 7, using Daniel 2 as the basic frame of reference.

The vision of Daniel 7 starts where the dream of Daniel 2 began—the Babylonian Empire—and covers the same historical period, taking the reader to the moment when God establishes His kingdom on earth. The biblical text contains enough pointers for us to conclude that God employed the principle of recapitulation as He conveyed His revelation to His prophet Daniel. At the same time it confirms the historicist method of apocalyptic interpretation discussed in the previous chapter.

FOUR KINGDOMS

Although Daniel 2 and 7 mention four kingdoms, they explicitly identify only one with a specific historical nation. Daniel said to the king of Babylon: “You are that head of gold” (Dan. 2:38). Here Nebuchadnezzar stands for the kingdom he rules, the Babylonian Empire. When contrasted with silver, gold becomes an appropriate symbol for Babylon, because during the Neo-Babylonian period gold was 12 times more valuable than silver.¹ Daniel 7 represents the first kingdom by the image of a winged lion, a wild beast. Jeremiah compared the Babylonians to a lion leaving his lair to destroy, and to an eagle flying rapidly and terrorizing the nations (Jer. 4:7; 49:22). The parallelism between Daniel 2 and 7 not only supports the identification of the lion image with the Babylonian Empire, but also the application of the same

symbols to the Babylonians in other prophetic books.

The prophet clearly defines in Daniel 5:28 the empire that followed the Babylonian one when he announces to Belshazzar: “Your kingdom [Babylon] is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” The reference is not to two different kingdoms but to one, something explicitly stated in Daniel 8:20 in the interpretation of the symbol of a two-horned ram. That symbol parallels the symbol of the bear in Daniel 7 and designates the same historical entity. The angel interpreter told Daniel: “The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia.” One symbol, the ram, stands for the union of Medes and Persians as one kingdom (cf. Dan. 6:8). The historical name of the third empire appears in Daniel 8:21—Greece. The prophet does not name the fourth empire, but according to Jesus, Rome would fulfill the role of the fourth empire in the future destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70 (Matt. 24:15, 16).

The internal parallelism of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel, the principle of recapitulation, the identification by an angel of some of the symbols used in the visions, and information found in other parts of the Bible all provide us a reliable interpretation of those apocalyptic prophecies and serve as a guide for unraveling other such prophecies.

NEW ELEMENTS IN DANIEL 7

In Daniel 7 we find not only parallels to Daniel 2 but the introduction of new developments in the apocalyptic drama that enlarge our understanding of God’s vision of the future. They include the figure and role of the little horn and the judgment scene.

The Little Horn

The passage gives two important details that will assist us in identifying the little horn with a concrete historical entity—first, the moment when it became powerful, and second, its role and nature.

1. *Rise of the Little Horn to Power.* We can establish the historical moment when it begins to gain power by the following biblical information.

A. The little horn was part of the fourth beast; therefore, it had to appear within history during the time of Rome and not before. The beast was not yet dead when the horn assumed its role in history. As a matter of fact, the horn and the beast would be destroyed at the same time (Dan. 7:11, 24-26).

B. The activity of the horn would last a long period of time, coming to an end shortly before the visible formation of God’s kingdom on earth (Dan. 7:25, 26). From the advantage of our historical perspective we can look back and conclude that the little horn was to be active in one way or another throughout most of the Christian era up to the second coming of Christ.

C. The fact that the vision associates the horn with the 10 horns of the beast suggests that it came into full power after the fracturing of Rome, the empire represented by the beast. Daniel 2 had already indicated that the fourth kingdom would be a divided kingdom (Dan. 2:41). The vision recorded in chapter 7 develops that idea in more detail. The angel tells Daniel: “Ten kings . . . will come from this kingdom” (Dan. 7:24), meaning that the kingdom will splinter into a number of small kingdoms (cf. Dan. 8:22). Only after that takes place will the power represented by the little horn emerge (Dan. 7:24).

D. The horn rose to power through conflict with three of the 10 horns. Three of them “were uprooted” (verse 8) or “humiliated” (see verse 24), thus losing their power and influence. The horn did not simply appear after the fall of Rome but, more precisely, after historical events removed three of the 10 powers into which the empire divided.

With that information at hand it is not difficult to examine secular history and find a historical entity that meets or

fulfills the biblical pointers to the moment when the little horn would begin its activity. We have to start at the time when the Roman Empire began shattering from the barbarian invasions of the fifth century. By A.D. 476 the empire had fragmented beyond repair. Barbarian kingdoms rose from its ruins.² The collapse of the empire took the average Roman citizen as well as the church by surprise. In fact, it was difficult for the church to explain the fall of an empire that, after the conversion of Constantine, had supported the Christian faith.³ Prophecy was being fulfilled, and the church was not only unaware of it, but even unable to explain what was taking place.

Although taken by surprise, “when the crisis came the church found powers within itself to deal with the crisis, to endure, to survive and finally to go far toward permeating and controlling the new state of affairs which the barbarian invasions and settlements had brought about.”⁴ Getting control of the new state of affairs took some time, but the foundation had been laid during the time of Constantine when “bishops began to play an important official part in the juridical and economic life, especially in the municipalities. In this period of the decay of Roman imperial authority, their role became increasingly important in the political sphere as well. When Attila was on the point of pushing into central Italy from the north in 452, the embassy that persuaded him to change his plan was headed by Pope Leo I. In the areas ruled by German kings, the bishops served as protectors and spokesmen for the Roman population. They were often hampered, however, by the fact that most of the German rulers who had been converted to Christianity were Arians. Hence there is great significance in the conversion of such a powerful ruler as the Frank Clovis to Catholic Christianity.”⁵ In fact, it was necessary that the church permanently overcome the problem of Arianism in order to remove a main obstacle in its attempt to gain control of the new state of affairs.

Arianism, a heresy originating in the teachings of an

Alexandrian priest called Arius (c. 336), denied Christ’s divinity. Some of the barbarian peoples accepted that type of Christianity, creating serious conflict between them and the main part of the church that acknowledged the divinity of Christ. But “gradually the Catholic Church succeeded in eliminating Arianism. In some instances this was achieved by military action that all but wiped out the Germanic element.”⁶ The orthodox Christian forces had to defeat the three main barbarian tribes that had accepted Arianism, exterminating the Arian Vandals in 534 and breaking the power of the Ostrogoths in 538. Adventist commentators differ concerning the identity of the third power. Some consider the Arian Heruls, eradicated in 493, to be the third power.⁷ Others argue for the Visigoths, decimated by Clovis, king of the Franks, in 508.⁸ But it is clear that orthodox Christianity eliminated no less than three Arian powers, making it easier for the church to exercise greater political power after the fall of Rome.

According to Daniel 7 the little horn would perform certain specific political and religious activities aimed at God and His people. It spoke boastfully against God by instituting doctrines and dogmas not found in the Scriptures. The teaching office of the church⁹ introduced nonbiblical concepts and required their acceptance by all. Christian leadership defined the church as the exclusive means through which God’s grace reached humanity, and a priestly system evolved to mediate that grace to the individual. The mediation of saints in heaven and of priests within the church substituted for and even supplanted Christ’s mediatorial priestly role. Theologians accepted such teachings as the immortality of the soul, the sacrament of penance, auricular confession, and others, even though they lacked biblical support.

2. *Nature and Role of the Little Horn.* The little horn was a persecuting power, waging war against God’s people. The union of state and the church resulted in religious intolerance that led in many cases to persecution and death. We

need only to remember the atrocities of the Inquisition, referred to by a Catholic writer as “one of the darker chapters in the history of the church.”¹⁰ Thousands upon thousands endured imprisonment, torture, and death because they did not submit to the authority of the ecclesiastical leadership. The horn also attempted to change the times and the law (Dan. 7:25). God only can change times: “He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them” (Dan. 2:21). Ultimately it is God who is in control of world politics, not the little horn.

The attempt of the little horn to change the law clearly revealed itself in the transfer of the biblical day of rest from the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day, Sunday. In this respect Catholicism is quite clear and unapologetic. The Catholic catechism says: “Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday? We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.”¹¹

The rise and fall of the little horn was to cover “time, times and half a time” (Dan. 7:25), a prophetic period the equivalent of 1260 days. In Daniel “time” designates a prophetic year (360 days), “times” is a dual, that is to say, a plural formed only by two elements (thus 720 days), and “half a time” is half a year (180 days). If we add 360 + 720 + 180, we get 1260 days. Apply the year-day principle, and we get 1260 years as the time for the hegemony or dominance of the little horn, the union of church and state during the Middle Ages.

A number of interpreters of apocalyptic during the past used the year 538 as the starting point for the 1260 years, and Adventists have accepted that date as the best possibility. That is the year when Rome defeated the last Arian kingdom, the Ostrogoths.¹² In order to view the significance of this prophetic period properly, we should understand that “Roman Catholicism, viewed as a particular set of ideals, beliefs, and philosophies, enjoyed increasing *influence over the minds of Western Europeans* during the early part of the

1260 years (around 538-1000), was dominant during the central part (1000-1300), and waned during the last part (1300-1798). And the prophetic period was to be marked at its beginning and ending by specific events, the granting of power, throne, and authority and later by a capture and the stroke of a sword [Rev. 13:2, 3].”¹³ The 1260 years ran from 538 to 1798, when the French general Berthier arrested and exiled Pope Pius VI in an attempt to end the Roman Catholic system.

As we look back at history and at the results of the union of church and state during the Middle Ages, we find ourselves amazed at the precision with which the prophecy given to Daniel around 500 B.C. came to realization. “What an astonishing fulfillment of Bible prophecy! In the most brutal and non-Christian aspect of its medieval activity, the Roman Church appears as a direct and dynamic descendant of the Roman Empire.”¹⁴ The little horn indeed emerged from the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire.

Judgment Scene

The second new aspect we find as we compare Daniel 2 and 7 is a judgment scene in Daniel 7:9, 10, 21, 22, 26. We will deal with the judgment in the next chapter, but for now we will just notice several things. First, this judgment takes place in heaven before God, the heavenly council, and the angelic hosts. Second, God’s people receive the kingdom after the judgment ceases, which obviously means that the judgment takes place *before* God establishes His kingdom on earth. Third, the judgment begins some time after the 1260 years ended (after 1798 [Dan. 7:25, 26]). Fourth, God pronounces judgment in favor of His people (verse 22) and as a result the little horn is finally destroyed (verse 26).

GOD, THE SON OF MAN, AND HISTORY

The message of Daniel 2 and 7 is not about the historical succession of earthly kingdoms, but about how that phe-

nomenon leads to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth through the work of God and the Messiah, the Son of Man. Implicit in both chapters is a particular understanding of human history and where it is heading. Scripture partially conveys that specific view of history through the intriguing symbols it uses to represent the different kingdoms.

In Daniel 2 we find a large statue in the form of a human being. It represents the various kingdoms by its different materials (gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay), but in Daniel 7 we encounter animals or wild beasts symbolizing the same kingdoms. In the case of the statue we have one basic object, in the form of a human being, apparently suggesting that history is the result of human achievement. The vision offers no suggestion of violence as we move from the head to the arms, to the thighs, and to the legs of the statue. An element of disorder does appear with the fourth kingdom in that it fractures and remains divided to the end. However, efforts are made to minimize the division through intermarriages. One empire seems to follow the other in logical sequence in an almost peaceful way. Yet the vision alludes to a process of deterioration in human history. The passage considers each kingdom to be in some respect inferior to the previous one. Human history is not developing and growing into something greater and more beautiful—into a unified whole—but is rather heading toward fragmentation and lack of cohesiveness. Near the end of world history there will be a perception of human unity, but it will be very fragile and easily broken.

Daniel 7 uses wild animals to represent the four kingdoms. They arrive on the stage of human history through struggle and war symbolized by a storm-tossed sea (Dan. 7:2). Violence seems to characterize the kingdoms as they rise and fall. The wings of the lion get torn off, bringing its power to an end (verse 4), the bear was bloodthirsty (verse 5), the leopard had authority to rule (verse 6), but the fourth beast was absolutely savage, crushing, devouring, and trampling its victims underfoot (verse 7). The symbolism of wild

beasts seems to emphasize the demonic in history, while the statue emphasizes the more human side. The human and the demonic interact within history and appear to have control over it. Yet Daniel rejects that conclusion. Above the human and demonic there stands the power of God and His kingdom.

The vision informs us that history is not simply the arena where the human and the demonic accomplish their egotistic and perverted wills but the place where God personally intervenes, resisting them and delivering His servants, those who rejected both human or demonic power as the center of their lives. History may appear to be little more than violent incidents planned and executed by the earthly nations, but it is also the setting within which God accomplishes His ultimate purpose of salvation for the human race, culminating in the establishment of His kingdom among us.

Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:23) and announcing that the kingdom was not only a future event but already present in the world in His own person (Luke 17:21). During the rule of the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire, Jesus was already pointing to the fifth kingdom and proclaiming that God's rule, His kingdom, was already at work in His ministry. Daniel describes the kingdom of God as a rock cut out of a mountain—but not by human hands—that destroyed all other kingdoms (Dan. 2:44, 45). This kingdom is not the result of human effort, but comes from God Himself (Isa. 14:13). Jesus emphasized the transcendental nature of His kingdom when He said: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). He is the rock that will transform our world into God's kingdom (Luke 20:17). That kingdom will become gloriously visible at the Second Coming when the world's kingdoms become "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). The message of the dream and the vision proclaims the final triumph of God's rule on our planet. He is not yet universally acknowledged as Lord of our planet, but

soon He and the Lamb will be recognized as worthy of praise by all. It is to that goal that the judgment scene points.

¹ B. Kedar-Kopfstein, “Zāhābh,” in G. Johanness Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), vol. 4, p. 36.

² “In 476 Odoacer deposed the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, had himself proclaimed king in the barbaric fashion, and governed Italy with moderation under the theoretical tutelage of the emperor of the East. The end of the Roman Empire of the West passed almost unperceived” (“Rome, Ancient,” in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia* [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1981], vol. 15, p. 1126).

³ R.P.C. Hanson wrote: “Among pagans it [the fall of Rome] roused angry accusations that the Roman Empire had collapsed because the Christians had caused the withdrawal of worship from Rome’s ancestral gods. Among Christians it produced bewilderment and dismay. How could God allow an empire which had recently espoused the cause of Christianity in so signal a manner to be destroyed?” (“The Reaction of the Church to the Collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the Fifth Century,” in Everett Ferguson, ed., *Church and State in the Early Church* [New York: Garland Pub., 1993], p. 372).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

⁵ M.R.P. McGuire, “Roman Empire,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1967), vol. 12, pp. 578, 579.

⁶ D. M. Barry, “Arianism,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, p. 794.

⁷ C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1981), vol. 1, p. 123.

⁸ William H. Shea, *Daniel 1-7* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, Pub. Assn., 1996), pp. 167, 168; Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), pp. 106, 107.

⁹ In Catholicism the teaching authority of the church (magisterium) plays a key role in defining beliefs. The Catholic Church usually defines the magisterium as “the perennial, authentic, and infallible teaching office committed to the apostles by Christ and now possessed and exercised by their legitimate successors, the college of bishops in union with the pope” (J. L. Allgeier, “Teaching Authority of the Church [Magisterium],” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13, p. 959).

¹⁰ “Inquisition,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, p. 541.

¹¹ Peter Geiermann, *The Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1977), p. 50.

¹² On the year 538 and the 1260 years, see C. Mervyn Maxwell, “The Mark of the Beast,” in Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Revelation—Book II* (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 121-132.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁴ Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 1, p. 127.

3

THE SON OF MAN AND THE FINAL JUDGMENT

The doctrine of the final judgment is a Christian concept found not only in the Bible but also in ancient Christian creeds. It is not the invention of the Adventist Church, but has been a part of the Christian message since apostolic times. According to Paul, judgment formed part of the gospel he preached to Jews and Gentiles and was not incompatible with his teaching on justification by faith. The good news of the gospel is that although the judgment condemns us, Jesus brought a justification based not on the law but on faith in Him as our substitute and Saviour. While we still face a judgment, now we can meet it with confidence, knowing that we will be acquitted in and through Christ.

CHRISTIANITY AND A PRE-ADVENT JUDGMENT

It may surprise some Adventists to know that many other Christians believe in a judgment that takes place before Christ’s return. In fact, Catholics and many Protestants share the concept. Catholic theology distinguishes between the particular judgment and the *general judgment*.¹ The particular judgment takes place immediately after death and determines whether the soul will experience heaven, purgatory, or hell.² This judgment occurs before the second coming of Christ and is necessary because of the Catholic doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The general judgment takes place at the Second Coming, is universal in character, and includes both the righteous and wicked. Human beings will experience it in the body after the resurrection.³

It is not clear why, though, we would need a general judgment if the particular judgment determines each individual's eternal destiny.

Dispensationalists have a highly developed doctrine of judgment that conceives of at least seven different individual judgments.⁴ The first one involves the judgment of the church in heaven after the rapture and before the Second Coming. We could consider it to be a "pre-Advent" judgment. Again one wonders why believers who have already been raptured should face a judgment. Would not the fact that God raptured them indicate that they had gone through judgment and been acquitted? The other judgments take place at the Second Coming (e.g., judgment of Israel, judgment of the Gentiles) and following the millennium (e.g., judgments of Satan and fallen angels, judgment of unsaved dead).⁵

Another group of Christians prefer to describe the judgment as a single universal event that takes place at the second coming of Christ when the general resurrection of all, wicked and righteous, occur. That position seems to ignore that Christ comes a second time to save those waiting for Him and not to determine whether they should be saved or not (Heb. 9:28). He had to make that decision some time before His return.

We, as Adventists, have taught that the final judgment consists of a process that begins in heaven before Christ's return (Dan. 7:9, 10, 21, 22, 26, 27) and concludes after the millennium (Rev. 20:11, 12). Those who claimed to have accepted Christ as their Saviour undergo judgment in heaven before Christ's coming (Dan. 7:22; Rom. 2:5, 6). Then the Second Coming saves the faithful from their enemies (Heb. 9:28), reveals the legal decisions reached in the heavenly tribunal (Rom. 2:5), and appropriately rewards each one (verse 6). Next follows the millennium, during which the righteous—taken to heaven—will judge the wicked (Rev. 20:4; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3). After the millennium God will make known the decisions reached in the heavenly tribunal, and

Satan and all his followers will be justly condemned to eternal death (Rev. 20:12-15). Based on our understanding of apocalyptic prophecies we have also been able to identify the historical moment when that judgment began in heaven, namely in 1844 (Dan. 7:25, 26; 8:13, 14; Rev. 14:6, 7). Hence the importance and urgency of our church's message and mission.

Our understanding of the final judgment integrates all the biblical information related to that particular subject into a coherent doctrinal statement. Since the Bible rejects the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, we deny that the pre-Advent judgment takes place at the moment a person dies, and yet we affirm that it does begin before Christ's return. The Bible also teaches that the rapture occurs at the Second Coming; therefore, we believe that the judgment does not take place after the rapture but rather before the return of Christ. Then the righteous will receive the reward assigned to them in the heavenly tribunal.

JUDGMENT AND INVESTIGATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A righteous judgment begins with an investigation, a search for facts and their evaluation before reaching a final verdict. That is the case in any tribunal, including the heavenly one. People in biblical times commonly conducted judicial inquiries before making legal decisions. For instance, the phrase "they carefully investigated" (Judges 6:29) refers to that process. Job, describing his responsibility at the city gate as judge, states: "I investigated the case which I did not know" (Job 29:16, NASB). Esther informed the king that two of his servants were plotting to kill him, "the plot was investigated and found to be so, [and] they were both hanged" (Esther 2: 23, NASB). We could cite many other examples.

God also conducts investigations before passing sentence against or in favor of humans. We see this clearly indi-

cated in Genesis 3:8-18, the first trial recorded in the Bible. Scholars have found in Genesis 3:11-20 a “trial,”⁶ a legal process,⁷ or a judgment scene.⁸ In this scene God functions as a prosecutor,⁹ investigating the crime committed by the first couple. The story “follows step by step the procedure of a legal action:

- 8-10: Hiding and discovery
- 11-13: Interrogation and defense
- 14-19: The three sentences of punishment.”¹⁰

It is important to notice that it involves an interrogation—God asks questions, investigating the nature and reason for the crime committed. In other words, we have in this story an investigation within the judgment process in which God searches for and analyzes the evidence. The obvious questions are Did God already know about the crime? and If He did, then why did He need to conduct an investigation? Umberto Cassuto, a Jewish Bible commentator, raised those questions and suggested that “since the subsequent narrative portrays God as omnipotent, it stands to reason that He is not depicted here as one who is unaware of what is around Him.”¹¹ He adds that “the Judge of the whole earth calls man, in order to demand from him an account of his conduct.”¹² According to others, the purpose of the questions is (1) to establish the facts and “to make clear to the man and the woman what they have done”;¹³ (2) to allow “the man himself to acknowledge his crime”;¹⁴ (3) or even better, to move the culprit “into confessing his guilt.”¹⁵

It is interesting to observe that during the investigation God questioned Adam and Eve but surprisingly ignored the serpent. The Lord does not judge it in the same way that He does the couple. God condemns only the enemy and pronounces a sentence against him.¹⁶ Here is an excellent parallel to the last judgment in that God is the one who searches for the truth, conducts the trial, and pronounces a verdict. Daniel 7 follows the same pattern during the eschatological judgment in that it portrays God opening the books (investi-

gating the evidence), conducting the trial, and passing a final sentence (in favor of His people and against the enemy).

Other cases in which God investigated before pronouncing a sentence appear in Genesis 4:9-13; 18:22; and Psalm 7:8, 9. In the latter passage the phrase “who searches [*baḥan*] minds and hearts” refers to the investigative process, as indicated by the use of the verb *baḥan*. Here it “suggests the investigative phase necessary for right judgment”¹⁷ (cf. Ps. 11:4-6).

The investigation of evidence is a common theme in the prophetic books. Just a few examples may suffice. Hosea 4:1-3 contains an announcement of a trial, the examination of the evidence, and a verdict. Micah 6:1-16 depicts a full trial that includes witnesses, listing the evidence against the people, and the legal decision. Zephaniah 1:12 uses the verb “search” to refer to the grounds on which the judge will base the sentence. It is simply impossible to have a trial without a legal investigation of the evidence.

JUDGMENT AND INVESTIGATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

During the New Testament period the principle stated by Nicodemus was well known: “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?” (John 7:51). It is legally unimaginable to pass a sentence without gathering and analyzing all the evidence. Paul appeared before Festus and Agrippa for a trial that obviously included evaluating the evidence that supported the charges against him (Acts 25:2-11; 26:2-32).

The divine tribunal follows the same pattern. Scripture describes God as impartially judging each person’s work—that is to say, He carefully evaluates or examines the life of each individual before giving a verdict (1 Peter 1:17). His judgment is universal. Both the living and the dead “will have to give an account” to God (1 Peter 4:5) and He will “judge

men's secrets" (Rom. 2:16). In other words, God will investigate evidence hidden from human sight. The standard of judgment is the person's response to Jesus (2 Thess. 2:12) and to the law (James 2:12). Scripture emphasizes the idea of investigation by its insistence that God will judge humans according to their works (Matt. 12:36, 37; 16:27; Rev. 20:13), including Christians (1 Cor. 3:8-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:23-25).

Judgment will take place at "the judgment seat [*bema*]" of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) and God (Rom. 14:10). The New Testament here used an image taken from the secular legal system in which the Greek term *bema* designated a place where an official stood, listened to legal cases, and pronounced legal sentences (Acts 18:12, 16; 25:6, 10). Courts followed a legal procedure that required gathering evidence, evaluating it, and rendering a final verdict. The inspired writer employs the human practice to illustrate what takes place in the heavenly tribunal. The idea it conveys is that of an investigation and evaluation leading to a verdict. Each one of us "will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12), *but the good news is that in the heavenly tribunal the One who speaks for us, who will acknowledge us before the angels (Luke 12:8, 9), our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and Intercessor (Heb. 7:25), He is in charge of our hearing.* That has to be the case, because the judgment of God's people will take place in heaven before Christ's return. Since we cannot be there, Christ will represent us.

Daniel 7 indicates that the judgment begins in heaven, and the New Testament supports the concept. We have seen already that in Daniel the judgment commences before the kingdom of God is established on earth. Paul associates it with the Second Coming in Romans 2:5, 6 and 2 Timothy 4:1. Hebrews 9:27, 28 informs us that the final judgment takes place after one dies and that the next eschatological event is the Second Coming. According to verse 28 Christ does not come to judge His people but to save them—that is to say, to

give them their reward already determined in the judgment. According to Romans 2:5, 6, it is at the "day of God's wrath [the Second Coming], when his righteous judgment will be revealed," and God "will give to each person according to what he has done." We find here two important ideas. First, the "righteous judgment" of God is something still hidden at the present time but will eventually be revealed. This means that a judicial decision was reached before the Second Coming, because it is at that moment that the decision stands revealed. Second, God based the judicial decision on the person's deeds. Heaven used them in the investigative aspect of the judgment to determine the final destiny granted at Christ's return.

EXAMINING THE RECORDS

The Bible mentions several heavenly books preserving the life history of each member of the human race. Even non-Israelites in the ancient world believed in such heavenly books. Mesopotamian records speak of "the tablet of life," "the tablet of his misdeeds, errors, crimes," and "the tablet of his good deeds."¹⁸ But it is difficult to determine the nature and in some cases the purpose of such heavenly records. The Bible speaks about the book of life, based on the practice of keeping a record of the names of people who lived in a city (e.g., Isa. 4:3; Eze. 13:9). The heavenly book of life contains the names of all those who were part of God's people (Ex. 32:32, 33; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; Luke 10:20; Rev. 21:27). Apostasy could result in the removal of one's name from that book (Ps. 69:28; Rev. 3:5). It also records human deeds, whether good or bad (Isa. 65:6; Rev. 20:12). The book of remembrance could be the same as the book of deeds (Mal. 3:16; cf. Esther 6:1). The earthly counterpart of the heavenly book of deeds could have been the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah that preserved the good and bad things each king did. The prophets used them to evaluate the lives of the various kings. We do not know the nature of the heavenly records, but

what is extremely important is their function. The Bible refers to them to emphasize the final judgment's objective and impartial nature. Such records provide objective evidence for the members of the heavenly council to determine the destiny of each individual (Dan. 7:10; 12:1; Rev. 20:12). God obviously does not need those records, but His creatures do. *Those who have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour should not be concerned about the content of their records in heaven, because Christ has granted them forgiveness of sin and Christ's righteousness has been credited to them. As long as they remain in a genuine covenant relationship with our Saviour the investigative judgment will simply confirm and fix forever their previous commitment to Him.*

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND JUDGMENT

The Bible teaches that we are saved by faith in Christ but that we are judged by works. Christian theologians of all traditions have long attempted to integrate the two seemingly contradictory statements. Therefore, this theological problem is not peculiar to Adventists. We have indicated that for Paul gospel and judgment were not contradictory concepts but that they both belonged together (Rom. 2:16). Judgment was one of the fundamental concepts the early church taught new converts (Heb. 6:2), and it was part of the apostolic proclamation (Acts 24:25).

A Lutheran theologian has written: "A doctrine of justification which avoids the concept of judgment loses its character as proclamation of the lordship of God and loses therewith the only basis of the humanization of mankind. A concept of judgment which does not receive its meaning from the doctrine of justification leaves no more room for assurance of salvation."¹⁹ We must keep both concepts together in order to present a balanced picture of Scripture. Here is how two non-Adventist scholars have attempted to describe the relationship between judgment by works and justification by faith:

"Paul . . . believes in a final judgment of every man. Its primary function will be to disclose whether he belongs to Christ or not and to determine his destiny accordingly. For those who through faith in Christ have come into relationship with God, the verdict anticipated in justification and demonstrated in their lives will be confirmed. For those who have rejected Christ, their condemnation will be sealed."²⁰

According to Travis, when we are justified by faith in Christ we receive in advance the verdict of acquittal to be pronounced at the divine tribunal in the final judgment. Therefore, the final judgment confirms that judicial decision by making it clear that we belong to Christ. Only those who do not belong to Christ are condemned.

"Such a public occasion [described in Romans 2:5], in which a public verdict will be given and a public sentence passed, will require public and verifiable evidence to support them. And the only public evidence available will be our works, what we have done and have been seen to do. The presence or absence of saving faith in our hearts will be disclosed by the presence or absence of love in our lives."²¹

Justification by faith is not a concept or an abstract idea that we apprehend only with our intellect. Those who have been justified live a life of obedience to the Lord that reflects a life controlled by love toward God and toward others. The following statement summarizes quite well the Adventist position on this issue.

"The Bible teaches that justification belongs to 'last things,' for it brings the hoped-for verdict of acquittal in the last judgment into the present. . . . Therefore, the testimony of the Scripture is contradicted when human logic concludes that since justification, a present reality through faith, belongs to last things, nothing further can be asked of the believer in the final judgment. Though the blessing of acquittal in the future judgment indeed becomes operative even now, Scripture is clear that what God desires to see in the final judgment is justified believers who through His grace have

borne fruit to His glory [Phil. 1:9-11]. The new history God gives each believer is not over when he comes to Christ and is justified; it is just begun. At the end God asks for justification with its fruit—*not in the sense of the formula 'Faith plus works saves,'* but in the sense that justification is the source of sanctified fruit.”²²

PURPOSE OF THE FINAL JUDGMENT

The final judgment is a search for truth that seeks to re-establish justice and harmony in a world disrupted by the presence of sin. The judgment makes the innocent victorious over the wicked and reaffirms and vindicates the divine principles that rule the universe. In fact, the final judgment culminates in a cosmic recognition of God's righteousness, a theodicy (*theos*, “God,” and *dike*, “justice”). Based on the evidence that God will present during the final judgment, every intelligent creature in the universe will testify that God is indeed righteous and merciful. Only then will it be safe to bring the warfare between good and evil to a close and to extinguish Satan and his followers from the universe.

Philippians 2:10, 11 anticipates the moment when the whole cosmos will acknowledge God and Christ as worthy of praise: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This will be the experience of those who are in heaven, namely, angels and celestial beings. John describes those beings as falling down before God and praising Him for His wisdom and power that He has manifested in His marvelous acts of salvation on behalf of His people (Rev. 7:11, 12). Those heavenly beings witnessed the judicial proceedings in heaven, and they are persuaded that God is just in His judgments against evil powers (Dan. 7:10; Rev. 16:5; 19:1-10). The second group Paul mentioned as joining those in heaven to praise God consists of human beings. This eschatological expectation finds its roots in the psalmist's call to

the nations to praise God. God's people and the kings of the earth and all the nations were invited to worship Him (Ps. 5:6, 7; 148:11). Even nature received an invitation to recognize God as Creator and Redeemer (Ps. 148:7-10). Paul suggests that such an event will take place at the end.

The third group comprises those “under the earth.” The Greek word used by Paul (*katachthonios*) appears in Greek literature to designate divine beings or demons localized in the underworld, the realm of demons.²³ Paul seems to be using it here to refer to evil spiritual powers in order to stress the fact that even they will finally acknowledge and confess that only God and Jesus are worthy of praise and worship. It is not a confession based on repentance but a recognition that they were on the wrong side of the great controversy and that God is righteous in condemning them. We have an Old Testament legal precedent for that practice.

Israel carefully investigated Achan's sin, and after identifying him as the culprit, confronted him with the consequences. God's people sentenced him to death in order to restore social and spiritual order in Israel. But before the execution Joshua said to him: “Give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me” (Joshua 7:19). Some have called it a doxology of judgment. Let me explain. In this situation, to give glory and to praise the Lord meant that Achan accepted responsibility for his sin and that he was ready to declare publicly that God's judgment against him was deserved and righteous. It is not a confession of sin leading to forgiveness but a recognition of the fact that the person is guilty as charged and the divine verdict is a just one. Demonic powers will finally acknowledge that God is righteous and that the sentence pronounced against them is a righteous one. It would appear that God seeks to persuade even the archenemy that He is indeed whom He is—a God of justice and love. Even Satan will clearly perceive the truth. No intelligent creature will go into eternal extinction questioning or

having doubts about the true nature of God's character.

Ellen G. White describes the experience of Satan during the judgment after the millennium and his doxology of judgment as follows: "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.*"²⁴ It is only then that God can bring to an end Satan's reign of destruction.

Those who have accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord should not fear the judgment, because they have already pronounced their doxology of judgment. Confronted with God's judgment on the cross against sin, they recognize that they are guilty as charged and that God was right in condemning them to eternal death. But they also know that the executive phase of their judgment took place in Christ and that by accepting Him as Saviour they will not be condemned in the final judgment (Rom. 10:9, 10; John 5:24). We can face the future in full confidence.

¹ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), p. 1164.

² J. H. Wright, "Judgment, Divine (in Theology)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8, pp. 36, 37.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-40.

⁴ S. N. Gundry, "The Judgment of the Nations," in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p. 591; David R. Nicholas, "Judgments, Various," in Mal Couch, ed., *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregal, 1996), pp. 225-227.

⁵ John F. Walvoord lists seven different judgments that take place at the moment of the Second Coming and afterward (*Major Bible Prophecies* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], pp. 381-388). Nicholas gives a more complete list in "Judgments," pp. 225-227.

⁶ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p. 91; Walter Brueggeman, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), p. 49.

⁷ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 253.

⁸ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in Frank A. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), vol. 2, p. 52.

⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 194.

¹⁰ Westermann, p. 252.

¹¹ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Genesis I-IV* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), p. 155.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Westermann, pp. 254, 255.

¹⁴ Hamilton, p. 194.

¹⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), p. 77.

¹⁶ Westermann writes: "The crime began with the serpent, a creature of God; there is no explanation of the origin of evil. The serpent is not interrogated; it is cursed" (p. 255).

¹⁷ Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts and Procedures in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1994), p. 244.

¹⁸ Shalom M. Paul, "Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1973): 345, 346, 351.

¹⁹ Ernst Kaesemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 56, 57.

²⁰ Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God* (Hants, U.K.: Marshall Pickering, 1986), p. 64.

²¹ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 84.

²² Ivan Blazen, "A Tension Resolved," *Adventist Review*, Aug. 11, 1983, p. 9.

²³ Hermann Sasse, "Katachthonios," in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 3, pp. 633, 634.

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 670. (Italics supplied.)

4

DANIEL 8: THE PRINCE OF THE
HEAVENLY HOST

Daniel 7 introduced the Messiah as a royal figure who will inherit the kingdom of God and share it with His people. Now Daniel 8 presents the Messiah as a priest ministering on behalf of God's people in the heavenly sanctuary. The two pictures complement each other and provide a more complete portrait of the promised Messiah's complex work and nature. The basic message is the same: The Messiah works, as king and priest, on behalf of God's people and will be victorious over all evil powers, thus bringing the conflict between good and evil to an end. Since Daniel 8 emphasizes the priestly role of the Messiah, the vision uses terminology and images taken from the Israelite sanctuary to communicate its message.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: MEDO-PERSIA AND GREECE

Daniel had the vision "in the third year of king Belshazzar's reign" (Dan. 8:1). Commentators have used ancient historical records to identify that year as 548/547 B.C.¹ The prophet received the vision about two years after the one recorded in Daniel 7 (550/549 B.C.), and nine years before the events recorded in Daniel 9 took place (539 B.C.). Interestingly, a time span of about 53 years exists between the moment Daniel received the interpretation of the king's dream (chapter 2; 603 B.C.) and the vision of chapter 7.

The year 547 B.C. brought with it significant changes in the history of the ancient Near East. Babylon had been declining as a world empire, and a new more powerful political

system was on the rise—the Medo-Persian Empire. The Medes, mentioned for the first time in historical records dated to 858-824 B.C., inhabited areas to the northwest of Iran that today include Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. It was probably around 621 B.C. that Cyaxares was able to unite the Median tribes into a kingdom powerful enough to resist the Assyrian armies. In fact, they allied themselves with the Babylonian armies against the Assyrian Empire, thereby defeating it. His son Astyages, a weak ruler, followed Cyaxares.

The Persians probably resided in southern Iran. Lack of historical information does not allow us to recover the early history of the Persian kingdom. Ancient Near Eastern specialists agree that the rise to power of Cyrus II as king (559 B.C.) made the Persians an influential and powerful kingdom. It seems that until then the Persians had been under the control of the Medes. Cyrus II married the daughter of Astyages and appeared to have been interested in taking over the Median Empire. Tensions between him and Astyages developed, and he finally rebelled against Astyages in 550 B.C. Although outnumbered by the Medes, Cyrus won at least partly because many of the Median troops deserted to him. Thus the Medo-Persian Empire came into existence under one of the most capable kings of the ancient Near East.

Daniel 8 symbolizes this new empire by a ram with two horns, representing its two major factions, the Medes and the Persians. One of the horns was longer than the other, suggesting that one of the kingdoms, Persia, was more powerful than the other, Media. Once Cyrus defeated Astyages, he directed his attention against Lydia toward the north, conquering it in 547 B.C., the year when Daniel had the vision described in chapter 8. By controlling the north, Cyrus was ready to conquer the west, Babylon, without being concerned about an attack from the north. Therefore, "strategically Cyrus' conquest of Babylon began with the campaign against Lydia" in 547.² Daniel's vision here did not include a symbol for the Babylonian Empire, because from God's per-

spective the kingdom was already in the process of collapsing. Another possible reason for not including a reference to Babylon may be found in the time period mentioned in the prophecy (the 2300 days), which, as we will see, was to start counting from the time of the Medo-Persian Empire.

The Medo-Persian Empire conquered to the north (Lydia), to the west (Babylon), and to the south (Egypt; Dan. 8:4). Cyrus's son, Cambyses, captured Egypt in 525 B.C. By then the "Persians had no more neighbors in the Middle East: the ancient kingdoms of Media, Lydia, Babylonia, and Egypt had been transformed into satrapies administrated by the Persians."³

No human kingdom has lasted forever, and Medo-Persia was no exception. During the course of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. the empire faced serious internal and dynastic conflicts. When Alexander the Great appeared as a Greek leader and king, the fate of the Medo-Persian Empire was sealed. It put up a strong fight for survival, making it difficult for Alexander to obtain easy victories, but he came out victorious, killing the "ram" (Dan. 8:7).

The prominent horn on the head of the goat in Daniel 8:5 represents Alexander the Great (verse 21). In 12 years and eight months he created a world empire whose influence still lingers in Western societies. Alexander "lifted the civilized world out of one groove and set it in another; he started a new epoch; nothing could again be as it had been. He greatly enlarged the bounds of knowledge and of human endeavour, and gave to Greek science and Greek civilization a scope and an opportunity such as they had never yet possessed."⁴ He was about 33 years old when he died in June 323 B.C. "at the height of his power" (Dan. 8:8), leaving behind him no successor and an enormous empire without a leader. The empire soon split into many separate states that internal struggles reduced to four main ones. *Cassander* controlled Macedonia, *Lysimachus* took Thrace and sections of Asia Minor, *Seleucus* ruled over Syria and Babylon, and Egypt

came under the power of *Ptolemy*. Prophecy was fulfilled with amazing accuracy!

THE LITTLE HORN

The fact that the language used to describe the little horn in Daniel 8 echoes that portraying the previous world powers suggests that the little horn represents another new empire. A couple examples will illustrate the point. The text describes the political expansion of the Medo-Persian and Greek empires and the same applies also to the horn (Dan. 8:9). In addition, as the Medo-Persian Empire "became great" (verse 4), so the Greek Empire "became very great" (verse 8), and the little horn "grew in power" (literal translation: "grew/became excessively great" [verse 9]). We notice a crescendo effect in the description of the power achieved by these different empires—each one becoming more powerful than the previous, with the last one reaching a unique greatness.

The passage describes the horn's origin in an interesting way: "Out of one of them came another horn" (verse 9). What does that mean? The previous verse ended with: "In its place four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven." The immediate antecedent of the phrase "out of one of them" is the "four winds of heaven," not necessarily the four horns, an interpretation confirmed by the grammar of the text. In Hebrew nouns and pronouns have gender, and their gender agreement helps the interpreter to understand the relationship between nouns and pronouns. This is what we find in this particular case: "Out of one [feminine] of them [masculine]" can only refer back to "the four winds [feminine] of heaven [masculine]." The little horn emerges from one of the winds of heaven.⁵ According to Daniel 7:2 "the four winds of heaven" were "churning up the great sea" from which the four beasts came. These same winds are the source of the horn and implicitly associate it with one of the beasts that came from the sea.⁶

A comparison of the little horn mentioned in Daniel 7 with the horn in Daniel 8 reveals enough parallels to demonstrate that they both designate basically the same power. For instance, the symbol is the same, a horn; the horn is at first small and later becomes great (Dan. 7:8, 20; 8:9); in both cases the horn is a persecuting power opposing God's people (Dan. 7:21, 25, 27; 8:10, 24); it exalts itself (Dan. 7:8, 11, 20, 25; 8:10-12, 25); it is an anti-God power appearing at the climax of the vision (Dan. 7:8, 9, 21, 22, 25, 26; 8:12-14, 25); its activity extends to the time of the end (Dan. 7:25, 26; 8:17, 19); and it is supernaturally destroyed (Dan. 7:11, 26; 8:25).⁷ It is difficult to deny that the two horns represent the same power.

The significant difference is that in Daniel 7 the little horn develops from the head of a terrible beast that represents pagan Rome with the horn itself standing for papal Rome, while in Daniel 8 the little horn represents both the beast and the horn. A part of the whole (the horn) symbolizes the whole (the fourth beast of Daniel 7). We find support for this conclusion in the fact that in Daniel 8 the little horn participates in a *horizontal* conquest—it goes against the south (Egypt), the east (Syria), and the Beautiful Land (Israel)—representing the activity of *pagan Rome* (Dan. 8:9). But it also reaches up to heaven (a *vertical* expansion against the people of God and the role of the Prince in the heavenly temple)—the work of *papal Rome* (verses 10-12). This horn incorporates the activity of the beast and its horn described in Daniel 7. Perhaps the reason Daniel 8 does not mention such a terrible beast is that the animals used to represent the kingdoms (ram and goat) are clean animals, while such a beast would have to be considered unclean. That would have distorted the connection between the vision and the sanctuary.

LEVITICAL CONCEPTS AND IDEAS IN DANIEL 8

Daniel 8 portrays not only the rise and fall of kingdoms but also what God is doing for the benefit of His people and

how the little horn opposes that work of redemption. Consequently, in the vision we find images and terminology employed in the sanctuary services to describe God's work for His people as well as military terminology applied to what the horn does. Some examples will clarify what we are saying.

We have already mentioned the symbols of the ram and the goat, clean animals used as sacrificial victims in the sanctuary services. We also find two different terms employed to designate the Temple: "place of his sanctuary [*miqdash*]" (Dan. 8:11) and "sanctuary [*qodesh*]" (verse 13). The connection with the sanctuary and its services could hardly be more explicit. The passage calls an angel "holy one" (verse 13). Only holy ones could officiate in the sanctuary. In fact, the concept of "holiness" is of central importance in the sanctuary services, and a priestly responsibility was distinguishing between the holy and the common (Lev. 10:10). The term "host" (Dan. 8:11) appears in the setting of the sanctuary as well as in warfare contexts. Scripture employed it to designate an army (2 Chron. 26:11-15), and the Levites, like an army, had charge of protecting the holiness of the sanctuary (Num. 3:23, 30; 8:24, 25). The latter had to stop at any cost a person who attempted to violate the sanctity of the tabernacle (Num. 1:51).

Other terms used in the context of the sanctuary are "horn" (Dan. 8:9), which reminds us of the horns on the altar (Ex. 27:2; 29:12); "truth" (Dan. 8:12), which in Malachi 2:6 refers to the instruction given by the priest to the people; and "rebellion" (Dan. 8:12), found in Leviticus 16:16 among the sins that the Lord was willing to expiate during the Day of Atonement. Of particular importance is "the daily" (Dan. 8:11; wrongly translated "daily sacrifice") used in the sanctuary to designate the daily/continual work of the priest. The Old Testament employs it in conjunction with the daily burnt offering (Ex. 29:42), the "bread of the Presence" (Ex. 25:30), the lighting of the lamps (Ex. 27:20), the offering of

incense (Ex. 30:8), etc. In other words, the expression designated the many different activities continually performed by the priest in the sanctuary. They included rites performed both in the court and in the holy place of the sanctuary. The expression never designated the work of the high priest in the Most Holy Place. “Daily” (Hebrew *tamid*) specified the daily/continual work of mediation and intercession of the priest in the sanctuary on behalf of the people. Daniel 8:14 refers to the yearly service through the verb “to vindicate/cleanse” (Hebrew *nitsdaq*), which Scripture also employs in sanctuary contexts (see next chapter).

The title “Prince of the host” is also important in the context of the sanctuary. The “host/army” mentioned here is the heavenly one, and this Prince is in charge of it (Dan. 8:11). “Prince” usually refers to a military or a royal leader (1 Sam. 17:52; Jer. 26:11), but can indicate the high priests (1 Chron. 24:5; Ezra 8:24). In Daniel 8 the title “Prince” combines royalty and leadership ideas with priestly functions. In fact, the passage emphasizes the priestly function of the Prince because He is performing the daily services on behalf of His people. Who is the Prince of the heavenly host? The full title appears in Joshua 5:13-15 to designate a heavenly being equated with the Lord Himself (Joshua 6:2). We as Christians identify Him as the Son of God.

It is really amazing to find in Daniel 8 so much terminology related to the sanctuary. Such usage indicates a connection between the chapter and the sanctuary services. Therefore, we should employ passages dealing with the sanctuary and its services to clarify what Daniel seeks to communicate. The prophet presupposes that his readers are acquainted with such passages.

THE WORK OF THE LITTLE HORN

The sanctuary-related terminology clarifies not only what God is doing for His people through the “Prince of the host” but also the nature and work of the little horn. Funda-

mentally an antisanctuary power that opposes the priestly work of the Prince, it attacks the sanctuary and the Prince in an effort to usurp His priestly work. Military imagery and ideas from the earthly sanctuary combine to describe the horn’s offensive. At the beginning of the struggle the horn confronted the “host/army” that, like the Levites in the Old Testament, protected the holiness of the heavenly sanctuary. The horn was able to defeat “some” of the army, opening a breach that allowed it to go after the Prince (Dan. 8:10). But the horn could only usurp the work of the Prince—“it took away the daily . . . from him” (verse 11)—and in an act of “rebellion” it set up, or appointed, its own “host/army” over or in control of the daily (verse 12). The truth of the sanctuary was rejected and cast to the ground. This vivid description of the damage caused by the little horn found its fulfillment in the apostasy of the Christian church announced by Paul (2 Thess. 2:3-12), resulting both in the removal of Christ as our only and exclusive mediator before the Father and in the introduction into the Christian church of many other mediating figures between God and the believer (e.g., a human priestly system, the souls of the apostles and martyrs, Mary, and the sacrifice of the Eucharist). The church identified itself with the heavenly sanctuary, and the priestly system became the sole means of mediating grace to humanity.

THE WORK OF THE PRINCE

The fact that the horn usurped the role of the Prince and established a false priestly system does not mean that the work of the heavenly Prince/Priest came to an end. It simply became obscured. Those committed to Him continued to benefit from His mediation in the heavenly sanctuary, a process described by Daniel in terms of the daily work of the priest in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. But the high priest also performed a yearly service, and Daniel used that service to refer to what the Prince did shortly before the destruction of the little horn and the establishment of God’s

kingdom. Once a year the earthly sanctuary was cleansed, and, according to Daniel 8:14, a cosmic cleansing would begin at the end of the 2300 days/years, leading to salvation for God's people and the destruction of the little horn.

THE QUESTION AND THE ANSWER

The vision now shifts to an audition, that is to say, the prophet hears God reveal something. He hears a conversation between two heavenly beings involving the issue of time. We have here a question followed by an answer: "How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and of the host that will be trampled underfoot?" (Dan. 8:13). Let me give you a more literal translation: "Until when the vision, the daily, and the rebellion causing desolation to give both the sanctuary and the host a trampling?" "Until when" puts the emphasis on the end point of the period and what follows. So the question concerns the moment in time when the vision comes to an end, a conclusion supported by the way the answer is phrased: "Until . . . , then" (verse 14). The words "concerning" and "sacrifice," in the phrase "*concerning* the daily *sacrifice*," do not appear in the original Hebrew text. The question is structured as follows:

"Until when the vision,
the daily,
the rebellion causing desolation
to give both the sanctuary and the host a tram-
pling?"

"Vision" refers to the whole vision found in Daniel 8, beginning with the ram and ending with the usurpation of the little horn (see Dan. 8:1). The question clarifies that the "vision" is the one that includes the priestly work of the Prince ("the daily") and the wicked scheme of the horn ("the rebellion").⁸ *The question is not about how long the little horn is going to profane the sanctuary but about when the content of*

the whole vision will be fulfilled. The answer indicates that the fulfillment of the *whole vision* will take 2300 days/years. At the end of that period the little horn's usurpation of the priestly work of the Messiah will come to an end through the eschatological day of atonement.

THE 2300 EVENINGS AND MORNINGS

The Greek and Latin versions of the Bible have interpreted the 2300 evenings and mornings as "days." They read: "Twenty-three hundred days, evenings and mornings."⁹ This is understandable because the phrase "evenings and mornings" designates a full day in the Old Testament (see Gen. 1:5-31). That being the case, we have to take the 2300 days contextually as symbolic of years. As we have already indicated, the question was When will the whole vision, which includes the daily and the rebellion of the little horn, be fulfilled? That vision goes back to the time of the Medo-Persian Empire and covers the Greek and Roman (pagan and ecclesiastical) empires. Their history covers much more than 2,300 literal days. We are unquestionably dealing here with prophetic days used to designate years.

The vision does not give us a specific year to start the 2300 years but offers us a general point of reference. Since the vision begins with a ram representing the Medo-Persian Empire, the 2300 years originated at some point during that particular empire. We also know that when the 2300 years end, the eschatological day of atonement will commence. Daniel 9 will provide us a more specific date for the start of the 2300 years.

We should also notice that the parallels between Daniel 7 and 8 indicate that the judgment in Daniel 7 and the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8 are related to each other and point to the same final event, the completion of our salvation. One apocalyptic vision helps us to understand better the other apocalyptic vision. The work that the Prince performs for them before God in the heavenly sanctuary as-

sure God's people of victory. His work of mediation cannot be separated at all from the sacrificial death of the Messiah predicted in Daniel 9.

¹ John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (Dallas: Word, 1989), p. 208; Gerhard F. Hasel, "The First and Third Years of Belshazzar (Dan 7:1; 8:1)," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 15 (1977): 153-168.

² T. Cuyler Young, Jr., "The Early History of the Medes and the Persians and the Achaemenid Empire to the Death of Cambyses," in John Boardman, N.G.L. Hammond, D. M. Lewis, and M. Ostwald, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), vol. 4, p. 36.

³ Pierre Briant, "Persian Empire," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 5, p. 238.

⁴ W. W. Tarn, "Alexander: The Conquest of the Far East," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 6, p. 436.

⁵ W. H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, pp. 41-43.

⁶ J. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, p. 125.

⁷ The parallels come from William H. Shea, "Unity of Daniel," in Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Daniel* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), pp. 187-189.

⁸ See James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), who writes: "The subsequent items [the constant, the desolating iniquity, etc.] are expegetical to the 'vision,' detailing its chief contents" (p. 341).

⁹ See John J. Collins, *Daniel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), pp. 326, 327. Goldingay takes the phrase "evenings and mornings" (p. 213) to refer to days.

5

DANIEL 9: THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

Two prominent figures in Daniel 9 perform a similar task of intercession and mediation, namely, Daniel and the coming Messiah. The chapter as a whole addresses the question of sin, the need to remove it, and the important role of a mediator between God and humanity to bring them together. The work of human mediators is a pale reflection of the Messiah's role, and therefore their mediation has serious limitations. Nevertheless, a study of Daniel's prayer will illustrate the nature of prophetic mediation that found its deepest fulfillment in Christ.

DANIEL'S ROLE AS INTERCESSOR

Daniel's prayer expresses his most profound feelings for his people, for the seriousness of their sins, and for his God. We notice anguish of soul as he prays, but at the same time we observe hope based on his knowledge of the God of Israel as a loving and forgiving deity. So Daniel approaches Him in full confidence, and in the process provides for us some fundamental characteristics of a prophetic mediator, a role that points to the coming Messiah.

1. Pleads for Others: A mediator/intercessor seeks to benefit others. Daniel prays on behalf of the people and their leaders in Jerusalem, Judah, and elsewhere (Dan. 9:7). Their spiritual and social conditions make God's intervention necessary—even indispensable—in their lives and history. The prophet stands alone before the Lord as representative of

the people, voicing their extreme need. Jesus also pleads for others, not for Himself: “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25).

2. *Identifies Himself With Sinners:* Daniel not only confesses the sin of the kings, the princes, and the fathers, but he includes himself among the sinners. “O Lord, we . . . have sinned against you” (Dan. 9:8); “we have rebelled against him” (verse 9); “we have not obeyed the Lord our God” (verse 10). But his identification with sinners is based on the fact that he is a sinner in need of forgiveness. In the case of Christ we find a radical difference between Him and the mediation of the prophets. Christ was without sin (Heb. 4:15) and therefore had no need to confess personal sin or to offer sacrifices for personal forgiveness (Heb. 7:26, 27). But He identified Himself in a unique way with sinners: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

3. *Acknowledges God’s Righteousness and Love:* The mediator not only represents the people before God but also God before the people. Daniel describes the Lord in his intercessory prayer as righteous and merciful (Dan. 9:7, 18). He acknowledges the people’s sin and at the same time proclaims that God is righteous in His judgment against them. It was on the cross of Christ that God revealed Himself as just in condemning sin and in forgiving sinners: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement. . . . He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25, 26). God’s justice and mercy expressed themselves in perfect unity through the person and sacrifice of the Mediator Himself.

4. *Trusts in God’s Mercy:* Closely related to what we just said is the fact that Daniel trusted completely in God’s mercy. He prayed: “We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy” (Dan. 9:18). No

human achievement can give us the right to approach God on our own, demanding that He grant us what we need. We do not deserve forgiveness, and yet He bestows it on us because of His “great mercy.” In fact, the prophet goes to God because he knows that He is a loving God: “The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him” (verse 9). The value and effectiveness of intercession and mediation is found precisely in the fact that God is always willing to forgive and that He is always looking for a channel through which His forgiving love can reach us. Jesus said: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him” (Matt. 7:11). We can approach the loving and righteous God that Christ revealed to us only through Him (John 16:24).

THE ROLE OF THE MESSIAH

The second part of Daniel 9 deals with the coming of the Messiah and His work on behalf of God’s people. This is one of the most important messianic prophecies in the Bible not only because it describes in unparalleled ways the result of His work but particularly in that it provides us detailed information about the historical moment during which He was to appear. We will deal first with His work and its results.

1. *“Finish Transgression”* (Dan. 9:24): The verb “to finish” could be also rendered “to bring to an end,” “to eliminate.” The Hebrew word translated “transgression” is *peshac*,^c possibly one of the most important words for sin in the Old Testament. It designates a criminal act that results in broken relationships, whether among human society or with God. The verb means “to break with.” This type of sin affected in a special way God’s sovereignty, requiring either His judgment or an expression of His forgiving grace.¹ “Whoever commits *peshac* does not merely rebel or protest against Yahweh but breaks with him, takes away what is his, robs, embezzles,

misappropriates it. Although it always implies a conscious behavior, the term *per se* does not describe the attitude but the criminal act that consists in the removal of property or breach of relationship.”² When something shatters a relationship, it becomes necessary to reconcile the parties involved in order to reestablish social or spiritual harmony. Christ brought to an end sin defined as the breaking of our relationship with God by restoring us to God: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19).

2. “*Put an End to Sin*” (Dan. 9:24): The verb translated “put an end” literally means “to seal,” but it could express the idea “to seal shut, to store up.” Several other passages use it in conjunction with “sin” to indicate that the Lord stores sin up until the day of vengeance when He will punish sinners as they deserve (Deut. 32:34, 35). The act of sealing sins in Daniel “does not look forward to a punishment in the distant future, but means that the sin is forgiven.”³ The word used for “sin” is *chatta’t*, a comprehensive term that defines sin as an “error, a mistake.” The verbal form means “to miss the mark or target.” The human race has not been able to live up to God’s standards, but the vision announces that the Messiah will take care of our failures. He took our sins on Himself, bringing them to an end. Our sins were, so to speak, “sealed shut, stored up” on the cross where they received their deserved penalty.

3. “*Atone for Wickedness*” (Dan. 9:24): The verb “to make atonement” appears frequently in the book of Leviticus to refer to the process by which sin was removed from the sinner and transferred to the sacrificial victim and ultimately to the sanctuary. The repentant sinner left the sanctuary cleansed from his or her sin and in restored harmony with God. Daniel 9 now employs a new word for sin, “wickedness” (Hebrew *‘awon*), expressing the idea of sin as a crooked action or a perversion of what is right. Christ took care of sin in all of its forms and atoned for them on our behalf: “He is the

atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

4. “*Bring Everlasting Righteousness*” (Dan. 9:24): The righteousness brought by the Messiah was permanent and final. The Hebrew word here rendered “righteousness” is *tsedeq*, meaning “accuracy,” “what is correct” (see Lev. 19:36); “the right thing, what is honest” (see Prov. 8:8; 12:17); “equity,” “communal loyalty” (see Lev. 19:15). It designates a divinely established state of social and religious order that could be disrupted by sin, making it necessary for God to restore it through judgment, cleansing, and/or forgiveness. The Messiah would bring everlasting righteousness in the sense that through Him God would return social, religious, and cosmic order to a world plagued by sin and disorder. He would achieve this particular goal through a saving and punitive judgment (Isa. 11:4, 5), and through cleansing and forgiveness (Isa. 53:11, 12).

Jesus was God’s instrument to restore order in our world of sin by making it possible for us to reestablish a proper relationship with God through His own sacrifice: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known. . . . This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Rom. 3:21, 22). This personal and cosmic return to order will reach its consummation when God establishes His kingdom forever on our planet. Daniel 9:24 introduces this righteousness, and Daniel 8:14 describes that same righteousness—one bringing salvation and cleansing—as reaching its consummation during the eschatological day of atonement.

5. “*Seal Up Vision and Prophecy*” (Dan. 9:24): The act of sealing up the vision and the prophet implies an element of determinism in the prophecy, thus assuring us that the prophecy itself will be fulfilled. To seal means to authenticate

something, to affirm its genuineness. When applied to prophecy, the metaphor means that the prophecy is authenticated when what it has announced finds its fulfillment in history. Then the prophecy and the prophet himself stand vindicated and clearly identified as God's instruments. The prophecy concerned here is in a special way the messianic prophecy of the 70 weeks, whose fulfillment establishes beyond any doubt that God spoke through Daniel, and that the rest of his prophecies will also see their completion. The New Testament considers the coming of Christ as the Messiah to be a fulfillment of prophetic predictions (e.g., Matt. 2:5, 6). But the time prophecies also played a significant role in pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. For instance, Paul wrote: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, . . . that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal. 4:4). The emphasis here is not so much on His birth but on His work through which we became children of God—a fulfillment of Messianic prophecies.

6. *"Anoint the Most Holy"* (Dan. 9:24): The phrase "the most holy" "always refers to locations or objects (the tabernacle or temple, especially its innermost room, also its altars, vessels, incense, sacrifices, etc.)."⁴ Here, the reference is not to the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, however, because in such cases the article accompanies the phrase in the Hebrew, whereas in Daniel the article is absent. The term never designates a person, as for instance the high priest. Therefore, the best linguistic interpretation is to take it to refer to the sanctuary/Temple and its sacred objects. Exodus 30:26-29 records the anointing of the earthly sanctuary in which God commanded Moses to anoint the tent of meeting, the furniture, the altars, and the utensils. Through the ritual act they became "most holy." Daniel also combines the verb "anoint" and the phrase "most holy," indicating that he is referring to the anointing of the heavenly sanctuary in which the Messiah would initiate His priestly ministry toward the end of the 70 weeks. The book of Hebrews makes clear that after Christ's

sacrificial death He ascended to heaven, entered the heavenly sanctuary, and began His work of mediation, thus inaugurating a way of access to God (Dan. 9:12; 10:19, 20). There He was enthroned as king and priest.

7. *"Will Be Cut Off"* (Dan. 9:26): Here is one of the clearest biblical predictions announcing the Messiah's death and suggesting at the same time, through the use of the verb *karat* ("cut out, exterminate"), the violent nature of that death. In the legal sections of the Pentateuch the verb commonly designates a person condemned to death.⁵ Daniel 9:26 could have been in Christ's mind when, during His arrest, He said to His disciples, "But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matt. 26:56). Or when He announced to the disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem to die violently but that on the third day He would rise again (Luke 18:31-33). Paul probably used this prophecy, among others, to demonstrate from the Scriptures that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead (Acts 17:3).

8. *"Put an End to Sacrifice and Offering"* (Dan. 9:27): The Hebrew verb translated "put an end" is *shabat* ("to rest, cease, stop"), and the specific verbal form used by Daniel means "put an end to, bring to a conclusion, remove." It is a clear announcement of the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system. In God's plan that system had a particular role to play, but with the arrival of the Messiah that function would no longer be needed. The sacrifice announced in Isaiah 53, that of the Servant of the Lord, would be the only one that could then remove sin. The New Testament considered the sacrificial system to be a shadow or type of the sacrifice of Jesus (Heb. 10:1). His sacrifice brought redemption, cleansing, and forgiveness of sin, making it absolutely unnecessary for us to offer any other sacrifice for our sins (verses 14-18). Jesus Himself announced the end of the sacrificial system when He said to the Samaritan woman that the time would come when God would be worshiped "neither on this moun-

tain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:21).

9. “*Confirm a Covenant*” (Dan. 9:27): The verb *gabar* (“confirm”) means “to be superior, strong,” and practically always expresses the idea of superiority. “To make a firm covenant” implies that this covenant is a better and superior one. It is better because it is not limited to any particular ethnic group but has been made with “many,” that is to say, for the benefit of all humanity. And it is firm because it is a permanent one. In the New Testament Jesus made a firm covenant that included not only Jews but also Gentiles, therefore universal in its extent (Matt. 26:28). The gospel was to reach Jews and Gentiles alike, because they both needed salvation. God’s covenant is firm or strong in that it will not come to an end, because the Mediator is Christ, the Son of God (Heb. 9:15). His ministry is superior to the Levitical just “as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one” (Heb. 8:6).

CHRONOLOGY OF THE 70 WEEKS

The Messianic prophecy we just discussed was to find its fulfillment within a prophetic period of 70 weeks. The chronological information provided by the text itself makes it obvious that the weeks designate a period of 490 years (each week has seven days). The passage cites a specific event as marking the beginning of the prophetic period leading to the Messiah.

1. *The Decree*: The prophecy seeks to identify as clearly as possible the historical event that will initiate the period of 490 years. It is a royal decree authorizing two events associated with the city of Jerusalem: “the decree to *restore* and *rebuild* Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:25). The second verb, “to rebuild,” stresses the physical reconstruction of the city in order to make it inhabitable. The verb “to restore” (Hebrew *shub*) refers to something different, making it easier to determine the specific decree mentioned in the text. The Old Testament

never uses the verb for the physical reconstruction of a building or a city.⁶ When employed in connection with a city, it means to return it to the original owners to rule according to their laws (1 Kings 20:34).

A good parallel to the use of the verb *shub* (“restore”) in Daniel occurs in 2 Kings 14:22. The passage describes King Azariah as “the one who rebuilt [*banah*] Elath and restored [*shub*] it to Judah.” The verb “to restore” means that the city was to function as a city ruled by the Judahites according to their own laws and as part of their territories. The decree mentioned in Daniel not only called for the rebuilding of the city but also its return to the Jews for them to govern by their own laws. Only one decree meets both requirements—that of Artaxerxes I in 457 B.C.

Authorized by the king, Ezra began the rebuilding of the city as soon as he and the exiles who went with him reached Jerusalem (Ezra 4:7-23). The project soon halted, not because it did not have the king’s permission, but because of fear of insurrection once the city was rebuilt. In the time of Nehemiah the same decree was reactivated, and he went to Jerusalem to rebuild it (Neh. 1:1-11). Artaxerxes’ decree also authorized the Jews to govern themselves on the basis of their own legal system and to enforce it by appointing “magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates—all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them” (Ezra 7:25). Those who violated the law faced punishment by death, banishment, etc. The city, as indicated in Daniel 9:25, was restored to the Jews.

2. *Seven Weeks and Sixty-two Weeks*: The vision divided the 70 weeks into several sections, the first one being a period of six weeks that has no specific event explicitly associated with it. The context appears to suggest that the six weeks refer to the period during which the reconstruction of the city would occur. Add to that 62 weeks, and it will take us to the Anointed One—the ministry of Christ, *the Messiah*. From 457 B.C., the 69 weeks, or 483 years, extends to the

year A.D. 27,⁷ when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and initiated His public ministry (Luke 3:21, 22)—an amazing fulfillment!

3. *Seventieth Week*: During the week that the Messiah dies (Dan. 9:26), a firm covenant is established with “many,” and the sacrificial system comes to an end (verse 27). His death takes place at the middle of the week because it is at that time that from God’s perspective the covenant is made and the sacrificial system ceases. The three and a half years takes us from A.D. 27 to 31, when Christ was crucified and made available to us all the benefits mentioned in Daniel 9:24. The rest of the prophetic week extends to A.D. 34, when the 70-weeks prophecy ends. The year A.D. 34 “marks an event that has had a considerable impact on civilization as well as being a key event for humanity’s salvation. It was the year the message of the God of Israel explodes beyond the borders of Palestine and reaches the Gentiles, the ‘many’ just mentioned (Acts 8). It is also the year of the conversion of Paul and of his commission from Christ (Acts 9). As well as the year God poured the Holy Spirit on Gentiles and Peter receives his strange vision urging him to preach to the Gentiles.”⁸

4. *Fall of Jerusalem*: While Daniel 9:25-27 mentions the destruction of Jerusalem, it never associates it with a particular historical moment within the chronology of the 70 weeks. Instead the passage focuses on the activities or experiences of the Messiah. The vision introduces the fall of the city after the Messiah’s death, but does not state that it will occur during the last part of the last week. The desolation of the city is apparently decreed during the 70 weeks (Luke 13:35), but finds its fulfillment in A.D. 70 when the Roman armies razed the Temple and the city.

CONNECTION BETWEEN DANIEL 8 AND 9

Daniel 9 presupposes the vision recorded in chapter 8 and is in fact a response to Daniel’s concerns arising from

that vision. Possibly the most important aspect of the connection between the two chapters is that Daniel 9 provides an indispensable piece of information for properly understanding the vision recorded in chapter 8—specifically, the interpretation of the 2300 years. Daniel 8 informs us that we should count the 2300 years from the time of the Medo-Persian Empire, but chapter 9 gives the specific starting point, i.e., 457 B.C. Several different linguistic and conceptual links between the two chapters support that conclusion.

At the end of Daniel 8 the prophet finds himself confused about the 2300-year vision. In chapter 9 the same angel, Gabriel, who spoke to Daniel in chapter 8, returns to clarify the vision. Here the term *vision* is important. Daniel 8 has two words for *vision*. The first, *chazon*, refers to the totality of the vision, while *mar`eh* indicates only the aspect of the vision dealing with the conversation of the two angels and the 2300 years (Dan. 8:26: “The vision [*mar`eh*] of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision [*chazon*], for it concerns the distant future”). Daniel writes: “I was appalled by the vision [*mar`eh*]; it was beyond understanding [*bin*]” (verse 27).

When Gabriel returns to Daniel in chapter 9, he tells him: “Consider the message and understand [*bin*] the vision [*mar`eh*]” (Dan. 9:23). Since Daniel could not grasp the meaning of the vision of the evenings and mornings, the angel came to provide information that would help him realize that the prophecy was not dealing with the experience of the Jews in the Medo-Persian Empire. It pointed to the coming of the true Messiah and to the distant future, the time for the consummation of the work the Messiah of judgment (Dan. 7) and the cleansing in the heavenly sanctuary (Dan. 8:14). From Daniel’s perspective it was a distant future, stretching from 457 B.C. to A.D. 1844. Therefore, the 70 weeks (490 years) comprise part of the 2300 years, but were “cut off” from that long prophetic period (Dan. 9:24). The verb *chatak*, translated “cut off,” appears in Canaanite litera-

ture where it means, among other possibilities, “child.”⁹ The child is in a sense a “fragment” of the parents; thus, he or she was, so to speak, “cut off” from them. One could suggest that the 70 weeks period is the “child” of the 2300 years. The vision separates them from it in order to shed some light on the longer period.

The prophecy of the 70 weeks supplements the vision of the 2300 years by providing a specific date for its starting point and by introducing the Messiah as the one who will deal in a definite way with the sin problem. Daniel 8 shows us the Messiah as priest mediating for us in the heavenly sanctuary, while in Daniel 9 we see Him initiating that ministry by anointing the heavenly sanctuary. One puts the emphasis on the initiation of the work of the Messiah; the other points to the consummation of that work of judgment, cleansing, and salvation. What Daniel 7 left unspecified (the time for the beginning of the last judgment in heaven) and Daniel 8 did not define (the date for the beginning of the day of atonement), Daniel 9 finally reveals. The Lord wanted us to know about those prophecies so that we would realize that the time for the restoration of all things is close at hand and that we need to concentrate on what is indeed important—our relationship with the Lord and sharing this message with others.

¹ R. Knierim, “Pesha Crime,” in E. Jenni and C. Westermann, eds., *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, p. 1036.

² Ibid.

³ B. Otzen, “Chatam,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5, p. 268.

⁴ J. Goldingay, *Daniel*, p. 229.

⁵ J. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, p. 148.

⁶ For background on this section, see Brempong Owusu-Antwi, *The Chronology of Daniel 9:24-27* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Adventist Theological Society, 1995), pp. 131-136.

⁷ If one subtracts 457 from 483, the result is 26 years, not 27. Moreover, there is no year 0 between 1 B.C. and A.D. 1. In order to reach the correct date, we have to add a year to the result.

⁸ Doukhan, p. 151.

⁹ G. del Olmo and Lete J. Samartin, *Diccionario de la lengua ugaritica* (Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, 1996), vol. 1, p. 183. The passive form of the noun *chatak* means “son,” but the active means “progenitor.”

6

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DAY OF ATONEMENT

Science fiction has taken us to far-distant galaxies to visit innumerable planets inhabited by a great diversity of intelligent life. It tells stories of cosmic conflicts among different forces in the universe and their potential threat to human life on our planet. The writers of science fiction have extended to the universe the human predicament we experience on our small planet. Most of the writers implicitly reject a cosmic view of reality that has God playing any role. The universe belongs solely to natural forces.

The Bible takes us to the heaven of the heavens, however, to places we can only hope to visit in the future. It transports us to the very center of the cosmos, to the most important segment of space in the whole universe. Scripture takes us to where God has located Himself within the realm of His creatures—the heavenly temple. We cannot exaggerate the importance of that unique place. What occurs there determines the future and the safety of the rest of the universe. It was there that heaven confronted evil for the first time in the history of the cosmos, and it is there that the problem will be permanently solved, resulting in the cleansing of the universe from its miasma and restoring God’s creation to its original harmony.

THE EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY SANCTUARIES

God revealed through the Israelite sanctuary and its services His plan for resolving the cosmic problem of sin. Although a faint shadow of what was taking place in heaven,

it still conveyed enough to enable us to understand better what God was doing and is still doing in our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. By examining what took place in the earthly we can gain some insights about the heavenly.

Scripture makes it clear that the earthly was but a pale reflection of the much more glorious heavenly sanctuary (Ex. 25:9; Heb. 8:5). In the earthly God met with His people (Ex. 25:8; Ps. 26:8) and in the heavenly God sits enthroned among heavenly beings (Ps. 11:4; Dan. 7:9, 10; Ps. 89:5-7). Both places are centers of worship and adoration (Ps. 138:2; 103:19-22) and judgment (Ps. 96:7-10; Heb. 11:4-6); centers from which God brings deliverance to His people (Ps. 31:20; Heb. 8:6-9), grants them forgiveness (Lev. 4:35; 1 Kings 8:30), reveals His will (Ex. 25:22; Ps. 103:19-21), and blesses and bestows them righteousness (Ps. 24:3, 5; Deut. 26:15; 1 Kings 8:32). Undoubtedly a close functional relation existed between both sanctuaries, guaranteeing the effectiveness of what was done in symbol in the earthly.

The fundamental idea conveyed by the earthly sanctuary was that of a loving God willing to dwell among His people. The earthly sanctuary was in that respect a microcosmic illustration of the macrocosmic reality of God's loving desire to dwell among all His creatures in the universe. But how could the Creator dwell within the space He created for His creatures? Solomon first raised this important theological question during the dedication of the Temple he built for the Lord: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). The king recognized that God's creation cannot contain or circumscribe Him; that the space created by God cannot encompass Him, because He is not a creature but God the Almighty. Yet the God who by nature cannot be found within creation decided to locate Himself within it in order to make Himself accessible to His creatures. This is indeed divine condescension! Therefore, the heavenly sanctuary is the particular space from which

God's presence is felt throughout the cosmos. In some mysterious way He puts Himself within that cosmos. The heavenly sanctuary unites the infinite God with His finite creatures, the eternal and the temporal. That temple, located somewhere in the universe, informs us that our God wants to be as close as possible to all His creatures.

The nature of that heavenly temple escapes our full comprehension. No human building can properly represent it. But the fact that the earthly was modeled after the heavenly points to the reality, the concreteness, of the latter (Rev. 11:19; 14:17; 15:5). That heavenly temple is not empty. Inside it we find the most majestic throne one could imagine—the throne of God and Christ (Rev. 4:2). God's throne is not simply a symbol of His royal power, but a place where Christ, who took our human nature to heaven (1 Tim. 2:5), sits with His Father (Rev. 7:17). Yet the heavenly sanctuary also has seats for heavenly beings to sit around the divine throne (Dan. 7:10; Rev. 4:4).

Scripture uses the images of the earthly sanctuary to indicate that the heavenly sanctuary has itself distinctions of space. God moves from one place to another, and so does Christ our mediator (Dan. 7:9). John saw an angelic being ministering in the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary before the altar of incense (Rev. 8:3, 4), and he also observed the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place (Rev. 11:19). Since it is impossible to fully comprehend the nature of that temple, God has permitted us to refer to it using the language and images of the earthly parallel. By allowing us to employ that terminology, He can emphasize the concreteness and reality of the heavenly as well as its diversity of space and furniture without equating the heavenly realities themselves with those of the earthly sanctuary. Rejecting the language and images of the earthly sanctuary could result in spiritualizing and rejecting the reality of God's heavenly dwelling place.

SACRIFICE AND PRIESTHOOD

The earthly sanctuary not only pointed to the reality of God's dwelling among His creatures in the heavenly sanctuary but it also illustrated how He dealt from there with the problem of sin in the universe. The sacrificial system, with its diversity of sacrificial acts (Lev. 1-5), represented, as we have indicated already, Christ's sacrifice on the cross in which He bore the sins of the world and paid the penalty for them. It is because of that sacrificial act that we can be accounted as righteous before God by faith in Christ (Rom. 3:21-25; 2 Cor. 5:21).

In the earthly sacrificial system sinners came to the Temple bearing their sin (Lev. 5:1)—that is to say, assuming responsibility for it and for its penalty—but they also brought with them a sacrificial victim to which the sin was transferred, thus dying as their substitute (verses 5, 6). The sacrificial victim bore their sin (Lev. 10:17), and through the blood it was transferred to the sanctuary. God was in fact assuming responsibility for those sins. Sinners left the sanctuary cleansed from sin and blessed by the Lord, because a sacrificial victim died for them and God had assumed responsibility for sin.

Through the daily services the priest performed a work of mediation that consisted of representing God before the people and the people before God. Through the sacrificial system and the specific rituals associated with it something amazing took place: The unclean came into contact with the clean, the common with the holy, and yet the holy remained holy. Outside the sacrificial system, whenever the unclean touched the clean or the holy, it contaminated the latter. But that principle did not operate in the sacrificial system. The sacrificial animal bore the sin of the people, and yet its flesh remained holy. The priest ate the flesh and bore the sin and still remained holy (Lev. 10:17). That transfer of sin/impurity did not destroy the holiness of the sacrificial victim, the priest, or the sanctuary. The result of that encounter be-

tween the holy and the unclean was atonement! It is indeed amazing that in the context of atonement holiness and sin, life and death, and purity and impurity are brought together in an unfathomable, paradoxical relationship. The Lord brought them together, and out of this encounter atonement and forgiveness sprang into existence. The holy instrument came into contact with the unclean and yet remained holy. We can illustrate the process as follows:

ATONEMENT IN THE DAILY SERVICES

***Sacrificial
Victim***



Holiness → → → → → → → * < < < < < < *Sin/Uncleanness*



***Result:
Atonement***

But as long as that process continued in effect the resolution of the sin problem was not final, because it transferred the problem from the sphere of the sinner to the realm of God. At some point it was necessary to bring the process to an end and to reestablish God's intended cosmic order for the people. The Lord symbolically represented that restoration through the ritual of the Day of Atonement. It reversed the daily process of atonement—bringing the holy into contact with sin and the unclean. Instead, God separated Himself and His dwelling place from the presence of the unholy.

DAY OF ATONEMENT (LEVITICUS 16)

During the Day of Atonement the daily cleansing of the

people reached its climax and introduced a new beginning that reestablished God's order in the world of His people. The cleansing of the sanctuary made the people's cleansing final (Lev. 16:33). Christ offered Himself as our substitute, dying in our place, but after His resurrection He ascended to heaven, entered the heavenly sanctuary, and began His mediatorial work on our behalf (Heb. 8:2; 9:12). There He applies the expiatory benefits of His sacrifice to those who believe in Him as Saviour and Lord. That work of salvation heads toward its consummation and will result in the final cleansing of the universe. The Day of Atonement illustrates how that was to take place.

1. *Attitude of God's People:* The Day of Atonement was not a feast but a time of spiritual renewal during which the people came closer to the Lord than at any other time. In fact, it was the day when the high priest, who represented them, went into God's very presence—to the Most Holy Place inside the sanctuary. The Lord expected the people to rest and to afflict their souls before Him.

The Day of Atonement was a time of rest during which "no work" was to be done (Lev. 23:28). During the ceremonial Sabbaths the Lord commanded the people to "do no regular work" (Lev. 23:7, 21, 25, 36), implying that a certain type of work was allowed. The absolute rest of the weekly Sabbath (Ex. 31:14) was applied to the rest of the Day of Atonement, emphasizing the need of the people to find total rest and dependence only in God. The people's state of repose contrasted with the high priest's constant activity during that day. They were able to find and enjoy rest because their high priest was working in their behalf. What they could not do he was doing for them before the Lord. During the antitypical day of atonement God's people should find rest in Christ, our mediator in the heavenly sanctuary. We must live the Christian life, relying only on His grace and not on our works. As we approach the closing of the great controversy we will be challenged to find security and safety in

human plans, but God calls us to continue to rest in the Lord in spite of any human pressure to the contrary.

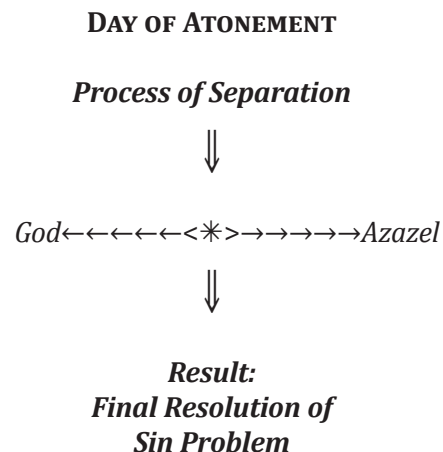
During the Day of Atonement God also said to the people: "You must deny yourselves" (Lev. 16:29). The verb "to deny" (Heb. *'anah*) means "to humble oneself," suggesting a willingness to submit to God's will. We do not know what was involved in this self-humiliation, but it probably included fasting, as suggested in Isaiah 58:3, 5. Fasting was a religious act through which worshipers expressed their total dependence on the Lord for the preservation of their lives. God ordered humans to work and to eat in order to contribute with Him to the preservation of their lives (Gen. 1:29; 2:15; cf. 2 Thess. 3:10). But the Lord used the Day of Atonement to teach His people their need for total reliance on His power to sustain them. They practiced fasting in order to show that they had placed their lives in His hands, that He alone could safeguard them.

2. *Day of Judgment:* The Day of Atonement was a time of judgment for Israel. The work of the high priest inside the sanctuary, cleansing it from the sins of the people, had its counterpart in God's process of judgment. We cannot separate those two aspects from each other during our search for the meaning of the ritual. The Lord evaluated whether the people were humbling themselves before Him, whether they were relying totally in His loving grace, and whether they were resting from their works and depending on what He was doing for them. If the judgment found that some did not deny themselves or did not rest in the Lord, they were to be "cut off" from the people. God Himself would "destroy" them (Lev. 23:29, 30). During that day a judgment took place that included an evaluation of possible evidence, a verdict, and the execution of the verdict.

Daniel 7:9, 10, 13, 14 records the prophet's vision of God's initiation of the final judgment. The event takes place in the heavenly sanctuary, where God has His throne and where He functions as judge. Scholars have been trying to

identify the biblical materials that provided the background for the scene in which the Son of man comes to God's presence with the clouds. Some have suggested that the best parallel available is the entrance of the high priest to the Most Holy Place once a year.¹ As he went into the second apartment, he is the only personage in the Old Testament who approached God in a cloud of incense (Lev. 16:2, 12, 13). "We are thus led to the conclusion that Daniel 7:9-14 describes the eschatological Day of Atonement (perhaps a Jubilee) when the true high priest will come to the Ancient of Days surrounded by clouds of incense."² Daniel employs this image to indicate that the Son of man is not only a royal figure but a priestly mediator who at a particular moment in salvation history approaches God in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary to perform a work of judgment that grants the kingdom to Him and His people.

3. Cleansing the Sanctuary: As pointed out above, during the daily services the sacrificial system through the mediation of the priests brought sin to the very presence of God. Now, on the Day of Atonement, the ritual reversed, removing sin from the sanctuary. We can illustrate the process as follows:



The Day of Atonement was a moment in the ritual services when God revealed Himself as a holy God who came into contact with sin for a specific period of time with the intention of providing forgiveness and atonement for repentant sinners. By nature He did not have anything in common with sin and uncleanness. Yet the service vindicated God, identified the true source of evil, and permanently expelled sin from God's presence.

4. Azazel—An Elimination Rite: After cleansing the sanctuary the high priest returned to the courtyard, transferred all Israel's sins to the goat for, or representing, Azazel, and sent it to the wilderness (Lev. 16:20-22). The symbolism is very rich. Azazel is a demonic figure contrasted with the Lord and the goat that represented God (verse 8). The goat for Azazel did not bear sin and impurity in order to expiate them. Not a sacrifice, it simply carried the sin of the people to the wilderness (verse 22). The wilderness often symbolized chaos and death in the Bible (e.g., Job 6:18; Isa. 34:11) and represents the place where unclean powers dwell (Isa. 13:21; 34:14; Lev. 17:7). Spiritually speaking, it is there that Azazel dwelt, and the goat carried the peoples' sin to him. The ritual act symbolically removed sin from the camp and returned it to its place of origin.

The removal of evil through an elimination rite occurs in other ancient Near Eastern religions, although we do not find a ritual significantly similar to Leviticus 16. Babylonian literature speaks of rituals performed to exorcise a sick person afflicted by a demon. They sought to send the demon and the disease back to the underworld, to the place from where both came. The Hittites performed a particular ritual when the Hittite king and his army, returning from war, came down with a plague. The king selected a man, a woman, a bull, and one ewe from the land of the enemy for the ritual. He then presented them to the god or goddess who had supposedly caused the plague. The king or his appointee, representing the army, transferred the plague to the victims who thus be-

came carriers of the evil. The king prayed: "You, male God, be appeased with t[his dec]orated man. But to the king, the [leaders], the ar[my, and the] land of Hatti, tur[n yourself fa]ithfully. [] But let this prisoner b[ear] the plague and carry (it) ba[ck into the land of the enemy]."³

The idea of transferring a collective evil to a place outside the camp appears in Leviticus 16, but not the idea of appeasing a deity. This is understandable because Israelite religion forbade the worship or appeasement of demons. Through the ritual of Azazel the Lord identified the true source of sin and impurity and made him responsible and accountable for their presence among God's people. No excuse is given for the people's sins, thus the need to atone for them during the daily services, but the rite acknowledged that the ultimate origin of sin and impurity resided in a demonic power. Thus the ceremony vindicated God from any charges raised against Him about His connection with the phenomenon of sin.

5. *Message of the Day of Atonement:* The eschatological day of atonement universalized the ritual meaning of the Israelite practice that announced the time when God would forever solve the sin problem. Hebrews 9:23 declared that the heavenly things themselves need to be cleansed, echoing Daniel 8:14's prophecy of that event. Daniel does not use the common Hebrew word for "cleansing" (*tahar*), but *tsadaq* ("to be just, right, innocent; to be justified"), which expresses ideas of vindication (1 Kings 8:32; Isa. 50:8), cleansing (Ps. 18:20; Isa. 53:11), and judgment (Ps. 7:8). The verb *tsadaq* combines legal and cleansing concepts, thus providing an understanding of the Day of Atonement that went beyond the purely ceremonial dimension present in the Israelite ritual and contained in the Hebrew word *tahar* ("to cleanse"). The type could not express in its totality the fullness of the antitype.

Daniel 8 summarizes Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary by presenting Him to us as performing the daily ser-

vices (Dan. 8:11), a work of mediation on behalf of His people, and by announcing the time when Christ would begin the second aspect of His priestly work, the eschatological day of atonement (verse 14). The prophetic period of 2300 years ended in 1844, and then Christ began the closing aspect of His high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The final judgment is now in progress and time is short, but mercy and forgiveness still remain available for those who want to be reconciled with God. It is time to walk in close fellowship with the Lord and to rest on His wonderful grace.

The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary vindicates God's people by making their cleansing final. No records of their sins will remain in heaven or even on earth. Forgiveness means that there will not be a remembrance of their particular sins, even though the righteous will always remember that the power of the Lamb of God redeemed them. At the moment of the Second Coming their nature will be transformed from a sinful one to a glorified one, and their own memory of sin will be cleansed (1 Cor. 15:52-54). Then God's covenant promise will reach its consummation: "I will . . . remember their sins no more" (Heb. 8:12).

Revelation 20:1-3 describes the typological fulfillment of Azazel's banishment to the wilderness under the image of binding Satan, who for 1,000 years must remain alone with his evil angels on our ruined planet. "When the work of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary has been completed, then in the presence of God and heavenly angels and the hosts of the redeemed the sins of God's people will be placed upon Satan; he will be declared guilty of all the evil which he has caused them to commit. And as the scapegoat was sent away into a land not inhabited, so Satan will be banished to the desolate earth, an uninhabited and dreary wilderness."⁴

The eschatological day of atonement will clearly reveal that God is indeed a righteous and merciful deity and that the charges raised against Him by evil powers are absolutely

unfounded (Rom. 3:4). It is at the close of the conflict that the doxology of judgment, discussed previously, will take place, and every intelligent creature in the universe, including Satan and his angels, will acknowledge that God is righteous. The true and only originator of sin and evil in the universe will stand clearly identified and will assume responsibility for his actions and for instigating other creatures to rebel against God. Christ bore the penalty for the sins of repentant sinners but not for Satan's responsibility as their instigator. It is that element of sin that is placed on Satan. Christ's work of cleansing and judging the universe will erase all doubts concerning God's character, making it possible to bring the great controversy to a close. Then God will reestablish the original cosmic harmony that sin disrupted.

¹ See Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, "The High Priest as Divine Mediator in the Hebrew Bible: Daniel 7:13 as a Test Case," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers—1997* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 161-193.

² *Ibid.*, p. 186. It is interesting to observe that this non-Adventist scholar is echoing what Ellen G. White stated when she wrote: "Christ had come, not to the earth, as they expected, but, as foreshadowed in the type, to the most holy place of the temple of God in heaven. He is represented by the prophet Daniel as coming at this time to the Ancient of Days" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 424).

³ David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in the Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), p. 46.

⁴ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 658.

7

MATTHEW 24: JESUS' SERMON ON APOCALYPTIC PROPHECY

Jesus is the indispensable link between the apocalyptic prophecies of the Old Testament and those found in the New Testament. A student of Daniel, He provided information that clarified for us the content and fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies and reaffirmed their validity for the Christian church. Christian apocalyptic prophecies are firmly rooted in the teachings of Jesus to His disciples and through them to the church. Following the prophetic pattern found in Daniel, His sermon begins with what was going to happen from the time of His ministry to the moment of His return in glory to establish God's eternal kingdom on earth. He commenced not with the Babylonian Empire but with the Roman Empire, Daniel's fourth kingdom and then ruling, and concluded with Daniel's fifth kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Jesus' sermon has one basic purpose—to exhort the church to faithfulness and watchfulness as it confronts and experiences threatening events that will lead to Jesus' glorious return from heaven. It tries to discourage premature excitement about the timing of the Second Advent by listing a series of events and signs that will precede it. While Jesus' sermon does not question the certainty of the event itself, it implicitly indicates that time will last longer than some may have thought. Yet everything is part of God's plan.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Jesus was leaving the Temple area, heading to the Mount of Olives, when the disciples commented about the religious

complex. In response, Jesus prophesied the Temple's total destruction. It stunned the disciples. As soon as they got to the Mount, in a more private conversation, they asked Him several questions: First: "When will this [the destruction of the Temple] happen?" Second: "What will be the sign of your coming?" And finally: "[What will be the sign] of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). They did not question the trustworthiness of the prophecy, but were interested in the time element, perhaps because they immediately identified the destruction of Jerusalem with the moment when God would establish His kingdom on earth. Jesus begins His exposition where they are in order to enlighten them about the church's future. As He talks about the fall of Jerusalem, the ruin of the city becomes "a symbol of the final ruin that shall overwhelm the world."¹

The three questions raised by the disciples form the basic structure of Jesus' apocalyptic sermon. It then concludes with an exhortation to readiness and watchfulness. Let us examine each of the questions.

*"What will be the sign of the **end** of the age?"*

While it was the last question the disciples raised, Jesus answers it first in His sermon (Matt. 24:4-14). The key word in it is "end," and Jesus uses it several times as He deals with the question (verses 6, 13, 14). In His answer Jesus alerts them to dangerous deceptions that could undermine their faith. In the process He provides them with information that could protect them. He talks about *religious* deception in the form of individuals claiming to be the Christ/Messiah (verse 4), and about social upheaval in the form of wars that could, on the other hand, make them believe that He has handed the world over to evil. Those elements, together with famines and earthquakes, will remain in the world to the very end. None of them is by itself the sign of the end. They simply show that "the end is still to come" (verse 6).

During the time of waiting the disciples will be persecuted and put to death, rejected by many (verse 9). But be-

yond that the church itself will struggle with serious internal conflicts. Many will abandon their faith, others will betray their fellow believers or deceive them through false prophecy, and still others will lose heart because of the increasing evil in the world (verses 10-12). In the midst of that dark picture Jesus exhorts the church: "He who stands firm to the end will be saved" (verse 13). The final outcome of the conflict is predetermined, and only those who endure will participate in it.

Jesus has not yet answered their question about the "sign . . . of the end" (notice that it is singular). Verse 14 now explicitly states: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The universal fulfillment of the gospel commission will usher in the end (Matt. 28:18-20). "The end of the present age, concerning which the disciples inquire in the question of verse 3, cannot come immediately but must be preceded by a period of universal evangelization."² The end of Jerusalem will be a partial fulfillment of the end of the age of sin.

"When will this [the destruction of the Temple] happen?"

Now Jesus addresses the disciples' first question, that concerning the Temple's destruction (Matt. 24:15-20). Verse 15 introduces His answer: "When you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' . . . then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (verses 15, 16). The phrase "the abomination that causes desolation" is a quote from Daniel, where it appears three times (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). The best parallel is Daniel 9:27, because, as in Matthew, the context deals with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple by pagan Rome. "Abomination" designates that which religiously and ethically offends God and causes desolation or destruction among God's people. Scripture frequently employs the term to idolatrous practices that the Lord considers detestable (e.g., Isa. 66:3; Jer. 7:30). But in some cases it also refers to

those who perform them; as in Hosea 9:10, where Israel became an abomination by practicing abominable acts.

The destruction of the Temple would take place when Roman armies surround the city, making its fall imminent. That pagan army is the abomination that causes desolation, and its arrival will clearly indicate to the disciples that the Temple's destruction is about to happen. Luke is more explicit: "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20). Luke believed that such an event was a fulfillment of prophecy (verse 22), and Matthew makes clear that the prophecy was the one uttered by Daniel.

Knowing when the Temple's destruction would occur was important for the earliest church, because, according to Jesus, His followers would have time to leave the city, thus avoiding the struggles and sufferings that usually accompanied a siege. Jesus' advice is that those outside the city should not go back to it but should find places of refuge in the mountains. No one should be concerned about personal belongings. Everything inside the city would have to be abandoned. Several conditions might make flight difficult for believers. Jesus mentions in particular the problems facing pregnant women and nursing mothers. He wants them to know that He is thinking about them and that He is concerned about their well-being.

Jesus also mentions winter and Sabbath and suggests to the disciples that they should pray that their flight might be at a different season and a different day. During winter Palestine can become bitterly cold during the night and the roads muddy, making it difficult to travel. A flight during the Sabbath would make Sabbath observance almost impossible. When Jesus suggests that the disciples pray about it, His advice clearly implies that He expects the church to be observing the Sabbath about 40 years after His death and resurrection. He is not planning to abolish the Sabbath commandment! His comment shows His interest in the per-

sonal and spiritual well-being of believers during the fall of Jerusalem.

Jesus' answer to the disciples' first question is brief and to the point: The presence of the Roman armies means that the fall of the city and the Temple has arrived. Christ does not describe the Temple's destruction or the terrible conditions inside the city during the siege. His main interest focuses on the experience of His followers, and He gives them words of encouragement, sympathy, and concern.

*"What will be the **sign** of your coming?"*

Jesus addresses the second question last because it is the most important one. In a sense it parallels the question about the end of the age in that they both take us beyond the destruction of the Temple to the very end of the world. He separates His replies to those two questions by placing His answer about the Temple between them. Thus the sermon ends with a development of what He said in Matthew 24:4-14 followed by an exhortation.

A reading of most Bible translations gives the impression that verse 21 is a continuation of the previous discussion about the fall of Jerusalem. However, that is not necessarily so. First, the language shifts from the regional—Jerusalem—to the universal. The affliction or distress is of such a nature that it threatens all, making it difficult to survive. Second, Jesus is now discussing the fate not of the Jews but that of the "elect," who seem to be in danger. The danger does not seem to involve the fall of the city, because He has already told them how to avoid that threat. Third, the introductory phrase "For then" does not mean that what follows will take place in conjunction with the invasion of the city. "Then" serves to introduce what follows in time,³ that is to say, the next important event after the fall of Jerusalem, and refers to the experience of the church and not to what happened to the Jews in Jerusalem. Jesus is moving from the fall of the city to the affliction of His followers. He now introduces His answer to the second question His disciples had raised.

From pagan Rome and its attack against the Temple and the city of Jerusalem Jesus takes us to the work of ecclesiastical Rome after the collapse of the Roman Empire predicted in Daniel 7:25. But His main interest is the question the disciples asked about His second coming. He describes the predicted tribulation in terms of its intensity (“unequaled from the beginning of the world”) and its extent in time (“those days will be shortened” [Matt. 24:21, 22]). We will first consider the time element. The verb translated “to be shortened” (*koloboo*) means “to maim.” God had to intervene and “maim” the time of oppression, cutting “it shorter than it would have normally been in terms of the purpose and power of the oppressors.”⁴ God had already prefixed the time of duration of the oppression, curtailing (“maiming”) the intentions of His enemy. Daniel defines that period as 1260 years (Dan. 7:25).

The intensity of the oppression is so great that it actually threatens the elect ones’ very survival. The language used to describe it echoes what we find in Daniel 12:1, 2, but we should not equate the two tribulations with each other. “The tribulation of the 1260 year-days was the greatest in history in that it continued for centuries and from time to time produced extremely high percentages of mortality.”⁵ Some specific signs of the end would follow the tribulation—the emergence of false messiahs and the Second Coming. The tribulation mentioned in Daniel 12:1, 2 is also unique, but according to the context it “will occur in connection with the resurrection at the second coming. It will occur after the court of judgment described in Daniel 7:9-14 has finished examining the books. It will bring terror only to the wicked. God’s people will be delivered from it, ‘every one’ of them.”⁶

After the oppression, according to Jesus, the evil powers will attempt to deceive even the elect (Matt. 24:23, 24). The deception produces a counterfeit Son of man who will appear in different parts of the world claiming to be the Christ. Individuals proclaiming themselves to be prophets will sup-

port the various manifestations. Together with the false christ, they will perform “great signs and miracles” (verse 24). This deception is so powerful that Jesus prophesies it in order to protect His followers from it. But He does more than that. He describes the mode of His return to earth. In contrast to the local manifestations of the false christ, the true Christ will fill the planet with the glory of His person as He returns on the clouds of heaven: “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (verse 27). The universal impact of His presence contrasts with the limited regional manifestation of the false christs.

Jesus now returns to the period that immediately follows the tribulation and that precedes the Second Coming (verse 29). He associates the end of the tribulation with several cosmic signs: The darkening of the sun and the moon, the falling of the stars, and the shaking of the heavenly bodies. Since we have already showed that the prophetic period of 1260 years ended in 1798, the signs therefore had to take place around that date. It is indeed impressive to notice that a whole series of important prophetic events took place between 1755 and 1844.⁷ The following chart illustrates the point:

EVENT	YEAR
The great earthquake of Lisbon	1755
The Dark Day (sun and moon)	1780
Prophetic period of 1260 years ended	1798
The falling of the stars	1833
Beginning of judgment in heaven	1844

Such a cluster of events was not the result of pure coincidence but of God working within history, calling our attention to the fact that important prophetic events were taking place that would bring us closer to our Lord’s return. One of the signs Jesus mentioned still awaits fulfillment: the shak-

ing of the heavenly bodies. A powerful earthquake that will remove every mountain and island from its place (Rev. 6:14) will accompany the shaking, and will take place at the very moment of the Lord's coming.⁸

Until now Jesus has described the dangers that the church will face up to the moment of His coming as well as some specific events that will take place. The events would assist the church in knowing where it stood within the flow of prophecy leading to Christ's return. Now Jesus is ready to answer the question of the disciples—"What will be the sign of your coming?" Notice again that the disciples used the singular "sign." And Jesus gives them a specific answer: "At that time [then] the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn" (Matt. 24:30). Bible interpreters have speculated about the nature of this particular sign but have reached no consensus about its meaning. Some have taken it to be the cross, others the Son of man Himself. This last option may be closer to the truth. Ellen G. White identifies the sign of the Son of man as the cloud on which Christ returns and which from the distance looks black and small: "Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man's hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man."⁹

Christ portrays His coming in glory in vivid language full of emotion, sound, and action. We hear the blast of trumpet and witness the angels rushing from one end of the sky to the other to gather the redeemed. But notice also the wail of mourning and lament as the rest of humanity find themselves on the wrong side of the spiritual conflict, afraid of Him whose very nature is love. They cannot cope with the intensity of His love.

READINESS

Jesus' sermon extends itself through Matthew 25, giving

us a total of 96 verses, of which He used only 31 to answer the disciples' questions. About two thirds of the sermon emphasizes our need to be ready to meet the Lord and to wait for His return. The time between the ascension of Jesus and His return was to be filled with expectation (Matt. 24:32-25:13) and the fulfillment of the mission that Jesus entrusted to the church (Matt. 25:14-46).

Our study of apocalyptic prophecies should stimulate us to walk closely with the Lord and to share our hope with others. It is by sharing it that we retain it. We must live in constant and joyful expectation, knowing that the One who died on the cross for us will soon return to establish a permanent and visible relationship with us. Jesus' apocalyptic sermon and its fulfillment within the history of the Christian church should reaffirm our conviction that what yet remains will itself soon be fulfilled.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 120.

² Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Dallas: Word, 1995), p. 696.

³ The Greek term *tote* ("then") can designate future time, introducing events that will then take place. The term *for* (Greek *gar*) sometimes serves as a marker of a new sentence and could be translated "and, then," or left untranslated.

⁴ Gerhard Delling, "Koloboo," in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 3, pp. 823, 824.

⁵ C. M. Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2, p. 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷ See William H. Shea, "Cosmic Signs Through History," *Ministry*, February 1999, pp. 10, 11.

⁸ Some interpret Revelation 6:12-14 as describing future events that will occur at the moment of Christ's return (e.g., Hans LaRondelle, *The End-time Prophecies of the Bible* [Sarasota, Fla.: First Impressions, 1997], pp. 139, 140). They argue that the great earthquake in verse 12 is the same event mentioned in verse 14. It is true that the verses are structured in terms of an inverted parallelism:

- a. earthquake
- b. sun, moon, stars
- b'. sky
- a'. Mountains and islands

But that does not mean that the second set of parallels refers to the same exact events. For instance, the darkening of the sun and the moon and the falling of the stars is not the same as the sky receding "like a scroll." Yes, they both deal

with heavenly bodies, but they do not describe the same event. The parallelism is synthetic or progressive. In fact, the list is not only progressive, it also shows an intensification of the nature and results of the events. The passage lists the earthquake (1755), the darkening of the sun and the moon, and the falling of the stars in the same order in which they met their fulfillment in history. Verse 14 is a parallel to the phrase “the heavenly bodies will be shaken” in Matthew 24:29. But now Revelation 6:14 informs us that at that time not only will the heavenly bodies be shaken but the earth itself tremble in a unique way. It is this cosmic shaking—which affects the heavenly bodies and the earth—that will take place at the moment of the Lord’s return.

⁹ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 640.

8

THE CHILD, THE WOMAN, AND THE DRAGON: REVELATION 12

Revelation 12 summarizes as no other passage in the Scriptures the cosmic struggle between God and the forces of evil. It takes us back to the primeval conflict in heaven itself and then moves to the closing encounter between the dragon and the remnant. The passage clearly identifies the main protagonists—God, the Child, the woman, and the dragon—and makes patently clear that victory belongs to those who identify themselves with the cause of the Child and reject the dragon’s evil plans. They triumph over all evil powers through the Lamb’s unblemished and expiatory blood.

As we interpret Revelation 12-14 we will use the same methodology that we employed with the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and the Sermon on the Mount of Olives. The content of Revelation 12 provides a chronological sequence of historical events: The woman giving birth to the Messiah, the attack of the dragon against the Child, the Child taken to heaven, the dragon attacking the woman, and the dragon transferring his rage to the remnant of the woman. The prophecy takes us back to the birth of Jesus and moves from there to His ascension and the Christian era, climaxing with the end-time attack of the dragon against God’s remnant people.

The first six verses of Revelation 12 raise the topics that verses 7-16 then develop. Verse 17 introduces a subject explored in the next three chapters of the book. The following chart shows the way John organized the content of this apocalyptic prophecy.

CONTENT OF REVELATION 12

SUBJECT	INTRODUCED	DEVELOPED
Attack of the Dragon Against the Child	Revelation 12:3-5	Revelation 12:7-12
Attack of the Dragon Against the Woman	Revelation 12:6	Revelation 12:13-16
Attack of the Dragon Against the Remnant	Revelation 12:17	Revelation 13; 14

THE PROTAGONISTS

Any struggle involves more than one person, and in the case of the conflict between good and evil, it incorporates the whole universe. Revelation 12 mentions the main characters in that confrontation, who they are, and their particular roles.

The Woman

The first character introduced at the beginning of the prophecy is a beautifully dressed woman. Scripture quite often uses the symbol of a woman to represent God's people (Isa. 54:1, 5; 2 Cor. 11:2). The phrase "clothed with the sun" (Rev. 12:1) seems to go back to the language used to portray God when He appeared to humans. Habakkuk wrote: "God came from Teman. . . . His glory covered the heavens. . . . His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hands, where his power was hidden" (Hab. 3:3, 4). During the transfiguration Jesus' "face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light" (Matt. 17:2). Sometimes the Bible describes God's servants as reflecting the light or the glory of the sun. God counseled David, "When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning" (2 Sam. 23:3, 4). The Lord compared those who in their dealings with others reveal God's righteousness to the brightness of the sun.

Isaiah prophesied the time when the Lord's glory, again represented by the sun's brightness, would be reflected by His people for the benefit of the world: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Isa. 60:1-3). In Revelation 12:1 we find the fulfillment of that prophecy under the symbol of a woman, God's people, who reflect to the world the light of the Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2; cf. Matt 13:43). God describes His people in terms of His ideal for them.

The passage associates two other symbols with the woman: the moon and a crown of 12 stars. The 12 stars symbolize God's people whom the woman represents (e.g., Gen. 37:9; Dan. 12:3). The image of the moon under her feet is difficult to interpret, but could represent the permanency of the Messianic kingdom. Scripture regarded the sun and the moon as symbols of permanency and employed both of them to describe the dynasty of David in Psalm 89:35-37: "I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." The biblical writer wisely places the idea of permanency at the beginning of a chapter in which the dragon threatens the very existence of the woman, God's people. If we examine the cosmic symbols—the sun, the moon, and the stars—as a unity, they could be expressing the idea that something new is about to take place in the human-divine relationship. In Genesis 1:14, 15 God appointed to the celestial bodies the function of identifying the changes of seasons. By finding them grouped together again in Revelation 12:1, the prophet may be saying that through the birth of the Messiah a new era is about to begin.

The woman was pregnant and about to give birth. The Old Testament sometimes portrays God's people as a pregnant woman writhing in pain and soon to give birth to a child. Giving birth was a symbol of salvation. Isaiah wrote: "We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind [a gas]. We have not brought salvation to the earth" (Isa. 26:18). In contrast to that sad picture, the woman in Revelation 12:2 bears the Saviour of the world.

The Dragon

Revelation 12:3 introduces the red dragon as the second protagonist in the struggle between good and evil. The symbol of a dragon—a serpent-like animal—to represent evil powers or demons was common throughout the ancient Near East. This idea seems to go back to the story of the Fall in Genesis 3, in which the serpent appears for the first time in the Bible. In fact, John clearly identifies his book's dragon with that "ancient serpent called devil, or Satan," who is still leading "the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9). We confront here God's archenemy. Revelation regards the color red as the color of death (Rev. 6:4), and it reflects the dragon's extremely violent nature (Rev. 12:7, 12). But since red is also the color of sin (cf. Isa. 1:18), one could in addition suggest that it serves to define the dragon's moral and spiritual nature as totally corrupted by sin and evil.

The demonic symbol has seven crowned heads identified in Revelation 17:9, 10 as the main kingdoms it used to achieve its own purposes and to oppress God's people (see Rev. 13:2). It also has 10 horns, a symbol of a divided kingdom or a diversity of political powers (Dan. 7:24). We find no crowns on the horns because at the moment in which the events described in the passage were taking place the Roman Empire had not yet splintered. The same symbolism of 10 horns also refers to the totality of the nations that will join the dragon against the remnant (Rev. 17:12, 13).

With its long tail the dragon swept a third of the stars to the ground, an allusion to the host of angels that accom-

panied Satan when God cast him from heaven. Isaiah 14:12-15 describes the fall of Lucifer, later known as Satan, and Jude 6 indicates that other angels went with him—"the angels who did not keep their position of authority but abandoned their own home." Concerning those powers Isaiah wrote: "In that day the Lord will punish the powers [hosts] of heavens above and kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days" (Isa. 24:21, 22). The fallen angels together with Lucifer fought against Michael and His angels (Rev. 12:7).

The Child

The promise of salvation God gave to Adam and Eve in Eden now meets its fulfillment as the woman's seed, who will crush the serpent's head, is being born (Gen. 3:15). His birth, His ministry, and His death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven are the most important events in the war between good and evil. Without them our planet would know nothing but misery, oppression, sin, and eternal death for all. Although He was "born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4), His destiny was to sit on God's throne and to rule the world with "an iron scepter" (Rev. 12:5). "Scepter" commonly designates in the Bible the shepherd's staff used to guide the sheep or to protect them from the attacks of wild animals. Both Scripture and many ancient Near Eastern texts called kings "shepherds" and expected them to protect and guide the people under their rule. Christ has an "iron scepter" in the sense that His judgment rests on unbending justice and truth.

THE CONTROVERSY

While the relationship between the woman and the Child is a loving one, that between the dragon and the woman and her Child was antagonistic as the creature sought to destroy the Child and then the woman.

Attack Against the Child

The dragon waited for the woman's Child to be born in order to devour Him (Rev. 12:4). Satan attempted to achieve that by using King Herod, a representative of one of its seven heads (the Roman Empire), who tried to kill the child Jesus (Matt. 2:13, 16). The dragon's desire to devour the Child continued throughout Christ's ministry through the temptations and conflicts that the dragon launched against Him (Heb. 4:15). But Christ was always victorious, and finally returned to heaven. Revelation 12 says nothing here about Christ's death on the cross, though verses 7-12 will develop that theme.

The summary of the conflict between Christ and the dragon (Rev. 12:4, 5, 7-12) will then expand in terms of what took place at the cross. The language used in those verses suggests that the battle described there is the one that took place when Michael defeated Lucifer and his angels and cast them out of heaven. Yet the hymn recorded in verses 10-12 implies that it was the struggle that took place at the cross where Christ defeated Satan again, making salvation available for God's people here on earth. The idea that at the cross Christ defeated the evil powers is common in the New Testament (e.g., Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14), and Christ Himself stated that His death would cast Satan out of heaven (Luke 10:18; John 12:31).

John here employs the language and the images of the original battle in heaven to describe the spiritual war that took place at the cross between Christ and Satan. Isaiah 14:12 depicts a celestial being, Lucifer, *cast to the ground* after attempting to make himself like God. In Revelation 12:10 John uses that same expression, suggesting that he had that passage in mind. Scripture indicates that even after Satan's expulsion from heaven he still had limited access to it and that he used the opportunity to accuse God's servants (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1). Revelation 12:7-12 suggests that even that limited access came to an end at the cross.

John sought to demonstrate that Christ has always defeated the evil forces, that we can also overcome them through the blood of the Lamb, and that the dragon has now a limited time of activity before his final destruction. Although the primary reference of the passage is to the conflict on the cross, by describing it in terms of the original war in heaven John provides significant information about the origin of the war between good and evil.

Attack Against the Woman

As indicated earlier, verse 6 summarizes the experience of the woman and further develops it in verses 13-16. Once defeated by Christ, the instrument of God's redemptive work, the dragon went after the woman, God's agency in proclaiming Christ's saving work. The sequence is important in that it provides chronological information useful in interpreting this apocalyptic prophecy. It moves from the birth, ministry, and victory of Christ over Satan on the cross to the persecution of the church. We find in that chronology a reference to the prophetic period of 1260 days/years or "time, times, and half a time" (verses 6, 14). In Daniel 7:23-25 we notice a prophecy about the attack against God's people and also the time limits for it—1260 years. The Old Testament book depicts the fourth kingdom under the symbol of a strange beast that represented pagan and ecclesiastical Rome. In Revelation 12 we find the dragon using those same two powers to attack Jesus and the church, and during the same prophetic period. Since both visions follow the same pattern, we should interpret them the same way.

As it describes the woman's experience, the passage emphasizes not so much the severity of the dragon's attacks as God's providential care for her. We know that she suffered and that many died because of persecution (Dan. 7), but John is interested in showing that in spite of all that, God was still taking care of His church. He prepared a place for her in the wilderness, made it possible for her to escape to there, and provided for her needs for 1260 years (Rev.

12:6, 13, 14). The language used to portray God's protection of the church seems to come from the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. In the wilderness God provided for the Israelites (Deut. 8:15-18), protected them (Deut. 32:10, 11), and established a deep loving relationship with them (Hosea 11:1). Once more He will carry His people to the wilderness on "eagles' wings" (Ex. 19:4), and again the earth will help them by swallowing the flood of persecution the dragon sends against them (Ex. 15:12). The language here expresses the idea that although the woman will face the dragon's wrath, God will protect her and sustain her. Yet the conflict will be so fierce that it will decimate the church. Although at the end only a remnant will remain, the dragon determines to exterminate even them (Rev. 12:17).

Attack Against the Remnant

The vision now introduces a new event in the struggle between the dragon and Christ. Unable to destroy the church, the dragon goes after what is left of it, the remnant of the seed of the woman. The existence of such a remnant demonstrates that our planet has not fallen under the dragon's total control, and that some still want to see the human race totally restored to the harmony shared by the rest of God's universe. They want to see sin, evil, suffering, and death eradicated from our planet and long to experience instead the loving rulership of a merciful and righteous God. This remnant appears on the arena of the cosmic conflict at a particular historical moment, namely, sometime after the 1260 years of the dragon's attack against the woman.

The Bible regards the concept of the remnant as an indispensable element in salvation history. Throughout the conflict between God and the forces of evil the enemy never succeeds in exterminating God's people because He always preserves a remnant of them in order to carry on His divine intentions and fulfill His salvific will. The Old Testament depicts three types of remnants: a historical, a faithful, and an eschatological.¹

The *historical remnant* consists of a group of individuals who have survived a life-threatening experience that could have resulted in the total extinction of the larger group to which they belonged. For instance, those who escaped the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel, Scripture calls a remnant, a powerless group of survivors (Amos 5:3). Yet they have the potential to become a blessing to the nations (Micah 5:7, 8). Those who returned to Jerusalem after the exile represent "the Jewish remnant that survive the exile" or "those who survived the exile and are back in the province" (Neh. 1:2, 3). *The Lord preserved the historical remnant, not necessarily because they were all faithful, but because of His plan for the human race. In fact, the historical remnant consisted of a mixture of faithful and unfaithful individuals.*

The *faithful remnant* is characterized by their commitment to the Lord, and God uses them in a special way to accomplish His purpose within history. When Elijah thought that he was the only faithful remnant left, God told him that He had reserved 7,000 Israelites who had "not bowed down to Baal" (1 Kings 19:18). They remained loyal to the Lord under the most difficult and life-threatening circumstances. With respect to the relationship between the historical and the faithful remnants, God intended to transform the historical remnant into a faithful remnant through a process of cleansing and separation. Ezekiel wrote:

"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again. They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts are devoted to their vile

images and detestable idols, I will bring down on their own heads what they have done" (Eze. 11:17-21).

We should notice several things in this passage. First, the Lord addressed the historical remnant scattered throughout the surrounding countries and promised to bring them back to the land. Second, those returning had been worshiping idols. Third, the Lord promised to transform them by giving them an undivided heart. Fourth, these who allowed God to change them were to be characterized by obedience to God's laws. Fifth, a group from within the historical remnant would resist God's transforming power—they would continue to worship idols. Sixth, God would have to remove those who persisted in idolatry from His remnant. Consequently, the historical remnant would become a faithful remnant. The cleansing of the historical remnant would take place through judgment and fire (Isa. 4:2-4).

The *eschatological remnant* consists of all of those who have gone through cleansing and judgment and have emerged victorious after the day of the Lord. The remnant of Israel will go out to the nations "that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations" (Isa. 66:19). According to Zechariah 14:16, "The survivors [the remnant] from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles." The prophet goes on to announce divine judgment against the nations that do not join God's eschatological remnant (verse 17). The eschatological remnant consists of those Israelites who remained faithful to the Lord during God's cleansing process joined by those from the nations who chose to serve the Lord.

The end-time remnant in Revelation 12:17 is a historical entity, because it comprises what remained after the attacks of the dragon against the woman for 1260 years. Scripture describes the remnant in terms of God's ideal for them. The remnant is faithful in that it has a particular mes-

sage from God to proclaim to the world in order to gather the faithful ones from all nations (Rev. 14:6-12).² It is not an invisible entity but easily identifiable. John provides for us a list of key characteristics that define and identify the remnant. Two of them appear in Revelation 12:17. The first one is that they keep God's commandments. The book of Revelation has a great interest in God's commandments, particularly those of the first table, dealing with Him and His worship.

Revelation also presents a serious warning against those who worship the beast, the image of the beast, and the dragon (Rev. 14:9-11). An angel summons humanity to worship "him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of waters" (verse 7). It is interesting to observe "that the language of this central affirmation is based on the fourth commandment expressions in Exodus 20:11. There it states, 'In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them . . .' This language is reflected in Revelation 14:7. . . . At the decisive center-point of Revelation's description of the final crisis is a direct allusion to Exodus 20. Attention to the Sabbath command is, therefore, the ideal response to God's final call to worship . . ."³ Those who keep God's commandments—including the seventh-day Sabbath commandment—form the remnant.

The remnant has the "testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17). The phrase could be understood to refer to the faithful testimony the remnant bears to Jesus, but the verb "to have" favors a meaning of the testimony that Jesus bore, what He taught from God in person and communicated through His prophets. Decisive for the interpretation of that phrase is Revelation 19:10, which equates "testimony of Jesus" with "spirit of prophecy," another way of referring to the gift of prophecy (cf. Rev. 22:8, 9).⁴ We can conclude that "the testimony of Jesus—Christ's witness—refers to the prophetic gift, which is also present in the remnant church. God

promises that through the Spirit of prophecy—the Holy Spirit—He will again manifest Himself in a special way to the remnant church to keep and to guide them in the last days, when Satan will make special efforts to destroy them.”⁵ This found expression in the Adventist Church in a special way in the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White.

The historical and faithful eschatological remnant now participates in a mission around the world of gathering God’s people through the messages of the three angels (Rev. 14:6-12). It will lead to an eschatological remnant formed from both the purified historical remnant and those who have accepted God’s invitation to come out of spiritual Babylon. A visible group, the remnant is free from unfaithful members. Satan will not be able to defeat God’s remnant people. Evil powers “will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers” (Rev. 17:14).

¹ See G. F. Hasel, “Remnant,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), vol. 4, p. 130.

² See Clifford Goldstein, *The Remnant* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1994), pp. 78, 79.

³ Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9 (1998): 183.

⁴ See Gerhard Pfandl, “The Remnant Church and the Gift of Prophecy,” in Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Revelation—Book II* (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 315-320.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

9

INSTRUMENTS OF THE DRAGON AGAINST THE REMNANT—I: THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

Those who plan to wage war usually seek additional support, particularly if the enemy they face has a reputation of being powerful. That explains why Jesus said to us that without Him we cannot do anything (John 15:5). The forces of evil are too powerful for any human being to confront them on his or her own strength independent of the true source of power, Jesus Christ, who has always defeated them. Only our union to Christ enables us, through the power of the Spirit, to overcome as He did. Those who believe have formed an alliance, a covenant, with the Lord. They have committed themselves to rely on Him in their struggles and conflicts with evil, knowing that the Lord will strengthen them and support them during their most difficult times.

In his war against the remnant the dragon realizes that he faces a formidable enemy and that he needs to form an alliance with false religious powers as well as with the political agencies that he can use to achieve his purposes. Revelation 13 describes that alliance or coalition. The dragon intends to unite the world against God’s remnant people as part of his last attempt to become our world’s sole and exclusive ruler. Knowing that Christ defeated him in heaven and on the cross, and that he has not been able to destroy the woman, the dragon is now more careful in planning his last struggle against the remnant.

Instead of immediately launching a massive attack, the

dragon “went off,” that is to say, he “went away” to get ready to make war against the remnant (Rev. 12:17). Where did he go? Revelation 13:1 tells us that he went to the seashore to coordinate his plans with a beast from the sea and another from the land. Together they will form a powerful coalition to fight against the remnant. For now we will concentrate on the beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1-10).

STRUCTURE OF THE PASSAGE

Biblical writers organized their ideas or the message they received in various ways in their desire to effectively communicate with their audiences. By studying how the author put a biblical passage together we avoid misreading it and are able to follow the flow of thought without major difficulties. Revelation 13:1-10 seems to be organized as follows:

Description of the Beast	13:1, 2
Experience of the Beast	13:2-4
Power Received	13:2
Power Lost	13:3
Power Restored	13:3, 4
Work of the Beast	13:5-7
Blasphemed	13:5
Exercised Authority	13:5
Blasphemed	13:6
Exercised Authority	13:7
Future Experience of the Beast	13:8-10
Power Restored	13:8
Power Removed	13:9, 10
Exhortation—Description of the Saints	13:10

We follow that outline in our exposition of the passage.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:1, 2)

The first beast arises from the depth of the sea, a symbol of chaos and the realm of the demonic and evil that the Lord in the future will bring to an end (Rev. 21:1). The beast’s description indicates that it is indeed the dragon’s representative. Like him it has 10 horns and seven heads, but the horns now have crowns on them, a detail suggesting that the kingdom symbolized by this beast is already a divided one. The description further clarifies our identification of this power. Its body resembled a leopard, the feet were like those of a bear, and the mouth like that of a lion. Such details point the reader back to Daniel 7, in which we find the same symbols representing different kingdoms. The lion stood for Babylon, the bear Medo-Persia, and the leopard Greece. Revelation lists them in inverted order not only because those kingdoms are in the past but also because John wants us to understand that the beast from the sea is the same as the fourth beast of Daniel 7—pagan and ecclesiastical Rome. The fact that the horns have crowns indicates that what the beast from the sea does will take place after the division of the pagan Roman Empire. Therefore, the beast from the sea symbolizes ecclesiastical Rome.

EXPERIENCE OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:2-4)

1. *Power Received:* As the beast emerged from the sea, the dragon deputized it as his representative by granting it his power, his throne, and great authority. This is basically an enthronement ritual during which the dragon appoints the beast as his coregent. To some extent it parallels the enthronement of Christ described in Revelation 5. In fact, throughout the book Revelation John portrays Satan and the beast as attempting to imitate God and Christ. The parallels are impressive.

THE DIVINE VERSUS THE DEMONIC IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

GOD	DRAGON/SATAN
1. A Holy Trinity: Father, Christ, and the Spirit (Rev. 1:4, 5)	1. False Trinity: Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet (Rev. 12:13; 16:13, 19)
2. God Sits on a Throne (Rev. 4:9)	2. Satan Has a Throne (Rev. 2:13)
3. God Is Worshiped by the Inhabitants of the Universe (Rev. 4:10; 5:13)	3. Satan Is Worshiped by the Inhabitants of the Earth (Rev. 13:4)
4. God's City Is the Heavenly (Rev. 21:2, 10)	4. Satan's City Is Babylon (Rev. 14:8; 18:10)
5. God Places a Seal on His People (Rev. 7:4)	5. Satan Puts a Mark on His Followers (Rev. 13:16)
6. God's People Are Represented by a Pure Woman (Rev. 12:1)	6. Satan's Followers Are Represented by a Harlot (Rev. 17:2)
7. God Is Full of Wrath Against His Enemies (Rev. 11:18; 19:15)	7. Satan Is Full of Wrath Against the Church (Rev. 12:12)
8. God Has Three Angelic Messengers (Rev. 14:6-11)	8. Satan Has Three Demonic Messengers (Rev. 16, 13, 14)
9. God Gives Authority to the Christ (Rev. 2:27)	9. Satan Gives Authority to the Beast (Rev. 13:4)

We also find some significant parallels between Christ the Lamb and the beast from the sea. (See next page.)

As we can see, the book of Revelation uses almost the same terminology and images to describe the activity of both God and Satan and Christ and the beast from the sea. Through this literary characteristic Revelation seeks to disclose the true nature of satanic deception: Satan wants to occupy God's place in our planet, and he plans to achieve his goal by falsifying the divine. To that end he gave power to the beast.

THE DIVINE VERSUS THE DEMONIC

THE LAMB OF GOD	THE BEAST FROM THE SEA
1. Christ Received Authority From the Father (Rev. 2:27)	1. Beast Received Authority from the Dragon (Rev. 13: 2, 4)
2. Christ Sits on the Throne With God (Rev. 3:21)	2. Dragon Gave His Throne to the Beast (Rev. 13:2, 4; 16:10)
3. Christ is Worshiped by the Universe (Rev. 5:13, 14)	3. Beast is Worshiped by the Dwellers of the Earth (Rev. 13:4, 12)
4. Christ the Lamb Has Seven Horns (Rev. 5:6)	4. Beast Has 10 Horns (Rev. 13:1)
5. Christ Was Dead but Is Alive (Rev. 1:18)	5. Beast Received a Deadly Wound but Lived (Rev. 13:14)
6. God's People Reign With Him (Rev. 1:6; 2:26, 27)	6. Beast Is Supported by the Kings of the Earth (Rev. 17:12)
7. Christ Has a Remnant (Rev. 12:17)	7. Beast Has a Remnant (Rev. 19:21)
8. Christ Has a Prophet (Rev. 1:1, 9)	8. Beast Has a False Prophet (Rev. 19:20)
9. Christ Is at War (Rev. 12:7; 19:11-17)	9. Dragon and Beast Are at War Against the Lamb (Rev. 12:17; 19:19)
10. Christ Has an Army of Angels (Rev. 12:7)	10. Satan Has an Army of Fallen Angels (Rev. 12:7)

2. *Power Lost:* However, a mortal wound seriously threatened the beast's power (Rev. 13:3), an event that took place at the end of the 1260 years in 1798, during the French Revolution, when General Alexander Berthier took Pius VI prisoner and the prelate died in prison. At that time "many assumed that the destruction of the holy see had at last been accomplished, and the fortunes of the papacy had indeed reached their nadir under him."¹ The arrest and death of Pius VI "marked a low point in papal fortunes not plumbed for

centuries and gave rise to a prophecy that the apostolic succession had come to a close with the demise of 'Pius the last'."² The French government hoped to destroy the pontifical government after the pope's death by not allowing the election of another pope. The wounding hoped to bring the system to an end.

3. *Power Restored*: The prophecy stated that the wound would be healed so that what looked impossible still would take place. In fact, the restoration process began during the French Revolution itself with the election of a new pope, Barnaba Chiaramonti called Pius VII, who entered into dialogue with the French government. As a result a concordat issued in 1801 legally established the Roman Catholic religion in France. Since then the restoration of the influence and power of the church has been constant but will reach its climax in the near future when humanity will worship the dragon and the beast. This political and religious power will be so powerful that no one will dare to face it. Except the Lamb!

WORK OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:5-7)

The following verses describe how the beast used the power it received from the dragon. A summary of its work appears in Revelation 13:5, and the two following verses further develop it. The beast opened its mouth and spoke insolent words and *blasphemies*, but John does not yet tell us what it said. The beast also had *authority*, given to it by the dragon, and exercised it for 42 months. Revelation describes the work of the beast here in terms of the little horn of Daniel 7, which tells us that it spoke against God and exercised authority for 1260 years (Dan. 7:25). The period of 42 months is the same as the 1260 years. For symbolic purposes, the biblical writer considered each month to have 30 days that when multiplied by 42 give a total of 1260 days. The same prophetic period mentioned in

Revelation 12:6 and 14, it suggests that Revelation 13:1-10 is a development of Revelation 12:6 and 13-16.

The text returns now to the theme of *blasphemy* in order to expand it a little more (Rev. 13:6). The Bible often uses the phrase "to open the mouth" to introduce a solemn and authoritative speech, as, for instance, when Jesus opened His mouth to preach the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:2), or as an introduction to a sermon (Acts 10:34). "The use of this phrase in Revelation 13:6 suggests that the beast is speaking in an official, formal manner."³

In the Bible "to blaspheme" designates a type of speech that devalues another person or thing and that expresses human arrogance. The beast *blasphemes God*, robbing Him of His glory and honor in order to build up his own glory and honor. In the New Testament to blaspheme God is to ascribe to oneself divine prerogatives, for instance the capacity to forgive sins (Mark 2:7). The beast also *blasphemes the name of God* by damaging His reputation. The conduct of those who claim to be His servants could damage God's reputation if their behavior does not exhibit loving obedience to God's expressed will (e.g., 1 Tim. 6:1). Acts of apostasy also blaspheme God (Acts 26:11). But obviously the most serious blasphemy against God and His name is to accept worship due only to Him (Rev. 13:8).

The beast *blasphemes God's dwelling place*. Christ ministers on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary, applying to our lives the benefits of His atoning death. To blaspheme it is to detract from its uniqueness and importance within the plan of salvation. It is precisely what the little horn in Daniel 8:9-12 was doing as it cast down the sanctuary and took away the daily from the Prince of hosts. When we deny the reality of the heavenly sanctuary and substitute the church and a human priestly system, we diminish and damage the importance of God's dwelling place.

The connection between the phrase *to blaspheme those*

who dwell in heaven and the previous one (*blaspheme the dwelling of God*) is not as clear in the Greek as we would like it to be. Notice the different ways translators render the passage: “to slander . . . his dwelling place and those who live in heaven”; “blaspheming . . . his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven” (RSV). The second translation equates God’s dwelling with those who dwell in heaven, while the first one considers them to be two separate objects against which the beast blasphemes. The interpretation that finds here two different subjects is supported by Revelation 12:12 in which the heavens and those who dwell in them are invited to rejoice because of Christ’s victory over the dragon. In addition, John tells us several times that he saw the heavenly sanctuary where heavenly beings worshiped God (Rev. 4; 5; 11:19; 14:17).

Who are the dwellers of heaven? Perhaps we can answer that question by asking Who are the dwellers of the earth? In the book of Revelation the dwellers of the earth are those who worshiped the dragon and the beast, that is to say those who do not have their names written in the book of the Lamb (Rev. 13:8; 17:8). Enemies of God and His people (Rev. 6:10), they killed God’s two witnesses (Rev. 11:10). The servants of God are not part of the inhabitants of the earth; they belong already to the kingdom of God and are, spiritually speaking, dwellers of heaven. Blaspheming against them means that they became the object of persecution by the beast, as the next verse indicates (cf. Acts 13:45; 18:6).

The concept of *authority* that Revelation 13:5 introduced, verse 7 now develops a little more. The beast becomes a persecuting power, opposed to God and those who serve Him, thus repeating what we found in Daniel 7:25. The beast was a religious and political power launching an attack against God’s people and attempting to gain universal hegemony.

FUTURE EXPERIENCE OF THE BEAST (REV. 13:8-10)

4. *Power Restored*: If you look carefully at your Bible, you will notice that while the verbs in the previous verses speak of something in the past, now in Revelation 13:8 the verbs look to the future, suggesting that the events narrated have not yet happened.⁴ It describes the future restoration of the beast and what will take place after its healing (verse 4). The language used suggests that the events still lie in the future: “All the inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast” (verse 8). This refers to the time when the whole human race will have polarized into two groups—those who follow the Lamb of God, and those the dragon. The inhabitants of the earth are those who support the dragon’s global program, described in some detail in the following chapters.

Worship plays a central role in the war between good and evil. As we have suggested, Satan and his allies want to occupy God’s place in our planet and become the exclusive objects of worship. Revelation 13:8 indicates that they will achieve that goal only to a limited extent. Those who join them are only those whose names do not appear in the Lamb’s book of life. The book of life contains the names of the citizens of God’s kingdom, those who have the right to enter the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27). That privilege belongs to them because of the Lamb “who was slain from the creation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). The blood of the Lamb alone makes it possible for us to be citizens of the heavenly city and to overcome the dragon and his allies.

5. *Power Removed*: The apocalyptic prophecy announces the moment when the beast will permanently lose its power. The book of Revelation often uses the phrase “he who has an ear, let him hear” to introduce an important exhortation (Rev. 2:11, 17; 3:6). Some evidence suggests that Revelation 13:10 describes the experience of believers. In that case, it would be saying that some of them will go into captivity and some will be killed, but that they

should all remain faithful to the Lord (cf. Jer. 15:2). But it could also be describing the final fate of those who persecuted and killed God's servants (Matt. 26:52). This will be the time when the Lord will vindicate His servants, avenging them as they earlier requested Him to do (Rev. 6:10). It is a comforting thought to know that evil will not last forever; that it is God's plan to exterminate it from the universe. Meanwhile, His servants are to remain loyal to Him.

EXHORTATION—DESCRIPTION OF THE SAINTS (REV. 13:10)

The final exhortation describes those who will resist the persecution and oppression of the beast and the dragon to the very end. The victorious ones are "the saints," another name for the remnant mentioned in Revelation 12:17. They are saints because they identified themselves with the Holy One (Rev. 16:5) and thus belong to Him. And they are saints because they are totally devoted to the Lord and manifest it through a life of prayer. The priestly work of Christ makes their prayers acceptable to God (Rev. 5:8; 8:3, 4). The saints are the enemy's object of attack (Rev. 13:7), and some of them will die as martyrs (Rev. 16:6; 17:6; 18:24), but they will not betray their Saviour (Rev. 14:12). Righteous people (Rev. 19:8), they look forward to the reward they will receive from God (Rev. 11:18). At the final judgment they will rejoice with the rest of the universe in proclaiming God's justice in the way He dealt with evil (Rev. 18:20). Their final destiny is the New Jerusalem, where they will reside forever (Rev. 22:5).

Revelation exhorts the saints to be patient and to be faithful, two fundamental characteristics of the Christian life. Patience means perseverance in faith, a refusal to yield or surrender under even the most distressing circumstance. But it also expresses the idea of looking forward to the moment of liberation. Hope precedes patience, but patience makes it possible for us to resist. Faithfulness implies a particular object of devotion and commitment, a

deep level of loyalty based on a response of gratitude to God for the many benefits He has bestowed on us. The object of commitment is God and the Lamb, whom the saints will never betray. The bond between them and their Saviour is so strong that nothing will be able to break them apart. Secure in the sense that they are in God's hands, they know that nothing can snatch them out of His grasp (John 10:28). Those who will be victorious in the final conflict have a personal connection with their Saviour, and through the power of the Spirit they will not allow anyone to wrest them from Him.

However, the conflict is not yet over—more is coming.

¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 302.

² J. F. Broderick, "Papacy," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, p. 965.

³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 744.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 746.

10

INSTRUMENTS OF THE DRAGON
AGAINST THE REMNANT—II:
THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH

The political map has radically changed since the Middle Ages. Since the end of the cold war freedom and democracy are becoming the foundation of more and more political systems around the world. If the union of church and state that prophecy predicts is to take place at a global level, it would require a series of extraordinary events to precipitate such a change. But prophecy indicates that the transformation will take place and that the beast coming from the earth (Rev. 13:11-18) will play a significant role in producing a radical shift in the thinking of the nations, one that will lead to the final confrontation between God and the forces of evil. Therefore, it is of paramount importance for God's people today to have a clear understanding of this apocalyptic prophecy in order to avoid deception and to unmask the enemy's plan. We may not be able yet to understand every detail of that prophecy, but many of its elements are clear enough for us to anticipate what will take place.

ORIGIN AND APPEARANCE OF
THE SECOND BEAST (REV. 13:11)

The origin of this beast has no parallel in any of the previous apocalyptic prophecies, in which most of the beasts emerge from the sea. The verb *anabaino*, translated "coming out," means among other things "to go up, ascend, grow up." The context determines the particular nuance

expressed by it. In Revelation 13:11 the preposition *ek* ("from, of"), translated into English as "of," follows the word. It points to the place from whence the beast comes up—the earth. Usually plants are what emerge from the earth, and Scripture uses the verb to describe a growing plant (Mark 4:7, 8, 32; Matt. 13:7). It also describes a fish taken out of the water—that is to say, fished (Matt. 17:27). Revelation confronts us with a beast (Greek, *therion*) that is coming out or growing like a plant from the earth—a strange image. Does a biblical antecedent exist for this extraordinary phenomenon? Yes.

In Genesis 1, the story of our planet's creation, the Lord commanded and birds flew through the air and the waters brought forth fish. But with respect to livestock and wild animals, He said, "Let the land [the earth] produce [*yatsa'*] living creatures" (Gen. 1:24). The verb *yatsa'*, "to produce," has different usages in the Old Testament, but sometimes it refers to the growth of a plant, the produce that comes out of the earth (e.g., Isa. 11:1; Deut. 14:22). Obviously, the idea in Genesis 1:24 is not that animals are a type of plant, but that God commanded the creation of the animals out of the earth. The Hebrew term translated "animal" in Genesis 1:24 is the equivalent of the Greek *therion*, "beast," used in Revelation 13:11.

Thus we do have a biblical parallel to the symbolic image of a beast coming out of the earth. But what does it mean? According to Genesis, bringing a beast into existence from the ground or earth is a divine act of creation, a manifestation of divine power. Since this is the only parallel to Revelation 13:11, we would have to conclude that the second beast comes into existence as a result of a divine act of creation—that God was involved in its origin. It did not generate spontaneously out of the forces of chaos, the sea. Two other pieces of information confirm this.

First, the beast from the earth has two horns similar to those of a lamb. In Revelation the symbol of a lamb always

designates God's redemptive instrument of salvation, Christ. By connecting an element of the lamb symbol with this beast John tells us that the creature had some association with God as it came out of the earth and that it was not necessarily God's enemy. Only later, when it is able to talk, does it become an agent of the dragon, speaking like a dragon. Second, the rest of the book of Revelation calls the beast a "false prophet" (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). In the New Testament that title generally designates individuals within the community of believers who became agents of deception by proclaiming false prophecies. In a sense, we could compare the second beast, or false prophet, to Balaam, who originally appeared to have been a true prophet of God, or at least used by the Lord, but who apostatized and became an agent of deception (Num. 22-24; Joshua 24:9, 10; Rev. 2:14). That seems to be the experience of the beast that emerged from the earth.

RELATION TO THE FIRST BEAST (REV. 13:12)

The authority of the second beast derives from the first beast and ultimately from the dragon itself. The connection is with the authority of the first beast, because in that way we are able to understand the nature of the authority of the beast from the earth. It is the same type exercised by the sea beast. As we have already noticed, the authority of that beast consisted in opposing God and persecuting His people. The power represented by the second beast will do the same, but it will do it "on . . . behalf" of the first beast. A literal translation of the phrase "on behalf of" would be "before/in its presence," meaning "by his authority," suggesting that the second beast acts as the representative of the first—or even better, "at the commissioning of the beast."¹ The false prophet is at the service of the beast from the sea.

The most important task of the beast from the earth is to bring the final healing of the first into full effect. We already saw that the wounded beast will be totally healed

when it becomes an object of global adoration. Now Revelation tells us that the false prophet will be instrumental in achieving that goal. He "made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed" (Rev. 13:12). The rest of chapter 13 will explain the process through which the false prophet leads people to worship the beast.

IDENTIFYING THE SECOND BEAST

We are now ready to identify the second beast, the false prophet, mentioned in Revelation 13:11. The first thing that we should observe is that the false prophet rises to power sometime after the wounding of the first beast but before its total healing. We base this conclusion on the fact that the beast from the earth helps heal the first beast. It also indicates that there is a time during which the two beasts coexist and work together toward a common goal. Since the first beast received its mortal wound in 1798, the beast from the earth rises to power around that year.

Second, we have also indicated that the first beast is at least initially a divine instrument or agency promoting ideals compatible with biblical principles. This suggests that for a time the beast from the earth does not oppose God's people or at least has no desire to persecute them. Therefore, we can conclude that the beast represents a power that acknowledges religious freedom.

The beast from the earth represents a power that rose to dominion around 1798, was at first gentle like a lamb, and promoted religious freedom. The only historical possibility is the United States of America as a Protestant nation. That land became a refuge for Protestants who wanted to live in an environment where they could escape persecution because of their religious beliefs. Apparently the Lord had some specific plans for Protestant America. Ellen G. White wrote: "The United States is a land that has been under the special shield of the Omnipotent One."² To it

came Christian exiles seeking “asylum from royal oppression and priestly intolerance,” and they determined “to establish a government upon the broad foundation of civil and religious liberty.”³ She adds: “The Lord has done more for the United States than for any other country. . . . Here Christianity has progressed in its purity. . . . God designed that this country should ever remain free for all people to worship Him in accordance with the dictates of conscience. He designed that its civil institutions, in their expansive productions, should represent the freedom of the gospel privileges. But the enemy of all righteousness has designs upon God’s purpose for this country. He will bring in enterprises that will lead men to forget that there is a God.”⁴ The beast from the earth will finally speak like a dragon: “Prophecy represents Protestantism as having lamblike horns, but speaking like a dragon.”⁵

LEADING THE WORLD ASTRAY (REV. 13:13-15)

Revelation 13:11 tells us that the beast from the earth will speak like a dragon, and verse 12 clarifies that as meaning that it will make “the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.” The obvious question is How would that happen? The answer appears in verses 13-17, which describe the global plan of the second beast, the false prophet. The false prophet will use *deception* and *persecution* or *coercion* to achieve its purpose. It will deceive the whole world except for the remnant, who will still have to endure persecution.

Deception (verses 13, 14): Here the character of the second beast as a false prophet surfaces in all its deceptive power. Through the phenomenon of spiritualism apostate Protestantism will become a deceptive influence. The signs appear to validate the false prophet’s claim to be a divine agency. The false prophet even causes “fire to come down from heaven” (verse 13).

The book of Revelation in some cases associates fire

with the Godhead. For instance, John saw “seven torches of fire,” identified as a symbol of the Spirit (Rev. 4:5, RSV). In fact, the Spirit descended on the apostles in the form of tongues of fire (Acts 2:3). John also links fire with Christ, whose eyes “were like a flame of fire” (Rev. 1:14, RSV), and His “legs [were] like pillars of fire” (Rev. 10:1, RSV).

The Bible often regards fire as a divine symbol. We refer to fire as a theophanic motif, that is to say, when God appeared or manifested Himself to humans, fire accompanied Him. The most important apparition of God (theophany) to humans in the Old Testament took place at Sinai: “Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire” (Ex. 19:18, RSV). But possibly the best parallel to the work of the false prophet is the incident of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. The prophet confronted the people with the need to choose between God and Baal as the true object of worship. In order to help them decide, a miracle would take place: the true God would cause fire to descend from heaven (1 Kings 18:20-39). But Baal could not perform the miracle. Only the Lord manifested Himself as the true God through the fire that flashed from heaven. The book of Revelation says that the time will come when evil powers will be able to imitate God, causing fire to descend from heaven and turning the allusion to Mount Carmel upside down.

Revelation 13:13 describes an attempt by evil powers to falsify God’s presence. Through miraculous activities they seek to persuade humanity that they represent the true God. As a result of that false theophany, many will worship the dragon and the beast (verses 4, 12). But the greatest and most wonderful theophany will soon take place: the “appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, RSV). Scripture associates that event with fire because the one who is coming back is our *God* and Saviour. The best example appears in 2 Thessalonians 1:7: “When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty an-

gels in *flaming fire*" (RSV). The true fire coming from heaven symbolizes Christ's presence at the Second Coming!

When Revelation 13:13 states that the false prophet will cause fire to come down from heaven, it is referring to an attempt on the part of Satan to *imitate* the second coming of Christ in order to deceive the world. "And no wonder," Paul wrote, "for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14, RSV). The devil will attempt to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that he is worthy of worship by pretending to be the Messiah. We already saw that Jesus alerted us to such a false manifestation of Messianic claims.

Ellen G. White has described that event for us in vivid language: "As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. . . . The great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. . . . The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: 'Christ has come! Christ has come!' The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him."⁶ She adds: "We shall be commanded to worship this being, whom the world will glorify as Christ. What shall we do?—Tell them that Christ has warned us against just such a foe, who is man's worst enemy, yet who claims to be God."⁷ We have nothing to fear from him because he is a defeated enemy, and the Lord will strengthen us to confront him.

Persecution (Rev. 13:14, 15): In order to deceive humanity, evil powers will perform many miracles, including imitating the second coming of Christ. But in order to gain the world's support in persecuting the remnant and killing them, the forces of evil create an image to the beast and require all to worship it. This is the time the human race will be polarized, clearly revealing those who follow the Lamb.

To create such an image with the intention to worship it violates the second commandment. The Israelites in Babylon confronted the same challenge, but they did not fear to be identified as keeping God's commandments, and thus re-

fused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image (Dan. 3). Possibly the model for that image came from the king's own dream (Dan. 2).

The beast from the land is able to deceive the inhabitants of the earth and then uses its influence to order them to "make an image *to* the beast," which is also an "image *of* the beast" (Rev. 13:14, 15, KJV). It is an image "to" the beast in that it will be put at the service of the first beast to accomplish its purpose, and it is an image "of" the beast in that it mimics the actions of the first beast—it acts like the beast.

An image is a copy of something and represents it by being present wherever the original cannot. The beast united the civil and religious powers, opposed the true God, and waged war with Him and His people. Consequently, the image of the beast reproduces on an even larger scale the spirit and disposition of the beast from the sea. It is at this point that the healing of the first beast will be a reality, and all those who let themselves be deceived by the miracles performed by the false prophet will worship the dragon and the beast (verses 4, 8).

Revelation illustrates how the beast and the dragon put their plans into effect through the symbolism of breathing life into the image (verse 15). The beast from the land, Protestant America, will initiate a process that will provide world support to the beast's agenda. The symbolism derives from Genesis 2:7, in which God breathed the breath of life into Adam, His image, who would represent Him on our planet. The act of breathing depicts the divine power to create life. By giving life to the image of the beast the forces of evil make a theological claim that they have power over life and death—to determine who should live and who should die. Any refusal to support the beast's agenda would result in death. This is salvation through obedience to the demands of evil powers.

Revelation 17:12-14 describes the same event. The world's political leaders, represented by 10 kings, "have

one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them.” It will be the final phase of an attack against the remnant first mentioned in Revelation 12:17. The prophecy foretells a time Protestant America will unite with ecclesiastical Rome in a global effort to promote the agenda of the dragon and the beast in opposition to the message of the Lamb.

MARK OF LOYALTY (REV. 13:16-18)

The beast from the land will totally control commerce through its power to exclude people from participating in the world economy. Loyalty to the beast and the dragon will be a prerequisite for financial stability and exchange. The fate of all will rest on their devotion to the beast from the sea—a loyalty evidenced by having a mark equated with the name of the beast or the number of its name. We are dwelling here with the very nature of the beast—its character, what it stands for. The mark is an exterior condition that expresses the spirit of that power and thus makes it possible for others to identify those who support it. The result of the mark has to be visible in some way; otherwise it could not function as an indication of loyalty.

The dragon’s spirit of rebellion and opposition to God has manifested itself in a particular way in his attack against God’s law, a point made quite clear in Daniel 7:25. The passage prophesies the attempt to change God’s law, and history tells us that this took place in the shift of Sabbath observance to Sunday observance. In the book of Revelation, as we have indicated already, the law of God plays a significant role. John describes God’s people as those who keep His commandments. Thus what really distinguishes Christ’s followers from those of the dragon is obedience to divine law, including the fourth commandment. It could very well be that the critical issue at the end of the conflict would not only be admitting that Christ is

our Saviour but also demonstrating that He is our Lord by being faithful to Him and to His law. Since Satan will attempt to identify himself as Christ, acknowledging him as Saviour would be expected from all. Those who follow the true Christ will reveal themselves by obeying His law and not those rules imposed on humanity by the dragon and its associates. The issue of Sunday observance will be of key importance in defining those who do not submit themselves to the Lord. However, Sunday observance is not yet the mark of the beast. Only when enforced by law under the threat of persecution and death will it become so.

John gives the number of the beast as 666. Here is one of those cases in which interpreters should be very careful and avoid speculating as much as possible. Adventists have traditionally followed other Protestant interpreters in finding that number in the sum of the letters of the papal title *VICARIVS FILII DEI* (“Vicar of the Son of God”). The German Protestant writer Andreas Helwig seems to have originally suggested it around 1611.⁸ Uriah Smith accepted the interpretation and popularized it among Adventists through his book on Revelation. Interestingly, Ellen G. White, who wrote extensively on final events, never used that title to explain the number 666.⁹

As we evaluate that interpretation of the symbolic number 666 we must keep in mind that it is not certain the “Vicar of the Son of God” was ever an official title of the pope. Second, if the number is somehow related to the numerical value of the letters of the name, we confront the problem of determining what language to use. The biblical text does not specify any particular language; therefore, any that we selected would be a matter of personal opinion. Finally, the Greek phrase translated “It is man’s number” (Rev. 13:18) could be also rendered “it is the number of humanity.” In that case, it is not referring to a particular person but to a characteristic of humanity separated from God. Since God created humans during the sixth day, it could

stand as a symbol of humanity, but a humanity not yet at rest with God and without the joy of a harmonious relationship with God during the seventh day.¹⁰ The number reveals the rebellious nature of the enemies of God and His remnant. That seems to be the best available interpretation.

¹ H. Kraemer, "Enopion (in the presence of) Before," in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), vol. 1, p. 462.

² *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), vol. 7, p. 975.

³ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 441.

⁴ ———, *Maranatha*, p. 193.

⁵ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 975.

⁶ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 624.

⁷ ———, *Maranatha*, p. 206.

⁸ LeRoy E. Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 2, pp. 605-608.

⁹ See *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1996), vol. 11, pp. 221-225.

¹⁰ See Beatrice S. Neall, *The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse With Implications for Character Education* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), p. 154, where she writes: "Six hundred sixty-six, however, represents the refusal of man to proceed to seven, to give glory to God as Creator and Redeemer. It represents man's fixation with himself, man seeking glory in himself and his own creations."

11

THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES: REVELATION 14:1-12

Revelation 13 ends on a dark note. Supported by his two main agents—the beast from the sea and the one from the land—and by all the inhabitants of the earth who had vowed alliance to him, Satan seems to be in control of the remnant's fate. His global plan appears to be successful. Soon, he thinks, he will have obliterated the remnant from the planet, and he will become the sole ruler of the human race. What he seems to have overlooked is that God also has a global plan, and that the remnant people are indispensable to its fulfillment. Therefore, no one will be able to destroy them.

THE LAMB AND THE REMNANT ON MOUNT ZION

1. *On Mount Zion:* The remnant is indestructible because they are with the Lamb of God on Mount Zion, hidden from the dragon's attacks under the wings of the Omnipotent One. This vision focuses not on the remnant but on the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. God redeemed His people through the Lamb, and He will make them victorious through the blood of the Lamb in the last apocalyptic battle. Though threatened by the dragon with death, the remnant are described as beyond the reach of the forces of evil. While they are still on earth, they are yet spiritually in the safest place in the universe—in the company of the Lamb.

Mount Zion in the Old Testament was the site of the Temple and where God reigned and dwelt among His people. Psalm 2 describes a situation in which the nations of

the earth have conspired together against God's anointed one, the Messiah. The Lord laughs at them and proclaims the defeat of the nations, because, He says, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill" (Ps. 2:6). Zion is the remnant's place of refuge: "For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors" (2 Kings 19:31). The remnant are the survivors left on Zion (Isa. 4:2, 3), preserved by God from the enemy's attacks. The same association of ideas appears in Revelation 14:1, where the Messiah and the remnant become the target of the dragon and its associates, but the remnant find refuge under the Messiah.

2. *The Seal of God*: The symbol of 144,000 individuals who have the name of the Lamb and the name of God written on their foreheads also represents the remnant. That symbol especially seems to depict those who will be alive on earth when Christ returns, an interpretation supported by the fact that Revelation 6:14-16 describes the Second Coming followed by the question: "The great day of their [God and the Lamb's] wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev. 6:17). The answer to the question occurs in chapter 7: The 144,000. Ellen G. White says about them: "These, having been translated from the earth, from among the living, are counted as 'the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.'"¹ It is tempting to speculate about this issue, but we must resist, because the information we have is extremely limited.

The 144,000 have the name of the Lamb and that of His Father written on their foreheads. Since according to Revelation 7:3 God placed His seal on the foreheads of His servants, the seal and the name of God must refer to the same thing. The name of God and the Lamb stands for their characters—for what they are. Hence to have their names on our foreheads is to reflect God's character in our lives. He revealed it to us through His law and the life of Jesus, who exemplified it for us. We already indicated that in the

book of Revelation those who belong to God obey God's commandments. Their lives of obedient submission to God's will reveals that they indeed belong to Him and are under His protective care. This unwavering commitment to God and to truth distinguishes them from those who follow the beast and have its mark. Accepting Christ as our Saviour cannot be separated from a life of loving obedience to all of His commandments. His law contains the seal of God in the fourth commandment, a sign of creation (Ex. 31:17), redemption (Deut. 5:15), and sanctification (Ex. 31:13). The remnant's obedience to that commandment during the closing scenes of the cosmic controversy will distinguish them from those who worship the dragon and the beast. Through the power of the Spirit that obedience results in a holy character.

A NEW CHOIR AND A NEW SONG

John hears a great and wonderful song that to him is like the refreshing sound of rushing waters, like the powerful sound of thunder, and like the inspiring, uplifting, and harmonious sound of a harp. The images he uses indicate that the music is unique, that he has never before been in a musical program like this one, and he searches for words to express his experience. The choir seems to consist of the 144,000, the remnant that now sings before the throne of God. No one else can learn this song, because no one else has gone through their experience.

John lists several key characteristics of the 144,000. First, God "*redeemed [them] from the earth*" (Rev. 14:3). Revelation 14:3 and 4 tell us twice that the people of God were "*redeemed/purchased from the earth/from among men.*" The same verb appears in Revelation 5:9 where heavenly beings sing: "You [the Lamb] were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." The New Testament clearly testifies that Christ bought or redeemed us and that

the price He paid was His own blood/life (2 Peter 2:1; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). Christ earned the right of God's people to stand before His throne and to praise Him for His sacrificial death. It is not the reward of our faithfulness to Him. Thus we do not belong any longer to ourselves, because Christ, our new owner, paid the price for our redemption (1 Cor. 6:20). We are loyal to Him because He met the cost of our salvation.

Second, "*they are virgins*" (Rev. 14:4, KJV). The phrase "those who did not defile with woman" clarifies the metaphor (verse 4). The image is that of a betrothed woman who keeps herself sexually pure for her future husband. In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul applies the same metaphor to Christians: "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." The 144,000 have remained faithful to Jesus by not contaminating themselves with the prostitute described in Revelation 17.

Third, "*they follow the Lamb*" (Rev. 14:4). The remnant does not worship the beast and the dragon. The close relationship between the 144,000 and the Lord began when they were still on earth and will continue throughout eternity. Fourth, *they were "offered as firstfruits"* (verse 4). Israel dedicated the firstfruits to God as an expression of gratitude for the harvest. They belonged to God. The 144,000 are Christ's in a special way because of their unique experience at the close of the cosmic struggle when they had to face deception and persecution from the forces of evil in a way never seen before in human history. They will follow the Lamb wherever He goes. The image of the firstfruits also points to the fact that many others will experience salvation. The 144,000 are the token of God's vast harvest. The redeemed of all ages will join Christ and the eschatological remnant to enjoy His presence forever.

Fifth, "*no lie was found in their mouths*" (verse 5). One of the fundamental characteristics of the redeemed ones is

that they have proclaimed the truth. Nothing in their words or actions reflects any kind of deception. To lie is to identify oneself with the evil forces and the false prophet (Rev. 16:13; 19:20). Those who love falsehood will find themselves excluded from the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:15). Finally, the remnant is *blameless*—that is to say, without moral defect. They identified themselves with Christ, who was "unblemished" (Heb. 9:14). Through His sacrificial death He makes it possible for all to be without any blemish before God (Eph. 5:27). The last generation will have an intimate close relationship with the Saviour that is constantly growing in sanctification as they rely only on Christ's power to save them from their enemies.

THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

We can easily explain the connection between Revelation 14:6-12 and the previous section (verses 1-5) as a description of the process and means through which God gathered the eschatological remnant together. The chapter begins by showing us that group assembled before God's throne. Now it informs us how God called them out from among earth's inhabitants. Revelation 13 discussed the dragon's global plan and the strategy he used to unite the world against Christ and His remnant. Now we get a glimpse of God's own global plan and His goal. Two forces working at a global level seek the loyalty of the human race, and it is important for us to be on the right side of the conflict.

Although we do find some similarities between the two plans, the differences are fundamental. They both use three *instruments* or means of communication. God employs three angelic beings (verses 6-9), and the dragon resorts to three demons (Rev. 16:13). They are messengers of life and death respectively. The *method* God uses consists of the proclamation of the gospel of salvation and judgment "to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev. 14:6). The dragon counters by performing miracles and getting the

support of the kings of the earth (Rev. 13:13; 16:14). God appeals to human reason and to the real spiritual needs of the individual and makes sure that every person hears the message and reaches a decision. The dragon appeals to the emotions and imposes his will by force through political power and authority.

The two plans have fundamentally different *purposes*. God wants to prepare His people against deception, to gather His remnant people from all the nations to Mount Zion, and to unmask the dragon's true plans (Rev. 14:1, 6-9). The dragon attempts to deceive the whole world (Rev. 13:13; 16:14), to gather the kings of the earth on Armageddon (Rev. 16:16), and to defeat the remnant (Rev. 13:15). The *final result* of the two plans are diametrically opposites. God's plan will triumph and His people will be victorious (Rev. 14:4), while the dragon and its confederates will end in defeat and destruction (Rev. 16:19). One cannot overemphasize the importance, the need, and the urgency of proclaiming the three angels' messages to the world. God has entrusted this great privilege and responsibility to the Adventist Church, and nothing should detract us from fulfilling our mission.

MESSAGE OF THE FIRST ANGEL (REV. 14:6, 7)

1. *Content of the Message:* Both heavenly and human agencies participate in proclaiming God's last message to the human race. Scripture defines the *content of the message* presented by the first angel as the "eternal gospel" (verse 6). The "good news" of salvation through faith in Christ's sacrificial death lies at the heart of this angel's proclamation. Gospel means "good news," and John's use of it presupposes its apostolic understanding; we should, therefore, interpret it in light of the rest of the New Testament. "The gospel does not require men to achieve their own salvation by an act of repentance. The gospel is a declaration that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1 Tim. 1:15), that 'God

loved the world so much that he gave his only Son' (John 3:16), that 'Christ died for us while we were yet sinners' (Rom. 5:8); and John's gospel is the same: 'to him who loves us and has released us from our sins with his own life-blood . . . be glory and dominion for ever and ever' ([Rev.] 1:5, 6)."² (See also Rev. 5:9.) This gospel is eternally and permanently valid for all ages and all persons.

2. *Target of the Message:* The *target* or *audience* of the gospel is of a universal nature, because the problem the gospel seeks to solve is universal and affects every individual on the planet. The angel addresses it to "those who live [literal, "sit"] on the earth," more specifically to "every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev. 14:6). The passage presupposes that the final polarization of the human race has not yet occurred and that many will, after listening to the gospel, then choose to follow the Lamb. They will become part of God's eschatological remnant. In fact, Christ purchased the remnant itself through His blood "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9; cf. Rev. 14:3). God is using the historical expression of the remnant—those left after the attack of the dragon against the woman for 1260 years—to gather the rest of the eschatological remnant, those who will be alive when Christ returns.

3. *Response to the Message:* The angel extends an invitation—a *call*—for everybody to "fear God," "give him glory," and "worship him" (Rev. 14:7). This succinct invitation summarizes the response God expects from the human race as it faces the forces of evil in the last battle of the conflict between good and evil. The *fear* of the Lord derives from the fact that He is great, majestic, and unique. His presence inspires fear because He is beyond our full comprehension (Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Mark 9:2-6). But He says to us, "Fear not," because His presence does not endanger our existence but can enrich it beyond our expectations. So the phrase "fear God" expresses the idea of trusting submission

to God. Since His presence also brings salvation to His people, the “fear” that it elicits results in praise and adoration to Him. Those who fear God are those who praise Him, trust in Him, and keep His commandments (Deut. 8:6). The call to fear God invites us to be ready to face our majestic and unique God in a state of submission and commitment to Him through obedience to His loving will.

Often in the Bible the fear of the Lord leads the individual to give glory to God (Rev. 15:4; Matt. 9:8). In the Old Testament the Hebrew word translated “glory” (*kabod*) means “weight.” People commonly believed that a person’s function in society was determined by his or her “weight,” that is to say, by the individual’s importance and influence. Wise or wealthy persons were highly influential; their words and actions had social “weight” and inspired respect and honor. Society publically acknowledged their “glory/weight” by recognizing what they did for others. Hence the verb came to mean “to be honored,” to acknowledge the importance of someone. Therefore, to give glory to God means to acknowledge Him as the most important person in the universe. No one is “weightier” than He or more influential than He in our lives. To give glory to God is to assign to Him first place in our lives and to oppose the global plan of the dragon who wants to rob God of His glory.

The urgency of the call, or invitation, to fear God and to give glory to Him results from the fact that the hour of God’s judgment has arrived. The proclamation of the messages of the three angels takes place while the judgment announced by Daniel is still in progress. The judgment is good news in that it informs us that Christ is still working in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf and that time still remains for us to join Him in the battle against the dragon. It is the last opportunity the human race has to join the Lamb in opposition to the forces of evil.

The angel summons humanity to “worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of

water” (Rev. 14:7). Worship is a key element in the cosmic conflict because it raises the important question of the true and rightful object of adoration. The dragon attempts to place itself and the beast from the sea at the very center of human existence by becoming the focus of human worship (Rev. 13:4; 14:9). The remnant forms from those who have decided to worship only and exclusively the Creator. The Sabbath commandment describes God as worthy of worship because He is our Creator (Ex. 20:11) and Redeemer (Deut. 5:15), and John uses some of its language to ground the reason to worship God.

MESSAGE OF THE SECOND ANGEL (REV. 14:8)

The message of the first angel essentially proclaims the triumph of God’s plan for the world while the message of the second angel announces the failure of the dragon’s. Scripture uses the symbol of a city, Babylon, to represent the achievements of the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the land. The fall of the city describes God’s victory over those evil powers. The Bible also depicts Babylon as a woman in order to illustrate that it is not only a political power (a city) but also a religious power (a woman). We saw already that Scripture employs a woman as a symbol for the people of God either as a faithful community (Rev. 12:1) or as an unfaithful community, a prostitute (Rev. 17:5). The city will be destroyed, the prostitute burned with fire (verse 16).

Babylon in the Old Testament represented human arrogance and rebellion against God. The construction of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) depicted both a rejection of divine guidance and an attempt at self-preservation through human effort. The Babylonians called the city *Bab-ilu*, “gate of the gods,” suggesting that through the city they had access to the gods. The Bible distorted the meaning of that name by interpreting it on the basis of the Hebrew verb *balal*, “to mix up, to confound” (verse 9). The city, far from

being a place of access to God, was a center of confusion. Babylon became an appropriate symbol for the archenemy of God and His people (Jer. 50:24, 28, 29).

The book of Revelation uses the term *Babylon* to describe the end-time archenemy of God and the remnant. John applies the image of a prostitute to Babylon to remind us of its true nature. As indicated earlier, the symbol of a prostitute stands for a community unfaithful to God. Such unfaithfulness manifests itself in two ways. First, the community rejects God's truth and practices a syncretistic system of worship that is fundamentally an act of idolatry (Jer. 2:23-25; Hosea 1-3). Paul announced that this process of apostasy would enter the church (2 Thess. 2:3; Acts 20:28, 29), and it led to the loss or distortion of important biblical truths.

Second, spiritual unfaithfulness manifests itself in an attempt to rely on civil power rather than on divine power to achieve the community's goals (Eze. 16:26-29; Lam. 1:2, 9), thus displacing God and putting His authority in the hands of the state. The book of Revelation describes evil powers as seeking the support of the kings of the earth to promote their own agendas against God and the remnant (Rev. 17:12, 13).

The process of apostasy that Paul predicted began immediately, developed during the Middle Ages, and will reach universal dimensions at the end-time with the support of apostate Protestantism and spiritualism. Then the eschatological Babylon will threaten the remnant's very existence (Rev. 13:15). But the message of the second angel proclaims the fall of that heinous city, the collapse of the coalition against God's people. This fall is, first, a spiritual one when the beast from the sea and the false prophet join forces with the dragon and the kings of the earth against the remnant and their message. It will lead to the polarization of the human race. Second, the fall is also the breaking apart of the coalition, the failure of the dragon (Rev. 17:15, 16). We are rapidly heading toward both events.

MESSAGE OF THE THIRD ANGEL (REV. 14:9-11)

The message of the third angel is a wake-up call to the human race, warning us of the dangers ahead of us. It vividly describes the experience of those who will join the coalition of the dragon to fight against the Lamb. Those who worship the enemy and willingly accept the mark of the beast "will drink of the wine of God's fury" (verse 10). The symbolism, that of a cup of wine containing God's judicial wrath against evil, often appears in the writings of the prophets (Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Hab. 2:16), and points to the final and definite collapse of sinners. "Like an intoxicating drink, this robs the one who must drink it . . . of his senses, and causes him to stagger and fall, so that he cannot stand up again."³ The image conveys the idea of a progressive judgment that leads to total unconsciousness. The extent of the punishment depends on the person's deeds (cf. Rev. 22:12). The moral arbiter of the universe will bring the cosmic conflict to an end. The wicked will perish in the presence of the Lamb and the angels—in other words, they will witness the Lamb's dominion before they die.

The book of Revelation borrows language from the prophetic announcement of the destruction of Edom to describe the total eradication of evil and unrepentant sinners from the universe. Isaiah wrote: "Edom's . . . land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again" (Isa. 34:9, 10). It is a language of permanent destruction and not that of a never-ending torment. John employs that same imagery to announce the total and final extermination of the wicked. There is no rest for them, because they rejected the rest that Christ offered them (Matt. 11:28-30). Yet no one needs to go through such painful experience, because Christ has already drunk from the cup of God's wrath for all (Mark 14:36).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REMNANT

After describing the final fate of those who follow the beast and the false prophet, Revelation exhorts the remnant to remain loyal to God (Rev. 14:12). Once more we find the expression “patience/endurance” (see Rev. 13:10) and the need to keep the commandments (see Rev. 12:17). But a new element also surfaces: They keep the faith of Jesus. We could understand the phrase as meaning that they must remain loyal to the message of Jesus (see 2 Tim. 4:7). But it could also indicate that they keep their faith in Jesus—that is to say, they place their faith in the work Christ did on their behalf on the cross. The ambiguity of the phrase suggests the presence of both ideas—that the remnant remains loyal to the message of Jesus, including the recognition that salvation is only through faith in Him. They believe that the law and the gospel should not be separated from each other. Those who have accepted salvation only through Christ also keep the commandments.

God’s global plan will be successful, and we are part of it!

¹ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 649.

² G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 182, 183.

³ Leonhard Goppelt, “Poterion,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, p. 149.

12

THE CLIMAX OF APOCALYPTIC
EXPECTATION: THE BLESSED HOPE

A survey made in North America in 1995 revealed that about 60 percent of the population believed that Christ will return to our planet. That so much belief in the Second Coming still exists in a rapidly secularizing society indicates the continuing relevance of the Christian hope. It was the hope of the return of Jesus that gave courage to thousands of Christians who were willing to go to the Roman arena to confront wild beasts or to become human torches during times of persecution. They were willing to die rather than to give up their faith in the promise Jesus had made to them: “I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3).

Christianity has never forgotten the doctrine of the Second Coming. Yes, sometimes it has been de-emphasized and even ignored, but it has never been rejected as meaningless. There has practically always been an element of expectation in the Christian church—a looking forward to the eschatological manifestation of our Saviour and Lord in glory. Differences of opinions concerning the mode of that event, though, have made it necessary in these last days to proclaim to the whole world exactly how the Lord will return. If evil forces will attempt to imitate Christ’s second coming, then we must have a clear and biblical understanding of its nature.

JESUS HIMSELF IS COMING BACK

The New Testament states emphatically that the One

who is coming is the one who went back to His Father's house. Jesus promised His disciples: "I will come back" (John 14:3). This important statement indicates two facts. First, the One who is returning is the one who was speaking to them, the one who called them to be His disciples. He was the one who taught them and whom they saw healing the sick and comforting the oppressed until He died on the cross. Christ promised them that He would not send a representative to take them to be with Him, but that He would do it Himself. No one else would mediate their relationship with Him—He Himself was coming back. Second, that statement expresses the certainty of His return. "I will come back" is not what the Greek text literally says. In Greek the verb is in the present tense: "I come back." Now, contextually the verb is expressing a future action, but the Greek construction that Jesus employed uses the present tense for a very specific reason. Called a futuristic present, it stresses the certainty of the action of the verb. It is so certain for Jesus that He will come back that He uses the verb in the present tense. The promise states that Jesus is absolutely sure that He Himself will return a second time.

Two angels expressed that certainty during Christ's ascension when they said to the disciples: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Heaven wants us to understand that He who is coming is the one who was here before. When He returns He will not be teaching a different message or promoting a different lifestyle but will be reaffirming what He has already taught us and did for us.

JESUS IS COMING IN GLORY

Nevertheless, there is a difference between the Jesus who was with the disciples and the One who is coming: "He comes in his Father's glory" (Mark 8:38). Peter states that at the Second Coming "his [Jesus'] glory is revealed" (1

Peter 4:13). That glory is now hidden in heaven, but at the Second Coming He will display it to the human eye. Only a few of the disciples witnessed Christ's glory during the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1, 2), but now all will see it. This is the glory of His divinity, because the one who is coming is God: "We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us" (Titus 2:13, 14).

THE NATURE OF THE SECOND COMING

Scripture uses dramatic and colorful language to describe the Second Coming and the effect that it will have on the human race and the whole planet. We will witness the convergence of the sphere of God and His angels with the human, resulting in an indescribable experience of light, sound, movement, and emotion. When the King erupts into human existence, all barriers that have separated us from Him will permanently disintegrate. Our world will be forever integrated to the divine.

1. *It Is Globally Visible:* The human race will witness a divine epiphany, the most glorious that human eye has ever seen (Titus 2:13). God had appeared to humans in the past but only to a selected few in a particular geographical setting. But now the manifestation of God's presence inundates the whole planet in a mysterious and majestic way. Every eye will see Him. No one will be able to avoid this imposing and unavoidable manifestation of the glory of God in Jesus (Rev. 1:7; Matt. 24:30). Christ's divinity encircles the planet and illuminates every corner of it. The planet will be literally invaded and possessed by His presence.

2. *It Is Angelic:* Christ is not a cosmic lone ranger, but a cosmic king who arrives surrounded by millions of angels who ride like a powerful army with Him (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 19:11-16). Our planet's atmosphere appears to recede as if attempting to make room for the myriads of angels who for

centuries have ministered on behalf of human beings on a world characterized by suffering, pain, sin, and death.

3. *It Is Audible*: Sound will characterize Christ's second advent. The blast of the trumpet will reverberate across the planet, announcing victory and liberation (1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52). It proclaims the coming of the King of the universe to reclaim our planet and to incorporate it to the unity of His visible kingdom. Unable to control themselves, God's people will burst into praise and song to the Lord. Like a powerful choir they exclaim: "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us" (Isa. 25:9).

4. *It Is Transforming*: Over and above the shouts of joy the voice of the Son of God will be heard as never before on the planet. Powerful and penetrating, it is the voice of the Archangel, the Prince of the angels (1 Thess. 4:16). It penetrates to the very depths of the earth, shaking it up. Confronted by their Creator, the mountains tremble and the sea convulses (Rev. 6:12-14). Perhaps that is the way they welcome their Creator who will liberate nature itself from the enslaving power of sin (Rom. 8:19-21). But even more important, the King of kings speaks to those who sleep in the dust of the earth, waiting for Him to awaken them.

Those who died with their faith placed on the meritorious death of the Son of God on the cross will return to life at the moment of the Second Coming (1 Thess. 4:16). It is an act of re-creation, but they will not come out of the tomb the way they were when they went into it: "The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:42-44). God's servants still alive when Jesus returns will also go through a miraculous transformation that will extinguish their sinful nature without destroying them. God will remove evil's poison, returning human nature to the way it was when it came from the

Creator's hands. This surgical process that penetrates into the very center of our beings, this transcendental metamorphosis, will take place "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (verse 52)! Then the perishable will be clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality (verse 53).

5. *It Reunites*: That moment will be charged with new and deep emotions. Angels will race through the sky, gathering God's people from one end of the heavens to the other (Matt. 24:31). It is impossible to imagine the emotional state of the redeemed ones as they see themselves surrounded by angels and in the very presence of Jesus. All during their pilgrimage on this planet they anticipated by faith what their eyes now observe, and their very beings now burst with the joy of salvation. Nothing will separate them from their Saviour again. The reunion with Christ will be at the same time a reencounter with friends and relatives separated by death. They embrace each other in expressions of love that will last forever, because that day death itself will die for them, and permanent union will replace separation (1 Cor. 15:54-56).

6. *It Brings Judgment*: But the picture will have its dark side. For those who chose alienation from God, who denied their need for His presence in their lives, the return of Christ as king will be a traumatic experience (Matt. 24:30). They will experience excruciating pain as they realize that their separation from God is permanent and final. Their agony is intense, because they will not participate in the joy of the reunion. Screams fill the air as they desperately seek to hide from Jesus' inescapable presence (Rev. 6:15-17). They cry out in vain because no such refuge exists. Mercifully the brightness of the glory of Jesus puts an end to their miserable existence (2 Thess. 2:8). The intensity of God's love is too much for their self-centered existence and brings it to an end.

7. *It Takes Us Home*: Meanwhile the redeemed ones will rise into the sky to meet the Lord and to begin their journey home (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). Jesus said to His disciples: “In my Father’s house are many rooms. . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come back . . . that you also may be where I am” (John 14:2, 3). Now He will fulfill that promise, and together He and the redeemed will travel to the dwelling of God, where the Father will welcome them to the heavenly family (Rev. 7:9-17).

ENJOYING THE INCONCEIVABLE: ISAIAH 35

We know little about what life will be like in heaven, but the little we do know makes us eagerly anticipate it. Human language cannot fully express the new order of things. How can we conceive what perfect harmony will be like if all we know is dissonance? How can we define a life free from sin if all we have is one ruled by sinful tendencies and sinful acts? The best we can do now is to describe heavenly life in terms of negations—in terms of what it will not be like: “He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4). What will replace all of that? Fullness of life and joy!

Isaiah 35 describes the radical changes that will take place in nature and humanity at the moment when the divine realm becomes visible within the human realm. The prophet uses poetic language to express that which is beyond our full understanding.

Transformation of Physical Nature (Isa. 35:1, 2): Isaiah begins with the transformation of nature. He saw an explosion of joy and gladness in the natural world. Those places characterized by an absence of fullness of life—the desert, the wilderness, the parched land—now rejoice. They now possess the glory of Lebanon, the splendor of Mount Carmel, as life blossoms on them. What produced such a drastic change in the natural world, that wonderful trans-

mutation? Someone came to visit it, and it experienced a divine epiphany. The Lord showed Himself to the places of death and infertility, and when they saw His glory, it radically changed them. God’s powerful presence transformed nature and filled it with gladness and joy.

Transformation of Human Nature (verses 3-7): From God’s impact on the natural world the prophet moves to the condition of the human race. Humanity has also lost fullness of life. Scripture describes their hands, a symbol of power and creativity, as feeble. The knees—symbol of the ability to move, to travel, to stand tall—are so weak that they are about to collapse from exhaustion under the weight of the human predicament. Fear seizes human hearts—the fear of an uncertain future, of death, of disorientation—because they do not know their final destination, their goal in life. To them God has a word of comfort: “Be strong, do not fear” (verse 4). The road may be hard and difficult, but hold on, be courageous, do not allow fear to paralyze you, because something wonderful is about to happen!

A divine epiphany is about to take place—and it will change everything. The same divine apparition that transformed nature is going to defeat God’s enemies and bring salvation to His people. While the divine presence destroys the forces of evil that diminish and threaten life on our planet, it also has a salvific goal. It liberates human nature from the effects of sin. The coming of the Lord revives the feeble and fearful race and restores it to the pristine condition of God’s original creation. Then the blind will see the Lord’s glory and splendor. The ears of the deaf will open to hear the sound of God’s presence. God’s power will enable the lame to leap like a deer, and the mute join the natural world as it shouts for joy. This is the joy produced by the vision of the Lord in all His glory!

The Way of Holiness (verses 8, 9): The prophet saw a new and rejuvenated world. Liberated from the fear and threat of death and sicknesses, humans could now be all

that God wanted. That renovated world has a highway called the “Way of Holiness” (verse 8). While on earth God’s people walked the narrow way, but in the new world the narrow way will become a highway! Jesus said: “I am the way” (John 14:6). He has always been the Way of Holiness, and throughout eternity He will continue to be the very ground of our holiness.

The Nature of Joy (verse 10): Joy is difficult to conceptualize, particularly the kind the prophet describes for us. Here it is a new mode of existence, not an ephemeral emotional reaction to some fleeting pleasure. The joy we now know is temporal and limited. Sadness and pain usually quickly replace it. But Isaiah portrays joy as a permanent experience, one that will determine and possess human existence in the new world. It would appear that what the prophet calls joy will replace the sinfulness of our fallen nature. Whatever that indescribable experience may be, it will certainly include fullness of life in the visible presence of our Creator and Redeemer. No one can possibly anticipate what it will be like to live throughout eternity with Him.

Hope preserves human existence. The human heart experiences many hopes, but each one of us needs an all-encompassing hope, one that functions as the center of our lives on this world. The Bible identifies it with the blessed hope of Christ as the one who came, died for us on the cross, is now interceding for us in the heavenly sanctuary, and will soon return to take us home, bringing the cosmic conflict to an end. It is that hope that provides meaning to our existence and gives us the courage we need to face the future. Soon we will move from the realm of sin into the mystery of a new world absolutely free from its presence and effects. Oh, what a day that will be!

13

PREPARING FOR THE APOCALYPTIC CONSUMMATION

How can we prepare ourselves for the most glorious experience any human being has ever had? How can we anticipate what is at the moment beyond our full comprehension? How can we get ready to cross the threshold leading into eternity, into a permanent and visible union with our God and Saviour? Our readiness for heaven is the work of Christ in our hearts through the activity of the Spirit, and all we need to do is to be willing to allow Him to do it. But even if we do not feel the need to be ready, we can ask God to make us willing, and He will then place the desire in our hearts. We should not forget that the warfare between good and evil also rages in our hearts, and that it is Christ who takes the initiative in calling us to join Him during the cosmic conflict. By nature we are on the side of evil and in rebellion against God. Therefore, in order to be ready to meet our Lord coming in glory, we must let Him liberate us from sin’s enslaving power.

FREED BY CHRIST

Christ’s defeat of the dragon on the cross has made it possible for every human being to escape from sin’s power. No reason exists for anybody to remain a slave of sin, because Christ made ample provision on the cross for their release. But He did something else. He sent the Spirit to work in the hearts of sinners, to invite them to accept the gift of freedom and salvation that Christ has for them. The Spirit works in the hearts of all even before they realize that

it was the Spirit that was pulling them to Christ. He operates quietly, perhaps unperceptively, awakening our conscience and revealing to ourselves our true condition. There can be no healing if there is no awareness of the seriousness of our disease. To be spiritually healed, we must have the painful realization that we are in fact sinners in a state of alienation from God, heading toward eternal extinction. If you ever have felt the need to improve your life—that something was spiritually and morally wrong with your life—then you have experienced the presence and loving touch of the Spirit in your life. He wants us to realize that we need help. Many turn off that work of grace in their hearts through unbelief or restlessness, through the exciting experiences that the world offers, or through total indifference that justifies our natural evil nature. But the Spirit seeks to confront us with our true condition, and sooner or later He will reach everyone. It is just a matter of time.

The way we react to the influence of the Spirit in our sinful heart will determine whether we are willing to join Christ in His end-time war against the dragon or will remain under the enslaving power of sin. Those who let the Spirit draw them to Christ will exchange lordships and experience the cross's liberating and transforming power. They are the ones who, when confronted with their existential uncleanness, acknowledge it and cry out to God for a radical change in their lives. Through confession and repentance the soul acknowledges its existential aloofness from God and others and the pain it has caused God, others, and itself. It finds in Christ a new power that reorients and enriches the life. The soul turns to Jesus as the only hope of re-creation and renewal—and Jesus does not reject it.

Repentance should result in a personal and permanent commitment to the Lord manifested through the baptismal rite. Baptism unites us to Christ and His death (Rom. 6:3). It publicly expresses the fact that we believe that Christ's death is our death, that He died in our place. When we are

baptized, we also participate spiritually in Jesus' resurrection. We come out of the water endowed by the Spirit with freedom to live a new life in harmony with the principles of the kingdom of heaven. This public declaration of faith is an indispensable part of our preparation to meet our Lord at His return.

JUSTIFICATION AND NEW BIRTH

Through faith in Jesus we are accepted by the Father, because in Him God paid the penalty for our sin. This is justification by faith. God placed our sin and its consequences on Jesus, and He died in our place and redeemed us (2 Cor. 5:21; Mark 10:45). When we believe that Christ received what we deserved—in fact, what was ours—and we repent and confess our sins, we are reconciled to God and declared righteous by Him (Rom. 3:22-24). Our salvation is God's doing from beginning to end. On the cross He provided the means of salvation, and through the work of the Spirit He creates in our hearts the need to seek the Lord and thus leads us to repentance, confession, and conversion. It is the Spirit who takes us to Christ, in whom we are justified by faith.

At the very moment that God justifies and accepts us the Holy Spirit also baptizes us. Our reception of the gift of the Spirit means that we belong to God—that is to say, that we are holy. But it also means that we have been born again. Our natural birth brought us into a world controlled by sin and death—we were sinners by nature. The new birth means that we do not belong any longer to that old humanity but to a new humanity initiated by Christ. It is a humanity at peace with God, reconciled with God, and united to God through faith in Christ. *No one is automatically born into this new humanity without being born again from above—from God* (John 1:13). Only those who have been born again are truly God's sons and daughters (John 3:6).

The new birth is a miracle of grace that excludes, by its very nature, human participation and initiative. It is a spiritual rebirth that takes place at the volitional and rational center of our very being, the heart. Those who accept the Spirit's invitation to lovingly submit their hearts to Christ will experience the mystery of the new birth. What takes place at that moment at the center of our personality is impenetrable and mysterious. We can say only that the Spirit breaks through our sinful nature to reach the very core of our existence. He brings peace to us, ending our enmity toward God (Rom. 5:1). In a mysterious way the Spirit defeats our selfishness and pours God's love into our hearts (verse 5). Becoming partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), we are new creatures, free from sin's enslaving power (Rom. 6:18). As a result, we are no longer in Adam but in Christ, no longer belonging to a humanity characterized by sin and death but to Christ. This personal and reconciling experience implants in our hearts new desires in harmony with God's will—something impossible before.

The new birth is not a mystical experience that erases our individuality. It might take place quietly, or it can be more emotional. But it is the beginning of the Christian walk with the Saviour. Now the Spirit empowers us to live as new creatures controlled by God's love (2 Cor. 5:14) and not by the selfishness characterizing those born only of flesh and blood. The principles implanted by the Spirit should then take control of our daily lives, and through that power we should begin to develop and reflect the values and loveliness of the heavenly family. We could even say that the Spirit is regenerating us daily into our Saviour's likeness.

GROWING IN CHRIST

The Christian life is a constant growing in God's grace. Grace initiated our relationship with the Lord, and grace now preserves it (Heb. 13:20, 21). At conversion we begin

a journey with our Lord as we walk daily with Him, contemplating Him and being transformed into His likeness. It is the natural response of love and gratitude of those who have experienced the saving power of the death of Christ. Never should we consider our spiritual and moral development to be in any way a means through which we attain salvation or complete Christ's saving work. They are rather the objective evidence that shows that we have been saved and justified by Christ alone. The absence of that evidence would reveal that we still remain outside the saving realm of Christ in spite of what we may say. Jesus compared Himself to a vine and His followers to the branches on which the fruit—the grapes—are to grow. The branch bears fruit only as long as it stays attached to and nurtured by the vine itself. "Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4).

We remain united to Christ when we willingly submit to His revealed will. In fact, sanctification is our humble and loving submission to God's loving will: "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). Such submission presupposes a possible conflict of wills—God's and ours—but that we are willing to express self-denial by acknowledging God's wisdom and love communicated to us through His call to obedience. But obedience goes deeper than that. If our obedience depends upon our union to Christ through the Spirit, then our obedience is simply a vehicle through which God expresses His love to others. When we obey Him, He is using us—our bodies, our minds, and our skills—to touch others with His love. Obedience is a spiritual disposition that consists of placing our lives before God for Him to use as He pleases and to His glory. Yes, our will is involved, but it consists of deciding to obey Him and in reaffirming that decision. The Spirit provides the power we need to remain attached to Christ.

Our communion with Christ keeps us united to Him. Those who want to have a strong body need to do physical

exercises every day; otherwise fat accumulates and muscles lose their strength and flexibility. The spiritual aspect of our life as intelligent creatures requires constant nurture and exercise in order to keep it in optimum condition. We need a daily program of spiritual exercises that will help us maintain a healthy connection with our Saviour. This should include communion through prayer, through the study of the Word, and through a willingness to let the Lord use us to serve others in need and/or by sharing with them our faith. Sharing our faith with others both strengthens it and helps us to understand it better. Such a program of communion with the Lord could be a private and personal one, but couples with children could turn it into a family activity that will greatly benefit our future generations. Those who are waiting in the Lord and getting ready for the Second Coming will continue to grow in grace through communion with Him.

DANGERS AHEAD

1. *Religious Formalism:* Our world keeps us so active and busy that we hardly have time and energy to continue to grow in grace and in knowledge of our Saviour. The risk that we face as members of God's remnant is that our religious experience may become formal and superficial, lacking depth. In other words, we confront the temptation of professing a faith relationship with Jesus and not living up to it—of professing to believe something and not putting it into practice. As the message to the church of Laodicea indicates (Rev. 3:14-22), this may be one of the greatest challenges that we face today.

The message of Laodicea addresses church members who honestly believe that they have all they need in their spiritual life. They confuse knowing *about* with personal knowledge and full commitment to what they know. Although they have heard the message of truth, they have failed to appropriate it to themselves. "As a people we are

triumphing in the clearness and strength of the truth. We are fully sustained in our positions by an overwhelming amount of plain Scriptural testimony. But we are much wanting in Bible humility, patience, faith, love, self-denial, watchfulness, and the spirit of sacrifice. . . . It is not enough to merely profess to believe the truth."* Claiming that we have been justified by faith without showing the evidence for it, as reflected in a life of total commitment and obedience to the Saviour, is meaningless. It is tantamount to saying "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing" when the truth is that "you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). The Christian message should take control of the heart and incarnate itself in what we think, plan, and do. It should accompany us everywhere we go and determine the way we relate to others and to everything society offers us. We must allow the Spirit to transfer the values and principles of our religious convictions to the working place, to our social life, and to our private moments. Otherwise we have only an external profession of faith. To be ready for the coming of the Lord is to start living here on earth the kind of life that we will enjoy in the kingdom of God.

2. *Spiritual Discouragement:* Those waiting for the Lord must persevere in order to be overcomers (Matt. 24:13). The long pilgrimage discourages some. Paul, confronting a congregation going through a similar situation, wrote: "Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees" (Heb. 12:12); in other words: "Keep on walking; the pilgrimage is not yet over!" "For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay'" (Heb. 10:37). We have observed how much emphasis the book of Revelation puts on the need to persevere, to hold on to Jesus in spite of any opposition and trial. Because we are involved in a spiritual war on the side of Christ, we are the target of the enemy's attack. The enemy constantly bombards us with sinful propaganda, hoping to discourage us

or to separate us from our alliance to our Saviour. He attacks us personally, tempting us to question God's leading in our lives. In church he seeks to convince us that God has not given us a message and a mission for the end-time. Some of those who have fallen through discouragement and frustration have angrily turned against the church, becoming our enemies. Yes, the dragon wages war with the remnant, doing all it can to divide and discourage the saints in order to conquer them. We need perseverance and a firm and deep rooting in the truth that God has entrusted to us.

THE REMNANT WILL OVERCOME

The attacks of the dragon will not be able to defeat the remnant. They will threaten their existence, but they will not be able to extinguish them from the face of the earth. A group of human beings will be ready to meet the Lord coming in glory! In fact, we are not an endangered species.

Ornithologists tell us that during the 1860s the United States of America had 9 billion passenger pigeons. Humans began to hunt them on a massive scale, using the feathers for mattress stuffing, some of the inner parts of the birds for medicinal purposes, and the meat for food. Many birds perished in shooting matches. The result? On September 1, 1914, the Cincinnati Zoo had the one remaining pigeon. They called her Martha. For 14 years they had been offering \$1,000 to anyone who could bring a mate for her, but none was found. On September 1, at 1:00 in the afternoon, the pigeon died—and with it a species.

That will not be the experience of God's remnant people. The Lord will preserve the human race through a faithful remnant. As a matter of fact, God has already preserved a remnant of the human race through His Son. He became human, a member of the human family, and God took Him to heaven to His throne out of the reach of the dragon because He had defeated it once and for all. Think about this. If all human beings of the past, the present, and the future were to

reject the salvation offered to them by Jesus—if all of them were to perish—the human race still would not be eternally extinguished from the universe. The Son of God would remain forever as the embodiment of God's remnant from Planet Earth! He is an earthling and will be one for eternal ages! But the good news is that the Son of God has many other brothers and sisters who through Him will overcome the dragon. They too will be preserved and become part of God's remnant people on earth. Through them the human race will survive throughout eternity.

Apocalyptic prophecies point to that glorious future of perfect harmony at a cosmic level under the peaceful and loving leadership of a God who was willing to become human and die in order to preserve a sinful and rebellious fragment of His immense creation. In spite of their apparent pessimism, apocalyptic prophecies offer a fundamental and essentially positive outlook for the human race. They indicate that our deepest need for restoration and freedom from the sickness of sin will become a reality. It is this essentially positive perspective that instills hope in the hearts of millions of individuals who eagerly anticipate the full realization of those prophecies. Those who overcome will experience the indescribable joy of a hope that did not fail, and will spend eternity praising God and the Lamb for their mercy and unfathomable love. We should all be there.

* Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 3, pp. 253, 254.