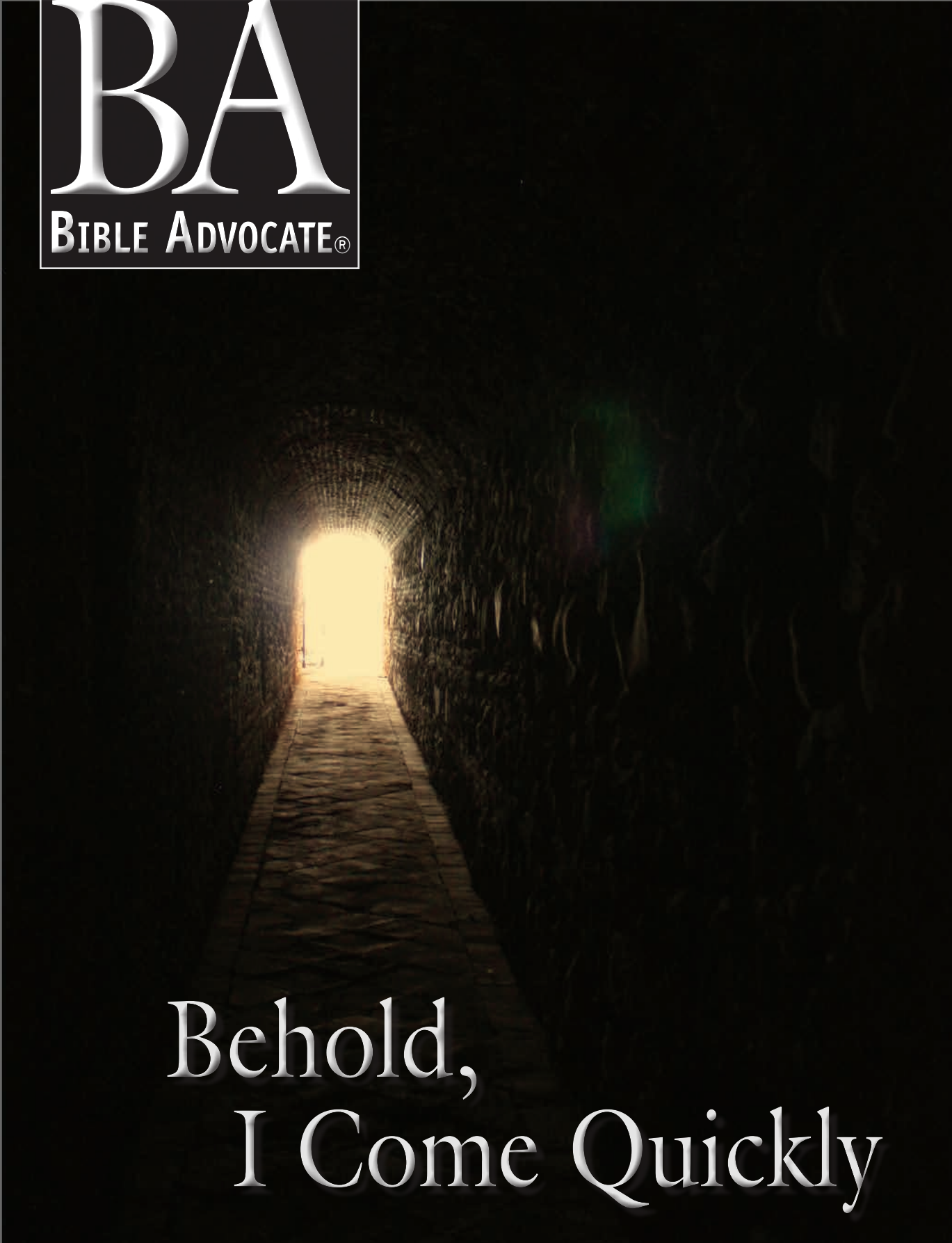


November - December 2015

A photograph of a long, dark tunnel with a bright light at the end, creating a strong sense of perspective and hope. The tunnel walls are made of rough, textured stone or brick, and the floor is paved with square tiles. The light at the end is a bright, warm yellow, illuminating the path ahead.

Behold,
I Come Quickly



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2015: Crossroads

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The Prophetic Edge

The year 2016 is devoted to discipleship in the *Bible Advocate*. We're looking forward to exploring that key theme through six lenses taken from Ephesians 4:4, 5: one Lord, baptism, faith, Spirit, body, hope — and with one God over it all. Stay tuned (and consider contributing!).

But not too fast; 2015 isn't over yet. As is our tradition, the final BA of the year is dedicated to prophecy — specifically, Jesus' final words in the last chapter of the Bible: "Behold, I am coming quickly!" (Revelation 22:7a, 12a, 20a).

Prophecy in general — and this prophetic promise in particular — does not invite us to prognosticate. They do not call us to predict the "day and hour," as many have been prone to do.

At the same time, the opposite holds true. Prophecy can't be ignored, relegated to the past, or explained away by those frightened, skeptical, or just annoyed by the prophetic challenge. Like all prophecy, "Behold, I come quickly!" unsettles us with this reality: "Prepare to meet your God . . ." (Amos 4:12). In other words, *are you ready?*

The prophetic word comes from the margins and puts us on notice. It reminds us that we live at the edge of history, between resurrection and return. Its voice confronts us at the edge of judgment and hope. For every generation, this means living at the edge of future expectation and present faithfulness.

"Behold, I come quickly!" brings us to the edge of being His people and anticipating His future. Prophecy speaks to the now as it relates to tomorrow and speaks to the church as she relates to the world.

This is why the prophetic word is so important for us today. It's why Moses hoped that all God's own would be prophets and Paul saw prophecy as the chief gift (Numbers 11:29; 1 Corinthians 14:1, 39). It boldly orients us in God's time, while also critically positioning us within this world.

The prophetic word challenges us when we're tempted by nationalistic idolatry, political manipulation, economic injustice, cultural accommodation, religious hypocrisy, and personal complacency. "Behold, I come quickly!" is repeated thrice so we'll not forget who is Lord as we stand patiently at the edge of decision.

I pray the prophetic reflections found in this year-end *Bible Advocate* will bless you as we face our time and place together, hopefully and faithfully in Jesus Christ our Lord.

— Jason Overman



Contrasting the wicked
with the redeemed.
by Israel Steinmetz

Ours is a time of fascination with sexuality and its myriad deviations. The “sexual revolution,” traced to the 1960s in the US, is entering its third generation. Already in 2015 we’ve seen

- the release of a film adaptation of a bestselling novel about sadomasochism, followed by yet another movie about male strippers;
 - the US Supreme Court ruling that same-sex “marriage” is a constitutionally protected right;
 - the spokesman for a leading restaurant chain accused of sexual crimes involving children;
 - several prominent Christians caught in sex scandals;
 - a website that facilitates extra-marital affairs hacked, exposing 32 million users.
- The list goes on.

As every dark corner of sexual immorality is explored, Christians are reminded to live in the light of Scripture. Thankfully, Scripture speaks at length about sexuality, *commending* loving sex within marriage as holy — divinely ordained and sensually delightful



— while *condemning* extra-marital and other immoral sexual practices as sinful — destructive and death-dealing.

This bifurcated view of sexuality is writ large in Revelation’s visions, particularly those of the whore and the bride. The whore of Babylon is one of Scripture’s most lascivious and vile characters, while the Lamb’s bride is one of its most winsome and pure. In these two we see a microcosm of the biblical narrative on sexuality and a call to purity in our relationship with God and one another.

Genre-sensitive interpretation

Of course, to appreciate this we must read Revelation on its

own terms. The book identifies itself as a revelation, or “unveiling” (1:1), letter (1:4-6), and prophecy (1:3). Let’s see an example of how genre-sensitive interpretation can aid in understanding by looking at the visions of the whore and the bride.

Vision of the whore. The whore features prominently in the visions of Babylon and its fall in Revelation 17-18. She is powerful, promiscuous, and pernicious. The earth’s kings are intoxicated by her immorality as she openly advertises her blasphemy. She is drunk on the blood of the saints and rules over the multitudes and kingdoms of the earth (17:1-18). When the whore falls to judgment, the kings of the

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earth don't mourn her but the loss of her wealth (18:1-20). Conversely, a multitude in heaven celebrates her destruction (19:1-6).

Vision of the bride. In stark contrast to the whore is the bride, a major character in chapters 19-22. The bride is pure, holy, and beautiful (19:8; 21:10-14). She's beloved by the Lamb and prepares expectantly to be with Him (19:7; 21:2). Their wedding supper is an event for the cosmos, and ushers in an eternity of righteousness. So intimately connected are the bride and Lamb that her glory is the "glory of God" (21:11), and her brilliance is — like the One on the throne — compared to a perfect

jasper (4:3; 21:11). As the visions end, the bride joins the Spirit in a longing cry for Jesus to "Come" (22:17).

Apocalyptic features. Here we have graphic apocalyptic visions of a purple-clad prostitute dominating the world and a glorious city-bride marrying a slain Lamb. For many readers, the imagery is overwhelming and confusing. But let's remember the purpose that apocalyptic literature serves. The symbols reveal the truth about evil and oppressive systems and their inevitable overthrow by a God of righteousness and justice. The visions of the whore and bride are symbolic portrayals.

The whore represents evil. She is openly engaged in wickedness

and is responsible for the persecution and death of the righteous. She reigns supreme over the cultural, economic, and political powers that oppose God's rule. She is "the great city." While Babylon was destroyed long before Revelation's writing, it remained a powerful symbol of corruption, immorality, and materialism. Sexual promiscuity and filth function as the central symbols of its evil.

The bride represents God's redeemed people. While described variously throughout the book, they are those who have found salvation in the Lamb and are forever set apart from the kingdoms of this world. Their robes of righteous deeds are made white by washing in blood. They are faithful witnesses to the truth in a world held captive to lies. Sexual fidelity and purity function as the central symbols of their righteousness.

Epistolary features. Now let's view these visions from the standpoint of a letter being written to seven first century churches. Here we should pay special attention to those receiving the letter. How might each group be affected by our passage?

Those who've grown complacent (Sardis, Laodicea) should recognize that they're in the midst of a cosmic battle of good

As every dark corner of sexual immorality is explored, Christians are reminded to live in the light of Scripture.

and evil. Either you're a member of the multitudes that serve the whore, or you are a member of the bride. There is no third option. The churches that have accommodated themselves to materialism and sinful culture (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira) should ask, "Is my true treasure in Babylon or the New Jerusalem?" Those suffering persecution for their allegiance to the Lamb (Smyrna, Philadelphia) should feel justified and encouraged: Judgment is coming against wickedness, but a reward awaits them.

Prophetic features. As a prophet, John communicates God's word to God's people, assuring them of His love and sovereignty and calling them to covenant faithfulness. The whole letter is a call for believers to take part in faithful witness and worship to God in the midst of a world dominated by the powers of evil.

The whore is a prophetic symbol of evil and its call for allegiance in the form of blasphemous rejection of God, immoral living, and materialistic obsession. The bride is a prophetic symbol of righteousness and its call for allegiance in the form of love for God, purity, and prioritizing spiritual wealth.

Alternatives today

As Christians, we still live in a world overrun by evil. The whore still rules over the kingdom of darkness, dictating economics, politics, and culture. The whore is not the Roman Catholic Church, a secret society, or a coming one-world government. Rather, it is a symbol of evil powers at work in all those who have not been redeemed. Sexual immorality symbolizes the fallen state of humanity, because it embodies a rejection of God, unrestrained satisfaction of appetites, and the

horrific consequences of sin.

Those who have been redeemed are symbolized as a chaste and beautiful bride, eagerly awaiting the return of Christ. They commit themselves to righteous living in a sinful world, acknowledging that their reward is eternal, not temporal. Sexual fidelity symbolizes the redeemed state of humanity because it embodies a submission to God, righteous fulfillment of appetites, and the unspeakable pleasures of holiness.

To apply this portion of Scripture, we turn away from the wickedness of this world with its rejection of God, unrestrained lusts, and obsession with wealth. We turn instead to our Redeemer and soon-coming Lamb. We live lives of trust in God, righteousness, and prioritization of eternal treasure. This lifestyle includes a commitment to God's design for sexuality in our relationships with one another.

But the disciplines of sexual purity and fidelity are but one example of faithfulness to God. As we live in faithful purity — both sexually and otherwise — we join the Spirit and say, "Come, Lord Jesus!" **BA**

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Be sure to read other prophecy articles at baonline.org.

Questions & Answers



Jesus said He's coming quickly, but He hasn't returned yet. Doesn't this show that the Bible is not really trustworthy?

The words "I am coming quickly" are found on the lips of Jesus four times, all in the book of Revelation (3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). These are the only Bible texts (KJV) where the word *quickly* is linked to Christ's ultimate return. A review of Jesus' earlier predictions of His return suggests that *quickly* in this setting might speak not just to the possibility of Christ's prompt coming again after His departure to heaven but also to the sudden and unexpected nature of His return, as He had predicted when speaking to the Twelve.

To assist the reader in recalling how Jesus repeatedly addressed this quality of sudden and unexpected quickness about His return, we quote several of those expressions here, lifted from Matthew 24:36-44; Mark 13:32-37; and Luke 21:34, 35: "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. . . . be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. . . . Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. . . . For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth."

On the other hand, there are no passages in the four Gospels where Jesus says clearly that the time between His ascension and His ultimate return will be small or short.

It is true that Jesus' first disciples and the early church did misunderstand these words, and others, from their Lord to imply that His return would be within a full generation of when He spoke them. In the Olivet Discourse on prophecy, for example, Jesus had said, "This generation will by no means pass away till all these things

take place" (Matthew 24:34; see also 10:23b and 16:28).

As the years after His death, resurrection, and ascension turned into decades, and decades into centuries, the church came to realize that these words were not intended to be time or date predictions for Jesus' return to earth, but could as easily be understood in other ways. Had not the Christ also said that the time of His coming was uncertain to everyone but the Father, that no man could know it, and that believers should live in constant watchfulness and readiness for what would come like a thief comes — in sudden surprise and without warning?

In this way the Christian church grew in grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior. Led by the same Spirit of God that lived in Jesus and spoke the very words of God through Him, believers came to understand that Jesus had not foretold that His bodily return to rule and reign on earth would come immediately, or within forty years, or within a century, or even within two millennia of when He foretold it. Rather, believers understood that Jesus' return would come unexpectedly, unannounced, suddenly, and speedily — quickly! — when it came.

The Bible is trustworthy not because every word and verse in it is immediately clear to everyone who reads it, but because it faithfully reports the mighty works and words of God through Moses, the prophets, and most emphatically, through the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostolic witness. Yes, there are difficult texts and concepts here and there in Scripture, but none sufficient to negate the immeasurable benefits of the whole. Yes, Jesus Christ is coming quickly just as He promised — one way or another.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Don't take a chance on false prophets.
by David Kidd

Sam: I believe the saints will be raptured away before the terrifying rule of Antichrist. Watch out for falling airplanes!

Dave: I believe this is a false prophecy built partly on a misinterpretation of Daniel 9. It provides a false sense of security to some who think that if they're not ready at Christ's return, they'll at least have a chance to get right with Christ during the tribulation. Watch yourself, Sam, and be ready!

Sam: That's OK, Dave. You have a different view. Let's not debate it. After all, Bible prophecy is not a salvation issue!

Folly of false prophets

Were Sam and Dave right in their conclusions? I wonder if King Jehoshaphat and King Ahab would agree with them. Four hundred prophets told them to go to war at Ramoth Gilead, but the prophet King Ahab hated, Micaiah, warned of disaster if they went (2 Chronicles 18:16-22). King Ahab died at Ramoth Gilead because he listened to the false prophets.

I wonder whether the people of Judah living in Jeremiah's day would agree that prophecy is not a salvation issue. Jeremiah warned, "Surrender to the Babylonians or die!" (see Jeremiah 21:8, 9). Of course, the false prophets, whom many followed, counseled otherwise.

Note what Jeremiah 23:16, 17, and 32 say false prophets can do to God's people and how they do it. They make us worth-

Prophecy: Salvation Issue?

less; they don't profit us at all. They do this deliberately through lies and recklessness. The cruel Babylonians mercilessly came against Judah. Jeremiah was right!

Fast-forward to the New Testament. Many people heard Jesus. Some understood that He was fulfilling messianic prophecies and was their Savior. Others, however, including the respected religious leaders, turned against their only hope of salvation. As with King Ahab and Judah, Bible prophecy became a salvation issue for them when they crucified Christ, did not repent, and did not heed Jesus' warnings about the impending destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 23:31-38; Luke 19:41-44; 21:5-24). As Adam Clarke wrote, "[I]t is very remarkable that not a single Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem though there were many there when Cestius

Gallus invested the city."¹ They fled and were saved.

True test

We therefore learn that prophecy can be a salvation issue when we fail to tell the difference between a false prophet and a true prophet. As in Jehoshaphat's case, a false prophet can cause us to join the wrong people.

Hence, we need to take serious heed of the test of true prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1-3; 18:22). They will be loyal and obedient to God. Their "Thus saith the Lord" will never fail. The safest ground for us is not to accept the prophetic teachings of anyone unless we are fully con-

1. Adam Clarke, as quoted by Ralph Woodrow (http://www.the-highway.com/matt24_Woodrow2.html). Web accessed 9-17-15.



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vinced of their godly manner of life and that their teachings are consistent with the Word of God.

As Jesus said, “If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matthew 15:14).

Clarification and warning

It is not our intention to give the impression that the very end time will be like the times of Jehoshaphat, Jeremiah, or AD 70, when people had to recognize specific signs and follow specific physical instructions (i.e., escaping Jerusalem) to be saved. That salvation was physical, with a physical way of escape.

The salvation this article is concerned with is spiritual and solely dependent on our being in right relationship with God through Christ. The point of using the physical examples is simply to show the importance of distinguishing between true and

false prophets.

Beware: Bible prophecy is also a salvation issue if we become false prophets ourselves. Revelation 22:18-20 provides a severe warning in this regard. If anyone adds to or takes away from the prophecies of the book of Revelation, God will take away his or her part from the Book of Life.

So let’s not be reckless with prophecy as the false prophets were in Jeremiah’s day. It’s reckless to teach from a Bible prophecy if we have not fully considered its context, if we are not sure of its meaning, and if we are not adequately trained. When we have the slightest doubt, keeping silent on the meaning of a prophetic text is by far the wiser option. Remember, teachers will receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1).

Grand purpose

The most important way Bible prophecy can be a salvation issue is if its grand purpose is not fulfilled in our lives. Jesus highlighted this in Luke 24:25-27:

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

The key aim of Bible prophecy is to point us to Christ our Lord and Savior. If we don’t put our faith in Him and follow Him, Bible prophecy has not profited us at all. It thus has become a salvation issue in our own lives.

In a close, trusting, and loving relationship with Christ we have nothing to fear now — or in the last days. Being in Christ and living in the Spirit is like being in Noah’s ark. The world may be falling apart all around us, but we are safe in Christ, even if our understanding of the end times is limited. The apostle Paul himself only knew and prophesied in part (1 Corinthians 13:9). What matters most is that we know, love, and serve the true Shepherd and Master of the end times. **BA**

David Kidd and his wife Angella live in Adelaide, Australia, where David serves as an elder in the Church of God (Seventh Day). Apart from Christian ministry, David enjoys playing tennis to keep fit.





Revelation and living below the image of God. by Jason Overman

We humans have an affinity with beasts. Little wonder, considering we both were made from the ground on the sixth day.

I often ask myself, *Am I a man or a beast?* A question like this occupying my thoughts speaks to our innate similarities and *differences*. After all, the beast takes no thought for such concerns. Though man and beast were made side by side, human beings carry the breath and image of God. We alone of all creatures live under His command and contemplate being more, or less, than we were created to be (Genesis 1:24-28; 2:7, 19).

Where beasts begin

This line of thinking is no curiosity; it is of urgent importance. Consider the first and last books of the Bible, Genesis and Revelation. In Genesis 3 a beast of the field, the serpent, tempts the first family to disobey their Maker and reach beyond their grasp to be like God. The result is that in their attempt to be *more*, Adam and Eve became *much less* than God intended them to be. Their sin, and the fall that followed, links them — and all of us — to the beastly nature that deceived them in the first place.

Genesis 4 reveals the terrible consequences when Cain, like a beast of the field, slew his broth-

er Abel in the field. After Cain's sacrifice had been rejected, God warned him that sin, like a beast, was crouching at his door, desiring to take him (vv. 7, 8). Cain was to master this beast, but he didn't; the beast took him. And worse than killing him, it remade him in its own beastly, predatory image. God gave Cain a mark to keep men from killing him, but that mark also identified him as the beast that killed a brother.

Later, in Genesis 37, one brother becomes many when Joseph's brothers conspire to kill him, and lie, "Some wild beast has devoured him" (v. 20). Beasts abound as the brothers' behavior, far from brotherly, now conforms to the destructive

deception of that first beast of the field. The image of God is grossly distorted; man and beast interchange.

Where beasts end

These seminal Genesis stories are writ large in Revelation, where the serpent and his beastly spawns have grown to staggering proportions, threatening to swallow the world. They're now universal in scale: political, economic, cultural, all-encompassing philosophies of being. The potent images of the dragon, beast, and lamb-like beast found in Revelation 12 and 13 are painted in vivid, dreadful apocalyptic detail. This imagery shouldn't be taken literally; it both conceals specifics and reveals deeper realities that defy plain speech.

These multi-headed monsters rampage across history, ravaging and growing. Their appetite cannot be sated. They want your soul. They want your worship. They want your identity. That is what the mark of the beast is. The number 666 is the sign of the image and interest of the beast-man, who idolizes selfish sixth-day existence while denying the Creator who completes all in seven. This beastly boast is common in Scripture. Take Nebuchadnezzar, whose pride brought his heart down to that of a beast, until "seven times" passed over him and he recognized the Most High (Daniel 4:31, 32; 5:20, 21).

Revelation presents us with a showdown over whose image we will bear. Revelation 13 reveals a slaying beast and those who have his sign on their *foreheads* (the center of thought and identity). Revelation 14 contrasts this

with a Lamb slain and those who follow Him. They have a mark on their foreheads, too: the name of our Father God. His heavenly image is borne by those who live beyond mere earth-bound instinct or self-bound interest and freely trust and obey His lordship (Revelation 13:18; 14:1).

Battling beasts today

We know how the story ends; we know whose image wins. The Lamb will toss the beasts into the lake of fire at His coming (19:20). But until that day, we must not be lulled into complacency, thinking that the battle is behind us. It's still underway. The actors have not changed, nor have their tactics. The deception of the serpent of Genesis 3:1 is alive and well in the lamb-like beast of Revelation 13:14.

The beast as a God-denying, man-idolizing system of life remains all around us. The third angel's message of Revelation 14:9, 10 warns against conforming to this beast. But how do we overcome this political deception? How do we resist its economic dominance? How do we avoid worshipping at its altar? This beastly temptation that snared Adam and Eve, and so much of the earth since, presents us with a challenge. How do we rise above its near irresistible

domination of thinking, doing, and being?

It helps that the features of the four beasts of Daniel 7, corresponding to the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, are all rolled up into the grotesquely monstrous chimera of Revelation 13. We have examples to learn by. As generations before us, we know these greedy beasts when we see them. And as Daniel, John, and others recognized and withstood the idolatrous thought- and world-devouring beasts of history, God's people will endure their subtlety and strength in our own time, too.

But how?

Good news

The good news of Revelation is that God and the Lamb have already, and will, defeat evil in all its manifestations. This brings us hope and courage in the face of dragons.

The good news of Revelation is that those who worship God and the Lamb have both the testimony of Jesus and God's commandments (12:17; 14:12). This brings us patience and blessing in the face of beasts.

The good news of Revelation is that by the blood of the Lamb, we have overcome (5:9, 7:14; 12:11). By the blood of

As Daniel, John, and others recognized and withstood the idolatrous thought- and world-devouring beasts of history, God's people will endure their subtlety and strength in our own time, too.

Is Three Times Enough?

What do you love? What do you long for? Loving and longing uniquely unite in expectation. Humans have a gift for anticipation, and what we greatly anticipate has a way of shaping how we live in the present. So what do you look forward to, and how does that impact today?

The whole Bible ends with *an* answer to this question. In the final verses of Revelation, after John has endured the great apocalypse, he utters this solemn response: “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20b).

John’s final words, like an “Amen!,” are more specifically an answer to Jesus’ urgent, thrice-repeated promise in Revelation 22: “Behold, I am coming quickly!” (vv. 7a, 12a, 20a).

A blessing follows these decrees for the ones who keep the words of this prophecy and Jesus’ commandments, uniting His future with ours in present acts of faithfulness.

But I suspect if we are to answer Jesus’ triple promise as John did, a deep “longing love” must exist. Life is just too busy and distracting, too tempting to endure to His coming unless we are gripped and grounded in the love of our Beloved.

This challenge is addressed earlier in Revelation, where the church in Ephesus is warned about losing its first love: “I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand . . .” (2:4, 5). Jesus comes quickly, to reward or remove. Our “first love” readies us.

So the question isn’t *what* is your first love, but *Who*?

Jesus presses that question on Peter in the last chapter of John — again, three times: “Simon, do you love Me more than these?” Peter had gone fishing. We do, too. Just like Jesus’ tri-fold promise in the last chapter of Revelation, His tri-fold question to Peter demands a response.

“You know that I love You,” Peter earnestly replies each time. Jesus’ “Feed My sheep” and “Follow Me” redirect a straying disciple, reorienting his present and future.

“But what about John?” Peter wonders. Jesus’ response is for all of us: “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me” (John 21:3-22).

Jesus will come as He promised — and “quickly.” It’s a mere heartbeat away. The question is, are we ready? Are we following? Only love can ready us, following faithfully in the present as we anticipate our future with Him.

Let us be a people who love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8) and pray with John, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

— Jason Overman



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the Lamb, we have learned how God has redeemed all creation by sending His own Son in the likeness of a beast — not a slaying beast, like Cain, but as the Lamb slain, like Abel. By the blood of the Lamb, we see all creation — man and beast — in its proper place, praising the Creator of all (4:6-11).

This brings us wisdom and witness in the face of Lamb-like false prophets. This helps us tell the difference and avoid deception. Abel and Daniel, John and Paul distinguished monsters from lambs, the image of God from the idols of men, the redemption of divine love from the degradation of human lies. Now you and I must do the same.

Question answered

Am I a man or a beast? Paul in Romans 1 says we *do* have an affinity with beasts, exchanging divine glory for images of creeping things, exchanging gratitude for pride, truth for a lie, real worship for selfish idolatry. And we are turned over by God to the depravity that follows from these foolish exchanges.

This is the way the world is, but it is not the way it has to be. We do not have to be the wild, brute, evil beasts so many Bible writers warn against. God’s righteousness is revealed in Jesus Christ, His image restored. We’re not ashamed of this gospel because it is the power of God for salvation from every beastly way, if we will trust and obey.

If we will, we will not be beasts, but children of God. **BA**

by Ernie Klassek

By age thirteen, I had learned about the world's empires and kingdoms, past and present. And I had lived through one called the Third Reich, which was supposed to last a thousand years but thankfully ended after a mere twelve (1933-1945).

I read the Bible for the first time at age 28 and was surprised to find much about kingdoms, like Canaan (Psalm 135:11) and Babylon — called the “glory of kingdoms” at first (Isaiah 13:19) but banished into darkness in the end (47:5). I was amazed that the people of Israel should want their nation to become a kingdom, like others, even after Samuel told them what a king would demand (1 Samuel 8).

In the New Testament I came across numerous references to the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God. I read about the Devil taking Jesus up to a high mountain and promising to give Him all the power and glory of the world's kingdoms if He would fall down and worship Satan (Matthew 4:8, 9). Unlike Israel earlier, Jesus did not fall to the temptation of the kingdoms of this world.

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He twice stressed the Father's kingdom: “Thy kingdom come . . . For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (6:9-13).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus began, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3). And concluded it “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 10).



Throughout history, the poor and the righteous have borne the brunt of persecution and oppression. The early Christians in Rome suffered even unto death under several emperors. Paul wrote to them that if we suffer with Christ, we will be glorified together and that our sufferings now can't compare with the glory to be revealed in us (Romans 8:16-18).

Paul encouraged the Corinthians, “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Indeed, hundreds of years earlier, Daniel had seen visions of that event (see Daniel 7:13, 14).

Under the sway of the Devil, humanity still wants its kingdoms, its own forms of governments. We have tried just about everything: small monarchies, big empires, dictatorships, communism, democracies, and republics — and at times, even anarchy. All have failed or are failing.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews lists God's faithful who

refused to live by the world's systems and lived instead by His rule: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, David — to name a few. Verses 35-40 describe what many of them suffered, such as torture, mockings, and scourgings. Verse 40 was written to Christians long ago, as well as to us, here and now: “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

Today, as we stand between the kingdoms of this world and God's coming reign, we are reminded to “walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:12). We can do this now, together, knowing that someday soon the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord (Revelation 11:15). **BA**

Ernie Klassek writes from Booragoon, Western Australia. Scripture quotations are from the *King James Version*.



Adorned in Love

by Laurie R. Crowson

“Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:6c-8).

As a young woman preparing for her wedding day, I had butterflies in my stomach, giddy with anticipation about becoming one with the man God had placed in my path. My betrothed husband, Jody, had lovingly cared for me, staying by my side through Dad’s first heart attack and nurturing me in a godly way.

For months I planned and organized. I found a backup minister in case my father got too tired to finish the ceremony. I cleaned Mom’s dress, arranged for a family member to fix my hair and make-up, and found just the right accessories to complement the dress. I was ready for my special day.

Remembering those preparations makes me wonder: Are we as a church adorned and ready for our Lord’s second coming?

In Matthew 22, Jesus relates the parable of the wedding ban-

quet. A king invites guests to his son’s wedding. When the king finds a guest who isn’t adorned in wedding garments, he orders the man to be thrown out.

These stories are not unlike what happens in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus spends years courting and wooing us, lovingly caring for us, making us giddy with anticipation for His second coming. God *nurtures* us, supplying our every need – and even some of our wants. Jesus welcomes us, brothers and sisters, laughing with delight when we come to Him. So what are we doing to prepare ourselves for His return?

Revelation 19:8 tells us what to do: be “arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright.” The last part of this verse defines *fine linen* as the “righteous acts of the saints.” *Righteous* means acting in accord with divine or moral law.

Though it can be challenging to act according to divine or moral law, it’s time to take our church’s temperature concerning righteous acts. Are we reaching out to our communities with clothes, food, and other needed supplies and encouraging our youth to do the same? Are we working side by side, cleaning up schools, providing free babysitting for parents who need a break? Are we resolving conflicts in the church biblically, instead of venting to our best friend about it and spreading gossip?

These and similar tough questions may not be answered overnight, but they should be openly and reverently addressed as we anticipate becoming one with our Groom. Revelation 21:2, 3 describes that union:

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”

There’s a picture of my daddy walking me down the aisle at my wedding. In it he is somber, pensive, and a bit sad. I, however, have the purest, most joyously serene smile – solely focused on my bridegroom.

Are we as a church adorned as a bride today? Do we have our bright, clean linens on, focused on our Bridegroom? Let’s make sure we’re ready for that special day. **BA**

Laurie (Walter) Crowson is a certified medical assistant. She lives with her husband Jody and sons J. J. and Greg in Eugene, OR.



by Lisa Harp South

My mind goes blank when someone asks if I have a favorite verse, even when the question is more specific, as in “Write a five-hundred word thought on a favorite verse from Revelation or about Christ’s coming.”

But within twenty-four hours or less of the request, lo and behold, what should pop up on my Pinterest screen: a photo of a lion with his paw outstretched and a beautiful verse. A favorite verse – one that reminds me of how much the Lord loves me: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

In this portion of Scripture, Christ is inviting “. . . the Laodicean Christians to dine . . . in the present at the messianic banquet . . . ; it is an invitation to a genuinely lavish banquet. . . .”¹ This invitation portrays not only the friendship but also the shared intimacy between the host and the guests.

And yet the guests are more than simply guests; they are also the bride. Revelation 3:20 seems to be connected to 19:9a:

Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb’” (NASB).

According to R. S. Rayburn, this reference to the marriage supper of the Lamb clearly shows Christ’s love – His tenderness – for His people.² It also calls for us to prepare ourselves as an engaged woman prepares for her wedding – and even more so!



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We must be ready for His return. We must live as obedient and faithful servants.³

But must we do this on our own? In our own strength? No! Christ provides for our every need. We don’t have to seek wealth or fame. We don’t have to work ourselves into the ground to make ends meet. He loves us. He wants to take care of us. He desires intimacy with us. Wow!

Do I forget this occasionally? Yes – far too often. I let the cares of this world close in on me and swallow me up. Worry takes hold too fast. But I shouldn’t let it! The Ruler of the universe – the Creator, the Almighty – loves me and cares for me. I just need to “be zealous and repent” (3:19) and trust and obey. (That’s a favorite old hymn of mine, too.)

Can I trust Him to take care of me? To provide for me? Absolutely! Do I trust Him enough? No, but I’m trying. I’m learning. He’s brought me through a difficult

couple of years. He’s reproved and disciplined me (v. 19). But He hasn’t let me down yet. He has given me the strength to carry on. He is faithful and just. He is love.

Trust God. He has control of everything. Let’s prepare for the wedding banquet! **BA**

Lisa South is married and lives in Oklahoma as an isolated member of the Church. She works as a college site director and teaches history and writing courses part time.



1. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 775.
2. R. S. Rayburn, “Marriage of the Lamb,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Second Edition*, 745.
3. Ibid.

The Reward

I buried my talent;
I burned my lamp, waiting.

I fed myself
and drank;
I kept my clothing,
didn't visit.
Alone in prison You waited.

I sowed and reaped
what was mine,
believed I was with sheep.

You told me thrice,
"Behold, I come quickly!"
with vengeance and grace.

You did.

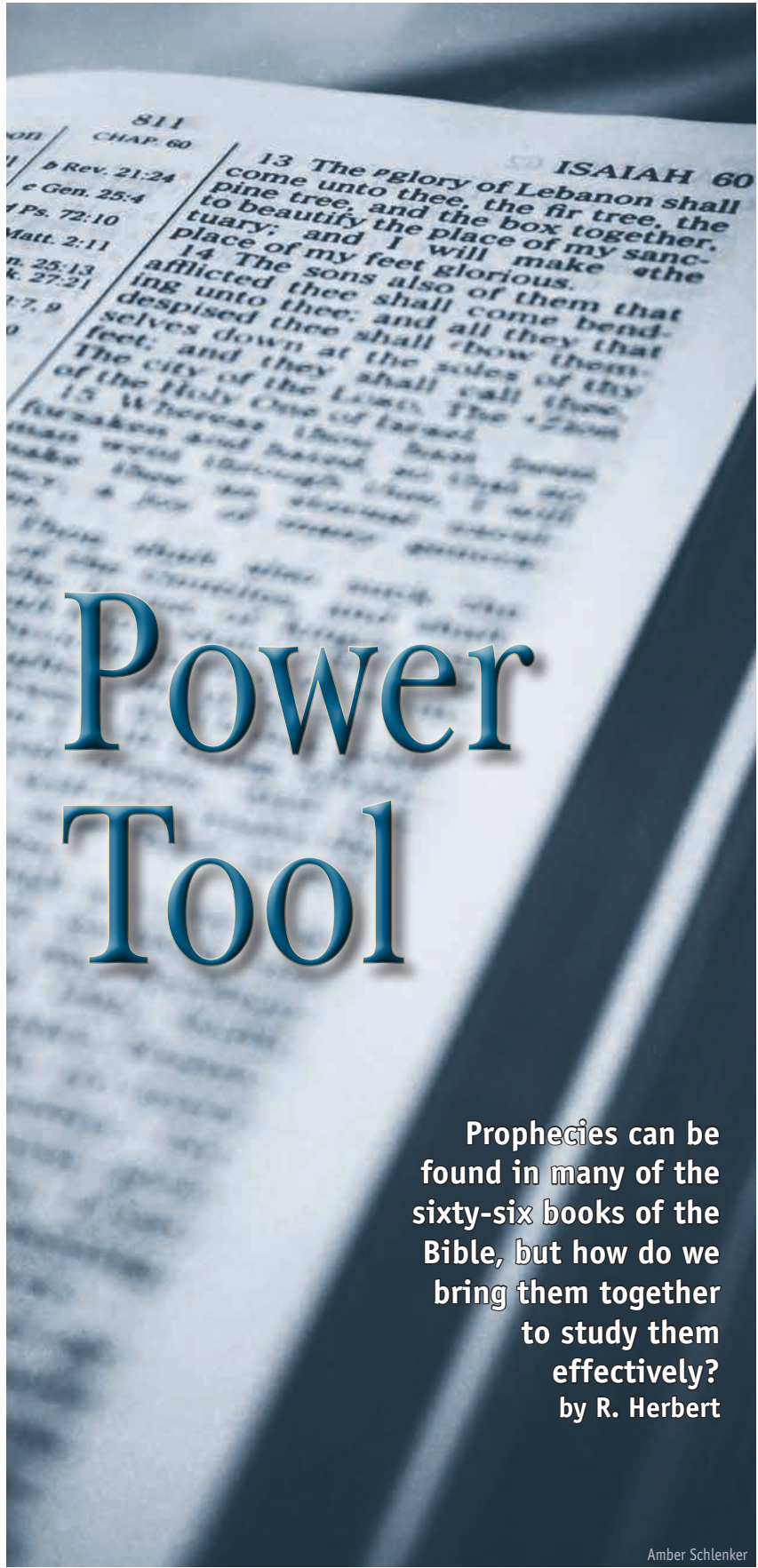
And I did not prepare,
for my work was only for me.

David Noorzdy

When Death is Spent

Sordid city, mountains fair,
Pleasant farm or thoroughfare
Evil hides, or outright dwells.
Though its presence often swells,
Oft we scarce regard its snare.
If we do, we'd wish to bare
A pathway to a place of rest,
And shelter in a country blest,
Where every deed's a fair success.
Such a land, alas, there's none!
Facts are shiftless, conflicts done.
Thus we'd seek where dark is small —
Raise our loved 'fore shadows fall.
And if or when the dark has come
In shape of want or terror's drum,
God, who planted that same good
That we would keep near if we could,
Will stand by us, if we stay by Him
And hark His Word, trust His voice within.
Though Death and Sin would take their fill —
Send us the grave, and our bodies still —
The Christ, who for the world did bleed,
He alone is who we need.
For out of darkness Light shall lead
Beyond the realm of mortal need,
For Love himself will greet us where
No tears are shed, for always there
No stain of evil finds a place,
Because its mem'ry's due erased.

R. J. Robledo



Power Tool

Prophecies can be found in many of the sixty-six books of the Bible, but how do we bring them together to study them effectively?
by R. Herbert

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, contains occasional prophetic statements scattered like seeds throughout its chapters. Revelation, the Bible's last book, reveals the great flowering of God's prophetic message. Between these two books we see the gradual growth of prophecy — part of what theologians refer to as *progressive revelation*. God did not have all the facts of His plan for humanity recorded in the beginning, but He has added details to the prophetic picture throughout the centuries and through successive biblical books (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

As a result, if we look carefully at many prophetic verses, we find additional information given as time goes on, expanding the prophecy like the growth rings of a tree. Even seemingly unique or isolated prophetic books, such as Jonah, are part of this development, reaching forward to future times through the ongoing addition of further layers of detail (Nahum 1; Matthew 12:39-41). Like other types of Scripture, prophecy is given "here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:10, ESV), and individual prophecies may contain many reflections of earlier and later revelations. So how do we connect these scattered prophetic messages?

You can use an effective tool to help "connect the dots": the body of cross-references included in the margins or center reference column of your Bible. But many of us don't use this aid or don't use it as effectively as we could. Let's look at the book of Revelation to understand this "power tool" in action.

* * * *

Amber Schlenker

Revelation quotes the Old Testament hundreds of times (estimated 550-850 times, depending on whether only direct quotations or allusions are counted). Seen another way, of the 404 verses in Revelation, some 278 of them (almost 70 percent) make clear reference to the Old Testament, and some of those many verses actually contain two, or even three, Old Testament references. While Revelation quotes or alludes to 24 of the 39 books in the Old Testament, most of the allusions come from the prophetic books, especially Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. That's where the cross-references of your Bible come into play.

Take, for example, John's vision of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21), which most cross-references compare with many of the statements in Isaiah chapter 60 (see sidebar). By comparing the Old Testament and New Testament prophecies, we see that the apostle John's statements were actually part of a continuing inspired prophetic tradition. John adds many details to the prophetic picture, but looking back at the earlier references can also provide more context for the later prophecies.

* * * *

Looking at these combined verses, the similarities between Isaiah's vision and that of John become clear. Despite slightly differing details of order and wording, by using the cross-references for the verses in either book, we can piece them together and see how closely John's vision matches that of Isaiah.

In fact, the correspondences between these two chapters

Seeing Isaiah in Revelation

Light of God	
Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.	Revelation 21:3a Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.
Isaiah 60:3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.	Revelation 21:24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.
Isaiah 60:5b The wealth on the seas will be brought to you . . .	Revelation 21:1b . . . and there was no longer any sea.
Isaiah 60:5b . . . to you the riches of the nations will come.	Revelation 21:26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.
Holy City	
Isaiah 60:11a Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night . . .	Revelation 21:25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.
Isaiah 60:12 For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined.	Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur.
Isaiah 60:14b . . . the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.	Revelation 21:10b . . . the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.
Isaiah 60:18b . . . but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.	Revelation 21:12, 21a It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. . . . The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl.

continued on page 20

End of Darkness

Isaiah 60:19

The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

Revelation 21:23

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

Isaiah 60:20a-b

Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light . . .

Revelation 21:25b

for there will be no night there.

Isaiah 60:20c

. . . and your days of sorrow will end.

Revelation 21:4

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

Isaiah 60:21a

Then all your people will be righteous and they will possess the land forever.

Revelation 21:27

Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

are so similar, some skeptics claim that John “copied” Isaiah. But this is unrealistic — not only because John knew many of his readers would be familiar with the book of Isaiah, but also because his vision contains so many details that are additional to, and independent of, what Isaiah wrote. It is as if both prophets were given similar visions, but John was given a clearer picture with more details, which fits the overall principle of progressive revelation that we find throughout the Bible.

* * * *

The principle of progressive revelation is clear. Carefully com-

paring Old and New Testament parallels (or parallels between books in the same testament) by using cross-references can help us better understand all the relevant verses of a given prophecy — just as we can better understand Isaiah through Revelation, and vice versa.

So why not dust off that study tool you have ignored for a while, and put it to work! **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) writes for several Christian venues, as well as for his websites *LivingWith-Faith.org* and *TacticalChristianity.org*. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.

The Sevens of Revelation



The book of Revelation is full of numbers. But one number stands out from the rest: seven.

Seven appears 54 times in Revelation, representing almost two-thirds of its total entries in the New Testament. We have

. . .

- 7 churches
- 7 spirits
- 7 lampstands
- 7 stars
- 7 lamps
- 7 seals
- 7 angels
- 7 horns
- 7 eyes
- 7 trumpets
- 7 thunders
- 7 heads
- 7 crowns
- 7 plagues
- 7 bowls
- 7 mountains
- 7 kings.

Drawing on the symbolic power of the creation story, where God finished and ended His work of making the heavens and the earth in *seven* days (Genesis 2:1-3), Revelation piles up the sevens to reinforce the apocalyptic climax and conclusion of time. The sevens of Revelation speak to God’s finished, completed work in history and the appearing of a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1).

— Jason Overman

The Door and the Storm

by Sarah Leteta

I'm reading the book of Revelation. It's night and it's stormy, which seems appropriate. Isn't a good mystery always better in the dark, with the occasional clap of thunder?

I haven't read this final book, with its final message, in a long time. I find myself stopping at chapter 4 to reflect on a "door" (v. 1) that's been mentioned a couple times in chapter 3 already: an open door Jesus sets before us (v. 8) and the closed door He stands at and knocks on (v. 20). When John goes through the open door in 4:1, he's suddenly at God's throne. There is thunder and lightning (v. 5).

Revelation is like a storm: It unsettles us with its symbolism and scenes of the future, shrouded in mystery. And storms can be scary. I wonder if John was afraid when he went through the door and saw those incredible sights. Was he tempted to close it?

In this moment, I decide to open my front door. I sit back down to read but can't concentrate. I get up, go back to the front door, and just stand there — far enough outside to hear the storm but enough inside to not get wet.

Something about John's experience takes me back to when I was a kid in Alabama. Spectacular storms would roll through, and the whole family would sit on the front porch and watch as the wind and thunder and lightning went nuts around us. I can see my parents clear as day:



Mom leaning on the railing, holding her long hair up off her neck, enjoying the cool wind, and Dad sitting, strumming his guitar as if the only thing missing were a soundtrack. We weren't afraid of storms.

I live in Canada now and still don't fear storms, but my kids hate them. They worry because they think all wind is a tornado waiting to happen. I'm always saying, "Kids, stop worrying! We live in Canada." They're quick to remind me of the great tornado that hit Edmonton in 1987 and blew the roof off one of the barns at the family farm. Their grandma saw the whole thing.

As I stand in the doorway thinking about my kids and fear and storms and Revelation, I'm aware that I fear other kinds of disturbances that life brings. I grab my phone and earbuds and listen to "Don't You Worry Child," by Swedish House Mafia. The song reminds me that our heavenly Father has a plan for all His children, young and old, for now and the future. We need not fear.

As the song ends, the rain slows down. I decide that I must somehow help my children overcome their fear. I will start by opening the door to thunderstorms, as John did — not revealing a God to fear but a God to trust. I'll read them the story of Jesus walking on the water to His disciples in the middle of a storm. "Do not be afraid," Jesus tells them (Matthew 14:22-27).

This is good advice for all of us, whether we're facing the tempests of life or reading Revelation. "Don't you worry, child," our heavenly Father says. We find Him on His throne, through the door and in the storm.

Safe and satisfied, I go inside and continue reading.

Sarah Leteta lives outside Edmonton, Alberta, with her husband Fred and their two children, Levi and Savannah. They attend the Parkland Church of God (Seventh Day).





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True Worship

by Andrea Slawson

Blessed is he who reads
and those who hear the words
of this prophecy . . . (Revelation 1:3a).

When I read these words a few years ago, their truth finally sank in: Revelation is a book of hope, not of doom. God in His kindness and mercy met me with a promise of blessings, and I received them!

One of those blessings is Revelation 4. In my opinion, it is the best chapter in the Bible. We get not only the slightest look at God and His authority but also the beautiful picture of raw, pure worship. The chapter is between the promise of a blessing to those who hear and the judgments of those who do not turn to the Lord. We see the throne

of God and His appearance like jasper, clear and radiant like a diamond, and a rainbow circling the throne. John uses precious jewels of awesome color in his description. Like Timothy stated in his first letter, God dwells “in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (6:16).

I’m envious of more than one aspect in Revelation 4. First, to be in the very presence of God, to be a part of His glory. Second, to give glory to God by worshipping Him without end – to be so full of God that I do not need rest from the worship (v. 8). So often our worship is what we have left over, but the example of the four winged creatures is that God is worthy of our best. They value God so much that their worship is unending. The twenty-four elders cast their

crowns before the throne – their highest achievement, their nobility. They take a posture of reverence in bowing face down before God – another example. Those closest to God, those in His presence, worship Him most.

We experience peace and awe in the worship setting – what it will be like one day when we live freely with God and worship as we were created to. Too often we think that worship is about us and how it makes us feel, about our needs, about bringing us to God. But the reality is like the example of the creatures and the elders: Worship is and should always be about and for and to God and His glory. Worship isn’t our action but our reaction to the glory of God. It moves us to respond in praise, falling on our faces in reverence.

The truest worship is real and unending. Revelation 4 shows us whom we should worship – God – and that true heart worship is not just an obligation to God but also a great privilege.

In order to have true heart worship with God, we must be with Him. God’s heart calls to us through His Word, and through it we will feel His love for us. He longs to bless us. All He asks is that we come into His presence.

Andrea Slawson is married to Bruce and has two sons, Andrew and Adam. She resides in Owosso, MI, and is a blogger for the Bridge Co-Mission, a ministry of the Northeast District.



Watch is a Verb

by Liorah Bogle

"But of that day and hour no one knows. . . . Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming — in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning — lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:32-37).

Four times in this short passage Jesus commands us to watch. But what does this mean? The definition of the verb *watch* is 1) to be sleepless or keep awake; 2) to be attentive or vigilant, ready; 3) to give strict attention to, be cautious, active; and 4) to be expectant.

As action verbs go, *watch* is not typical. Try to act it out. Compared to other action verbs, it doesn't seem to do much.

In Matthew 24:42, 44 Jesus says to "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming . . . at an hour you do not expect." He will come as a thief in the night, stealthily and silently.

So how do we watch without knowing when? How do we perform this task that Jesus commanded? What should watching look like in our day-to-day lives? Does it mean that we should wake up in the morning and do



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nothing but read our Bible, pray, and watch the news all day? Should we look up into the sky for signs of the clouds parting every hour, on the hour? I don't think so.

First Thessalonians 5 tells us that we who are of the day, who walk in the light (who are awake and watching), need to put on our armor — the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation — because watching will keep us busy! Verses 11-22 lay out many more daily activities for believers in this world of sin:

- Encourage one another.
- Edify one another.
- Warn those who are not living as they should.
- Comfort the fainthearted.
- Uphold the weak.
- Be patient with all
- Pursue good for all.
- Rejoice always.

- Pray without ceasing.
- Thank God for everything.
- Do not quench the Spirit.
- Do not despise prophecies.
- Test all things.
- Hold fast to what is good.
- Abstain from all evil.

I challenge all of us to meditate on and study each verb in this list and discover what God would have us do today, tomorrow, and the day after that. God has a blessing for those who watch (Revelation 16:15)! **BA**

Liorah Bogle, her husband William and five children live in Jasper, AR, where they attend and serve in the Church of God (Seventh Day).





The Big Picture

A vibrant twenty-first century church in a culture of extremes. by Jody McCoy

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For six thousand years, God's love has called us back when we've strayed. In the first two thousand years, God worked with individuals in a single community unified by a common language. In a community, we prefer to follow the crowd, forgetting that the crowd is also following us. With the anonymous security of safety in numbers, we unwittingly encourage each other to abdicate individual responsibility. How can God hold me accountable if everyone is doing it?

By the end of this first era, humanity had strayed so far that only one man could still hear God's call (Genesis 6:5-8). God rescued Noah and his family while He destroyed the entire world in a flood (7:19-24). This story illustrates that the unrighteous ignore His love. They drift too far. Once all hope is lost,

God grieves and moves on.

In the second two thousand years, God divided the global community after Babel (11:6-9) and chose Abraham as a paradigm of individual relationships (12:1-3). Abraham's descendants became the nation of Israel, and God gave them His moral law as an anchor against unrighteousness (Exodus 24:12). He moved Israel to the crossroads of the ancient world to serve as a righteous influence.

However, by the end of this second age, the Israelites were using the law to establish their own self-righteousness. They rejected Jesus when He came (Matthew 27:23-25); Paul laments their loss (Romans 10:1-4). From this we learn that the *self-righteous* ignore God's love as well. They do things their *own* way for too long. Once all hope is lost, God grieves and moves on.

After Israel rejected God's Son, God chose the Gentiles as His example (Hosea 2:23; Romans 9:23-33). Through Jesus, God provided a righteousness apart from the law (Romans 3:19-28). This third age, the age of Christianity, is now about two thousand years old. As Christians, we risk succumbing to both spiritual dangers of the preceding eras. At one extreme is a lawless grace that never transcends unrighteousness. At the opposite extreme is a graceless law that never transcends self-righteousness. Those at one extreme often justify their stance by pointing to those at the other extreme (John 8:3-11). However, in reality, which is worse: to be unholy or unloving (1 Peter 1:14-17; 1 John 4:8)? Both ignore God's holy love. Once all hope is lost, God will grieve and move on.

Though the trends are fright-

ening, God graciously rescues souls along the way (Romans 9:27; 11:5, 6). Our challenge as a church is to navigate successfully between the two extremes outlined above as we teach faith-based justification (Romans 3:20-31) and gratitude-based sanctification (Colossians 1:10-12). Through the continual outpouring of God's grace, our oneness in Christ leads to personal holiness as we grow in Him (Philippians 1:6).

Enemy of individualism

Today we're immersed in a culture that's taken the extreme views of law and grace to their logical end. At one end dwells a brutality bent on purifying the world of any interpretation of truth other than its own (radical Islam). At the other lurks an equal determination to undermine the foundations of truth itself (radical secularism). The former proclaims its own moral authority, while the latter proclaims its own moral autonomy. Self-righteousness and unrighteousness are at opposite extremes, but they share a common thread: individualism — the antithesis of God's love.

Individualism is an independent spirit that interprets benevolent correction as an affront to its moral authority and an imposition on its moral autonomy. In this corrosive environment, we learn to avoid any conversations of spiritual consequence. Paradoxically, we find that when we get together, we must leave each other alone.

How did we get here? As children, we first learn to be responsible for ourselves. Ideally, as we mature, our responsibilities grow

to include the welfare of others. This begins within the family, expands to our churches, and eventually reaches to our communities as God's love grows within us and we develop a compassion for humanity. The universal morality that guides us and binds us together comes from the Bible, and the power to love comes from His Spirit living within us.

This universal morality was lost when our culture rejected the Bible as the divine source of authority. On our own, no human has the moral authority to tell another human how to behave. Morality requires an authority that transcends humanity. Without the Bible's authority, right and wrong are nothing more than opinions. For example, "Thou shalt not kill" would mean nothing more than "Personally, I don't like murder, but that's just me. What you do is your business." As the ghost of God's morality fades away, a terrifying moral abyss awaits.

This culture infects us all. Since love invests itself in the lives of others, our practice of non-intervention deadens our sensibilities to care for others. Without a common moral bond, our community becomes a collection of self-focused individuals. Consequently, there is little sense of personal responsibility for any-

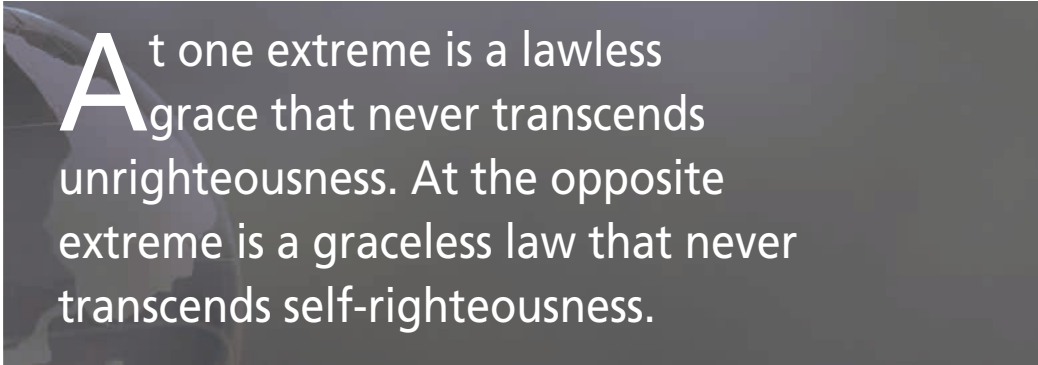
one but ourselves and little commitment to any greater cause. When we convene, we rely on nothing more than a collective self-interest to hold us together. Once the self-interest evaporates, so do we.

Individualism is the enemy of love; it keeps God's love at bay. We live in death's shadow, and we need His Spirit to lead us safely from its embrace. We must help each other, but the challenge is complex, since the disease causes us to reject each other's help.

If we are to succeed, we must expose ourselves to pain. We must patiently endure rebuffs and resistance as we allow His love to work through us. Love is willing to suffer for others, even at their hands. As we gain each other's trust, we can have deeper conversations. We can learn to correct each other without taking or giving offense. As we do, we can rebuild our sense of community. As we invest in each other's lives, His love will begin to resonate within our souls and reverberate throughout our churches. In this challenge, we stand or we fall. Eternity is in the balance.

A peculiar people

In the vision of a vibrant twenty-first century church, the Church of God (Seventh Day)



At one extreme is a lawless grace that never transcends unrighteousness. At the opposite extreme is a graceless law that never transcends self-righteousness.



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My Prayer Chair

by Joyce Starr Macias

Finding a special place to meet God every day is not a new idea. It's advice I've heard throughout my Christian life, and I'm glad I took it to heart some time ago. Over the years, my prayer chair and I have become the best of friends. It's where I read my Bible, pray, and ponder the wondrous things of God. Sometimes I rejoice. Other times, I weep. But I always find God waiting for me there.

My prayer chair would be just a piece of furniture to some people — a Bentwood swivel-rocker that is neither old enough to be antique nor new enough to be contemporary. Much like me, I think: nothing out of the ordinary and certainly not the latest model.

I used to keep the chair in my living room. I was alone then, a widow, much aware of my great need to pray and seek the solace of God's Word. In the loneliness of my after-work hours, the sight of my chair reminded me of the comfort I always found there. I never sat in it to watch television or knit or read. It became the hallowed place where I met God every day.

Several years later, I married a wonderful Christian man who had also endured many lonely widowed years. My prayer chair went with me when we moved to an apartment complex, although we had to do a lot of furniture juggling to squeeze "his" and "hers" pieces into our four rooms. We gave away many things, but not my prayer chair.

Prayer and daily devotions with my husband are precious times we share. I also love times of prayer in church when I unite with others in calling on the name of the Lord. But as much as I am blessed by praying with others, I never want to neglect time alone with God. Nothing can take the place of my own special time in my own special place where I meet with God.

Joyce Starr Macias writes from Phoenixville, PA.

defines a community for those committed to a gratitude-based, loving obedience to Christ (Titus 2:11-15; 1 Peter 2:9-12). Our Statement of Faith defines our common bond as a denomination within the larger body of Christ. Beliefs not defined in our Statement of Faith are individualized as personal convictions that encourage diversity without division. We are each free to differ in our convictions as we remain unified in His Spirit. Our foundation is the person of Jesus Christ, and His Spirit leads us into all truth (1 Corinthians 3:11; John 16:13). And at the heart of His truth is His love (Ephesians 4:15).

Since each of us progresses through a spiritual journey and new journeys are continually beginning, our churches will never be entirely free of unrighteousness and self-righteousness. Hospitals never rid themselves of disease, but patients do get better all the time. Love draws us in from both extremes as the unrighteous learn to obey and the self-righteous learn to love.

We all struggle with both. Our shared beliefs and personal holiness anchor our community, while personal gratitude and acceptance help us grow in grace and love (Revelation 14:12). We each worship together in gratitude as one community by His Spirit and His truth (John 4:23, 24). **BA**

Jody McCoy serves as executive director of the General Conference and lives in San Antonio, TX.





CoG7 In Action



Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Malaysia: New Great Commission opportunities await us in these and other least-reached nations of the world.



CoG7 missionaries stand ready. Your family and local congregation are invited to support one leader and commit monthly to pray and financially support this leader's mission. Will you?

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Contact us at 303-452-7973 or gcmisions@cog7.org.

November is Missions Emphasis.



Find out more at gcmisions.cog7.org
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Annual Hispanic Ladies' Retreat

In sunny Long Beach, California, the Bell CoG7 hosted the XXVIII Annual Hispanic Ladies' Retreat on Labor Day weekend (September 4-7). The 370 faithful women gathered from Argentina, El Salvador, Mexico, Canada, and the US to hear the theme "Build Your House on the Eternal" eloquently expounded by Sister Araceli Robles.

Sabbath evening concluded with a gala event at which some attendees modeled their eveningwear. Moved by an inspiring SHINE presentation, the ladies gave an impromptu offering of \$1,700 for this ministry.

New friendships were made and old ones renewed. The love shared among the sisters is amazing — tears, hugs, and laughter.

Next year's retreat is planned for Houston. A major discount is offered if registration is paid up front. Why not join us in 2016? *(Translation available.)*



July 8 - August 11, 2015, CoG7 member Adrian Crawford (left), son of Robert Crawford (UK), worked as a lab technician in an Ebola treatment facility near Freetown, Sierra Leone, and helped that country bring Ebola to an end. Recently, Sierra Leone reached zero cases nationwide. There must be no additional cases for 42 days for the country to be declared Ebola-free.

Pastor Appreciation

On page 29 of the September-October BA, ordained CoG7 elders who have served 25 or more years were recognized. Regrettably, seven men were inadvertently omitted from that list. Their names, hometowns, and years of service are given here for more "pastoral appreciation": **30-34 years:** Jose Balboa, Albuquerque, NM; Andy Hassen, Springfield, MO; **35-39 years:** Abel Zaragoza, Yucaipa, CA; **40-44 years:** John Lemley, Vancouver, WA; Edward Lewin, Oklahoma City, OK; Michael Vlad, Ava, MO; **50-55 years:** Dale Lawson, Turner, OR.

Calendar

November 6-8 - Fall Pacific

Northwest SWORD Retreat (WCD), ages 18-35+, Brooks Memorial State Park, Goldendale, WA; theme: "Building Upon the Cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19-22); guest speakers: Ben and Joy Sandford; contacts: Katelyn Chalus (541-743-1617; kate_the_angel44@hotmail.com), Danielle Hicks

STATEMENT

Of the ownership, management, and circulation (required by the Act of Congress of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code) of the BIBLE ADVOCATE, published bimonthly at Broomfield, Colorado for September 30, 2015.

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(509-842-4970; daniellesell-eck@yahoo.com), or Velia McDonald (425-404-0034; velia.mcdonald@gmail.com).

November 13-15 - Young Adult Ministry Retreat (ages 18-35), Angelous Oaks, CA, Camp Cedar Falls; theme: Discipleship (encourage, edify, and equip); guest speakers: Israel Steinmetz (San Antonio, TX), Jose Luis Arenas (San Jose, CA), Jose Hernandez (Las Vegas, NV); contact: sword.socal@gmail.com.

December 31 - January 3, 2016 - SWD Winter Youth Retreat, Camp Hoblitzelle, Midlothian, TX; early registration ends December 7 (\$165); more information: see COG7 Southwest District Student Ministries on Facebook.

“This We Believe” in Translation

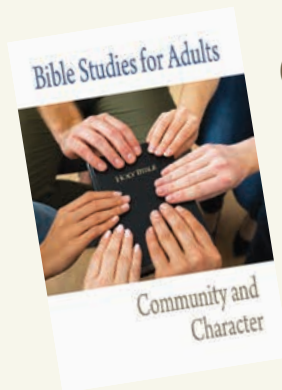
G. C. Missions is happy to report that we have actively translated *This We Believe* into many languages, including Spanish, French, Portuguese, Urdu (Pakistan), and Burmese (Myanmar). Translation into Telugu (India) and Cebuano (Philippines) is in progress. Translation teams for Swahili (Tanzania) and Kirundi (Burundi) are being set up, and Arabic (Middle East) is on the radar.

Thank you for your generous support! These translation efforts are your gifts at work to reach the world for the grace and truth found in our Lord Jesus Christ.



Attention, Adult Sabbath School Teachers!

Do you ever struggle with class prep or tackling a particular question? Join the new CoG7 online Sabbath School Teacher Forum for weekly discussion and resources so you can make the most of each lesson. E-mail Jason Overman (jason.overman@cog7.org) or Kevin Lewin (ourhouse@thelewins.us) for membership information.



Community and Character

The adult Sabbath school quarterly for January-March 2016 is available for order. *Community and Character*, written by Pastor Ken Lawson, explores the ethical norms of Jesus and the New Testament for that holy community God calls *church*. As members of the body of Christ, we commit ourselves to the moral life exemplified by Christ and taught in Scripture. Thirteen lessons cannot exhaust the subject of Christian ethics and character but will briefly cover the following critical areas: 1) Ethics toward Deity, 2) Personal Ethics, 3) Interpersonal Ethics within the Church, 4) Ethics toward Church Leaders, 5) Ethics within the World, and 6) A Personal Ethical Pledge to the Church.

Order from the Bible Advocate Press, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; e-mail bap.orders@cog7.org; or call 303-452-7973.



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International Congress

Europe

A complex continent, Europe presents big challenges for the Church in proclaiming the good news: post-modern thinking, lack of religious commitment, slowing economies, and more.

Delegates from eight countries (Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Ukraine, and the UK) convened in Gloucester, England, September 19-20. Representatives from Mexico, Nigeria, and the US were also present. The purpose of this gathering was to strengthen relationships among brethren in Zone 7, learn from one another, and seek solutions for greater collaboration. This memorable event combined worship and fellowship to improve carrying out evangelism, discipleship, and service for the glory of God.

On Sabbath, the Zone 7 delegates were part of approximately 500 attendees at the annual Missions Day in the Gloucester church. The day's theme was "Surrendering to God's Call," with Elder Whaid Rose giving the morning message. Afternoon presentations were made by missions agencies and the European delegations. Raising funds for the Church in Zambia received special focus.

Sunday morning, 45 or so delegates enjoyed a report-and-planning session. Following a presentation by Zone 7 Represen-



tative Paulo Coelho, delegates reported the status of the Church in their respective countries. IMC President Ramon Ruiz spoke on the mission and purpose of the Church, and reports were given by Whaid Rose, Ramon Ruiz, Robert Crawford, and Bryan Cleeton regarding Zones 1-6. Concluding the day was discussion concerning the Zone 7 challenges and facilitating greater gospel collaboration among the churches in Europe.

The Church in Zone 7 has sound leadership and potential for continued growth. While the challenges are great, we trust God to grant wisdom to achieve His greater purposes in this region. And we thank Him for the faithful leadership of Paulo Coelho, Robert Crawford, the Gloucester church, CoG7 in the United Kingdom, and churches in various countries that participated.

— Bryan Cleeton





While We Wait

“Come quickly, Lord Jesus” was the last thing I wanted to hear.

As a teenager growing up in the Church of God (Seventh Day), I would hear prayers ending with those words (usually the prayers of really old people, I thought), and I’d silently pray the exact opposite. “No, Jesus,” I’d plead. “Give me time to experience all the things I’m looking forward to: college, career, grown-up love, marriage, and what married people do. No, Lord Jesus. Please do not come quickly!”

It was kind of selfish and unfair, I thought, for those old people to pray, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” They were probably in their forties or fifties and had already lived their lives.

These days, I’ve joined the ranks of those “really old people” and have come to understand their perspective. It’s not that we’ve lived our lives and have nothing more to anticipate. And it’s certainly not that we wish to deny a younger generation the experiences of lives well lived. Rather, I think, it’s a matter of realizing just how dangerous and destructive the fallen world is and how amazing and wonderful our Lord Jesus Christ is.

So, yes – please “come quickly, Lord Jesus.” But until He comes, let’s not allow our focus on the glories of the future to distract us from our calling in the present. Speaking of His coming crucifixion, Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32, NIV throughout). Jesus was lifted up in crucifixion, and He *is* drawing all people to Himself. We have the great opportunity of being used by Him to do that as we “lift Jesus up” in an entirely different way.

How are we called to do this? By loving one another as He loves us. “By this,” said Jesus, “everyone will know that you are my disciples, if

you love one another” (13:35); by being “completely humble and gentle” and being “patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2); by making “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (vv. 3-5). As we practice love – Christ-like love – toward one another and those in our communities, we display the abundant life that Jesus came to give those who will receive Him. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,” said Jesus (John 10:10). We can lift Jesus up by demonstrating to those around us that Jesus *is* fulfilling that purpose.

A summer television series, *The Last Ship*, imagines a world decimated by a deadly plague. A doctor on board a US Navy destroyer develops the cure to the plague, but how can a limited amount of the life-saving vaccine be multiplied and spread throughout the entire world? By developing a way to make the cure contagious! People who come into contact with those who have received the cure become “infected” with the cure, incubate the cure within themselves, and then spread the cure to others.

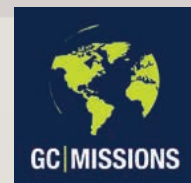
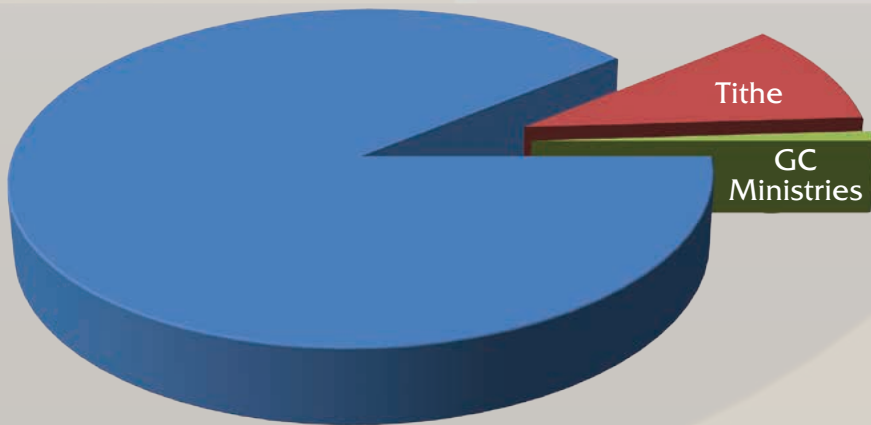
The world really *is* being infected and destroyed by a plague – the deadly plague of sin. “Come quickly, Lord Jesus!” But until Jesus returns, let’s each do our best to be contagious with the love of Christ. While we wait, let’s each practice the infectious love that lifts up Christ and builds His kingdom.

– Loren Stacy



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