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Sabbath School Lessons

Present Triumph-Future Glory



APRIL, MAY, JUNE 1989



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Meet the Author of This Quarter's Sabbath School Lessons



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Dr. Battistone and his wife, Adrienne, have two adult children. The family enjoys outdoor activities, and Dr. Battistone particularly enjoys backpacking and rock climbing.

Introduction to the Book of Revelation

“Present Triumph—Future Glory”

The book of Revelation, like the book of Daniel, is apocalyptic prophecy. The word *apocalyptic* is derived from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which means “a revelation.” Apocalyptic prophecy provides us special revelations from God based on the inspired visions and dreams of the prophet. These visions and dreams use symbolism extensively. Symbols that represent reality depict events to occur or messages to be given.

The focus of apocalyptic prophecy is on the end of time. An outline of history from the prophet’s day till the end often is provided, along with spiritual encouragement for God’s people in every era. The main purpose, however, is to concentrate our attention on events at the end of human history when earthly nations will be destroyed and the kingdom of Christ established for eternity.

All Scripture focuses on Revelation. The major prophetic, doctrinal, and spiritual teachings of the Bible are brought together in the book of Revelation.

The theme of the book of Revelation centers in Christ. Kenneth Strand expresses it as follows: “The theme of the book appears to be twofold: the promise of Christ’s coming in victory at the eschatological climax, and an assurance of God’s presence even now.”—*Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Naples, Fla.: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1979), p. 43.

Ellen White, whose writings dwell so largely on Revelation, urged Christians to give their best attention to this book. “The solemn messages that have been given in their order in the Revelation are to occupy the first place in the minds of God’s people. Nothing else is to be allowed to engross our attention.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 302. “When we as a people understand what this book means to us, there will be seen among us a great revival. We do not understand fully the lessons that it teaches, notwithstanding the injunction given us to search and study it.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 113.

An outline of the book of Revelation has been provided by Kenneth A. Strand, who has demonstrated that the first half of the book parallels the second half, in inverse order:

| | | |
|-------------|---|------------|
| 1:1-11 | Prologue-Epilogue | 22:6-21 |
| 1:12—3:22 | Church Militant and Triumphant | 21:5—22:5 |
| 4:1—8:1 | Ongoing Activity of God— Judgmental Finale | 19:1—21:4 |
| 8:2—11:18 | Trumpet Warnings— Plagues on the Wicked | 15:1—16:21 |
| 11:19—14:20 | Evil Powers Oppose God— Judged by God | 17:1—18:24 |

See Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Naples, Fla.: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1979), p. 52.

Blessing on Those Who Read

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 1:1-8.



MEMORY TEXT: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand" (Revelation 1:3).

WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT TO YOU. The message of the book of Revelation was given by God to enable you to prepare for the second coming of Jesus. Christ's purpose in passing on the message was to awaken and nurture hope in His soon return, and to inspire spiritual dependence upon Him as the means of making ready for the Advent. Those who read, hear, and live in harmony with the prophetic message are assured of the divine blessing awaiting the faithful at the end of time.

OUTLINE

- I. The Divine Revelation (Rev. 1:1, 2).
- II. The Divine Blessing (Rev. 1:3).
- III. The Divine Source of the Message (Rev. 1:4, 5).
- IV. The Divine Cleansing (Rev. 1:5, 6).
- V. The Divine Promise (Rev. 1:7, 8).

THE VALUE OF READING GOD'S WORD. Imagine what life would be like without the printed page. No morning newspaper to read. No magazines. No lesson quarterly from which to study. And no Bible. Some people seldom read; consequently, they would hardly know the difference. Others read regularly and would miss greatly the stimulation and enrichment they obtain from reading.

What value do you place on reading? A group of college students were given an exercise in values clarification. They were asked to list ten values and then to prioritize them on a scale from 1 to 10, number 10 being the most important and number 1 being the least. The experiment was quite revealing. For the great majority of students, there was a discrepancy between their *stated* values and their *actual* ones. High on one student's list was reading. He was quite surprised to find that he had spent less than 15 minutes that entire week in reading. Actually he had spent more time waiting in line for meals and sitting in the student lounge than he had spent doing many of the things on his values list.

Our lesson this week focuses on the spiritual value of reading God's Word. You may wish to participate in a values clarification exercise by keeping account of how you use the next 168 hours. If you own a televi-

sion and are in the habit of watching TV you may be in for a surprise. The way you use your time is an indication of what you value most. People who waste time, who frequently look for ways to kill time, or who complain about having too much time on their hands have a real problem. Their lives may lack purpose, or they may be struggling with the threat of meaninglessness or boredom.

If this is your experience or the experience of someone you know, the remedy may well be daily Bible reading. By acting decisively and without delay you may discover a change in your outlook. Where there now is despair, God's Word will awaken hope. If you persist until you have succeeded in forming a habit of daily Bible study, you will receive the divine blessing promised in God's Word.

SUN

I. THE DIVINE REVELATION (Rev. 1:1, 2).

The book of Revelation discloses in broad strokes the closing events of the great conflict between good and evil. Under inspiration, John depicts the spiritual drama in picturesque language that awakens and sustains the reader's interest from beginning to end. Throughout this entire drama Jesus Christ is the principal actor. The church is the supreme object of His love.

1. Because the first words of the book are "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," what would you conclude about the possibility of understanding its contents? Compare Revelation 1:1 with Romans 16:25; Ephesians 1:17.

Open to the study of all. "In the Revelation are portrayed the deep things of God. The very name given to its inspired pages, 'the Revelation,' contradicts the statement that this is a sealed book. A revelation is something revealed. The Lord Himself revealed to His servant the mysteries contained in this book, and He designs that they shall be open to the study of all. Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth's history, as well as to those living in the days of John. Some of the scenes depicted in this prophecy are in the past, some are now taking place; some bring to view the close of the great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven, and some reveal the triumphs and joys of the redeemed in the earth made new."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 584.

2. What is the "testimony of Jesus Christ" to which John bore record? Rev. 1:2; compare verse 9; 12:17; 19:10.

"In the Greek this phrase may be understood either as the 'testimony' (or 'witness') Christians bear concerning Jesus, or as the 'testimony' (or 'witness') that originates with Jesus and is revealed to His church through the prophets. . . . A comparison with ch. 19:10 clearly favors the latter interpretation. There the 'testimony of Jesus' is defined as the 'spirit of

prophecy,' meaning that Jesus is witnessing to the church through the medium of prophecy."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 812.

The view that the "testimony of Jesus" is the message that Jesus conveys to His church through the prophets is supported further by the statements in Revelation 22:10, 16, 18. From these verses it is clear that the "testimony of Jesus" in Revelation 1:2 is the prophetic message of the book of Revelation. The message, however, is not only a disclosure of events about to transpire but also a revelation of Jesus Christ. It is a message not only *from Him* but also *about Him* and His work.

How does this apply to you? Because the same Holy Spirit who gave the messages to the prophet John is available to explain them to you, are you seeking earnestly for His guidance as you study? If you are studying without His presence in your life, you will not receive light. If you are not making a personal effort to study, you cannot expect His enlightenment.



II. THE DIVINE BLESSING (Rev. 1:3).

This week's Memory Text contains a blessing pronounced on those who read, hear, and obey the prophetic message. This is the first of seven beatitudes in the book. It calls to mind the words of Jesus in Luke 11:28, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

3. Look up the following references and summarize in the blank space the six other blessings pronounced:

Rev. 14:13 _____

Rev. 16:15 _____

Rev. 19:9 _____

Rev. 20:6 _____

Rev. 22:7 _____

Rev. 22:14 _____

Seven specific blessings are pronounced upon God's people. The number seven appears frequently in the book of Revelation. The symbolism of the book includes seven spirits, stars, candlesticks, churches, seals, trumpets, and plagues. The number seven has the symbolic meaning of completeness. The seven blessings comprise the full manifestation of God's grace upon His people.

The blessing for those who read. The divine blessing is inseparably bound to the reading, hearing, and obeying of God's Word. As Moses reminded Israel on the borders of the Promised Land, "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8:3), so John reminds the church in the last days: absolute dependence on God's Word is the only way to survive the time of trouble.

Some will not receive the blessing. "Says the prophet: 'Blessed is he that readeth'—there are those who will not read; the blessing is not for them. 'And they that hear'—there are some, also, who refuse to hear anything concerning the prophecies; the blessing is not for this class. 'And keep those things which are written therein'—many refuse to heed the warnings and instructions contained in the Revelation; none of these can claim the blessing promised. All who ridicule the subjects of the prophecy and mock at the symbols here solemnly given, all who refuse to reform their lives and to prepare for the coming of the Son of man, will be un-blessed."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 341.

Understand and apply what you read. "One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained. Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 90.

"Am I spending adequate time reading God's Word?" What is an adequate amount of time? Isn't the quality of our study more important than sheer quantity? It is common to compare quality to quantity and to choose the former over the latter. Perhaps it is more useful to establish guidelines that will safeguard our habit of daily Bible study. Here are some suggestions:

- Select a regular time each day when you can study the Bible without interruption.
- Choose a time when your mind is most alert.
- Allow for time to pray before and after the study.
- Spend time reflecting on what you have read, making sure that you have understood it well.
- Make a practical application to your life of what you have studied.

III. THE DIVINE SOURCE OF THE MESSAGE (Rev. 1:4, 5).

4. Who is first mentioned as the one from whom the message of Revelation comes? What would you conclude from the way in which He is described? Rev. 1:4; compare 1:8; 4:8; Isa. 44:6.

God is everlasting. "In the word, God is spoken of as 'the everlasting God.' This name embraces past, present, and future. God is from everlasting to everlasting. He is the Eternal One."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 270.

5. Who next is referred to symbolically as the Source of the message of Revelation? Rev. 1:4; compare 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.

Only one Holy Spirit. In speaking of the "seven Spirits which are before his throne," John was using sanctuary imagery. There are not seven

Holy Spirits. The perfect work of the one Holy Spirit is illustrated by the oil in the candlesticks of the sanctuary being directed 7 ways. (See Zech. 4:1-6.) The candlesticks represent the seven churches and the worldwide church today. (See Rev. 1:20.) The Holy Spirit does a perfect work for God's people around the world.

6. In the blanks provided below list the three titles given to Jesus in Revelation 1:5. Do they appear elsewhere in the book? If so, where? What do the titles mean?

Title 1 _____

Jesus is a witness of the truth. He not only bears the truth but fully embodies it, as He so forcefully declared to the disciples in His farewell discourse. (See John 14:6.) A witness is one who speaks from firsthand knowledge. When the Bible speaks of Jesus as the Faithful Witness, it refers to His unique relationship with the Father that enables Him to give firsthand knowledge about God. (See Christ's intercessory prayer in John 17. See also John 3:11; 18:37.)

Title 2 _____

This title is a reference to Christ's resurrection. Through His resurrection Jesus conquered death and thus offers immortality to all who believe in Him. But Jesus was not the first to have been raised from the dead. Can you name a number of people who were raised from the dead before Jesus? Why then is He referred to as "the first begotten [or 'firstborn'] of the dead"? A study of the Greek word for "firstborn" (*prototokos*) used in Revelation 1:5 reveals that it was sometimes used to refer to those who were not the first to be born in their families. God sometimes called His "firstborn" one who was spiritually superior or preeminent because of his relationship with Him; not because he was the first child born into a family. This is the manner in which the Greek word sometimes is used in the Greek Old Testament. (See Ps. 89:20-27; 1 Chron. 26:10.) Jesus was the supreme or preeminent one to be raised from the dead. (See 1 Cor. 15:17-23; Rev. 1:18.)

Title 3 _____

Some have seen in this title an indirect reference to Psalm 89:27: "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." The psalm speaks of God's covenant with David and the benefits arising from it. In Revelation the title denotes Jesus' Messianic calling.

Do you know the Source? An attempt to grasp the message of Revelation will be successful only if you have a close and abiding friendship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then Jesus' victory over sin can be yours, and the spiritual message of His Word will become a living experience.

WED**IV. THE DIVINE CLEANSING (Rev. 1:5, 6).**

7. What does the revelator say that Jesus does for us when we come to Him? What is the result? Rev. 1:5, 6; compare Titus 3:5-7; 1 Peter 2:9.
-

The water and the blood. "When the soldier pierced the side of Jesus as He hung upon the cross, there came out two distinct streams, one of blood, the other of water. The blood was to wash away the sins of those who should believe in His name, and the other was to represent that living water which is obtained from Jesus to give life to the believer."—*Early Writings*, p. 209.

A willing sacrifice. At the cost of His own life, Jesus set us free from our sins. He did this, not reluctantly or begrudgingly, but willingly with joy in His heart ("who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" [Heb. 12:2]).

A father's love saves a son. A father grieved deeply because his only son had become addicted to drugs. As is often the case, the father did not recognize his son's addiction until he began to miss expensive tools and musical instruments at home. It was difficult for the father to accept the fact that for months his son had been lying to him and stealing from him. The son could not have hurt his father more if he had taken a knife and literally stabbed him in the chest. There was no simple answer to the father's heartbreaking "Why?" The son could only offer a pitiful plea for help. But that was all that the father needed. Several months later the boy was rebaptized and drawn into the fellowship of the church. Through the father's longsuffering and extraordinary love the son was set free from his oppression.

8. What is God's attitude to unbelievers? What does He do for them? Rom. 5:6, 8, 10; 1 John 4:19.
-

The sacrifice of Christ was an act of love that provides reconciliation, cleansing, and redemption. Because He bore our guilt we can come to God for forgiveness and acceptance. A major theme in the book of Revelation is spiritual victory for sinners who by faith accept the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:21; 7:3, 14; 12:11, 17; 14:4, 5; 19:7, 8.)

Are you allowing Christ to take your sins away? Are you growing up into Christ so that you can enjoy the fullness of His victory?

THU**V. THE DIVINE PROMISE (Rev. 1:7, 8).**

9. What supreme hope of the church is constantly upheld before the

reader of the book of Revelation? Rev. 1:7; compare 1:1, 3; 3:11; 22:6, 7, 12, 20.

Predictions soon to be fulfilled. Throughout Revelation many statements indicate that the events foretold will take place in the near future. Christ's coming is imminent. (See also Rev. 6:10, 11; 12:12; 17:10; 22:20.)

10. Why is God called the "Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 1:8). What does this title mean? Where else in the book does it appear? Is it used to refer to Jesus, as well as the Father?

The words *Alpha* and *Omega* are the names of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. (See Rev. 21:6; 22:13.) The phrase indicates completeness, comprehensiveness, and is the same in meaning as "the beginning and the end, the first and the last." (See the *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 734.) Used in reference to Christ several times in the book, the title emphasizes the completeness and comprehensiveness of the prophetic message of Revelation. This point finds further support in the solemn warning at the close of the book. (See Rev. 22:18, 19.)

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO ME? Special blessing is promised to those who read the book of Revelation. But reading and study take time. Spend a few moments now analyzing your time allocations:

I usually spend about _____ minutes daily reading the newspaper or other secular literature and about _____ minutes watching television.

By more careful budgeting of my time I believe I could spend _____ minutes each day in the study of God's Word including the Sabbath School lesson.

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Study the following texts. What do they teach about Jesus? Micah 5:2; Col. 1:16, 17; 2:9; John 14:9; 5:18; 8:58. Read "The Last Crisis" in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 11-18.

SUMMARY: God has provided the resources we need to face the coming crisis, survive its devastation, and be ready for Christ's return. Our relationship with Christ, fostered by daily Bible study, diligent prayer, and a proper assimilation of God's truth, will prepare us for ultimate triumph in His kingdom.

Christ Holds the Keys

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 1:9-20.



MEMORY TEXT: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:18).

CHRIST ASSURES YOUR FUTURE. The heart of the Christian faith is expressed in the words of the Memory Text. Because Jesus lives and holds the keys of hell and of death, you and I can face the past without regret and the future without fear, by trusting ourselves to His care.

OUTLINE:

- I. Tribulation and the Kingdom (Rev. 1:9).
- II. The Voice and the Message (Rev. 1:10, 11).
- III. The Vision of the Heavenly High Priest (Rev. 1:12-16).
- IV. The Power of the Risen Christ (Rev. 1:17, 18).
- V. Christ Sustains His Church (Rev. 1:19, 20).

DEATH IS NOT THE END. Reflecting on his wife's illness, a young man wrote these words: "She may die before morning. But I have been with her for four years. Four years. There is no way I could feel cheated if I didn't have her for another day. I didn't deserve her for one minute, God knows." The young man's attitude is admirable. To his way of thinking, life is a gift—his life, as well as his wife's. And he is truly grateful for the gift.

Death remains our enemy. It never was part of the divine plan. It is the tragic consequence of disobedience. Because death robs life of meaning and purpose, the believer can never accept it as an answer to the riddle of life. It is cruel and senseless. Without warning it strikes down innocent children, brings to an abrupt end a budding romance, and causes an elderly man to waste away slowly in great pain.

Christ's victory over death enables us to look to the future with confidence. Death indeed is our enemy! But Christ holds the keys of hell and death. You and I, therefore, can face tomorrow with courage, confidence, and positive conviction.

Christian believers face death with assurance. The father of four grown sons suffered a heart attack at the age of 63. The sons rushed across country to his hospital bedside, only to be greeted by a nurse who explained, "We're sorry. Your father has passed away." The sons were stunned and mortified. But one ray of light illumined the darkness of that sad event. The pastor was with the father in the intensive-care unit just before he died. He heard the dying man whisper, "Jesus, I know I will see You in the first resurrection." Nothing could have been more uplifting and

consoling to the sons than to learn that their father's dying words were an expression of triumph in Christ.

This lesson explains why that dying father could be so confident as he slipped away in death.

SUN

I. TRIBULATION AND THE KINGDOM (Rev. 1:9).

1. Even though the faithful follower of Christ will suffer trials and difficulties, what encouraging assurances is he given? Rev. 1:9; John 16:33; 2 Tim. 2:12.

John suffered for his faith. In the last decade of the first century A.D., John the beloved disciple of Jesus pastored the churches of Asia Minor with his headquarters at Ephesus. Subsequently he was arrested, taken to Rome, tried by Emperor Domitian, and placed in a caldron of boiling oil. He was removed unharmed and exiled to the prison island of Patmos.

Writing approximately 100 years later, Tertullian, a presbyter in Carthage, wrote: "Since, moreover, you are close upon Italy, you have Rome, from which there comes even into our own hands the very authority [of apostles themselves] . . . where the Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile."—Tertullian, "On Prescription Against Heretics," XXXVI; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, III, 260. (Compare *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 569, 570.)

2. Some Christians believe that the church will be spared the great tribulation at the end of time, that through some miraculous intervention (called "the rapture") God's people will be taken to heaven before the time of trouble. But this is not what the Bible teaches. Study the following texts. On the blank space to the right of each text write the words that indicate that Christians will face persecution before receiving the kingdom:

Rev. 7:14 _____

Rev. 12:17 _____

Rev. 13:15, 17 _____

Rev. 15:2 _____

Rev. 19:2 _____

John shared in Christ's sufferings. Jesus predicted John's sufferings. (See Mark 10:38, 39.) John would not have written to the churches in Asia the words "your brother, and companion in tribulation" (Rev. 1:9) had he not experienced suffering in the same degree as they themselves. It was his faithfulness, his patient endurance in the midst of persecution, that qualified him to write the words of the prophecy.

A question you should ask. Is my faith in Jesus, my love of the gospel, and my yearning for God's kingdom strong enough to withstand the intense persecution that John and his fellow believers experienced in their day?

MON

II. THE VOICE AND THE MESSAGE (Rev. 1:10, 11).

3. On what day did John receive His first vision? Rev. 1:10.

It is common to hear Christians refer to Sunday as the Lord's Day and to find them interpreting John's statement accordingly. But there is no reference in the Scriptures to Sunday as the Lord's Day.

4. Which day did Jesus claim to be His day? Mark 2:28.

John observed the Sabbath on Patmos. "It was on the Sabbath that the Lord of glory appeared to the exiled apostle. The Sabbath was as sacredly observed by John on Patmos as when he was preaching to the people in the towns and cities of Judea. He claimed as his own the precious promises that had been given regarding that day."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 581.

Sunday was not called the "Lord's day" until later. The Greek adjective meaning "belonging to the Lord," "the Lord's" (*kuriake*) in the later history of the early Christian church came to stand alone in Christian literature, without the word "day." Eventually this word became the accepted term for Sunday, the day of the resurrection of Christ.

"Although this term occurs frequently in the Church Fathers with the meaning of Sunday, the first conclusive evidence of such use does not appear until the latter part of the 2d century in the Apocryphal *Gospel According to Peter* (9, 12 . . .), where the day of Christ's resurrection is termed the 'Lord's day.' Since this document was written at least three quarters of a century after John wrote the Revelation, it cannot be presented as a proof that the phrase 'Lord's day' in John's time refers to Sunday."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 735.

5. What command did the "great voice" give to John? Rev. 1:11.

We know that the seven churches were literal congregations in the Roman province of Asia. "The order in which the churches are listed both here and in chs. 2; 3 represents the geographical sequence in which a messenger carrying a letter from Patmos would reach these seven cities in the province of Asia."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 737.

The prophecy of the seven churches can be applied in three ways:

- **The local application** considers the messages as directed to the specific churches in Asia Minor.
- **The historical application** recognizes the messages as especially relevant to seven periods of church history. "The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian era. The number 7 indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 585.
- **The spiritual application** sees all seven messages as spiritual counsel for the church at any one time. Ellen White applies all seven messages to us today. Notice, for example, how she applies the messages to Ephesus: [Quotes Revelation 2:4, 5]. "I am instructed to say that these words are applicable to Seventh-day Adventist churches in their present condition. The love of God has been lost, and this means the absence of love for one another. Self, self, self, is cherished, and is striving for the supremacy. How long is this to continue?"—*Review and Herald*, Feb. 25, 1902.

The important questions. Do I allow the voice of the Holy Spirit to apply the messages to the seven churches directly to my heart? Am I, by Christ's grace, ordering my life in accordance with these messages?



III. THE VISION OF THE HEAVENLY HIGH PRIEST (Rev. 1:12-16).

6. What candlesticks are you reminded of as you read the description of John's vision? Rev. 1:12; compare Ex. 25:31, 32; Zech. 4:2.

The seven golden lampstands (or candlesticks) are reminiscent of the candlestick with seven branches in the holy place of the Sanctuary. The symbolism is a little different in Revelation, because Christ could not be depicted as walking around in the midst of one candlestick with seven branches. But a comparison of Zechariah chapter 4 and Revelation 1 reveals that the meaning is the same. The candlesticks represent God's people, the oil (the sword in Revelation 1:16) represents the Holy Spirit, who flows from the heart of Christ to the hearts of His people. (See Zech. 4:6; Eph. 6:17.) The light of His love and truth shines through His people to the world. (See John 8:12; Matt. 5:14.) "God's people are to be channels for the outworking of the highest influence in the universe."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 11.

7. What is the significance of the manner in which Christ was dressed in His appearance to John? Rev. 1:13-15.
-

The robe. The phrase “a garment down to the foot” translates one Greek word that designates the long blue robe worn by the Israelite high priest in his daily, holy-place ministrations. (See Ex. 28:4, 31; 29:5; 39:22.) The first century Jewish historian Josephus described the same long blue high-priestly robe: “The high priest is indeed adorned with the same garments that we have described, without abating one; only over this he puts on a vestment of a blue color. This is a long robe, reaching to his feet.”—*Antiquities of the Jews*, iii.7.4; translated by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1960), p. 74.

The golden girdle. Covering the chest of the Israelite high priest were the ephod, the golden girdle of the ephod, and the breastplate. Each of these items of dress was interwoven with golden thread. His chest appeared golden. (See Ex. 28:6-8, 15.)

John saw Christ our high priest. Drawing from the imagery of the Old Testament, John depicts the high priestly character of Christ’s work in the heavenly sanctuary. John’s vision of Christ bears some striking similarities to the visions of Christ in Daniel 7 and 10.

“Although He is high priest and mediator in the sanctuary above, yet He is represented as walking up and down in the midst of His churches on the earth. With untiring wakefulness and unremitting vigilance, He watches to see whether the light of any of His sentinels is burning dim or going out. If the candlesticks were left to mere human care, the flickering flame would languish and die; but He is the true watchman in the Lord’s house, and true warden of the temple courts. His continued care and sustaining grace are the source of life and light.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 586.

What does Christ’s high priestly ministry mean to you? As heavenly High Priest He is able to forgive your sins (1 John 2:1). He applies the merits of His sacrifice to you (Heb. 8:1-3). He cleanses you of sin (Heb. 9:11-14). He constantly intercedes for you (Heb. 7:25).

WED

IV. THE POWER OF THE RISEN CHRIST (Rev. 1:17, 18).

8. What title did Jesus apply to Himself indicating that He is the eternal Deity? Rev. 1:17; compare verse 11; Micah 5:2; John 8:58; Rev. 22:13, 16.

Like the Father, Jesus has eternity of existence. Even though in verse 11 “textual evidence attests . . . the omission of the words ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last,’ ” verses 17 and 18, as well as chapter 22:13, 16, make it clear that “these titles apply specifically to Christ.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 736. The same divine characteristics possessed by the Father are shared by the Son. John was comforted by the assurance that the Being who appeared to Him was none other than the eternal Son of God, who as the “I AM” of the Old Testament had guided and instructed His people. (See Ex. 3:14.)

9. What does Christ's resurrection from the dead make it possible for Him to do for humanity? Rev. 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:22, 23; Matt. 16:19.
-

Spiritual and literal resurrection are possible because of Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus retains "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," but He shares them with us. He is the one who raises the spiritually dead, and finally raises the righteous dead from the grave. Even so, His grace enables us to make known His love to others, so that by our witness they might come to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom of grace and, ultimately, the kingdom of glory.

Christ's word raises the dead. "Satan cannot hold the dead in his grasp when the Son of God bids them live. He cannot hold in spiritual death one soul who in faith receives Christ's word of power. God is saying to all who are dead in sin, 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.' Eph. 5:14. That word is eternal life."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 320.

Have I experienced the resurrection from spiritual death that Christ offers? Am I using the keys of the heavenly kingdom lent me by Christ to lead others to enjoy the life that He imparts?



V. CHRIST SUSTAINS HIS CHURCH (Rev. 1:19, 20).

10. How do we know that John's message in Revelation applies both to the age in which he wrote and to the future of the church and the world till the second coming of Jesus? Rev. 1:19; compare 22:12, 14, 20.
-

11. Of what significance is the picture of Christ holding the seven stars in His right hand? Rev. 1:20.
-

"Angel" sometimes means human messenger. "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." The Greek word for "angel" in the New Testament sometimes refers to a human messenger. The word is translated "messenger" in Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:24; 9:52; and James 2:25.

Spiritual leaders sustained by Christ. "'These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand.' Revelation 2:1. These words are spoken to the teachers in the church—those entrusted by God with weighty responsibilities. The sweet influences that are to be abundant in the church are bound up with God's ministers, who are to reveal the love of Christ. The stars of heaven are under His control. He fills them with light. He guides and directs their movements. If He did not do this, they would be-

come fallen stars. So with His ministers. They are but instruments in His hands, and all the good they accomplish is done through His power. Through them His light is to shine forth. The Saviour is to be their efficiency. If they will look to Him as He looked to the Father they will be enabled to do His work. As they make God their dependence, He will give them His brightness to reflect to the world.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 586, 587.

12. What is symbolized by Christ walking about in the midst of the seven candlesticks? Rev. 1:20; 2:1.

The Spirit of Christ sustains us. The candlesticks represent Christ’s church around the world. John saw a sword coming out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16). The sword symbolizes the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:17; compare Heb. 4:12). The Spirit uses the Word of God to bring spiritual vitality to those who trust in Jesus.

Jesus promises that by His Spirit and Word He will sustain us. This promise is found throughout the Bible. (See Isa. 26:3; Ps. 55:22.) When the Lord puts His Spirit within us we are empowered to walk in His ways and keep His commandments (Eze. 36:27). The members of the remnant church keep His commandments because they are constantly receiving from Jesus the gift of His Holy Spirit. (See Rev. 12:17.) As long as we allow Jesus by the Holy Spirit to reign in our hearts Satan can have no power over us. (See 1 Cor. 10:13.)

HOW DOES THIS MESSAGE APPLY TO ME? Identify the sources of anxiety in your life. Number them in the order of their concern to you:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wayward children | <input type="checkbox"/> Marital tensions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships with others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health problems (yours or others) | |

Match the above problems with the following Bible promises and assurances: Eph. 5:21-33; Isa. 49:25; 1 John 1:9; James 5:15; Matt. 5:44; 6:25; 28:20.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read chapter 56, “Patmos,” in *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 568-577.

SUMMARY: The vision in Revelation 1:9-20 is intended to awaken and build faith in Jesus Christ as the almighty sovereign of the universe, and the loving high priest of His earthly children. Whatever the circumstances of our lives, our risen Lord hears our cry and supplies our need. Since He has gained the victory over the forces of evil, He holds the key to our eternal destiny.

Hear What the Spirit Says—I

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 2. Letters to the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira.



MEMORY TEXT: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 2:7).

ARE YOU HEARING GOD'S WORD? Hearing God's Word means not only listening to the message but also responding obediently to its requirements. To have "an ear" in the Biblical sense means to be receptive to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Christ wishes to be closely identified with you because you are part of His church. He feels your pain, weakness, and temptation. He sees your failures and triumphs. Through His Spirit He rebukes sinfulness, affirms victories, holds out hope, and exhorts you to hold on. He challenges you to holiness and victorious living.

OUTLINE:

- I. Love for Truth but Loss of Love? (Rev. 2:1-7).
- II. The Cross Precedes the Crown (Rev. 2:8-11).
- III. The Fight of Faith (Rev. 2:12-17).
- IV. No Room for Compromise (Rev. 2:18-29).

COUNSEL THAT STILL APPLIES. The book of Revelation is basically a letter, written and sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These were literal churches, but they were not the only churches in the Roman province at the time John wrote the book of Revelation. Earlier, the apostle Paul had written a letter to the church at Colossae, in which he asked the Colossians to see that his letter would be read in the church at Laodicea, as well as in their own church (Col. 4:16).

Why did the Lord select these seven churches? It has been suggested that these churches were chosen because their spiritual needs and general condition represented the state of the various parts of the universal church at any one time and throughout history. The fact that their total number is seven suggests that together they represent the entire body of believers past and present.

Application to the church today. Every generation of Christians found in all of Christ's corrections, consolations, and commendations practical counsel appropriate to their situation. The same point applies to our experience today. Although the message to Laodicea has special meaning to us, the messages to all seven churches are thoroughly relevant to the con-

temporary church. For example, some churches may be spiritually lukewarm and impoverished, while others face persecution because of their loyalty to the Lord.

Historical application. The seven churches also depict symbolically the periods of the Christian church from its very inception to the close of time. In this way we may construct an outline of church history by noting the characteristics of each of the seven churches.

How then are we to study the letters to the seven churches?

First, we may read each message against the historical background and within the setting in which it was originally written. In John's day the problems of specific congregations varied considerably.

Second, we may read the letters within the context of Christian-church history from the early developments in the first century A.D. to the present time. In doing so we will note how each message meets the special problems of a particular period.

Third, we may read Christ's words in the context of the spiritual needs of the worldwide church today. Every message applies to us.

SUN I. LOVE FOR TRUTH BUT LOSS OF LOVE? (Rev. 2:1-7).

1. How does John describe Christ in the address to the church at Ephesus? Rev. 2:1.

Christ controls and shelters the church. The word rendered "to hold" in context denotes Christ's complete control over the entire church. Christ does not hold the church against its will. He provides protection and security when His people maintain their union with Him.

The vision of Christ in the midst of the lampstands symbolizes His presence and activity in and among the individual churches. Our Lord is not aloof from us, but meets with us in worship, in study, and in fellowship. He is with us in the hour of trial, as well as in the moment of triumph, and ministers His grace in accordance with our needs.

Christ watches over the church and its members. "Christ walks in the midst of His churches through the length and breadth of the earth. He looks with intense interest to see whether His people are in such a condition spiritually that they can advance His kingdom. He is present in every assembly of the church. He knows those whose hearts He can fill with the holy oil, that they may impart it to others. Those who faithfully carry forward the work of Christ, representing in word and deed the character of God, fulfill the Lord's purpose for them, and Christ takes pleasure in them."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 956.

2. For what did Christ commend the church at Ephesus? How were the same noble qualities demonstrated in the apostolic church of the first century? Rev. 2:2, 3; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:3-8.

3. What special problem existed in the church of Ephesus and the church generally during the apostolic period? Rev. 2:4.

The church at Ephesus symbolized the apostolic church, which was known for its hard work and patience. The early Christians strove tirelessly to purge the church of moral contamination and false doctrine. However, they tended to become dogmatic and intolerant. Their judgment became clouded and their feelings hardened. They lost that great love for the Lord and His gospel that had motivated them at the first.

Christians became selfish. "In a single generation the gospel was carried to every nation under heaven. But little by little a change came. The church lost her first love. She became selfish and ease-loving. The spirit of worldliness was cherished. The enemy cast his spell upon those to whom God had given light for a world in darkness."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 26.

"The discussion of unimportant points of doctrine, and the contemplation of pleasing fables of man's invention, occupied time that should have been spent in proclamation of the gospel."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 580.



4. Who were the Nicolaitanes? Why did the early Christians hate their deeds? Rev. 2:2, 6; compare verses 14, 15.

The deeds of the Nicolaitanes were rejected by the apostolic church but tolerated in the later period represented by Pergamum. Some of the Christian writers in the postapostolic period identified the Nicolaitanes with the Christian Gnostics, who read Greek philosophical ideas into the Bible. Whether or not that identification was true, the Scriptures reveal why their deeds were unacceptable to the Lord.

The Nicolaitanes practiced the sins of Balaam. Verses 14 and 15 of Revelation 2 identify the sins of Balaam with those of the Nicolaitanes. Verse 15 may be translated: "So [in this manner] you also have those who hold similarly the teaching of the Nicolaitanes." What were the sins of Balaam? A study of those passages that speak of Balaam reveals that his sins were covetousness, hypocrisy, idolatry, and immorality. (See Num. 22-24; 25:1, 2; 31:8, 16; 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11.)

Are church members today guilty of the sins of the Nicolaitanes? "It is our work to know our special failings and sins, which cause darkness and spiritual feebleness, and quenched our first love. Is it worldliness? Is it selfishness? Is it the love of self-esteem? Is it striving to be first? Is it the sin of sensuality that is intensely active? Is it the sin of the Nicolaitanes, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness? Is it the misuse and abuse of great light and opportunities and privileges, making boasted claims to wisdom and religious knowledge, while the life and character are inconsistent and immoral?"—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 7, 1887.


“The doctrine is now largely taught that the gospel of Christ has made the law of God of no effect; that by ‘believing’ we are released from the necessity of being doers of the Word. But this is the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which Christ so unsparingly condemned.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 957.

5. What special promise to the overcomer was given to the apostolic church? Rev. 2:7; compare 22:2.

II. THE CROSS PRECEDES THE CROWN (Rev. 2:8-11).

6. What connection do you observe between the titles of Christ and the situation facing the church of Smyrna? Rev. 2:8, 10.

Poverty, persecution, imprisonment, and martyrdom afflicted the Christian church in the period A.D. 100—313. For the most part, those who responded favorably to the gospel were economically poor and socially disadvantaged. Pagans pursued and persecuted them at will. But the most severe treatment came from Jewish circles. Many Christians had been converted from Judaism.

-  7. What class of persons brought special trials for the church in the period represented by Smyrna? Rev. 2:9.

Satan’s church opposes Christ’s. “Christ speaks of the church over which Satan presides as the synagogue of Satan. Its members are the children of disobedience. They are those who choose to sin, who labor to make void the holy law of God. It is Satan’s work to mingle evil with good, and to remove the distinction between good and evil. Christ would have a church that labors to separate the evil from the good, whose members will not willingly tolerate wrongdoing, but will expel it from the heart and life.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 958.

Christianity was an illegal religion. During the period of Smyrna, Roman Emperors aided and abetted the persecution of Christians. There were attacks on Christians during the reigns of Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-138), Antoninus Pius (138-161), Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Septimius Severus (193-211), Decius Trajan (249-251), and Valerian (253-260).

8. What fierce persecution fulfilled the prediction of Revelation 2:10 that “ye shall have tribulation ten days”?

The Diocletian persecution. Begun by Diocletian in A.D. 303, attacks on the Christians continued until Christianity was recognized as a legal religion by the famous Edict of Milan passed by Constantine in A.D. 313.

9. **What promise of divine strength and support did Jesus promise to those opposed for their faith? Matt. 10:26-33; John 16:33.**

10. **What inspiring promises to the overcomer in Smyrna also apply to us? Rev. 2:10, 11; compare 1 Peter 5:4; Rev. 20:6, 14.**

Where will I stand? When the prophecies regarding the end of time are fulfilled and God's people are subjected to suffering similar to that endured by the early Christians, will I be on Christ's side? When facing a severe trial that seems to threaten my personal safety and security, will I find comfort in the recognition and acceptance of Jesus Christ as the "first and the last"?

WED

III. THE FIGHT OF FAITH (Rev. 2:12-17).

11. **Christ comes to the church at Pergamum as the one having "the sharp sword with two edges." What two applications can be given to the sword? Rev. 2:16; Eph. 6:17.**

The sword of the Spirit becomes the sword of retribution for those who reject Christ's love, pervert His truth, and oppose His people.

12. **What specific problems does Christ mention in His message to the church in Pergamum? Rev. 2:13, 14.**

Papal Rome was rising to power. Because the period represented by Pergamum was that of the developing Papacy (A.D. 313-538), it seems quite evident that Satan's throne is a reference to the center of papal worship, namely Rome.

Human theories and traditions took the place of Christian truth. "Almost imperceptibly the customs of heathenism found their way into the Christian church. The spirit of compromise and conformity was restrained for a time by the fierce persecutions which the church endured under paganism. But as persecution ceased, and Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and His apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human

theories and traditions. The nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 49, 50.

13. What promises to the overcomer in Pergamum also apply to us? Rev. 2:17; compare John 6:32-35, 63; Isa. 62:2.
-

How do I react to the temptation to compromise? Do I spend the greater part of my time fighting the good fight of faith or struggling with moral and spiritual compromise?

IV. NO ROOM FOR COMPROMISE (Rev. 2:18-29).

14. What connection do you see between the title of Christ and the problems facing the church in Thyatira that Christ addresses? Rev. 2:18, 22, 23.
-

15. What special commendation did Christ give to His people in the period represented by Thyatira? Rev. 2:19.
-

Some Christians were loyal to Christ throughout the period. The church of Thyatira is a fitting symbol of the Christian church throughout the Middle Ages (A.D. 538—1517). Many Christians in various lands maintained their union with Christ and loyalty to the simple faith of His apostles. For example, the early Christians in Britain, Scotland, and Ireland clung to the religion of the Bible. The Waldenses and the followers of Wycliffe and Huss were closer to apostolic Christianity than most of their contemporaries.

The Bible regarded as the only rule of faith. “In lands beyond the jurisdiction of Rome there existed for many centuries bodies of Christians who remained almost wholly free from papal corruption. They were surrounded by heathenism and in the lapse of ages were affected by its errors; but they continued to regard the Bible as the only rule of faith and adhered to many of its truths. These Christians believed in the perpetuity of the law of God and observed the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Churches that held to this faith and practice existed in Central Africa and among the Armenians of Asia.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 63.

16. What rebuke did Christ have for Christians in Thyatira and during the Middle Ages? Rev. 2:20-23.
-

Who was Jezebel? As the daughter of a heathen king and a worshiper of Baal, she provided the motivation for Ahab's apostasy (1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:19; 21:25, 26). She was a persecutor of God's prophets and faithful people (1 Kings 18:4, 13; 19:1-3; 21:5-15). She was a harlot and a sorceress (2 Kings 9:22). Because of her evil life, God's curse was upon her (2 Kings 9:30-37).

What organization during the Middle Ages possessed Jezebel's characteristics? The medieval Papacy practiced idolatry. Veneration of the pope, of images and relics, of Sunday in place of the true Sabbath, of earthly priests as mediators in place of Christ, and of the elements in the Mass—all of this amounted to idolatry. Spiritual immorality resulted from the acceptance of teachings and practices that came from pagan religions. God's people were the victims of the Inquisition. The Waldenses, Wycliffe and the Lollards, Huss and his followers, and Protestants in the sixteenth century were victims of papal persecution.

17. How long will "Jezebel," her consorts, and her children have influence on earth? When will God deal with them? Rev. 17:1-6, 15-18; 18:1-4, 21-24; 19:1-3.

18. What special counsel does Christ give His people who are afflicted by "Jezebel"? Rev. 2:24, 25.

19. What special promises are given to those who resist the deceptions of "Jezebel"? Rev. 2:26-29; compare 19:15, 16; 20:4; 22:16.

THE CRUCIAL QUESTIONS. What is the condition of my love for Christ and His truth? (Check the appropriate boxes below):

() Growing stronger () About the same
() Growing cold. () Growing weaker

Do I enjoy the riches of Christ's righteousness within by the presence of the Holy Spirit? (Circle the number below where you would place yourself):

Very much 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Very little

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Study the counsel contained in the following passages as it relates to Christ's instruction to the first four churches: 2 Peter 3:13, 14, 17, 18; Matt. 24:42-44; Read "A Holy Life," *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 21, 22.

SUMMARY: Wherever men, women, and children assemble for worship in the name of Jesus, the risen Lord is present and active in their midst. In anticipation of the dark hour of trial awaiting His followers, Christ approaches each fellowship and each individual with a special message.

Hear What the Spirit Says—II

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 3. Letters to the churches in Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.



MEMORY TEXT: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

GOOD NEWS FOR YOU. Fellowship with the Lord Jesus takes place when you respond without reservation to His initiative and receive His Word completely into your life. Christ, the great physician, aware of the spiritual lethargy of His churches, sometimes uses firm language to awaken them. But He follows His rebuke with heartfelt appeals, promises, and encouragement. We may respond to Christ's continued appeals by inviting Him into our hearts. His presence within brings victory and reward.

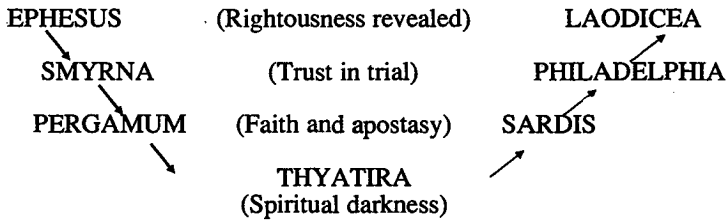
OUTLINE

- I. No Time to Sleep (Rev. 3:1-6).
- II. An Open-Door Policy (Rev. 3:7-13).
- III. All or Nothing (Rev. 3:14-22).

PROPHETIC AND SPIRITUAL MESSAGES. The messages to the seven churches reveal that throughout history progressive spiritual decline among professed Christians has been followed by progressive spiritual advance. Ephesus represents the spiritually and doctrinally pure church. This was the church of Christ and the apostles. But even in the apostolic church there was a loss of first love. The church of Smyrna was pure but persecuted. In the postapostolic period Satan sought to keep souls from Christ by destroying those who followed Him. The church of Pergamum allowed the perversion of doctrine and the relaxation of Christian standards. The low point was the period of Thyatira. During the Middle Ages spiritual darkness and doctrinal error held sway.

Sardis, the Reformation and post-Reformation church, like Pergamum, was generally speaking, a spiritually dead church, but with some members whose born-again relationship with the Lord rendered their works acceptable to Christ. The church of Philadelphia, like Smyrna, was rebuked for nothing. In the period from the French Revolution until the beginning of the pre-Advent judgment in 1844 there was a revival of the sacrificial spirit of the church of Smyrna. The church of Laodicea is rebuked for its lack of spiritual warmth, but those members who receive the gift of Christ's right-

eousness are restored to the state of purity that characterized the earliest Christians.



Messages for the last days. Last week's lesson directed attention to the fact that the seven churches of Revelation not only represent the historical development of the church but also represent the entire body of believers in every generation from the beginning of the Christian era until the close of time. All seven messages applied to the universal Christian church in the first century, and all seven messages apply to the worldwide church today.

Some Christians today have lost their first love (Ephesus). Some are faced with intolerance and persecution (Smyrna). Some are tolerating error and apostasy (Pergamum). Some are committing spiritual immorality by allowing themselves to be absorbed into the religious system symbolized as "Jezebel" (Thyatira). Some have lost that living faith that works by love (Sardis). Some are working faithfully for Christ while at the same time trusting in His mediatorial and judgment ministry (Philadelphia). Some are spiritually lukewarm, self-satisfied, and unaware that they are "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked" (Laodicea). We must take seriously all seven messages today.

A special last-day message. The message to the church in Laodicea has a special application to the church in the last days. The church of Laodicea was most like the contemporary church.

SUN

I. NO TIME TO SLEEP (Rev. 3:1-6).

1. What severe accusation is made against the church in Sardis? Rev. 3:1.

The church was listless, lifeless, and loveless. It had form but lacked power. What is a dead church? What is a dead Christian? The members in the church of Sardis were reputed to be spiritually alive, but they lacked living faith. Hence, their works were unacceptable to God. James had emphasized that living faith results in works acceptable to God. (See James 2:14-26.) "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). James did not teach that works save us. He taught that our works attest the genuineness of our faith. When James wrote that "by works a man is justified" (James 2:24; compare verses 21, 25) He used the verb "to justify" in the sense of

“attest,” “demonstrate.” (Compare Matt. 11:19; 12:37.) His message was that *living* faith, the faith essential for salvation, always results in good works. The reason for that is obvious. Christ reigns in the heart of the person who has living faith (Gal. 2:20). And Christ lives out His life of love and service through that individual.

The church of Sardis had become lazy and lethargic, exhibiting an alarming complacency, a spiritual death. Christ had ceased to live in the hearts of the members; their faith was a *dead* faith, and their works were dead works, which Christ could not accept.

2. What do the following texts indicate about the cause of spiritual death? 1 Tim. 5:6; Luke 15:13, 24; Rom. 6:13.

3. For what reason does the Lord counsel the church as He does? Rev. 3:2, 3.

The Greek verb translated “perfect” in Revelation 3:2 (KJV and RSV) means to make full, to fill, complete, finish something already begun, bring to an end. One of the most characteristic contexts in which the word is used in the New Testament is that which speaks of God’s will being perfectly fulfilled in and by believers because they are filled with the Holy Spirit. Christ died “that the righteousness of the law *might be fulfilled* in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4). Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would “*fulfil* every good resolve and work of faith by his power” (2 Thess. 1:11, RSV). He wanted the Philippians to be “*filled* with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:11, RSV).

Jesus could say of the Christians at Sardis, “I have not found thy works perfect before God” (Rev. 3:2) because they had lost their born-again relationship with Him. They were spiritually “dead” (verse 1). Hence, they lacked the inner power of the Holy Spirit to do works that God could accept. When Christ dwells within He performs through the believer works acceptable to God (Gal. 2:20). The Bible concept of perfection is Christ-likeness (Eph. 4:13). “The measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” is possible only to the one who is allowing Christ to dwell in his heart continually. Then it is true to say, “You have been made complete (full, perfect) in Him” (Col. 2:10, literally translated).



4. How do we perform works that are perfect in God’s sight? 1 John 2:29; 3:7; compare Eph. 4:13.

Perfect works are those that God accepts. In 1 John 2:29 we find that He regards as righteous the works of the person who “has been born of him” (NIV). Such a person “is righteous, just as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7, NIV), not because he is independently righteous, but because the righteous

Christ is living in his heart (Rom. 8:9, 10). The problem with the members in Sardis was that they had lost the presence of Jesus in their hearts.

When is imperfection sin? Not all imperfection is counted by God to be sin. If all imperfection were treated by God as sin, Jesus could never have made the statement recorded in John 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin" (RSV). The imperfect works of the people were not regarded as sin until they had received the light from Jesus. Paul taught that "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23, RSV). Everything we do is imperfect, because we are fallen, imperfect human beings. But not everything we do is sin. Martin Luther was correct when He wrote: "Works that result from the Word and are done in faith are perfect in the eyes of God, no matter what the world thinks about them—even if you should be merely a shepherd or an infant's nurse."—*Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO.: Concordia, 1961), p. 318.

Christ makes up for imperfection. "When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man's best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit. But He will not accept those who claim to have faith in Him, and yet are disloyal to His Father's commandment. We hear a great deal about faith, but we need to hear a great deal more about works. Many are deceiving their own souls by living an easygoing, accommodating, crossless religion. But Jesus says, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'"—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 382.

Two Builders. A genuine born-again Christian decided to build a house in the country for his growing family. He was not a builder by trade, but he did the best he could with his limited knowledge, trusting in God to help him. As you would expect, the house was imperfect. Ceilings, gutterings, and floors were not perfectly straight. But because the house was a work of faith, the builder could not be regarded as sinning. The house was a genuine work of heart. Another man who was a building contractor deliberately put inferior materials into the foundations of a house. Later the foundations sank and the house developed large cracks in the walls. Did he sin? Two imperfect houses, two imperfect men—one sinned, the other did not. Not all imperfection is sin.



5. Why does God expect his last-day people to receive His gift of victory over sin? Rev. 3:4, 5; compare Eph. 4:13; 5:27; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

There were some in Sardis whose works were acceptable to God (Rev. 3:4). They were allowing the Holy Spirit to live in their hearts. Christ's will is that everyone will copy these overcomers in Sardis: "He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life" (verse 5, RSV). Names are not blotted out of the book

of life until they are examined in the pre-Advent, investigative judgment. (See Dan. 7:9, 10; 12:1; compare Matt. 22:11-14.)

Victory in Christ. “Temptations and deceptions will be constantly brought up by the great deceiver to spoil the work of the human agent, but if he trusts in God, if he is humble and meek and lowly of heart, keeping the way of the Lord, heaven will rejoice, for he will gain the victory. God says, ‘He shall walk with Me in white, with unsullied garments, for he is worthy.’ . . . Christ says of the overcomer, ‘I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.’ The names of all those who have once given themselves to God are written in the book of life, and their characters are now passing in review before Him. Angels of God are weighing moral worth. They are watching the development of character in those now living, to see if their names can be retained in the book of life. A probation is granted us in which to wash our robes of character and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Who is doing this work? Who is separating from himself sin and selfishness?”—Ellen G. White comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 960.

Who will stand in the time of trouble? “Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. . . . Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father’s commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 623.

“Exact obedience is required, and those who say that it is not possible to live a perfect life, throw upon God the imputation of injustice and untruth.”—*Review and Herald* reprints, vol. 6, p. 519; see also *Review and Herald*, Feb. 7, 1957, p. 30; *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 355.

6. What is the source of the power to overcome sin? 1 John 5:4, 5.

“Christ alone can help us and give us the victory. Christ must be all in all to us, He must dwell in the heart, His life must circulate through us as the blood circulates through the veins. His Spirit must be a vitalizing power that will cause us to influence others to become Christlike and holy.”—Ellen G. White comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1144.



II. AN OPEN-DOOR POLICY (Rev. 3:7-13).

7. In the letter to Philadelphia, what is meant by the open and shut door? Rev. 3:7, 8.

Christ has absolute control over the royal household. (See Isa. 22:22.) John draws from the language of the prophet Isaiah to present Christ as the Messiah, who has the authority to admit individuals into or exclude them from the New Jerusalem.

No power can keep you from Christ if you choose Him. "The true Witness has given us the assurance that He has set before us an open door, which no man can shut. Those who are seeking to be faithful to God may be denied many of the privileges of the world; their way may be hedged up and their work hindered by the enemies of truth; but there is no power that can close the door of communication between God and their souls."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 961.

8. What annual event in the ancient sanctuary was symbolized by the open and shut door? Were there doors between the two apartments of Solomon's Temple? Lev. 16:2, 3, 29, 30; compare 1 Kings 6:31; 7:50.

The Antitypical Shut and Open Doors. "Then I was shown that the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ relating to the shut door could not be separated, and that the time for the commandments of God to shine out with all their importance, and for God's people to be tried on the Sabbath truth, was when the door was opened in the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary, where the ark is, in which are contained the ten commandments. This door was not opened until the mediation of Jesus was finished in the holy place of the sanctuary in 1844. Then Jesus rose up and shut the door of the holy place, and opened the door into the most holy, and passed within the second veil, where He now stands by the ark, and where the faith of Israel now reaches."—*Early Writings*, p. 42.

9. When will the door of mercy finally close for unbelievers? Matt. 25:10-13; compare Rev. 22:11; 8:5.

10. What thrilling assurances does Christ give to the overcomer? Rev. 3:9-13; compare 14:1.

III. ALL OR NOTHING (Rev. 3:14-22).

11. Why does Christ rebuke the Laodicean church so sternly? Rev. 3:14-17.

Does this message apply to us? "Many of the professed, peculiar people of God are so conformed to the world that their peculiar character is not discerned, and it is difficult to distinguish between him that serveth

God and him that serveth him not.' God would do great things for His people if they would come out from the world and be separate. If they would submit to be led by Him, He would make them a praise in all the earth. Says the True Witness: 'I know thy works.'"—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 125.

12. Study the following passages as they relate to the counsel to Laodicea (Rev. 3:18, 19). Summarize the teaching of each passage:

"Buy of me": Isa. 55:1-4 _____

"Gold tried in the fire": 1 Peter 1:7-9; Gal. 5:6 _____

"White raiment": Rev. 7:13, 14; 19:7, 8 _____

"Eyesalve": Ps. 119:18; 1 John 2:20, 27; Eph. 1:18 _____

"Repent": Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25 _____

Faith, righteousness, and discernment. "The gold that Jesus would have us buy of Him is gold tried in the fire; it is the gold of faith and love, that has no defiling substance mingled with it. The white raiment is the righteousness of Christ, the wedding garment which Christ alone can give. The eyesalve is the true spiritual discernment that is so wanting among us, for spiritual things must be spiritually discerned."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 965.

13. What wonderful promises are given to the one who heeds the counsel to the church of Laodicea? Rev. 3:20-22; compare John 14:18; Rev. 5:10; 20:4.

HAVE I APPLIED THESE MESSAGES TO MY LIFE? Am I growing in my love relationship with Jesus? Check the appropriate box below:

- () I find some evidence of Christian growth in my life.
 () I continue about the same in my relationship with Christ.
 () I am drifting away from Christ.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read again Revelation 2 and 3. See these comments on the counsel to Laodicea: *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 116, 117, 158, 310-312; *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 88, 89.

SUMMARY: In the letters to the seven churches, Christ is pictured as one coming to His people with counsel, consolation, and commendation in order to prepare them for His kingdom.

Holy Is the Lord

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 4. Worship in Heaven.



MEMORY VERSE: "They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8).

HOW MAY WE WORSHIP GOD ACCEPTABLY? The recognition of and response to God's holiness in adoration, praise, and thanksgiving constitutes acceptable worship. Without a proper knowledge of the holiness of God and an awareness of His love and care for His created beings it is impossible for us to offer Him our service.

Our sovereign God is enthroned in heaven. He is holy, just, and eternal. He is worthy of our love, gratitude, adoration, and worship. His throne is secure. We can trust Him.

OUTLINE:

- I. God Upon His Throne (Rev. 4:1-3).
- II. The Twenty-four Elders (Rev. 4:4, 5).
- III. The Four Living Creatures (Rev. 4:6-8).
- IV. Adoration for the Creator (Rev. 4:8-11).

PRAISE FOR GOD IN HEAVEN AND EARTH. On April 6, 1759, George Frederick Handel conducted his last performance of *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital in London. Eight days later he died. The British nation honored him with a grave in Westminster Abbey. In the opinion of many musicians, Handel's *Messiah* is the finest composition of music that ever was heard. How spiritually edifying the performance of *Messiah* can be!

Worship in heaven. The most impressive music on this earth will never be as moving as the worship we will be privileged to witness and enjoy in heaven. It is common knowledge that Handel's inspiration for composing *Messiah* came, in part, from the worship scenes depicted in Revelation. Night and day the heavenly hosts proclaim God's glory in the universe. But the sweetest, most uplifting, and awe-inspiring praise will be heard when the great controversy between Christ and Satan is ended. Then God will have completely and decisively vindicated Himself through the perfecting of His character in the lives of the redeemed.

"As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed thrill with more fervent devotion, and with more rapturous joy they sweep the harps of gold; and ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

Revelation 4 and 5 a unit. While the controversy with evil continues

on earth, praise and devotion are continually being offered to God by the sinless inhabitants of heaven. Revelation 4 and 5 depict different aspects of the same scene. The setting of chapter 5 is the throne room of heaven described in chapter 4. Together the two chapters provide the introduction and setting for the prophecy of the seven seals.

I. GOD UPON HIS THRONE (Rev. 4:1-3).

Having written the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor, John directs attention to the impending crisis on a global scale. Based on their specific conditions and particular circumstances, the churches received from the risen Lord messages of counsel and commendation. All were given the challenge to be true to the Lord during the great conflict awaiting them.

1. Where was the door that John saw opened and through which he looked? Rev. 4:1.

“In heaven. Not, ‘into heaven,’ as if John were on the outside looking in. Inasmuch as, looking within, he beheld the throne of God, this must have been a door opening upon the throne room of the universe.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 766.

John is taken up in vision to a door within heaven. Through the open door he beholds the holiness of God’s presence in a glorious scene of worship.

2. Compare John’s vision of God with the visions received by other Bible prophets:

Eze. 1:26-28 _____

Isa. 6:1-4 _____

Dan. 7:9, 10 _____

Isaiah saw into both apartments of the heavenly sanctuary. “In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah was permitted in vision to look into the holy place, and into the holy of holies in the heavenly sanctuary. The curtains of the innermost sanctuary were drawn aside, and a throne high and lifted up, towering as it were to the very heavens, was revealed to his gaze. An indescribable glory emanated from a personage on the throne, and His train filled the temple, as His glory will finally fill the earth. Cherubim were on either side of the mercy-seat, as guards round the great king, and they glowed with the glory that enshrouded them from the presence of God. As their songs of praise resounded in deep, earnest notes of adoration, the pillars of the gate trembled, as if shaken by an earthquake.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1139, 1140.

Heaven is closely connected to earth. "In the visions given to Isaiah, to Ezekiel, and to John we see how closely heaven is connected with the events taking place upon the earth and how great is the care of God for those who are loyal to Him. The world is not without a ruler. The program of coming events is in the hands of the Lord. The Majesty of heaven has the destiny of nations, as well as the concerns of His church, in His own charge."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 753.

3. The scenes of worship in Revelation were disclosed to John for the comfort and encouragement of the church. How should I seek communion with God and fellowship with His people? Heb. 10:23-25.

We are at the mercy of the enemy when we neglect to commune with God. In public worship we draw strength from hearing God's Word, singing hymns of praise, presenting our tithes and offerings, and making intercession for one another.

II. TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS (Rev. 4:4, 5).

In vision, John saw twenty-four elders sitting around God's throne. They were dressed in white garments and wore crowns of gold. Here and elsewhere throughout the book they are pictured falling down before God in adoration and praise (Rev. 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). Twice we find an elder talking to John (Rev. 5:5; 7:13), and on one occasion the elders appear with the four living creatures presenting to God the prayers of His people (Rev. 5:8). Night and day they offer God continual worship.

4. What is the significance of the white garments worn by the twenty-four elders? Rev. 4:4; compare Rev. 19:7, 8.

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5. Why are the twenty-four elders wearing golden crowns? What do crowns symbolize? Rev. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12.

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6. How many orders of ancient Israelite priests were there? 1 Chron. 24:2-19.

Revelation chapter 4 uses the number 24 symbolically. The entire scene is a symbolic representation of reality. It cannot be concluded that there are a literal 24 elders in heaven. The number points us to the function of the elders. Just as there were 24 divisions of priests who served in the ancient sanctuary, so the work of the elders is to assist Christ, our high priest, in His heavenly ministry.

7. Apart from their priestly duties in the sanctuary, what other function was performed by the Israelite priests? Deut. 17:8-12; compare 19:17; 2 Chron. 19:8-10; Eze. 44:24.

The ancient Israelite priests were assistant judges. In like manner the heavenly elders assist Christ in His work of judgment.

8. How did the twenty-four elders get to heaven? Matt. 27:52, 53.

Redeemed human beings in heaven. The crowns worn by the 24 elders represent the spiritual victory they already have received. The white garments they wear symbolize the righteousness of Christ given to believers. Christ brought into our hearts by the Holy Spirit is our righteousness (Rom. 8:9, 10; 10:6-10; 1 John 2:29; 3:7). The white robes represent Christ within. Seated before the throne of God in heaven are redeemed human beings who have received the ultimate spiritual victory through Christ who is their righteousness.

Raised with Jesus. When Jesus died on the Cross “the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matt. 27:52, 53, NASB). These resurrected saints were not left on this earth to die a second time. They were taken to heaven with Jesus as the firstfruits of His sacrifice. These saints in heaven are not the disembodied souls of the dead. They are redeemed human beings who were raised from the dead.

Just as Aaron and subsequent high priests were assisted by twenty-four divisions of Levitical priests, so Christ is assisted in heaven by human beings functioning as priests. They offer up to Christ “the prayers of saints” (Rev. 5:8). Christ is our one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). He presents the prayers of His people before the heavenly throne (Rev. 8:3, 4). But He is assisted by redeemed human beings who have already been translated to heaven.

The Revelation 4 scene takes place in heaven before the second coming of Jesus. Messages go into the earth after the 24 elders have assembled around the throne of God. (Rev. 5:1—8:1). The scene in Revelation 4 occurs before the seals of the little book in God’s hand are broken, and before the special messages contained in those seals are sent into the earth.

Why is it encouraging to know that Christ, our mediator and judge, is assisted in heaven by redeemed human beings?



III. THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (Rev. 4:5-8).

9. Who else is symbolically represented as present in heaven? Rev. 4:5.

In Lesson 1 it was explained that there is only one Holy Spirit. (See the comment on Rev. 1:4.) He is symbolized as “the seven Spirits of God” because the oil in the candlestick of the sanctuary was directed into seven branches. The seven-branched candlestick represented Christ’s people around the world. The Holy Spirit does a perfect work for them as He dwells in their hearts and works Christ’s will through them.

- 10. Describe the “beasts,” or “living creatures” that John saw before the throne of God in heaven. Rev. 4:6-8.**
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The Greek word for “beast” used in this passage means also “living thing or being, living creature.”

- 11. How do we know that the four living creatures are beings who exercise special authority in heaven? Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7.**
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- 12. How do we know that the living creatures are distinct from the main body of the angels? Rev. 7:11.**
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- 13. What similarities do you see between the four living creatures of Revelation and those described by Ezekiel? Eze. 1:4-10, 22.**
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Ezekiel’s living creatures each had four faces, but they were the same faces that John saw. Ezekiel saw the living creatures guided by the Spirit (Eze. 1:12, 20). Although they were supporting the throne of God (Eze. 1:26-28), they were in close contact with events on earth, because Ezekiel saw beside each living creature a “wheel upon the earth” (Eze. 1:15). The “wheel within a wheel” (v. 16, RSV), reaching from heaven to earth was guided by the living creature. The four wheels represent God’s control of earthly events by means of the living creatures. How reassuring it is to know that our personal lives and the complicated interplay of forces operating within societies and between nations are under the direct supervision of the Lord upon His throne!

- 14. Who are represented by the living creatures seen in vision by John and Ezekiel? Eze. 10:1, 15, 20.**
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The similarity of Ezekiel’s living creatures with John’s, and the fact that in both cases they are in close proximity to the throne of God justifies the conclusion that the living creatures of Revelation chapter 4 are cherubim (angels). In the same way that there were special golden cherubim placed

close to the throne in the earthly sanctuary (Ex. 37:7-9), in heaven there are cherubim superior in rank to the angels in general. They function as commanders, who pass on to the other angels the orders given by the Lord Himself.

If the living creatures are angels, how could they sing the song recorded in Rev. 5:9, 10? The Revised Standard Version presents the song of verse 9 in the third person (for "by thy blood didst ransom men for God"). Textual scholars have concluded that, since the textual evidence for the first person in verse 9 is somewhat divided, it probably should read in the third person as does verse 10. Possibly the heavenly chorus is antiphonal, the 24 elders singing verse 9 in the first person and the living creatures responding with verse 10 in the third person. At all events, the evidence from Ezekiel is sufficient—the living creatures are heavenly cherubim.

"The living creatures represent heavenly beings. . . . The forms chosen for this prophetic presentation were doubtless designed to symbolize heavenly messengers in their plenitude of offices, capabilities, and adaptabilities."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 577.

15. What Old Testament type illustrated the cherubim before the throne of God? Ex. 25:18-20; 1 Sam. 4:4.

Angels guard and direct your way. As we have seen, the angels before the throne of God are directly involved in the affairs of this earth. Their commands come from Christ Himself, who shares the throne with the Father (Hebrews 8:1, 2). The cherubim before the throne pass on Christ's commands to the angelic hosts. The Bible describes all of the angels as "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). They care for you and protect you from the forces of evil.

IV. ADORATION FOR THE CREATOR (Rev. 4:8-11).

The day David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, he led Israel in worship with a psalm of thanksgiving, exhorting them to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chron. 16:29).

16. For what do the living creatures and the 24 elders praise God? Rev. 4:8-11.

Without ceasing they extol God's greatness by declaring His holiness, power, and eternity. Holiness is the chief attribute of God. (See Lev. 11:44, 45.) When the prophet Isaiah was given a vision of God, he saw the celestial beings (seraphim) in the temple in heaven proclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3). John beholds a similar scene in vision. The four living creatures surrounding God's throne in reverential awe say, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord

God Almighty, which was, and is and is to come" (Rev. 4:8). The holiness of God instills within us a profound sense of awe, a deep reverence for His majestic presence.

17. In addition to the glorious manifestation of the divine presence in heaven, God's holiness is revealed in the wrath He displays toward sin. Read Revelation 15:3-8 and observe the connection between the holiness of God and the seven plagues.

Two reactions to God's presence. What makes the difference between those who experience awe in the light of God's holiness and those who are filled with terror? In the book of Hebrews we are admonished to offer our worship to God with reverence and fear for He is a "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28, 29). Should God fully manifest His holiness, we could be instantly destroyed by the sheer power of His presence. Awe, respect, and reverence for God's holiness and power result from a love relationship with Him.

Some are preparing for rejection. "God has shown me that at the very time that the signs of the times are being fulfilled around us, when we hear, as it were, the tread of the hosts of heaven fulfilling their mission, men of intelligence, men in responsible positions, will be putting rotten timbers in their character building—material which is consumable in the day of God, and which will decide them to be unfit to enter the mansions above."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 446, 447.

18. In view the coming crisis, what counsel does the apostle Peter offer us? 2 Peter 3:11-13.

HOW MAY THIS LESSON BE APPLIED TO MY LIFE? God's holiness makes me feel (check the appropriate box):

- () afraid, () uncomfortable, () my need for a Mediator,
 () thankful for the sacrifice of Jesus, () a desire to praise God,
 () hatred for sin.

Complete this open-ended sentence: God is worthy of my love and worship because _____



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read "Worldliness in the Church" in *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 183-199. Study Romans 12 and Hebrews 12 in connection with the message of Revelation 4.

SUMMARY: In our lesson this week we focused attention on John's throne-room vision recorded in Revelation 4. We saw that the purpose of the vision was to strengthen believers by encouraging them to exercise faith in the wisdom, power, and holiness of God.

Worthy Is the Lamb

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 5. The Lamb Before the Throne.



MEMORY TEXT: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).

YOU CAN COME CONFIDENTLY BEFORE GOD'S THRONE.

Jesus is your mediator and judge in the heavenly sanctuary. His death and resurrection make possible forgiveness, cleansing, and eternal life for those who trust Him as Lord and Saviour. The scroll that the Lamb takes from the hand of the Father is a book of destiny declaring God's verdict. God's judgments will be vindicated before the heavenly universe.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Scroll With the Seven Seals (Rev. 5:1).**
- II. No Cause for Weeping (Rev. 5:2-5).**
- III. The Lion and the Lamb (Rev. 5:6, 7).**
- IV. Rejoicing in Heaven (Rev. 5:8-14).**

GOD'S WORD IS A SURE GUIDE FOR DECISION MAKING.

Most of us have become accustomed to hearing the news and weather reports. Before deciding on what clothes to wear to work, many listen to these reports. Some carefully study political and economic trends in order to make sound business investments. Important decisions are made every day on the basis of information gleaned from the newspapers, radio, and television, not to mention the many consultation services that are available.

For the most part, the news on the basis of which we make most of our decisions has only temporary value. The weather changes daily. Political events and economic trends may have a longer impact, but they are soon forgotten. Few would be willing to pay the full price for yesterday's newspaper. The older the newspaper, the less interest we have in it. Unlike some things, news does not improve with age.

God's Word is different. With each passing day its message becomes increasingly important. As the world moves closer to its final destination, the need to read the Scriptures becomes more urgent. Because we know neither the day nor the hour when we may take our last breath, it is extremely important that we understand what is ahead of us and how we can best prepare for eternity.

Revelation chapter 5 adds some vital aspects to the scene portrayed in chapter 4. Together these two chapters depict the setting in which the seven seals are broken as the prelude to the second coming of Jesus.

I. THE SCROLL WITH THE SEVEN SEALS (Rev. 5:1).

After describing the awesome scene of worship in heaven, John directs our attention to the scroll with seven seals in the right hand of God. A message of unparalleled significance is contained in the scroll, which is sealed to secure its secrecy. With a loud voice a strong angel exclaims, “ ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?’ ” (Rev. 5:2, RSV). This is no ordinary scroll or book. Its contents have to do with the destiny of the world and its people. As long as the scroll is sealed, however, the divine verdict remains a mystery.

1. When is the seventh seal broken, making possible the opening and reading of the scroll in the hand of the Father? Rev. 8:1.

The little book in the hand of the Father is a scroll sealed with seven seals. Such a scroll sealed on the outside cannot be unrolled and read until all seven seals are broken. The contents of the scroll cannot be known until the seventh seal is broken. The contents of the scroll are not the same as the contents of the seals. The seals represent the events and messages that precede the opening of the scroll.

“The central item, the seven-sealed scroll, portrays a will or testament, for that is precisely what such a seven-sealed document was in Roman law of John’s day. . . . The breaking of the first six seals thus indicates events or conditions within historical time which are preparatory to the opening of the book in judgment; these seals represent the steps or means by which God through Christ prepares the way in history for the opening and reading of the great will or book of destiny at the judgment in the eschatological consummation. The seventh seal fitly represents the silence which accompanies that opening of the will.”—Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Naples, Fla.: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1976), pp. 55, 57.

2. What is the significance of the “silence” in heaven spoken of in Revelation 8:1? Isa. 62:1-4; 65:6, 7.

The sixth seal describes the second coming of Christ (Rev. 6:15-17). Not until after Christ comes and the wicked are slain by the glory of His appearance is the seventh seal broken. Then there is silence in heaven for about “half an hour” (Rev. 8:1). When Jesus is coming to destroy His earthly enemies, He “does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, round about him a mighty tempest” (Ps. 50:3, RSV; compare verses 4-7). “Behold, it is written before me: ‘I will not keep silent, but I will repay, yea, I will repay into their bosom their iniquities and their fathers’ iniquities together, says the Lord ’ (Isa. 65:6, 7, RSV).

The silence does not come until the wicked have been put to death, the righteous dead have been raised, and the righteous living are caught up with them. The silence is the great calm after the storm. It is a symbol of the great joy of the Lord, His heavenly hosts, and His redeemed people as

they travel to heaven. "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give" (Isa. 62:1, 2, RSV; compare Rev. 2:17).



3. When are God's faithful people finally rewarded? 1 Thess. 4:16-18; compare 2 Thess. 1:7-10.

The final verdict of the heavenly court is contained in the scroll in the Father's hand (Rev. 5:1). Those who are given eternal life are those who are clothed in white robes. (Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 13-15). They have their names retained in the book of life during the pre-advent judgment (Rev. 3:5), and at its conclusion are counted worthy of heaven (Dan 12:1). Daniel saw books of record opened in the judgment, including the book of life (Dan. 7:10). John's vision is complementary. He does not see the books of record. He is shown in the Father's hand the book of destiny, which is the verdict of the heavenly court after the books of record have been examined and the book of life edited.

The destiny of the wicked is recorded in the same scroll. "When Pilate washed his hands, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person,' the priests joined with the ignorant mob in declaring passionately, 'His blood be on us, and on our children.' Matt. 27:24, 25. Thus the Jewish leaders made their choice. Their decision was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open. In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 294.

II. NO CAUSE FOR WEEPING (Rev. 5:2-5).

John tells us that the angel found no one who was worthy to break the seals and unroll the scroll of destiny.


4. When John saw no one meet the challenge of the strong angel, how did he respond? Why did he respond that way? Rev. 5:2-4.

The promise given to John ("Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter," Rev. 4:1) appeared to be thwarted. Failure to find one to open the scroll would postpone indefinitely the disclosure of God's decision regarding the saved and the lost. Without a divine verdict, no one could be saved. If the scroll could not be opened, there could be no salvation for anyone.

5. What comforting reassurance was John given? Rev. 5:5.

6. When did Christ conquer so that He could open the scroll? Rev. 5:9, 10.

Christ's victory on the cross renders possible our victory, enables Him to break the seals and reveal the eternal verdict of salvation for His people. His victory also renders it possible for Him to destroy Satan and his followers. The scroll in the Father's hand is vitally important to earth's inhabitants because it announces who is saved and why, and who is lost and why.

-  7. What other evidence are we given that Christ's victory on the cross makes possible the spiritual victory of His believing people? Rev. 3:21; 1 John 5:4, 5.

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8. What other result follows from Christ's victory on Calvary? 1 Cor. 15:24-26; Rev. 20:9, 10.

Why have a pre-Advent judgment if God has known all along who will be saved and who lost? The Father holds the book of destiny in His hands. The book contains the future for life or death of every human soul. If God already knows who will be lost and who will be saved, why have the pre-Advent court session as described in Daniel 7:9-14? (Note that God foresees each soul's response to His grace, but He does not predetermine it: Rom. 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2; Isa. 46:9, 10; John 13:11.)

The pre-Advent court session is for the benefit of the unfallen universe. The purpose is that through the church "the manifold wisdom of God" might now be made known to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). Daniel saw present at the heavenly pre-Advent judgment a "thousand thousands . . . and ten thousand times ten thousand" (Dan. 7:10). God's design is that "affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nah. 1:9). For this purpose to be realized it is essential that no inhabitant of the universe should have any doubt about the justice of God.

The pre-Advent court session is also for those living on the earth now. Christ wishes His living believers to enter into a relationship with Him that will bear the scrutiny of the universe. The book of Revelation repeatedly emphasizes this motif. The pre-Advent judgment will not end until the servants of God have been finally sealed (Rev. 7:3). Then their characters will be fully in accord with God's will (Rev. 14:1). They will fulfill the description in Rev. 14:5: "In their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless" (RSV).

Are the results of Calvary manifest in my life? Can I rejoice in present salvation in Christ? (See Titus 3:5-7; Col. 1:13, 14.) Am I ex-

periencing progressive growth spiritually, increasing victory over sin, a closer and closer fellowship with Jesus? Am I seriously preparing for the seal of God?

WED**III. THE LION AND THE LAMB (Rev. 5:6, 7).**

One of the elders assured John that Jesus is able to open the scroll and loosen its seals because of the victory He has won.

9. By what titles did the elder refer to Christ? What do these titles mean? Rev. 5:5.

The lion of Judah: This title is taken from Genesis 49:9. Jacob was pronouncing final blessings upon his sons. Judah is called a "lion's whelp" and is promised that the scepter shall not depart from him "until Shiloh come."

The root of David: This title may be traced back to Isaiah 11:1, 10 where we find a reference to the stump and root of Jesse. David was Jesse's offspring or "root." Jesus Christ was the Son of David and the source of David's victory. Therefore Jesus is given the title "the Root of David." The titles, Lion of Judah and Root of David both signify Jesus' role as God's Anointed One or Messiah, and point to the great work of redemption that He has accomplished for us. He alone is worthy to unroll the scroll and reveal its contents, for He alone is Lord of lords and King of kings. (See Rev. 19:16.)

10. What symbol of Christ was John shown? Rev. 5:6, 7.

The symbol of a lamb being used to represent Christ is common throughout Scripture. John refers to Him as the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). Isaiah speaks of Him as "a lamb that is led to a slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7, RSV). Jeremiah increases our understanding of the symbol (Jer. 11:19). Peter borrows the Old Testament imagery when he writes of Christ as "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

11. Why was Christ depicted in this way? Lev. 4:32; John 1:29.

"A lamb was even less expensive than a goat, and for this reason it was expected that a poor man would bring a lamb. The lamb was therefore considered the poor man's offering. It is significant that Christ is repeatedly spoken of as the Lamb of God. He is the poor man's sacrifice."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 732.

12. What is symbolized by the seven horns of the Lamb? Rev. 5:6; Deut. 33:17; 2 Sam. 22:3.

In the Bible horns are sometimes used as a symbol of strength or power; whether spiritual power or national power. The psalmist wrote of the Lord as "the horn of my salvation" (Ps. 18:2). The seven horns of the Lamb represent Christ's perfect power to save by virtue of His sacrifice.

13. Who is symbolized by the Lamb's seven eyes? Rev. 5:6; Zech. 4:2, 6, 10.

In Zechariah 4:10 the prophet refers to the oil in the seven candlesticks as "the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." The "seven eyes" are a symbol of God's omniscience or infinite wisdom manifested through the work of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing hidden from Him. His eternal vigilance by the Holy Spirit brings comfort, strength, and protection to His committed people.

A magnificent portrayal of Christ. The Lamb bears the marks of a sacrificial death. They are the marks of Christ's sacrifice, the marks of tragedy and triumph. The Lamb is living, but it retains the scars of a cruel death. They remind us of the horrible nature and painful consequences of sin. They also point to the glorious victory that Christ accomplished for us.

The Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, bearing the sacrificial marks, is the all-powerful, all-wise Saviour, who has descended into the grave itself and has set free the captives of evil. He alone knows the mysteries of redemption and can reveal them to the church.

A divine contrast. "These symbols represent the union of omnipotent power and self-sacrificing love. The Lion of Judah, so terrible to the rejectors of His grace, will be the Lamb of God to the obedient and faithful. The pillar of fire that speaks terror and wrath to the transgressor of God's law is a token of light and mercy and deliverance to those who have kept His commandments. The arm strong to smite the rebellious will be strong to deliver the loyal."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 589.

What is Jesus to me, a Lion or a Lamb?

IV. REJOICING IN HEAVEN (Rev. 5:8-14).

In chapter 4 the 24 elders praised God for His work of creation. (See verse 11.) In chapter 5 they offer praise to Jesus for His work of redemption. In both cases the adoration is introduced with the words, "Thou art worthy." In chapter 5 the elders along with the four living creatures sing a new song (verse 9).

14. In each of the following texts we are exhorted to sing to the Lord a "new song" and are given the reason for the exhortation. List each reason on the blank space to the right of the text.

Ps. 33:3-5 _____

Ps. 40:1-3 _____

Ps. 96:1-6 _____

Ps. 98:1-3 _____

15. In what respect is the song to the Lamb a new song? Who else will sing a new song in the future? Rev. 14:3.

The song of victory. "By faith we may stand on the threshold of the eternal city, and hear the gracious welcome given to those who in this life co-operate with Christ, regarding it as an honor to suffer for His sake. . . . There the redeemed greet those who led them to the Saviour, and unite in praising Him who died that human beings might have the life that measures with the life of God. The conflict is over. Tribulation and strife are at an end. Songs of victory fill all heaven as the ransomed ones take up the joyful strain, Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and lives again, a triumphant conqueror."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 601, 602.

OF WHAT IMPORTANCE IS THIS VISION OF CHRIST TO MY LIFE? Christ the Lamb has perfect wisdom and power. Do you long for wisdom to know how to handle problems in your life? List some of these problems:

Think of areas of life in which you need the power of Christ to be an overcomer. List some of these:

Consider these promises: James 1:6; 2 Samuel 22:33-41; Isaiah 59:1, 16; Ephesians 1:19.



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 832-835.

SUMMARY: By virtue of the victory Christ achieved through His sacrificial suffering and death, He alone is worthy of the honor to open the scroll of destiny and loosen its seals. He is the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God.

Thou Wilt Judge and Avenge Our Blood

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 6. The vindication of God's people at the end of time.



MEMORY VERSE: "They cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, doest thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:10).

CHRIST EXONERATES HIS JUSTIFIED PEOPLE. God allows individuals, churches, and nations freedom to make choices. He allows history to take its course, but He intervenes in behalf of His people and overrules events to fulfill His divine will. The cry of the afflicted righteous is heard and registered in heaven, and toward the end of human history those who have suffered for Christ's sake are vindicated by the Lord Himself.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:1-8).
- II. Slain for the Word of God (Rev. 6:9-11).
- III. The Day of Their Wrath Has Come (Rev. 6:12-17).

HUMAN INTOLERANCE. Throughout history human beings often have been inhuman, causing great suffering. The Christian church has seen periods of great intolerance. Many faithful Christians, because of their loyalty to the simple principles of the Bible, have suffered at the hands of other professed Christians. The spiritual vitality of the early church gave place to apostasy and doctrinal error. Those who refused to accept the trend often paid for their dissent with their lives.

There is good news. Christ has defeated the evil powers and has provided a way of escape for every human being. Ultimately God will settle the great controversy and resolve the problem of evil by vindicating His character in the universe.

The prophecy of the seven seals (Rev. 6:1-8:1) traces not only the spiritual decline of the church throughout history but God's reaction to it. Mercifully the Lord has sent messages into the earth to lead His people back to the teachings of Christ and His apostles. The seals of Revelation 6 are not merely a history lesson. They provide messages for today as we face the challenges of end-time existence.

SUN

I. THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE (Rev. 6:1-8).

As was noted last week, the Lamb alone is worthy to open the scroll, by virtue of His triumph over Satan. When He opens the scroll, messages from God are carried to earth. These messages are designed to meet the spiritual needs of the church and humanity in general. Events in the church and the world threaten to turn souls away from Christ. God sends messages of light and warning to meet the emergency.

- 1. Fill in the chart below with the things that John saw and heard when the first four seals were opened (Rev. 6:1-8).**

| |
|--------------------|
| 1st Seal 6:1, 2 |
| 2nd Seal 6:3, 4 |
| 3rd Seal 6:5, 6 |
| 4th Seal 6:7, 8 |

- 2. Match the column on the left with the column on the right by placing the letter in the left column in the proper space:**

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|-------|
| a. White Horse | Death and hell | _____ |
| b. Red Horse | God's people weighed | _____ |
| c. Black Horse | Spiritual conquest | _____ |
| d. Pale Horse | Peace removed | _____ |

- 3. Read the apocalyptic discourse of Jesus in Luke 21:1-28. What signs did Jesus cite as evidence of the end of time? What similarities do you recognize between Jesus' teaching and the message of the seals?**

Seventh-day Adventists have consistently taught that the horses and riders depicted in the first four seals represent the church in its various stages of development and decline:

- **The white horse and its rider** with a bow and a crown go forth "conquering and to conquer." This symbolically depicts the church in its early state of purity when under the leadership of the risen Lord it successfully advanced the gospel against the pagan powers.

- **The red horse** with a rider bearing a sword to slay human life symbolizes the loss of spiritual purity in the church of the postapostolic period. Apostate Christians attempted to force their views upon others by military conquest and religious persecution.

o **The black horse** with a rider holding a balance or scales in his hand represents the church of the early Middle Ages which moved farther from God's revealed will. The church adopted the ways of the world to advance its mission, and set in motion a period of intense spiritual famine.

o **The pale horse** with a rider wearing the name "Death and Hades" represents the church of the later Middle Ages. Spiritual famine ended in spiritual death. The church had so turned away from the love and humility of Jesus that it ceased to be His church. Apostate Christians persecuted faithful Christians. Death and hell represent the divine sentence upon an apostate church.

The seals of Revelation 6:1-8:1 are being restudied constantly by Seventh-day Adventists. We recognize that this is a section of Scripture that demands close investigation. Together we need to open our hearts and minds to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit as we seek for the special relevance of this prophecy for the church and the world today.

MON

4. For those wishing to engage in a more in-depth study of the four horses of Revelation 6 the following study questions are offered:

a. Who sends the four horses and riders into the earth? Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7. The commands are given by the "living creatures" who are cherubim. Eze. 1:4-10, 22; 10:1, 15, 20. From whom do the cherubim receive their commands? Eze. 1:24, 25; 10:4, 5.

b. What is the command that the living creatures give to the riders of the horses? The KJV reads, "Come and see," but a better translation of the Greek text might be, "Come," or "Go." "Many copyists of the Greek manuscripts understood this to be a summons to John to come and behold the sequel to the breaking of the seal, and so they added the words, 'and see.' The AV follows this inaccurate rendering. However, the best Greek texts contain only the summons, 'Come.'"—George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), p. 96.

c. What is symbolized by the four colors of the horses? How are these colors used in other contexts? A concordance may be used to great advantage here. As a beginning note: "white" (Rev. 3:4, 5, 18; 19:7, 8); "red" (Isa. 63:1-5; 1:18); "black" (Jer. 4:27, 28; Isa. 50:2, 3); "Pale or pale green" (2 Kings 19:26; Eze. 17:24).

d. What is represented by the two items possessed by the rider of the white horse? The "bow" (Gen. 49:22-24; Zech. 10:1, 3-7) and the "crown" (Rev. 3:11; Lev. 8:9; Ex. 28:36-38; Rev. 7:1-3).

e. What kind of conquest is carried on by the rider of the white horse? (Rev. 6:2). Is it spiritual or military?

f. Is the message of the white horse being presented today? If so, what is this message?

g. If the message of the red horse, like that of the white horse, comes from God, how could it be said "to take peace from the earth?" (Rev. 6:4; compare Matt. 10:34-36). If the rider is sent into the earth by one of the cherubim who passes on God's command, why is he given a great sword? What does the sword represent? (See Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; compare Isa.

1:19, 20; 65:11, 12.) Is God ever responsible for apostasy or persecution? Could we conclude that the red horse does not merely represent apostasy but also God's reaction to apostasy?

h. What is the significance of the "balances" in the hand of the rider of the black horse? (See Job 31:6; Dan. 5:27; Psalm 62:9.) How and why are God's people being weighed in the balances today? (See *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 186, 187.)

i. We are told the price of wheat and barley in Revelation 6:6, but we are not told average income. Is that sufficient information to conclude that there are famine conditions? A denarius (penny) was the pay for a day's work given by the householder in Jesus' parable (Matt. 20:2, 9, 10, 13). Was it a depressed wage? Of what are wheat, barley, oil, and wine symbols in Scripture? (See Hosea 2:8; Joel 2:19, 23, 24; Zech. 4:1-6; Matt. 9:17; Gen. 49:10-12.)

j. For whom is death and hell intended (Rev. 6:8)? Who causes the destruction described under the fourth seal? Why? (See Eze. 14:21; Lev. 26:23-25; Jer. 21:7; Rev. 20:14, 15.)

When do the wicked suffer death and hell? (See Rev. 15:5-8; 16:1-21; 19:14-21; 20:9.)

Personal application. How does my spiritual life appear to the Lord? Do I appear more pale than pure? What should I do in order to enjoy a closer relationship with Christ? Am I willing to suffer for righteousness' sake as God's faithful have done throughout history?

TUE II. SLAIN FOR THE WORD OF GOD (Rev. 6:9-11).

We must remember that we are dealing with symbolic imagery in the book of Revelation. An attempt to interpret this passage literally will distort the prophetic message and at the same time make little sense. John's vision can be understood more clearly against the background of the Old Testament ritual of sacrifice.

5. What do the following texts teach about blood and sacrifice? Lev. 4:7; 17:11; Ex. 29:12.

In the sacrificial ritual the priests poured out the bullock's blood at the base or foot of the altar of burnt offering. The life of the animal was regarded as in the blood. When the priest poured the blood of the animal in this way, he was returning the life to God through the ritual of sacrifice.

6. Whose blood was symbolized by the blood poured beneath the altar in the earthly sanctuary? Isa. 53:12; John 19:33, 34.

7. What other application of the blood poured beneath the altar is possible? Rom. 8:35-37; Phil. 3:10; Rev. 12:11.

8. When facing the penalty of death for his faith, what was the apostle Paul's response? Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6.

The martyrs to be given eternal life. In prophetic symbolism John saw the martyrs who had given their lives because of God's Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ. John did not see disembodied souls in heaven. He saw a symbolic representation of the fact that Christ had reserved the righteous dead for eternal life which will be bestowed on the resurrection morning. (See 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Cor. 15:51-54.)

9. How may we copy the spirit of the martyrs? What does the counsel of the apostle Paul mean to you? Rom. 12:1, 2.

Heaven's supplies available. "All who consecrate body, soul, and spirit to God's service will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical, mental, and spiritual power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth His highest energies to work in heart and mind."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 513.

10. What metaphoric cry from the unconscious righteous dead is heard by God? Rev. 6:10.

The cry of the martyrs is actually a plea for justice, not in a cold, legalistic sense, but with a genuine passion for righteousness and peace. The martyrs' cry is not a desire for personal revenge, but a plea for divine vindication.

WED

11. Are the righteous dead judged at the time of death or later; at the second coming of Jesus or earlier? Rev. 6:10, 11; compare Dan. 7:9-14, 21, 22.

The judgment of the righteous dead did not take place in the first century A.D. Nor were the martyrs judged at the time of their deaths. Their cry rules out those possibilities. Many of them had been in the grave for centuries. Their symbolic cry was, "How long before thou wilt judge?" (Rev. 6:10, RSV). Moreover, they were told "to rest a little longer" (verse 11). They would be raised from the dead after being in the grave "a little longer." (See 1 Thess. 4:16-18.) The second advent of Jesus would occur only a short time in the future. One thing implied by the cry of the martyrs is that there is a pre-advent, investigative judgment. In this judgment they finally are vindicated.

12. How are the righteous dead judged? Rev. 6:11; compare 3:5; Dan. 12:1.
-

The righteous dead martyrs are judged in heaven. The "white robes" symbolize their vindication in the heavenly pre-advent judgment. Because they died in possession of Christ's righteousness, they could be judged worthy of eternal life.

13. What must occur before the righteous dead can be raised? Rev. 6:11.
-

Most English translations of Revelation 6:11 seem to indicate that the martyrs cannot be raised until a certain number of people have been put to death for their faith. However, the Greek of Revelation 6:11 reads simply: "And there was given to each of them a white robe, and it was said to them that they should rest yet a little time, until their fellow servants and their brethren also, who are about to be killed as they were, might be made complete (or perfect)." The Greek verb for "might be made complete" does not necessarily imply the completion of a particular number of martyrs. The idea of completing a number is not characteristic of the usage of this verb in the Greek Old Testament or in the New Testament.

14. How do we become spiritually complete? Col. 2:10-13; Eph. 3:16-19.
-

The work of the Holy Spirit. "The mighty power of the Holy Spirit works an entire transformation in the character of the human agent, making him a new creature in Christ Jesus. When a man is filled with the Spirit, the more severely he is tested and tried, the more clearly he proves that he is a representative of Christ. . . . Are we seeking for His fullness, ever pressing toward the mark set before us—the perfection of His character? When the Lord's people reach this mark, they will be sealed in their foreheads. Filled with the Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and the recording angel will declare, 'It is finished.'"—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, pp. 1117, 1118.

15. What will be the spiritual condition of God's people just prior to Jesus' second advent? Rev. 19:7, 8; Rev. 3:5; Eph. 4:13; 5:27.
-

Godly characters. "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.

“The godly character of this prophet [Enoch] represents the state of holiness which must be attained by those who shall be ‘redeemed from the earth’ at the time of Christ’s second advent.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 88, 89.

III. THE DAY OF THEIR WRATH HAS COME (Rev. 6:12-17).

The opening of the sixth seal reveals a series of events that mark the beginning of the end. The day of the Lord in Old Testament prophecy is the day when God will vindicate His name in the earth. It is a day of light for the righteous, but one of darkness for the wicked. (See Isa. 13:9, 10; Joel 2:1, 2; Amos 5:18-20.)

16. What is the first event in the natural world presented as a sign of Jesus’ soon appearing? Rev. 6:12; compare Jer. 4:23-28; Rev. 16:17-20.

17. What second sign of the Advent does John mention? Rev. 6:12; compare Isa. 13:9-11; Eze. 32:7, 8; Joel 2:10, 11.

18. What is the third sign of the Advent that John lists? Rev. 6:13; compare Isa. 34:1-4.

19. How does John describe the second coming of Jesus? Rev. 6:14-17; compare Joel 2:11; Nahum 1:6.

HOW WILL I GET READY? In preparation for the second coming of Jesus I plan to do the following (check the appropriate boxes):

- Spend at least 30 minutes daily in prayer and contemplation of the perfect life of Jesus.
- Devote myself to a prayerful study of the Bible.
- Get involved in outreach activities in my church.
- Budget my time and money to allow for greater investment in spiritual concerns.

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Compare Revelation 6:9-11 (judgment in progress) with chapter 19:1-8 (judgment completed). Read *The Great Controversy*, chapter 40, “God’s People Delivered,” pp. 635-652.

SUMMARY: The opening of the scroll in the Father’s hand reveals God’s appeal to humanity in view of earthly events. With the breaking of each seal, we are able to see the events and hear the messages from heaven that precede the second coming of Jesus.

God's Servants Sealed

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 7:1-8. The sealing before the end of time.



MEMORY TEXT: "I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of . . . Israel" (Revelation 7:4).

ARE YOU PREPARING FOR THE SEAL OF GOD? God's work of sealing His people saves them from the impending doom and secures them for His kingdom. If you live until Jesus comes you must receive the end-time seal of God to be saved. To be unsealed is to be lost.

The seven last plagues will not come until God's people are sealed. The symbolic number, 144,000, are redeemed from every nation. Their robes are made white and pure by the blood of the Lamb.

OUTLINE:

- I. Angels Hold Back the Winds (Rev. 7:1).
- II. The Angel From the East (Rev. 7:2).
- III. God's Sealing Work (Rev. 7:3; 14:1-5).
- IV. The One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand (Rev. 7:4-8).

GOD'S SEAL IS SPIRITUAL PREPARATION. A woman had a terrifying dream one night. She dreamed she had a cancerous mole. The disease spread rapidly throughout her body. She felt utterly helpless and was smitten with a sense of hopelessness. More than a few Seventh-day Adventists feel this way about their spiritual condition and the spiritual condition of their families. If not understood, our lesson for this week can cause despair, for it calls attention to the terrors awaiting the wicked in the last days. While few Adventists would speak of themselves as wicked, many lack the assurance of salvation. They tend to doubt that they should number themselves with God's faithful.

John's vision of the four angels at the four corners of the earth was designed to awaken hope within God's people and bring encouragement to them as they prepare for the great tribulation. In such a preparation, it is well to take inventory of our spiritual priorities and decide whether some changes are necessary. It is not too late to change. However hopeless our condition may appear, and however helpless we may feel, God's grace is sufficient. His wisdom and power are unlimited. He desires to take us and our loved ones safely through whatever trials await us.



I. ANGELS HOLD BACK THE WINDS (Rev. 7:1).

God's work of giving the seal to believers at the end of time is recorded

after the story of the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 6:12-17). But the seal of God is not given after the second coming of Jesus. The reason for the arrangement of the material here in Revelation is simply that chapter 6:17 asks an important question: "Who shall be able to stand?" The answer to that question is that those who have been sealed before the Advent will be able to stand without fear when Jesus comes. Revelation 7:1-8 answers the question of Revelation 6:17.

1. What is meant by "the four corners of the earth"? Rev. 7:1; compare Rev. 20:8; Job 1:19.

In the Bible the phrase "four corners" is a term for universality or wholeness. The four corners of a city refer to the whole or complete city. The phrase "four corners" does not mean that the city is square or flat. The same is true when a house, a nation, a class of people, or the world are being referred to. (See also Isa. 11:12; Eze. 7:2.) Isaiah 40:22 speaks of God as "he that sitteth upon the *circle* of the earth."

The "four angels" of Revelation 7:1 symbolize all of heaven's angels who are involved in ministering to mankind. (See Hebrews 1:14.)

2. What is symbolized by the "winds of the earth" that are held back by the angels? Rev. 7:1. Read each text listed below and summarize what it says about wind or winds:

Dan. 7:2, 3 _____

Jer. 49:36 _____

Jer. 23:19 _____

Hosea 13:15 _____

Angels are restraining evil forces. "The present is a time of overwhelming interest to all living. Rulers and statesmen, men who occupy positions of trust and authority, thinking men and women of all classes, have their attention fixed upon the events taking place about us. They are watching the strained, restless relations that exist among the nations. They observe the intensity that is taking possession of every earthly element, and they recognize that something great and decisive is about to take place—that the world is on the verge of a stupendous crisis.

"Angels are now restraining the winds of strife, that they may not blow until the world shall be warned of its coming doom; but a storm is gathering, ready to burst upon the earth; and when God shall bid His angels loose the winds, there will be such a scene of strife as no pen can picture."—*Education*, pp. 179, 180.

"I saw that the four angels would hold the four winds until Jesus' work was done in the sanctuary, and then will come the seven last plagues."—*Early Writings*, p. 36.

“The storm is coming, relentless in its fury. Are we prepared to meet it? Are we one with Christ as He is one with the Father?”—*Review and Herald*, Nov. 27, 1900.

“Already kingdom is rising against kingdom. There is not now a determined engagement. As yet the four winds are held until the servants of God shall be sealed in their foreheads. Then the powers of earth will marshal their forces for the last great battle. How carefully we should improve the little remaining period of our probation.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 968.

Am I ready for the winds of strife to be let loose? What kind of spiritual preparation am I making?

MON

II. THE ANGEL FROM THE EAST (Rev. 7:2).

3. Why is the sealing angel said to be from the east? Rev. 7:2; compare 16:12.

The east is an important symbol in the Bible. The original tabernacle and the temple of Ezekiel's vision opened toward the east (Ex. 27:13-15; Eze. 40:6). The tribe of Judah from which Jesus descended was camped on the east side of the camp of Israel in the wilderness (Num. 2:3). Moses and Aaron, both of whom were types of Christ, camped on the east of the tabernacle (Num. 3:38). The New International Version translates Luke 1:78: “Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun [or ‘east’] will come to us from heaven.” The “east,” or “rising sun” came from heaven to earth when Jesus came to redeem mankind. Malachi speaks of the Messiah as “the Sun of righteousness” who will “arise with healing in his wings” (Mal. 4:2).

Cyrus, who successfully led the Medes and Persians against Babylon (539 B.C.), was the deliverer from the north and the east. (See Isa. 41:2, 25.) Cyrus and his army were types of Christ and the heavenly angels who will defeat modern Babylon (Rev. 17:14). Christ and the angels are spoken of as “the kings of the east” (Rev. 16:12), as will be shown in a later lesson.

The sealing angel is Christ. The significance for Revelation 7:2 is that the sealing angel can be regarded as Christ Himself. He is the eastern One who seals His people. He brings the dawning of spiritual day to believing sinners. Just as Cyrus's victory made possible his decree liberating Israel from captivity in Babylon, so Christ's victory (Rev. 5:5, 9, 10) makes it possible for Him to separate His people from modern “Babylon” and seal them for eternity.

Am I allowing Christ to separate me from modern “Babylon”? (See Rev. 18:1-4.) Am I willing to live so near to Him that He will be able to place upon me his last-day seal?

TUE III. GOD'S SEALING WORK (Rev. 7:3; Rev. 14:1-5).

4. What four things are we told in Revelation 7:1-4 about those who are sealed?

5. Whose name is written on the foreheads of those who are sealed? What do names often signify in the Bible? Rev. 14:1; compare Rev. 14:5; 3:12.

The Old Testament background. The ancient Israelite high priest wore a turban on the front of which was a gold plate. On the plate were inscribed the words, "Holy to the Lord" (Ex. 28:36-38, NIV; Lev. 8:9). This is the Old Testament background to the symbolism used in Revelation 7 and 14. (Compare the discussion of the sealing in Ezekiel chapter 9.)

God's last-day people are to wear the crown of spiritual victory (Rev. 3:11; 6:2). They wear the crown in two senses: (1) they have the gift of eternal life now (1 John 5:12, 13); (2) they have victory over sin through the power of the indwelling Christ (1 John 5:4; Rom. 6:14).

The seal of God is "his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1, RSV). The one who overcomes sin through Christ's grace has Christ's name and the Father's name written upon him (Rev. 2:17; 3:12; 22:4). The Old Testament predicted that God's people would be called by a new name (Isa. 62:2; 65:15). "In the OT the Hebrew word *shem*, 'name,' is sometimes used in the sense of 'character' (see Jer. 14:7, 21), and may be almost synonymous with the person himself (see Ps. 18:49)." —*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 157. Many names in the Old Testament were intended to indicate the characters of those who had them.

When the believers have the name of Christ and the Father written upon them, they have the gift of the divine character. They are said to be sealed in their foreheads because their minds are totally dedicated to Christ. The Holy Spirit has come to dwell within them. They are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

We must have Christ's character. "Only those who receive the seal of the living God will have the passport through the gates of the Holy City. But there are many who take upon themselves responsibilities in connection with the work of God who are not wholehearted believers, and while they remain thus they cannot receive the seal of the living God. They trust in their own righteousness, which the Lord accounts as foolishness. . . .

"The seal of the living God will be placed upon those only who bear a likeness to Christ in character.

"As wax takes the impression of the seal, so the soul is to take the im-

pression of the Spirit of God and retain the image of Christ.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 970.

WED

6. What does John mean when he says that the sealed saints are “redeemed from the earth,” “from mankind”? Rev. 14, 3, 4, RSV.

“Soon we heard the voice of God like many waters, which gave us the day and hour of Jesus’ coming. The living saints, 144,000 in number, knew and understood the voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake.”—*Early Writings*, p. 15; compare *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 59.

“These, having been translated from the earth, from among the living, are counted as ‘the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.’ Revelation 15:2, 3; 14:1-5. ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation’; they have passed through the time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation; they have endured the anguish of the time of Jacob’s trouble; they have stood without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God’s judgments. But they have been delivered, for they have ‘washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 649.

7. In what sense are the sealed saints “not defiled with women”? Rev. 14:4; compare 15:2-4.

The 144,000 have resisted the advances of metaphorical Jezebel and her daughters (Rev. 2:20-23). To change the metaphor, they have rejected the attractions of the great harlot, Babylon, and her daughters (Rev. 17:1-6). Spiritually they are ‘spotless’ because they have rejected Satan’s counterfeit.

8. How do we know that God’s “seal” is the same thing as His “sign”? Is circumcision still God’s sign? Rom. 4:11; Gal. 5:6; 6:15.

9. What other important “sign” or “seal” has God given His people to encourage their relationship with Him? How important is this “sign” or “seal” today? Ex. 31:13, 17; Eze. 20:12, 20; Matt. 24:20.

Because Sabbath observance is a sign of holiness (Ex. 31:13), it is an important part of the experience of righteousness by faith in Christ.

The Sabbath test. "The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God's law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other, choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 605.

"The fourth commandment alone of all the ten contains the seal of the great Lawgiver, the Creator of the heavens and the earth."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 350. (Compare *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 307; *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 117.)

"Those who desire to have the seal of God in their foreheads must keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 981.

Are you, by Christ's grace, faithfully observing the Sabbath? The Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath command, are written on the hearts of believers in the new covenant experience. (See Hebrews 8:10; compare Jer. 31:31-33.) The Sabbath commandment is God's seal because it contains the name, authority, and dominion of the divine Law-giver (Ex. 20:8-11; compare 1 Kings 21:8; Esther 3:12). Because the Sabbath is such a vital part of the righteousness by faith experience, shouldn't we search the Scriptures to be sure that we are keeping God's day in the way He requests?



IV. THE ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOUR THOUSAND. (Rev. 7:4-8.)

We have discovered that the 144,000 are Christ's faithful, sealed people living on the earth when Jesus comes.

10. Is the number 144,000 literal or symbolic? Are the twelve tribes literal or symbolic?

The Scriptures teach that the 144,000 come from the twelve tribes of Israel: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. The number 144,000 stands for completeness and perfection and is reached by multiplying 12 by 12 and then by 1,000. It would be a mistake to conclude that John is thinking in literal terms. The mention of the 144,000 is contained in a highly symbolic prophecy. Revelation 7 uses such symbolism as "four angels," "four corners," "four winds," "the east," the seal in the foreheads of God's people. To interpret these symbols literally would be to miss the point of the passage. As we have seen, the symbolism has very significant meaning for last-day Christians.

Spiritual Israel. Those who are sealed and preserved through the great tribulation in the last days are not literally members of the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribes do not exist today. They are mentioned because in their totality they typify the people of God, including both Jews and Gentiles. In the New Testament the church established by Jesus and organized around the twelve apostles constitutes the new Israel. (See James 1:1; Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:6, 7; Gal. 3:29.)

Not every professed Christian will be sealed. While it is true that the 144,000 represent a complete and perfect body of believers, it does not follow that everyone who bears the name Christian will be numbered in that group. The angel holding the seal of the living God refers to the 144,000 as "the servants of our God." They are identified on the basis of their service to God. They are characterized by their faithfulness, obedience and loyalty. God claims them as His people because of their desire and decision to be His people.

We must not enter into controversy over who are the 144,000. "It is not His will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will not help them spiritually, such as, Who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand? This those who are the elect of God will in a short time know without question."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 174.

WHAT IS MY RESPONSE TO THIS MESSAGE? Read the statements below and respond accordingly:

1. God wants me to anticipate joyfully the sealing work, for it will bring great joy to my Christian experience.
AGREE () DISAGREE ()
2. Preparation for the seal of God will come by my growth in grace.
AGREE () DISAGREE ()
3. I grow in grace by working hard to make myself holy.
AGREE () DISAGREE ()
4. My Christian growth will occur as I choose Christ every day, abiding in Him by prayer and Bible study, and depending upon Him for spiritual strength.
AGREE () DISAGREE ()
5. I can cooperate with Christ in preparing for the seal of God by carefully keeping the Sabbath holy, by delighting in it and enjoying its spiritual opportunities.
AGREE () DISAGREE ()

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Study the relationship between Revelation 14:1-5 and the three angels' messages of verses 6-12. Read "A Present-Day Work," in *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 97-108.

SUMMARY: John saw in vision a picture of terrifying destruction that will take place in the last days. At this time of universal terror, every evil power will lash out in a final assault against the world and especially against God's people. But the Lord will not permit this terrible devastation to come until His people are protected. The faithful will be sealed with the seal of the living God and will be brought safely through the terrors of the last days.

Salvation From God

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 7:9-17; 8:1. The perfect joy of the redeemed in heaven.



MEMORY TEXT: "After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying 'Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb' " (Revelation 7:9, 10).

YOU CAN TRIUMPH IN CHRIST. In Christ's strength you can endure the tribulation, triumph over the enemy, and receive the blessed reward prepared for the faithful. A great multitude from every nation, tribe, and people will be redeemed from the tribulations of earth. They will stand clothed in the righteousness of Christ, victorious before the throne of God, and saved by the merits and power of Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Shout of Triumph (Rev. 7:9-12).
- II. God's Provision for Polluted Garments (Rev. 7:13, 14).
- III. Serving in God's Temple (Rev. 7:15-17).
- IV. The Journey to Heaven (Rev. 8:1).

THE CROSS BEFORE THE CROWN. Our lesson this week focuses on the blessed state of God's people in heaven. The vision of the redeemed is intended to bring encouragement and comfort to the last-day church. In His Olivet discourse (Matthew 24, 25) Jesus told His disciples that, before the end would come, there would be trouble such as the world has never witnessed. Through that message to His disciples, He speaks to us today. His purpose was to stress the need to be spiritually alert.

Revelation 7 is a parenthetical section. The vision of the redeemed in heaven is a scene of victory and celebration. The vision is presented out of chronological sequence. The sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17) describes the second coming of Jesus. As we will see, the seventh seal (Rev. 8:1) refers only briefly to the translation of the redeemed to heaven. Chapter 7 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. Why the interlude? Revelation 7:1-8 answers the question that is asked immediately after the description of the Second Advent: "Who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17). The answer is, "The 144,000 who are sealed before the Advent will be able to stand when Jesus appears." John is shown next the saved of all ages in heaven. Then he sees Christ break the seventh seal, which symbolically

depicts the triumphant procession of the saints from earth to the throne of God (Rev. 8:1). Hence, the vision of the saints in heaven is followed by a brief outline of how they arrived there.

Think positively. As we study this lesson our attention should focus on the future triumph that Christ promises the church and not on the earthly tribulation awaiting us. We should in faith visualize ourselves with the redeemed in heaven and verbalize to one another the assurance that Christ provides in His Word. This positive and creative thinking will vitalize our spiritual experience.

SUN

I. THE SHOUT OF TRIUMPH AND THE PRAISE OF ANGELS.

1. How does John describe the multitude he saw in vision? Rev. 7:9, 10.

A numberless multitude. In contrast to the 144,000, the multitude is as the sands of the seashore. Some Bible students see this as a reference to God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens (Gen. 15:5), and his promise to Jacob that his seed would be as the sand of the seashore (Gen. 32:12). The vision brings courage to those who are inclined to grieve over the empty pews on Sabbath morning while football stadiums and other sports arenas are filled to capacity. The vision makes clear that God's redemptive purpose will not be thwarted.

From every nation and people of earth. The innumerable multitude includes the faithful of every age. In one way or another they paid the price of fidelity. Once again we may see in the vision of the redeemed the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Through Christ Jesus our Lord, the divine promise finds its ultimate fulfillment. The redeemed, which no one can number, come from every nation, tribe, and people. Every race and ethnic group are represented. Peoples of different language systems and cultural backgrounds are there, as well. They have won the battle against sin—sinful thoughts, degrading habits, wicked deeds. The white robes worn by the redeemed represent the righteousness of Christ received through faith (Rev. 19:7, 8).

The multitude praise God for His salvation. The shout of joy and triumph from the redeemed attributes salvation to God. There is no hint of self-praise, no reference to human achievement. They faced the enemy, did battle with him, and came through victoriously by the grace of God alone.

2. Of what Israelite feast do the "palm branches" remind us? Rev. 7:9; Lev. 23:33-43.

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, and for the next seven days the Israelites were to live in booths (or tabernacles). They were to "take on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook" and "rejoice before the Lord your God seven days" (Lev. 23:40, RSV). The autumn harvests were over, the Day of Atonement was in the past. Relieved of sin and care, God's people could enjoy a feast of spiritual rest and rejoicing. They lived in booths made of palm branches to commemorate God's leading during the wilderness period (Deut. 16:12-15) and His wonderful blessing since. Note the presence of palm branches and trees in the wilderness tabernacle, in Solomon's Temple, and in the temple seen in vision by Ezekiel. (See 1 Kings 6:29, 32, 35; 7:36; 2 Chron. 3:5; Eze. 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37.) The palm tree is used in Scripture as a symbol of the flourishing Christian. (See Ps. 92:12-15; Song of Solomon 7:7, 8.)

The Antitype. In the antitypical situation (Rev. 7:9-12), the time of spiritual ingathering and the pre-advent judgment (Day of Atonement) are passed (Rev. 6:11; 7:1-8). The final harvest of the earth has been reaped (Rev. 14:14-20). Now in the heavenly kingdom, God's people are able to rejoice at the divine deliverance from spiritual Egypt. Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday before His crucifixion foreshadowed this wonderful rejoicing in the kingdom of heaven (John 12:13).

3. **After the jubilant cry of the multitude, the angels offer their praise to God. What significance is there in the seven words of praise in the angel's song as they are applied to God? Rev. 7:12.**

The thousands upon thousands of angels surrounding God's throne respond spontaneously to the rejoicing of the great multitude. They fall prostrate before God and offer Him a perfect anthem, a sevenfold ascription of praise.

 **II. GOD'S PROVISION FOR POLLUTED GARMENTS (Rev. 7:13, 14).**

4. **What rhetorical questions are directed to John by one of the 24 elders? How does John respond? What answer does the elder provide? Rev. 7:13, 14.**

Purified because of Calvary. "In all ages the Saviour's chosen have been educated and disciplined in the school of trial. They walked in narrow paths on earth; they were purified in the furnace of affliction. For Jesus' sake they endured opposition, hatred, calumny [false charges]. They followed Him through conflicts sore; they endured self-denial and experienced bitter disappointments. By their own painful experience they learned the evil of sin, its power, its guilt, its woe; and they look upon it with abhorrence. A sense of the infinite sacrifice made for its cure humbles

them in their own sight and fills their hearts with gratitude and praise which those who have never fallen cannot appreciate.”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 649, 650.

In Revelation 7:13, 14 the elder says three things about the faithful: (1) they came out of great tribulation; (2) they washed their stained garments; and (3) they made their garments white in the blood of the Lamb. This is a scene of triumph over sin, through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Attention is focused on the moral and spiritual victory God’s people have experienced through faith in Christ.

5. The following texts provide a background for understanding John’s reference to the saints washing their garments. Summarize what each one says about polluted garments or polluted lives and the need for cleansing or changing them.

Ex. 19:10, 14 _____

Ps. 51:1-7 _____

Isa. 1:18 _____

Isa. 64:6 _____

Zech. 3:1-5 _____

We can approach God only in the merits of Christ’s righteousness. To come before God’s presence in “filthy robes” is contemptuously disrespectful of His awesome holiness. When we approach God, we are to come in the name of Christ, fully penitent, and in humility seek forgiveness and cleansing.

TUE

6. What is done for us when we accept the blood of Jesus as our sin-offering? Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:14.

Luther cleansed by His blood. One night Martin Luther dreamed that he saw the devil standing in front of him with a parchment scroll in his hand. Although only partly unrolled the scroll reached right down to the ground. On the parchment Luther saw the long, seemingly endless list of his sins. But he noticed that the devil had his hand over one portion of the scroll. He commanded the devil to remove his hand, but he refused. Then in the name of Christ he commanded him again. The devil removed his hand, and Luther read the words “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

No wonder Luther could write: “Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life.”—*Luther’s Works* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1963), vol. 26, p. 130.

7. Describe further what the Bible teaches about the inner cleansing provided by the justifying blood of Jesus Christ. Titus 3:5-7; Rom. 10:6-10.

Only through Christ's blood is there cleansing. "Our condition through sin is unnatural, and the power that restores us must be supernatural, else it has no value. There is but one power that can break the hold of evil from the hearts of men, and that is the power of God in Jesus Christ. Only through the blood of the Crucified One is there cleansing from sin. His grace alone can enable us to resist and subdue the tendencies of our fallen nature."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 428.

"It is Christ formed within that makes a man worthy of receiving the crown of life, that fadeth not away. . . . This is our washing and ironing time—the time when we are to cleanse our robes of character in the blood of the Lamb. John says, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' . . . Shall we not let Him take them away? Shall we not let our sins go?"—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1131.

We must accept the bestowal of Christ's righteousness. "In order to meet the requirement of the law, our faith must grasp the righteousness of Christ, accepting it as our righteousness. Through union with Christ, through acceptance of His righteousness by faith, we may be qualified to work the works of God, to be colaborers with Christ."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 374.

"Genuine faith appropriates the righteousness of Christ, and the sinner is made an overcomer with Christ; for he is made a partaker of the divine nature, and thus divinity and humanity are combined."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 363, 364.

"Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 388.

The robes of the faithful represent the character of Christ bestowed upon them. His character has become the spiritual substance of their lives. The reference to their washing their robes in the blood of the Lamb is figurative. It signifies their willingness to be spiritually cleansed by the transforming power of God's grace.



III. SERVING IN GOD'S TEMPLE (Rev. 7:15-17).

Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, the faithful are able to stand in the very presence of God. John envisions them standing before God's throne in heaven.

8. What other visions of the heavenly temple were given to John? Rev. 4:2; 11:19; 15:5.

9. What earthly temple was a type or a shadow of the heavenly temple? Heb. 8:1-5; 9:1, 11.

The place of judgment for 1,000 years. In the heavenly temple the righteous engage in the judgment of the wicked during the millennium (Rev. 20:4-6; 1 Cor. 6:2). For 1,000 years the saved of all ages "serve him day and night in his temple" (Rev. 7:15).

At the end of the 1,000 years there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem on this earth. John "saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Rev. 21:22). The eternal city of the saved on the renewed earth will contain no temple because the sin problem has been finally eliminated. The heavenly sanctuary or temple is the place of mediation and judgment in view of sin. Sin finally is abolished at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:9), and the need for a place of intercession and judgment no longer exists.

10. How does Revelation 7:15 prove that when Jesus comes the second time He does not establish a millennial kingdom on this earth, but takes the redeemed to heaven?

Whenever God's temple is referred to in the book of Revelation it is always in heaven. (See Rev. 3:12; compare verse 21; 11:1, 2, 19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17.) When John mentions the new earth he specifically states, "I saw no temple therein" (Rev. 21:22). John saw the 144,000 on "mount Sion" (Rev. 14:1) "before the throne" (verse 3) after their redemption is complete. Mount Sion is identified by Paul as "the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). Revelation 7 depicts the "great multitude" of the saved, including the 144,000 "before the throne, and before the Lamb" (verse 9), serving Him "day and night in his temple" (verse 15). The multitude of the saved are then in heaven, not on this earth. Although the mediatorial ministry of Christ is now complete in the heavenly temple (Rev. 8:3, 5), the millennial judgment takes place there (Rev. 20:4).

11. List the wonderful blessings the faithful are promised in Revelation 7:15-17.

The victory is won. "They are no longer feeble, afflicted, scattered, and oppressed. Henceforth they are to be ever with the Lord. They stand before the throne clad in richer robes than the most honored of the earth have ever worn."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 650.



IV. THE JOURNEY TO HEAVEN (Rev. 8:1).

12. What did John see when the seventh seal was broken by Christ? Rev. 8:1.

13. Until when does God refuse to keep silent? Ps. 50:3-6; Isa. 62:1-4.

God is not silent until the recompense is dealt to the wicked and His people are eternally redeemed. The silence in Revelation 8:1, coming immediately after the appearance of Christ (Rev. 6:12-17), represents the rest, peace, and rejoicing among heaven's host and the saved after the verdict of the heavenly court has been put into operation. When the seventh seal is broken the contents of the book of destiny become known (Rev. 5:5, 9). God's people are gathered together by the angels and taken to heaven. (See Matt. 25:31; John 14:1-3.)

14. Because a day represents a year in symbolic Bible prophecy, how long is half an hour? Rev. 8:1.

The trip to heaven: "We all entered the cloud together, and were seven days ascending to the sea of glass, when Jesus brought the crowns, and with His own right hand placed them on our heads."—*Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 60, 61.

The antitypical feast of tabernacles begins when the righteous are caught up to meet Jesus. It continues until they are welcomed to heaven in the great gathering before the throne of God.

WHAT IS MY RESPONSE? Indicate whether you regard the following statements as true or false:

1. We should be willing to make any sacrifice to be among those who stand before the throne of God.
TRUE () FALSE ()
2. Christ is willing to take us to heaven in our weak, unchristlike state.
TRUE () FALSE ()
3. If we are to be taken to heaven with Jesus, our wills must be involved in daily choosing Christ, His love, and His power.
TRUE () FALSE ()

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Compare Revelation 6:12—7:17 with 19:11—20:4. Read *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 267-269; *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 503-516.

SUMMARY: Our lesson has directed attention to the innumerable multitude from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, appearing before God's throne in jubilation. They have passed through the great tribulation triumphantly, have been transported to heaven, and now are rejoicing before God's throne, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands.

The Church in a Hostile World

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 8. Trumpets 1-4.



MEMORY VERSE: "And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand" (Revelation 8:4).

YOUR PRAYERS COUNT. The prayers of the saints are important to God as He intervenes in a rebellious world and in hastening the return of Jesus as sovereign Lord. The final events of earth's history are under the full control of Christ. The seven trumpets open to our view great climactic events, past, present, and future. God's people may have confidence in His care during the coming crisis.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Angel at the Altar (Rev. 8:2-6).
- II. The First Four Trumpets (Rev. 8:7-13).

HOPE IN THE COMING OF THE LORD. Our lesson covers solemn issues—the close of probation and the judgment against the wicked. The prophecy of Revelation 8 was designed to nurture hope in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of living in dread of the close of probation, we would do well to avail ourselves of the privilege of prayer. We may draw comfort from the fact that God takes special interest in what we say to Him. He is moved by our sufferings, He knows our concerns, and He will spare no resources in His efforts to save us.

Revelation 8:2 begins the prophecy of the seven trumpets. The first six trumpets are presented in Revelation 8 and 9. Chapter 10:1-11:14 is a parenthetical section between the sixth and seventh trumpets. The seventh trumpet is dealt with in Revelation 11:15-19. Hence, four chapters of Revelation deal with the trumpets. How important that we earnestly study the message the Lord has for us in these chapters!



I. THE ANGEL AT THE ALTAR (Rev. 8:2-6).

1. What indication is there that the events of Revelation 8:3-5 are an introduction to the prophecy of the trumpets? Rev. 8:2, 6.

The trumpets are introduced before the vision of the Angel interceding for His people (Rev. 8:2). The blowing of the trumpets does not begin until the end of the Angel's work of offering incense (Rev. 8:6). The vision of the Angel offering incense and then casting the censer into the earth is intended to be the introduction to the prophecy of the trumpets. It is as though John is told: "The seven trumpeters are ready to sound. But first the offering of incense must cease. Then the trumpets can sound. At that point God will allow the events described under each trumpet."

2. What altar is described in Rev. 8:3? Compare Ex. 30:1-6.

A clear reference to the heavenly sanctuary. The altar John sees is the altar of incense, which is situated in the holy place, or the first compartment, of the heavenly sanctuary.

The earthly altar of incense. The altar of incense in the sanctuary of ancient Israel was eighteen inches square and three feet high. It was overlaid with gold. At each corner were horns, and around it was a railing to keep the burning coals from falling off the altar onto the floor. Incense was burned twice each day, morning and evening.

3. Why was incense offered in the earthly sanctuary? What does incense symbolize? Ps. 141:2; Mal. 1:11; compare Isa. 60:6.

4. Who is the "angel" John saw offering incense in the heavenly sanctuary? Rev. 8:3; compare Ex. 30:7, 8; Heb. 8:1, 2.

"The scene portrayed may be understood as symbolic of the ministration of Christ for His people. (See Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1; cf. PP 356; GC 414, 415; EW 32, 252.) Christ, as intercessor, mingles His merits with the prayers of the saints, which are thereby made acceptable with God."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 787.

5. Is Christ ever spoken of in Scripture as an "angel"? Ex. 3:2-6 (compare Acts 7:30-33); Ex. 14:19 (compare 1 Cor. 10:4).

6. Why is the incense said to rise "with the prayers of the saints"? Rev. 8:4; compare Rev. 5:8.

The merits and intercession of Christ. "As in the typical service the priest looked by faith to the mercy seat which he could not see, so the

people of God are now to direct their prayers to Christ, their great High Priest, who, unseen by human vision, is pleading in their behalf in the sanctuary above.

“The incense, ascending with the prayers of Israel, represents the merits and intercession of Christ, His perfect righteousness, which through faith is imputed to His people, and which can alone make the worship of sinful beings acceptable to God.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 353.



7. The following texts have to do with prayer and Christian living. Summarize the thought of each passage.

1 Thess. 5:17 _____

Phil. 4:6 _____

Heb. 4:16 _____

Constant communion with heaven. “Although there may be a tainted, corrupted atmosphere around us, we need not breathe its miasma, but may live in the pure air of heaven. We may close every door to impure imaginings and unholy thoughts by lifting the soul into the presence of God through sincere prayer. Those whose hearts are open to receive the support and blessing of God will walk in a holier atmosphere than that of earth and will have constant communion with heaven.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 99.

8. What is represented by Christ casting the censer into the earth? Compare Eze. 10:2; 9:8-10.

Ezekiel hears the command to a man clothed in linen to fill his hands with burning coals from the altar and then scatter them over the city of Jerusalem. This symbolizes the coming judgment against the city and the destruction of the Temple.

Revelation 8:3-5 deals with both intercession and judgment. In verse 5, the angel takes fire from the altar and casts it upon the earth, thus marking the end of Christ’s intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the ushering in of God’s judgment upon the world. The thunder, lightning, and earthquake dramatize the close of human probation.

The close of probation. “I saw angels hurrying to and fro in heaven. An angel with a writer’s inkhorn by his side returned from the earth and reported to Jesus that his work was done, and the saints were numbered and sealed. Then I saw Jesus, who had been ministering before the ark containing the ten commandments, throw down the censer. He raised His hands, and with a loud voice said, ‘It is done.’ And all the angelic host laid off their crowns as Jesus made the solemn declaration, ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.’”—*Early Writings*, pp. 279, 280.

“When the work of the investigative judgment closes, the destiny of all

will have been decided for life or death. Probation is ended a short time before the appearing of the Lord in the clouds of heaven.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 490.

TUE

9. What other passages in the Bible point to a close of probation before the second coming of Jesus? Briefly comment on each of the following passages:

Rev. 7:1-3 _____

Rev. 15:5-8 _____

Rev. 22:11 _____

Dan. 12:1 _____

Satan's destructive work after the close of probation. “When He [Christ] leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor. The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. God's long-suffering has ended. The world has rejected His mercy, despised His love, and trampled upon His law. The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one. Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 614.

God's counteracting work after the close of probation. “There was then no mediator between guilty man and an offended God. While Jesus had been standing between God and guilty man, a restraint was upon the people; but when He stepped out from between man and the Father, the restraint was removed, and Satan had entire control of the finally impenitent. It was impossible for the plagues to be poured out while Jesus officiated in the sanctuary; but as His work there is finished, and His intercession closes, there is nothing to stay the wrath of God, and it breaks with fury upon the shelterless head of the guilty sinner, who has slighted salvation and hated reproof. In that fearful time, after the close of Jesus' mediation, the saints were living in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor.”—*Early Writings*, p. 280.

In whose hands will you be at that time, Satan's or God's? While Satan will be bringing calamity and destruction upon the earth, God will be counteracting his work by pouring out the seven last plagues. Those whose faith is in the Lord will be protected from the fiercest of Satan's assaults.

II. THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS (Rev. 8:7-13).

The traditional Adventist View of the Trumpets. The trumpets cover the history of the Christian era as do the seven churches (Revelation 2, 3), but from a different perspective. The trumpets are interpreted to be the political events in history that have had an influence on the history of the church. (See Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, pp. 475-547; W. A. Spicer, *Beacon Lights of Prophecy*, pp. 215-267; Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation*, pp. 85-112.)

SEVEN TRUMPETS SIGNAL THE COLLAPSE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

I. Gothic invasion of the western ("third part") of the Roman Empire (410 A.D.)

II. Vandal attack of Rome by sea, destroying Roman fleet by fire (455 A.D.)

III. Rome attacked by the Huns under leadership of Attila (fifth century)

IV. The Roman government is destroyed successively: first the emperors, then the senators, and the consuls (fifth and sixth centuries)

V. Saracens (Islamic forces) attack the eastern part of the Roman Empire (seventh century)

VI. Turkish forces destroy the Byzantine or eastern third of the Roman Empire (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries)

VII. The end of the world.

This view of the trumpets focuses on history as the arena of God's wrath. The Roman Empire is singled out as the object of divine wrath because of the role Rome played in the persecution of God's people and in the suppression of God's Word. Such a view is consistent with the prophetic understanding of history as the sphere in which God reveals both His saving deeds and His work of wrath. When the Christian Era is viewed from the perspective of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the book of Revelation takes on a special relevance and significance that is otherwise missed.

10. What parallels can be drawn between the seven trumpets (Revelation 8-11) and the seven plagues (Revelation 16)?

List the symbols that are common to both the trumpets and the plagues.



11. Seventh-day Adventists are constantly studying the prophecy of the trumpets. Because we admit that we do not have all the light, we must turn to the Lord for the enlightenment of His Spirit as we seek to understand this prophecy. The following is a series of questions for the consideration of the student who wishes to search further:

a. Does the Bible mention any other close of probation, apart from the end-time close of probation? What close of probation did Ezekiel have in view when he wrote Ezekiel chapter 9? When did probation close for the nation Israel? Dan. 9:24; Matt. 23:37-39.

b. Give some examples in the Bible in which historical events are sometimes used as types or analogies of end-time events? Matt. 24:15-22; compare Dan. 8:9-12, 25; Rev. 13:14, 15.

c. Is it possible that the historical events described in the prophecy of the trumpets are intended to enlighten us as to the nature of future events? Can you think of other examples in which the Lord has used past events to help us understand the events of the future?

d. How do you interpret these statements by Ellen G. White? "*History will be repeated. False religion will be exalted. The first day of the week, a common working day, possessing no sanctity whatever, will be set up as was the image at Babylon. All nations and tongues and peoples will be commanded to worship this spurious sabbath. This is Satan's plan to make of no account the day instituted by God, and given to the world as a memorial of creation.*"—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 976 (italics supplied).

"We are standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. Many of the prophecies are about to be fulfilled in quick succession. Every element of power is about to be set to work. *Past history will be repeated*; old controversies will arouse to new life, and peril will beset God's people on every side. Intensity is taking hold of the human family. It is permeating everything upon the earth. . . .

"Study Revelation in connection with Daniel, *for history will be repeated. . . . We, with all our religious advantages, ought to know far more today than we do know.*"—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 116 (italics supplied).

e. What indications are there that the trumpets have an end-time application? Compare Rev. 7:1, 3 with 8:7; compare Rev. 7:2, 3 with 9:4.

f. What do you think Ellen White meant when she wrote: "Solemn events before us are yet to transpire. Trumpet after trumpet is to be sounded, vial after vial poured out one after another upon the inhabitants

of the earth. Scenes of stupendous interest are right upon us.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 982.

g. Considering the trumpets as historical events, who causes these events—God or Satan? Who was responsible for the barbarian attacks on the Roman Empire? Who caused the Mohammedan attacks on the Eastern Roman Empire? Does God cause everything that happens in history, or does He overrule and counteract the work of Satan?

h. How do you explain the close parallel between the trumpets and plagues? Are the historical trumpets types of the plagues? Or are the historical trumpets types of end-time trumpets that parallel the plagues? Could it be that the trumpets are Satan’s destructive work, while the plagues are God’s counteracting work?

i. What do other passages of Scripture have to say regarding the symbolism used under each of the first four trumpets? For example, in Revelation 8:7, what is symbolized by “hail and fire, mixed with blood” (NIV)? What is meant by: “a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up?” Why is the “earth” the subject of the first trumpet, while the “sea” is the subject of the second? Who is the “star” that fell from heaven under the third trumpet (Rev. 8:10)? How does he embitter the “rivers, and . . . fountains of waters”? Who are symbolized by the “sun,” “moon,” and “stars” mentioned in the fourth trumpet (Rev. 8:12)? A good concordance will help you see how other scriptures use these symbols.

It is important to interpret the symbolism of the book of Revelation in the light of other passages of the Bible. We must allow the Bible to interpret itself and not impose arbitrary, allegorical interpretations.

WHAT DOES THE COMING CLOSE OF PROBATION MEAN TO ME? What current events do you see as signs of the coming time of trouble and the close of probation? List them on the lines below:

I can make the following changes in my life in order to prepare for the coming crisis:



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read chapter 2, “Persecution in the First Centuries,” *The Great Controversy*, pp. 39-48.

SUMMARY: Revelation 8:2-13 focuses our attention on the close of probation and the first four trumpets. We believe that the trumpets predicted events that would occur throughout the history of the Christian Era. These events have had a close parallel to the history of the church.

Evil Forces Work Destruction

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 9. The fifth and sixth trumpets.



MEMORY VERSE: "And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads" (Revelation 9:4).

YOU CAN HAVE SHELTER IN THE TIME OF TROUBLE. The fifth and sixth trumpets depict the continuing contest between Christ and Satan. Judgments come upon those who reject God's invitation to repent. During the perilous times awaiting the church, those who are sealed by God will survive the assault of evil forces.

OUTLINE:

- I. Locusts With the Sting of Scorpions (Rev. 9:1-3).
- II. The Trumpet Announces Deliverance and Doom (Rev. 9:4-11).
- III. The Angels at the River Euphrates (Rev. 9:13-21).

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY THEME. This week we continue our study of the trumpets and the historical events associated with them. Of particular importance is the role played by Islamic forces during the Middle Ages. There is an underlying philosophy of history that should be recognized at the outset. It is a religious philosophy that is definitely Christian. It is a view of history from the perspective of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

The Adventist philosophy of history. The philosophy of history subscribed to by the Seventh-day Adventist Church takes its direction from the great controversy theme as set forth in Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White. It is here that the church finds its reason for existence. Its place within the scheme of history is established. Once this is recognized, the church's mission and destiny become clear. Who we are, why we are here, and where we are headed are answered with force and clarity.

A spiritual conflict. The history of the Christian church is seen as the dramatic unfolding of a spiritual conflict. A vital element in the story is the great Advent movement of the nineteenth century. The study of the fifth and sixth trumpets is therefore a study of early Adventist thought, as well as a study of the apocalyptic prophecies of John.

The great controversy theme is basic to our spiritual orientation as a body of believers. It provides the framework for our philosophy of science, health, and education. It enables us to answer questions on dress, diet, and

deportment. It points us to the spiritual realities at work in human lives, in communities, and nations past and present. It alerts us to the crisis the church is about to face and outlines the steps we are to take in preparing for the end of time.

SUN

I. LOCUSTS WITH THE STING OF SCORPIONS (Rev. 9:1-3).

The blast of the fifth trumpet shifts attention from the world of nature to the abyss of demons—the bottomless pit. The judgments announced by the first four trumpets were symbolically portrayed as cosmic calamities. The fifth and sixth trumpets foresee Satanic attacks upon professed followers of Christ.

- 1. The following texts contain references to the bottomless pit. In the blank space to the right of the text summarize what each passage teaches:**

Rev. 9:1 _____

Rev. 9:2 _____

Rev. 9:11 _____

Rev. 11:7 _____

Rev. 20:1, 3 _____

The devastation upon the earth, which John saw in response to the sounding of the fifth trumpet, was much more dreadful than he had witnessed in the scenes associated with the first four trumpets. Once again we must keep in mind that the scenes John describes are depicted in symbolic language and therefore should not be given a literal interpretation. John wishes to emphasize that behind the events of history is the dreadful activity of the devil and his evil angels.

In Revelation 9:1, 2, John says he saw a star fall from heaven. The star he understands to represent a person who was given a key to open the bottomless pit.

- 2. Two passages from the Old Testament depict the shocking destruction caused by locust plagues. Together they provide an appropriate background for the events of the fifth trumpet. Read them carefully and note the features both passages have in common with the scene described by John in Revelation 9:1-11.**

Ex. 10:1-20 _____

Joel 1:6, 7; 2:4-11 _____

The locust is a symbol of destruction in the Pentateuch (Ex. 10:1-20; Deut. 28:42), the historical writings (1 Kings 8:37) and the Psalms (78:46), as well as in the prophetic writings (Joel 1:2-2:11).

What was a locust plague like? An eyewitness report of a locust plague in Palestine illustrates their destructive power. "We had a famine in the second year of the war [1915] such as we had not experienced in 50 years. The sky was darkened by the gigantic swarms of locusts which covered the whole country, and neither sun nor moon could be seen. All of Palestine was transformed into a desert within a few days. All trees, from their tops to the ground, including the bark, were eaten up clean; our vegetable gardens, cultivated with so much labor, disappeared as by magic. The following spring there crept forth from hundreds of billions of eggs the new brood, which consumed the little that had been left. The result was a terrific famine."—Quoted by Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, p. 678. A column of traveling locusts may be as much as a hundred feet deep and four miles in length. It is not surprising to find a swarm of them stripping bare the vegetation of a given community.

In vision John sees demonic forces, not a plague of Palestinian insects. Their attack is directed against human life, not against the earth's vegetation. They are said to have the sting of a scorpion, a dangerous Palestinian creature whose poison produces pain and sometimes proves fatal.



3. To what did Jesus liken serpents and scorpions? Luke 10:17-20; compare Rev. 9:3.

4. What effect does the sting of the demonic locust have on its victim? Rev. 9:6.

The demons torture or torment their victims, but they are not permitted to destroy them. Their power is limited, for they still remain under the sovereign control of the Lord God.

5. What event in history does the fifth trumpet signify?

When viewed within the arena of human history, the fifth trumpet has been associated with the spread of the Islamic faith in the sixth and succeeding centuries of the Christian era. This view is presented by Uriah Smith in *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, pp. 493-505; Stephen N. Haskell, *The Story of the Seer of Patmos*, pp. 161-173; W. A. Spicer, *Beacon Lights of Prophecy*, pp. 225-233; and Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation*, pp. 90-92, among others.

From time to time there have been political movements that have seemed disastrous to God's people. The triumph of Nebuchadnezzar over Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C. was such an occasion. The Babylonian exile was not an experience that anyone wished to see repeated. Yet the exile taught a number of important lessons:

a) God can and does sometimes permit the "enemy" to gain the victory (Dan. 1:2).

b) God permits evil to come as a form of punishment to those who should have known better, but who pursued an evil course (2 Kings 23:37; 24:3, 4, 9, 19).

c) Faithful witness will be rewarded. Daniel and his companions are a prime example.

d) God's purpose in every change of circumstance is that a faithful witness should be given. There will be good results. "The once proud monarch [Nebuchadnezzar] had become a humble child of God."—*Prophecies and Kings*, p. 521.

What lessons may we learn from the Islamic conquests?

a) Disaster fell upon the Christian communities because they had not been living up to the light that they had. A review of the messages to the churches (Revelation 2 and 3) indicates that many had left their first love, false doctrines had crept into the churches, and there were idolatrous practices. The churches needed to renew their loyalty to the true faith.

b) Misconceptions had been given regarding God and the nature of Christ. Some of these misconceptions persist to our own day in the Muslim community. By contrast, the call to the worship of the one God seemed to be a reform.

c) The Christian church needs to make sure at all times that its teaching is in harmony with the Word of God, and that its practice is in harmony with its high calling. Rather than complaining of its lost dominion, the church should make sure that it is worthy of a place of honor.

The challenge to us. In view of the spread of Islam (900 million in the world today), what do you think the church should be doing? Are you making any contribution to this end? Do you foresee a time when professed Christians will again be subjected to attack by forces seen and unseen?

TUE

II. THE TRUMPET ANNOUNCES DELIVERANCE AND DOOM (Rev. 9:4-11).

6. In the Old Testament, the trumpet blast signaled the day of the Lord—a day of deliverance for the faithful but one of destruction for the faithless. Read the following texts and indicate whether they signify salvation or doom:

Isa. 27:13 _____

Jer. 4:5 _____

Joel 2:1 _____

Amos 3:6 _____

7. What is announced by the trumpet blast mentioned in the following passages?

Matt. 24:31 _____

1 Cor. 15:52 _____

1 Thess. 4:16 _____

In the Old Testament the sounding of the trumpet often announced a military event. It alerted the people in the city to the advancing armies of the enemy, and summoned the men to prepare for battle.

The New Testament passages cited above have to do with the spiritual conflict between the armies of heaven and the hosts of hell. The sound of the trumpet is good news for the faithful. It signals the final successful assault against the powers of evil. The dead in Christ are liberated from the prison house of Satan and are reunited with their loved ones in Christ's eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace.

Final Deliverance. "In comparison with the millions of the world, God's people will be, as they have ever been, a little flock; but if they stand for the truth as revealed in His word, God will be their refuge. They stand under the broad shield of Omnipotence. God is always a majority. When the sound of the last trump shall penetrate the prison house of the dead, and the righteous shall come forth with triumph, exclaiming, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' (1 Corinthians 15:55)—standing then with God, with Christ, with the angels, and with the loyal and true of all ages, the children of God will be far in the majority."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 590.

- WED** 8. The sounding of the fifth trumpet signals deliverance for some but doom for others. Who escape the scourge of the demonic forces? Revelation 9:4; compare Rev. 7:1-3.

Those having the end-time seal of God in their foreheads are believers who remain true to Christ in the midst of apostasy. They observe the true Sabbath. In every age God has had His people who honor the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, refusing to compromise with the vast majority of Christians. Just before Jesus comes those who, by His grace, are spiritual victors will be faithful Sabbathkeepers. (See Eze. 20:12, 20; Rev. 14:7, last part.)

9. Describe the scene John depicts in Revelation 9:7-11.

In the first six verses of the chapter, John informs us of the origin and mission of the forces opposed to Christianity. They take their direction ultimately from Satan himself. In verses 7-11 John describes the demonic forces. They are bizarre in appearance. They have long hair, are shaped like horses, look like locusts with scorpion tails, wear golden crowns above their human faces, and have the teeth of lions. Through this strange symbolism John portrays military events occurring in history.


III. THE ANGELS AT THE RIVER EUPHRATES (Rev. 9:13-21).

The blast of the sixth trumpet sets in motion the squadrons of cavalry who are now given permission to destroy a third part of the earth's inhabitants. With the sounding of the trumpet, the command is issued to release the four angels who were bound at the River Euphrates. As the fifth trumpet signaled the release of the demonic locusts from the bottomless pit, so the sixth trumpet frees the four angels to carry out their mission of destruction.

10. The following texts contain references to the River Euphrates. In the blank spaces summarize each passage:

Gen. 15:18 _____

Deut. 11:24 _____

Isa. 8:5-8 _____

Rev. 16:12-16 _____

The River Euphrates marked the boundary between Israel and her major enemies. Isaiah 8:5-8 pictures the Assyrian invasion of Judah as a great flood that swept across the nation with a terrifying force. The Euphrates also marked the eastern limits of the Roman Empire. The reference to invading horsemen was an omen of destruction to the Christian church insofar as it looked to the state for its support and protection.

11. What event in history was announced by the sixth trumpet?

Turkish invasions. "When the sixth trumpet sounded, John declares that four angels were loosed, which were bound to the great river Euphrates. Verse 14. This expression, scholars have believed, refers to the four leading sultanies, Aleppo, Iconium, Damascus, and Baghdad, which comprised the Ottoman Empire. They were situated in the region of the Euphrates River. They were to be loosed for a specific period: an hour, a day, a month, a year."—Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding the Revelation*, p. 92.

In symbolic Bible prophecy the Euphrates River symbolizes the land of the enemy, the residence of paganism, a place that is spiritually contaminated and controlled by satanic forces. The devil is not free to move these pagan powers at will. He is still subject to the supreme sovereignty of the Lord.

Angels will protect God's faithful. "In the midst of the time of trouble—trouble such as has not been since there was a nation—His chosen ones will stand unmoved. Satan with all the hosts of evil cannot destroy the weakest of God's saints. Angels that excel in strength will protect them."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 513.

HOW DOES THIS LESSON APPLY TO ME? I can prepare for the final attack on Christ's professed people by:

What can our church do to share the gospel with the millions who follow the teachings of Islam? Of the evangelistic strategies suggested below, check those you consider to be legitimate.

- _____ The use of short-wave radio to proclaim the gospel and offer Bible correspondence courses.
- _____ Colporteur work.
- _____ SDA medical teams sharing specialities and research.
- _____ A health-education program emphasizing the views that Adventists hold in common with Islam (e.g., our views on alcoholic beverages, drugs, and some foods).
- _____ A philosophical and educational approach in which we study comparative religions.

(FR) **FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION:** "In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition or caprice. But in the word of the God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 499, 500.

"The season of distress before God's people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship, and that no consideration, not even that of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to false worship. To the loyal heart the commands of sinful, finite men will sink into insignificance beside the word of the eternal God. Truth will be obeyed though the result be imprisonment or exile or death."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 512, 513.

"The present is a time of overwhelming interest to all living. Rulers and statesmen, men who occupy positions of trust and authority, thinking men and women of all classes, have their attention fixed upon the events taking place about us. They are watching the relations that exist among the nations. They observe the intensity that is taking possession of every earthly element, and they recognize that something great and decisive is about to take place—that the world is on the verge of a stupendous crisis."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 537.

SUMMARY: The fifth and sixth trumpets predicted the devastation caused by forces opposed to Christianity in the Middle Ages and into the modern period. These forces may be seen as a type or analogy of Satanic agencies that will afflict the professed followers of Christ before the second coming of Jesus.

The Sweet-Bitter Experience

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 10. God's people tested.



MEMORY VERSE: "And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter" (Revelation 10:10).

THE WAY OF THE CROSS. The final proclamation of the everlasting gospel is intended to prepare a people for the judgment, declare the end of prophetic time, and announce the imminent second coming of Christ. The message of the little book was sweet to those who listened. It turned bitter when Jesus did not come at the expected time (1844). We are to rejoice in Christ's victory and the glorious reward we will receive as a result. Nevertheless, the way to the kingdom is the way of the cross. There is trial now and triumph later.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Mighty Angel and the Little Scroll (Rev. 10:1-4).
- II. There Should Be Time No Longer (Rev. 10:5-7).
- III. A Sweet and Bitter Experience (Rev. 10:8-11).

WE GAIN STRENGTH FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE EARLY ADVENTISTS. This week's lesson focuses attention on the sweet-bitter experience of God's people in the last days. Emphasis is given to the Great Disappointment the early Adventists experienced in 1844 and the significance that Revelation 10 was to have for them. It is an important lesson for us to learn and remember, for it depicts the hardships and trials that God's people are called upon to endure for their faith. We are able to read about their experience because they persevered despite those trials and hardships and were greatly blessed for their faith. As a result of their fidelity to Christ and their supreme commitment to hasten His coming, the believers became God's agent of blessing to millions of lost people throughout the world. It is thus edifying and enlightening to read the history of the Advent movement along with our study of Revelation 10.



I. THE MIGHTY ANGEL AND THE LITTLE SCROLL (Rev. 10:1-4).

1. What description does John provide of the "angel" who bestrides the earth? Rev. 10:1-3.

John sees the angel coming directly from God's presence, clothed in a cloud. (See Ps. 104:3; Dan. 7:13; Matt. 24:30.) He has a rainbow upon his head. (See Eze. 1:26-28.) His face shone as the sun (compare Matt. 17:2), and His feet and legs appeared as pillars of fire (compare Ex. 13:21, 22; 14:19, 24). In describing the mighty angel, John draws from the language and imagery of the Old Testament. There is continuity in God's revelation.

The angel has His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the land, symbolizing God's absolute sovereignty over the earth. And in His hand He holds a little book or little scroll bearing a message for a brief period of time. His loud cry is as the roar of a lion, and "seven thunders uttered their voices" (Rev. 10:3; compare Hosea 11:10, Amos 3:8).

2. Who is the mighty angel whom John saw coming directly from God's presence? Compare Rev. 1:15, 16; 2:18; Matt. 17:2.

Christ appeared to John. "The mighty angel who instructed John was no less a personage than Jesus Christ. Setting His right foot on the sea, and His left upon the dry land, shows the part which He is acting in the closing scenes of the great controversy with Satan. This position denotes His supreme power and authority over the whole earth."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 971.

In previous disclosures John, following the instruction of Christ, wrote his visions in a book for the benefit of the seven churches (Rev. 1:11). This time he is told he is not to write down the message of the seven thunders, but to seal them up (Rev. 10:4).

3. Read Daniel 12 carefully and compare the prophet's vision with that which John describes in Revelation 10:1-6.

Daniel 12 forms an important background to the prophetic vision in Revelation 10. The description of the angel, the reference to the angel's oath, and the little book, or scroll, form the connecting links between the two chapters. In both places the contents ascribed to the little scroll have to do with time. Daniel is instructed to close and seal the book until the end time. John writes with reference to the time of the end, indicating a correspondence between both visions.

The little book represents the book of Daniel. "Daniel had been instructed to 'shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end' (ch. 12:4). This admonition applies particularly to the part of Daniel's prophecies that deals with the last days . . . and doubtless especially to the time element of the 2300 days (ch. 8:14) as it relates to the preaching of the first, second, and third angels' messages (Rev. 14:6-12). Inasmuch as the message of the present angel deals with time, and presumably with events at the time of the end, when the book of Daniel was to be unsealed (Dan. 12:4), it seems reasonable to conclude that the little book open in the

hand of the angel was the book of Daniel. With the presentation to John of the little book open, the sealed portions of Daniel's prophecy are revealed. The time element, pointing out the end of the 2300-day prophecy, is made clear. Consequently the present chapter focuses upon the time when the proclamation of vs. 6, 7 was made, that is, during the years 1840 to 1844."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 797.



4. Of what significance are the years 1840-1844 to the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Revived interest in the second advent of Christ. Early nineteenth century Europe and America witnessed a renewed interest in the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus. With attention focused on the New Testament, an increased number of Christians from various denominations began to question the traditional view, which interpreted the Second Coming as an event in the distant future, occurring after the millennium (*post-millennialism*). The millennium is the one thousand years of righteousness and peace to be enjoyed by the redeemed at the end of time (Revelation 20). After carefully studying the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation, the early Adventists rejected the postmillennial concept of the Second Advent and began to proclaim with great zeal the soon return of Christ.

Outstanding among those who taught Christ's soon coming were a Roman Catholic priest from Chile, Manuel de Lacunza, and English and Scottish preachers such as Edward Irving, Henry Drummond, and Alexander Keith. Through the preaching ministry of Joseph Wolff the message of the soon return of Jesus was taken to the Middle East and Asia. In Scandinavia young children were inspired to proclaim the glad tidings. The clergy of the state church organized opposition to the message.

The preaching of William Miller. The most prominent preacher among the early Adventists was a Baptist farmer from Low Hampton, New York—William Miller. His challenge of the postmillennial view came from a careful study of the Scriptures, with special attention given to Daniel 8:14. His powerful, persuasive preaching provided a great impetus to the Advent moment in America (sometimes referred to as the Millerite Movement). What made Miller's preaching unique was not his premillennial view, since others shared that position. Instead, it was his interest in prophetic time with emphasis on specific events and dates. He reasoned that the 2300-day prophecy of Daniel pointed to the second coming of Jesus, and concluded that it would take place in 1844.

5. What is symbolized by the "seven thunders"? Rev. 10:3, 4.

Historically, the sixth trumpet ended in 1840 (Rev. 9:15). The seventh trumpet, the "time . . . for the dead to be judged" (Rev. 11:18, NASB) when "God's temple in heaven was opened" (Rev. 11:19, NIV), began in 1844. The events of Revelation 10:8-10 symbolize the historical events between 1840 and 1844. In this period occurred the disappointments of March 21, 1843, and October 22, 1844. The Advent believers had partially

understood Daniel 8:14, but had misunderstood the nature of the events to occur at the conclusion of the 2300-year prophecy. The seven thunders sounded before the commencement of the seventh trumpet with its proclamation for time to end. The thunders were a divine forecast of the experience of God's people between 1840 and 1844. John was told not to write what he had heard, because God's people were to be tested by the bittersweet experiences involved in their expectation of Christ's coming in 1844.

God's people to be tested. "The special light given to John which was expressed in the seven thunders was a delineation of events which would transpire under the first and second angels' messages. It was not best for the people to know these things, for their faith must necessarily be tested. In the order of God most wonderful and advanced truths would be proclaimed. The first and second angels' messages were to be proclaimed, but no further light was to be revealed before these messages had done their specific work. This is represented by the angel standing with one foot on the sea, proclaiming with a most solemn oath that time should be no longer."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 971.

II. THERE SHOULD BE TIME NO LONGER (Rev. 10:4-7).

The mighty angel who stood on the sea and on the land lifted His hand to heaven and proclaimed that "there should be time no longer" (Rev. 10:6).

6. What is meant by the proclamation recorded in Revelation 10:6 "that there should be time no longer"?

The end of time. Literally, this would mean the end of the world and the beginning of eternity. In the context of events in 1844 that could not be the intended meaning. John was instructed to take the little scroll and eat it. And then he was told that he must "prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (verses 9-11).

Probationary time. The close of probation takes place near the end of time, after Christ completes His intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. When Christ finishes His work there will no longer be an opportunity to respond to God's offer of grace, to receive forgiveness and cleansing, and to experience victory over sin and Satan. The close of probation takes place after the gospel has been preached to every nation, tongue, and people (Rev. 10:11). In view of verse 11, the phrase "there should be time no longer" could not refer to the close of probation.

The end of prophetic time. The sound of the seventh trumpet ushers in the closing phase of God's redemptive work: "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (verse

7). This proclamation marks the end of the time prophecies and ushers in the last days. "This time, which the angel declares with a solemn oath, is not the end of this world's history, neither of probationary time, but of prophetic time, which should precede the advent of our Lord. That is, the people will not have another message upon definite time. After this period of time, reaching from 1842 to 1844, there can be no definite tracing of the prophetic time. The longest reckoning reaches to the autumn of 1844."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 971.

7. The references listed below contain the word *mystery*. Quote the phrase in which this word appears and state briefly what you believe it means. The first two are completed as examples:

Rom. 11:25 "This mystery"—*God's dealings with Israel and their future salvation.*

1 Cor. 15:51 "I shew you a mystery"—*the change in believers at Christ's return.*

Eph. 1:9, 10 _____

Eph. 6:19 _____

Col. 4:3 _____

2 Thess. 2:7 _____

The word *mystery* in the New Testament refers to secrets made known to God's servants through a divine disclosure. In Revelation 10:7 "the mystery of God" is His saving purpose, which will be made known fully at the end of human history. With the sounding of the seventh trumpet God will bring to fulfillment the plan of redemption, which He conceived before the creation of the world and set in motion immediately after our first parents fell into sin. This plan finds its end in the establishment of God's kingdom forever.

WED III. A SWEET AND BITTER EXPERIENCE (Rev. 10:8-11).

The angel commands John to take the little scroll and eat it, informing him that it will be sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach.

8. The following texts contain references to eating that are intended to be taken figuratively. Summarize briefly what each says:

Ps. 19:7-10 _____

Ps. 119:103 _____

Jer. 15:16 _____

Eze. 3:1-3, 7, 10 _____

The psalmist and the prophets speak of God's words and judgments as sweeter than honey. John finds the little scroll to be bitter, as well as sweet. Awaiting the church were both tragedy and triumph. John was privileged to be given the secrets of God's redemptive purpose, but with that privilege came the responsibility of announcing the coming crisis, hence the sweet-bitter experience.

Ellen White's sweet-bitter experience. Ellen White relates the mixture of ecstasy and agony she experienced in her vision of the new earth, at the end of which Jesus told her, "You must go back to the earth again, and relate to others what I have revealed to you." Reflecting on that disappointment, she wrote: "Sometimes I think I can stay here no longer, all things of earth look so dreary. I feel very lonely here, for I have seen a better land." After she came out of vision, everything appeared gloomy to her: "Oh, how dark this world looked to me," she wrote. "I wept when I found myself here, and felt homesick. I had seen a better world."—*Early Writings*, p. 20.

For Ellen White as well as for John, the sweet and bitter experience was very real, even though it was described symbolically. Both had to assimilate the content of the revelation—to take God's message into their very lives in order to make it a part of them—before they could communicate it to others. The command to communicate comes after the experience of eating.



9. How does the sweet-bitter experience of John describe in advance the experience of the early Adventists during the period from 1840 to 1844?

The message of the soon coming of Christ attracted thousands of people throughout America to the Millerite movement. As the autumn of 1844 approached, the believers labored intensely and with great expectation to advance the message of the Second Advent. For many no sacrifice was too great. Their hopes and aspirations centered on the imminent return of Jesus. October 22, 1844 came and went, leaving thousands in deep disappointment.

Zeal of early Adventists. "In the early part of the season some of our brethren in the north of New Hampshire had been so impressed with the belief that the Lord would come before another winter, that they did not cultivate their fields. About the middle of July . . . others who had sown and planted their fields were so impressed with a sense of the Lord's immediate appearing, that they could not, consistently with their faith, harvest their crops. Some, on going into their fields to cut their grass, found themselves entirely unable to proceed, and, conforming to their sense of duty, left their crops standing in the field, to show their faith by their works, and thus to condemn the world. This rapidly extended through the north of New England."—J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement*, p. 158.

The great disappointment. "I saw those who cherished the light looking upward with ardent desire, expecting Jesus to come and take them to Himself. Soon a cloud passed over them, and their faces were sorrowful. I inquired the cause of this cloud and was shown that it was their disappointment. The time when they expected their Saviour had passed, and Jesus had not come. As discouragement settled upon the waiting ones, the ministers and leading men whom I had before noticed, rejoiced, and all those who had rejected the light triumphed greatly, while Satan and his evil angels also exulted."—*Early Writings*, p. 241.

10. In what way was the 1844 disappointment a test of character?

WHAT DO THESE THINGS MEAN TO ME? Life for most people contains both joyous and sad experiences. How does Christ make a difference in the bittersweet experiences of a Christian? Think of your life since you became a Christian. Complete the two open-ended sentences below:

Christ has increased my joy since I became a Christian by:

Christ has enabled me to endure the bitter experiences of life by:



FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Read Ellen G. White, "The Advent Movement Illustrated," *Early Writings*, pp. 240-245.

After the great disappointment of 1844, the genuine believers did not abandon their belief in the second coming of Christ or their conviction that their movement was destined by God. A renewed interest in Bible study resulted in clearer understandings of prophecy. The soon coming of Jesus was found to be a certainty. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was established with a worldwide mission to warn the world of Jesus' return. Medical and educational institutions were founded throughout the globe. Churches, schools, hospitals, and publishing houses were erected to assist in taking the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Seventh-day Adventists understand their calling as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. They are to have a distinctive part in the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11). They take seriously the command of Revelation 10:11: "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings."

SUMMARY: The sweet-and-bitter experience of the early Adventists resulted from their belief in the soon return of Jesus. The experience was sweeter than honey as they anticipated the coming of Christ and the end to human suffering, sickness, and sorrow. When Christ did not come, the disappointment was bitter.

The Kingdom of Our Lord

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 11. The two witnesses and the seventh trumpet.



MEMORY VERSE: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

VICTORY IN CHRIST. Faith in Christ enables us to accept spiritual victory as an accomplished fact while we are in the midst of the final conflict with the enemy. The message of the atonement and the mediatorial ministry of Jesus will be clearly understood in the end time. God evaluates His people in the judgment and provides spiritual resources for spiritual growth. The great controversy will end with Christ as the decisive Victor. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Measuring and Its Meaning (Rev. 11:1, 2).
- II. The Testimony of the Two Witnesses (Rev. 11:3-13).
- III. The Seventh Trumpet and Christ's Triumph (Rev. 11:14-19).

A SUMMARY OF WHAT IS TO FOLLOW. With Revelation 11 we bring this quarter's studies to a conclusion. The message of the chapter is full assurance in Christ. We are given a picture of the victory at the end of time, when the wicked powers are defeated decisively and the reign of Christ begins.

Revelation 11 anticipates what is to follow. In some respects, chapter 11 summarizes what is discussed in the second half of the book. The command to measure the temple, the altar, and the worshipers anticipates the events symbolically depicted in chapters 12-14, particularly the call for endurance in Revelation 14:12. The reference to the two witnesses prophesying in sackcloth for 1260 days (Rev. 11:3) corresponds with the woman's fleeing to the wilderness for a similar period of time (Rev. 12:13, 14). The beast ascending from the bottomless pit to make war against the two witnesses (Rev. 11:7-10) foreshadows the dragon's efforts to war against the woman's offspring (Rev. 12:17). The devil uses the beast arising out of the sea (Rev. 13:1), and then one emerging from the earth (Rev. 13:11).

The power of the witnesses to smite the earth with plagues (Rev. 11:6) has its counterpart in the seven last plagues (chapters 15, 16). The great earthquake preceding the seventh trumpet, which destroys one tenth of the great city (Rev. 11:13), is an omen of the destruction caused by the seventh plague; "a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth" (Rev. 16:18, RSV). The declaration of triumph following the

seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15) is parallel with the praise following the doom of Babylon (Rev. 19:1-8). The outpouring of divine wrath against a defiant world (Rev. 11:18) foreshadows God's response to Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:7-10). Finally the vision of the temple and the ark of the covenant (Rev. 11:19) anticipates God dwelling with His people in order that they may see His glory and live forever in the light of His presence (Rev. 21:1-4, 22-27).

SUN

I. THE MEASURING AND ITS MEANING (Rev. 11:1, 2).

Revelation 11 is a continuation of the scene depicted in the previous chapter where John was commanded to take and eat the little scroll. In chapter 11 we find John receiving a measuring rod and with it a threefold command to measure the temple, the altar, and those who worship there. He is instructed to refrain from measuring the court outside the temple and is told that the court is given to the nations who will in turn trample over the holy city for a period of forty-two months. Once again we are dealing with symbolic prophecy.

1. Read Ezekiel 41:1-4; 43:1-9, Daniel 8:9-14, and Zechariah 2:1-7 and note how these passages serve as a background for understanding the vision of John.

Eze. 41:1-4; 43:1-9 _____

Dan. 8:9-14 _____

Zech. 2:1-7 _____

Ezekiel 40—43. Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet who conducted his ministry during a dark period of Israel's history. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Temple lay in ruins as a result of a military invasion. Large segments of the nation's population were held captive in Babylon. Earlier in the book, Ezekiel had expressed hope in the spiritual regeneration of a remnant, the destruction of Israel's enemies, and the restoration of the Jewish exiles to their homeland. Beginning with chapter 40, he outlines the organization of the restored community. He describes a vision of the restored Temple which was to be the center of Israel's worship. The measuring of the temple is symbolic of the restoration of Temple worship in Israel.

Daniel 8:10-14. The prophet Daniel wrote his visions during the same dark period in the history of his people. Jerusalem lay in ruins, the Temple had been desecrated, and the country was occupied by foreign powers. "How long," the prophet asks, "will this desecration of the sanctuary continue? When will God vindicate His name, cleanse the sanctuary, and restore His people to their rightful place?" The answer is given, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days" (Dan. 8:14).

Zechariah 2:1-7. The vision given to the prophet Zechariah comes during the trying times of Israel's reconstruction after the return from captivity. The prophet's message is one of hope, putting emphasis on the un-

limited prospects for growth. The new city will be without walls to permit the inflow of the Gentiles. The emphasis is on expansion.

Some prophets spoke to the same issue. The prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah provide an illuminating background for study of John's vision of Revelation 11. Ezekiel's vision of measuring the Temple is a prediction of spiritual restoration after a period of captivity. Both Daniel and John emphasize the same truth. The sanctuary message would be restored. Christ's mediatorial ministry would once again be understood. God's people will be measured in character and prepared to meet their returning Lord.

MON

2. What special significance does the command given to John to measure the Temple, the altar, and the worshipers have for Christians today? Rev. 11:1; compare Dan. 7:9-14; 12:1; Rev. 3:5.

The command to measure has a special application to Christ's judgment ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Support for this application may be summarized in the following way: (a) The temple is the sanctuary in heaven. (See Rev. 1:12-16; 2:1; 4:1-11; 5:1-14; 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 8:1-5.) (b) The measuring of the worshipers precedes the sealing of God's servants (Rev. 7:1-8). The measuring is the investigative judgment, which prepares God's people for the final struggle in the last days. (Compare Daniel 8:14.)

Measuring is judgment. "This restoration and preservation of God's temple would seem also to have a particular application to the fuller understanding of the meaning of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary that has come since 1844. . . . The measurement of worshipers suggests a work of judgment."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 800, 801.

"Now the Lord says, Measure the temple and the worshipers thereof. Remember when you are walking the streets about your business, God is measuring you; when you are attending your household duties, when you engage in conversation, God is measuring you. . . . Here is the work going on, measuring the temple and its worshipers to see who will stand in the last days."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 972.

Why God measures His people. God's reason for measuring His people is to prepare them for the challenge of the last days and to qualify them for heaven. The measuring does not produce quality in character, but points us to the divine resources that God makes available for growth and development. Our safety and security in the last days are bound inseparably to our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of the measuring is to establish the quality of that relationship and prepare us for the struggle ahead. (See Amos 7:7-9; Matt. 7:21, 22.)

TUE

II. THE TESTIMONY OF THE TWO WITNESSES (Rev. 11:3-13).

In the passage concerning the testimony of the two witnesses, there are

three important points: (a) the identity of the witnesses, (b) the testimony they bear, and (c) the time references.

3. Who or what are the two witnesses? Rev. 11:3, 4.

John describes the two witnesses as wearing the rough garb of sack-cloth—the garment of mourning and penitence in ancient times. Then he identifies them as two olive trees and two lampstands appearing before the Lord of the earth.

4. What was Zechariah shown that throws light on John's vision? What role does the Holy Spirit have in Zechariah's vision? In John's vision, how would you identify the Holy Spirit's work in the testimony of the two witnesses? Zech. 4:1-6, 11-14.

The identity of the two witnesses is linked to the description of their activities. Note the striking allusions John makes to the ministries of Elijah and Moses. (See 2 Kings 1:10; 2:11; 17:1; Ex. 7:14-18; 9:14-16; James 5:17; Mal. 4:4, 5; Jude 8, 9.)

The Old and New Testaments. Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally understood the two witnesses in Revelation 11 as a symbolic reference to the testimony of Holy Scriptures—the Old and New Testaments. The allusions to the work of Moses and Elijah do not require us to conclude that John had in mind two individuals.

The two witnesses are not members of the Deity. They are external to Him (verse 3, 4). They can be attacked by mortals, but they are able to defend themselves (verse 5). They have power to produce calamities and plagues, and they prophesy (verse 6). They can be killed (verses 7, 8), but they are resurrected (verse 11). They are “two prophets” (verse 10). When resurrected they are taken up to heaven for all their enemies to behold.

The two witnesses refer to something that can go on existing in God's presence while at the same time being attacked on earth. The interpretation that the “witnesses” are the Word of God, the Old and New Testaments, is the only one that fits the specifications given in the prophecy.

The Scriptures witness to the plan of salvation. “Concerning the two witnesses the prophet declares further: ‘These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.’ ‘Thy word,’ said the psalmist, ‘is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.’ Revelation 11:4; Psalm 119:105. The two witnesses represent the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments. Both are important testimonies to the origin and perpetuity of the law of God. Both are witnesses also to the plan of salvation. The types, sacrifices, and prophecies of the Old Testament point forward to a Saviour to come. The Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament tell of a Saviour who has come in the exact manner foretold by type and prophecy.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 267.

WED 5. What is the testimony of the two witnesses? Rev. 11:5-13.

Attention is focused not on the *message* of the witnesses, but on the *impact* of their testimony. By their testimony they provoked a response from the beast in the bottomless pit, who made war on them and killed them. Their bodies are left in the streets of the great city (symbolically called Sodom and Egypt—centers of moral depravity and gross idolatry or spiritual oppression). The peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations gaze at the slain witnesses, refusing to give them a proper burial. Instead, the followers of the beast celebrate the occasion by making mirth and exchanging gifts. The witnesses who had tormented them through prophecy and plague were at last dead. The festivity, however, is brief. The Spirit of God enters the bodies of the witnesses, and they rise up and are taken to heaven. Great fear falls upon the pagan world who see the resurrection and ascension of the witnesses. Then an earthquake destroys a tenth of the great city, killing seven thousand people and terrifying the survivors, who give glory to God. Thus through the sacrificial death (or martyrdom) of the witnesses, God's name is vindicated in the earth as pagans are compelled to acknowledge His sovereignty.

In this brief allegory we can see depicted the story of the great conflict between truth and error. It pictures the merriment of the wicked as fleeting and the cause of righteousness victorious at last.

6. What is the meaning of the time periods mentioned by John, and what significance do they have for us today? Rev. 11:2, 3, 9.

Three references to periods of time appear in this chapter: (1) 42 months, (2) 1260 days, and (3) 3 1/2 days. The Gentiles trample upon the holy city for 42 months (verse 2), the two witnesses prophesy in sackcloth for 1260 days, and the witnesses lie slain in the streets of the great city for 3 1/2 days.

The 42 months and the 1260 days are a reference to the period of papal supremacy (A.D. 538-1798). During this time, the two witnesses (the Holy Scriptures) prophesied in sackcloth. This was a time when the forces of evil "trampled under foot" truths in God's Word and persecuted those who persistently sought to study the Scriptures privately.

Attack on the Bible. Toward the end of this spiritual oppression, an attack against the Bible was launched in France under the influence of an atheistic regime. The effort was made to destroy God's Word, but in vain. This infamous assault began in November 1793, when a decree issued in Paris abolished the Christian religion. The period ended in June 1797, when the French government removed the restrictions. The period of 3 1/2 days' prophetic time symbolized 3 1/2 years.



III. THE SEVENTH TRUMPET AND CHRIST'S TRIUMPH (Rev. 11:14-19).

Before the seventh trumpet is sounded, the announcement is made: "The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come" (Rev. 11:14, RSV). The woes are announced by an angel flying in mid-heaven (Rev. 8:13).

7. What scene does John describe in heaven at the sound of the seventh trumpet? Rev. 11:15-18.

8. What do the following passages teach regarding God's kingdom and reign?

Dan. 2:31-45 _____

Zech. 14:9 _____

John 18:36 _____

The Hymn of Thanksgiving. The twenty-four elders respond to the declaration of triumph with a hymn of thanksgiving to God for the victory He won over the evil powers (Rev. 11:16-18). The triumph of God's wrath is an important theme in the book of Revelation. (Compare Rev. 6:12-17; 14:9-11, 17-20; 15:5-8; 16:17-21.)

In the elder's thanksgiving hymn, reference is made to the judgment of those who have died. The text has in mind the reward of eternal life for the righteous and death for the wicked.

9. What is meant by the opening of the temple of God in heaven? Rev. 11:19.

The beginning of the pre-Advent judgment. "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament." Revelation 11:19. The ark of God's testament is in the holy of holies, the second apartment of the sanctuary. In the ministration of the earthly tabernacle, which served 'unto the example and shadow of heavenly things,' this apartment was opened only upon the great Day of Atonement for the cleansing of the sanctuary. Therefore the announcement that the temple of God was opened in heaven and the ark of His testament was seen points to the opening of the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 as Christ entered there to perform the closing work of the atonement. Those who by faith followed their great High Priest as He entered upon His ministry in the most holy place, beheld the ark of His testament. As they had studied the subject of the sanctuary they had come to understand the Saviour's change of ministration, and they saw that He was now officiating before the ark of God,

pleading His blood in behalf of sinners.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 433.

10. When else will God’s heavenly temple be opened and the contents of the ark be revealed?

Immediately before Jesus comes. “When God’s temple in heaven is opened, what a triumphant time that will be for all who have been faithful and true! In the temple will be seen the ark of the testament in which were placed the two tables of stone, on which are written God’s law. These tables of stone will be brought forth from their hiding place, and on them will be seen the Ten Commandments engraved by the finger of God. These tables of stone now lying in the ark of the testament will be convincing testimony to the truth and binding claims of God’s law.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 972. (See also *The Great Controversy*, p. 639.)

WHAT HAVE THIS QUARTER’S LESSONS MEANT TO ME? The judgment-hour message will vindicate God’s character and truth to the world. List below some of the truths of the Adventist message that are now being supported by Biblical and scientific research:

The judgment-hour message also motivates us to evaluate our lives, repent of sin, and listen to the counsels of the Holy Spirit. List below some of the ways you can cooperate with Christ in bringing about spiritual healing and growth for yourself and others:

FURTHER STUDY AND MEDITATION: Compare the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15-19) with the seventh plague (Rev. 16:17-21). Read *The Great Controversy*, p. 301. Read also “The Bible and the French Revolution,” *The Great Controversy*, chapter 15, pp. 265-288.

SUMMARY: Revelation 11 begins with the command to measure the temple, the altar, and those who worship there. God measures His people before He permits them to pass through the dark period of trial. During this time they proclaim the last warning message to the world before the end. The conflict of the ages will close dramatically and decisively with a brilliant manifestation of God’s wrath. Revelation 11 closes on a note of triumph. God will vindicate His name in the earth and establish His righteous rule forever.

Lessons for Third Quarter, 1989

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lessons for the third quarter of 1989 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of the series is "Present Triumph, Future Glory." This quarter's lessons cover the first half of the book of Revelation.

FIRST LESSON: "God's Church—Pursued and Protected"

MEMORY TEXT: 2 Corinthians 11:2.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 12:1-16.

WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT TO YOU: Christ portrays the church's struggles through the centuries since His incarnation. Although the devil opposes us with great wrath, we must remember Christ has defeated him and given us the formula for victory over evil.

OUTLINE:

- I. The Woman of Light (Revelation 12:1)
- II. The Child of the Woman (Revelation 12:2, 4, 5, 10, 11)
- III. The Dragon and the Woman (Revelation 12:3, 4, 6, 7-16)

SECOND LESSON: "The Remnant of Her Seed"

MEMORY TEXT: Revelation 12:17.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Revelation 12:17.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BELONG TO CHRIST: God has identified His last-day church. Christ claims as His own those who will to obey His law and who receive the special instructions He has given.

OUTLINE:

- I. The final remnant
- II. The remnant identified as Commandment keepers
- III. The remnant have the "testimony of Jesus"

Lessons in Braille:

The regular Adult Sabbath School Lessons are available free each month in Braille and 16 2/3 rpm records to blind and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact the Christian Record Braille Foundation, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506.



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D.A. 250-252

"We are standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. Many of the prophecies are about to be fulfilled in quick succession. Every element of power is about to be set at work. Past history will be repeated; all controversies will arouse to new life...the perils of the last days are upon us, and in our work we are to warn the people of the danger they are in. Let not the solemn scenes which prophecy has revealed be left untouched. Let Daniel speak, let Revelation speak, and tell what is truth. WE ARE NEARING THE TIME WHEN THE PROPHECIES ARE TO BE FULFILLED..."


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EGW TM 112-118

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D.A. 251

- 
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 - The Seven Plague Judgments
 - Victorious Christian Living
 - God's Amazing Space City
 - The Seal of God
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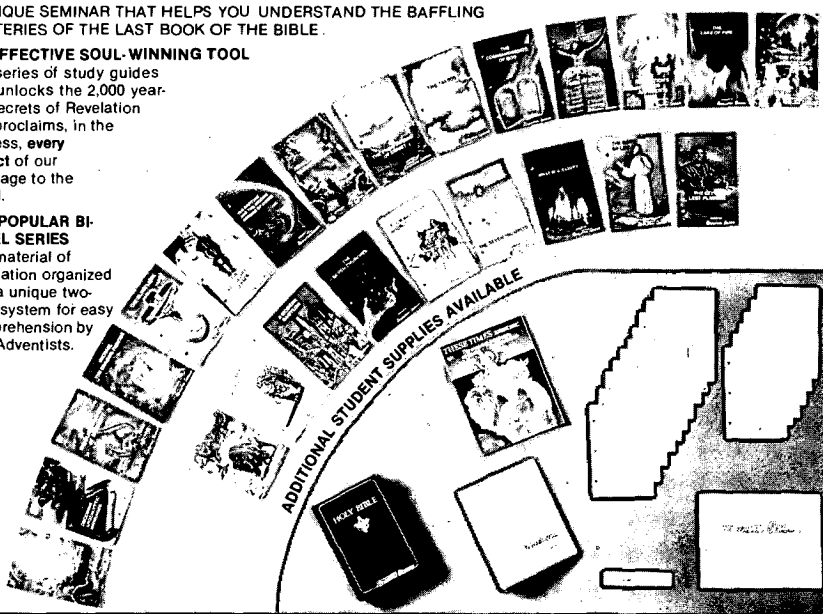
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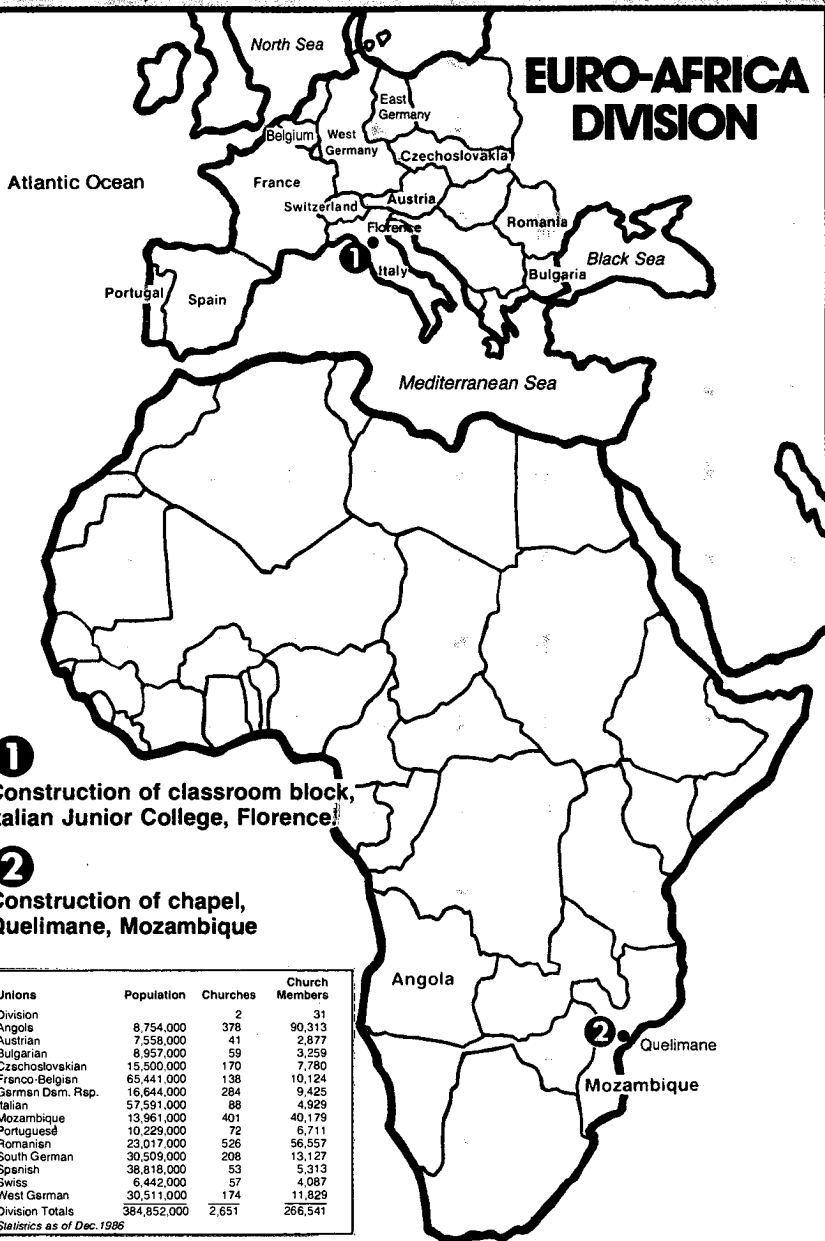


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EURO-AFRICA DIVISION



1
Construction of classroom block,
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2
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Quelimane, Mozambique

| Unions | Population | Churches | Church Members |
|------------------|-------------|----------|----------------|
| Division | | 2 | 31 |
| Angole | 8,754,000 | 378 | 90,313 |
| Austrian | 7,558,000 | 41 | 2,877 |
| Bulgarian | 8,957,000 | 59 | 3,259 |
| Czechoslovakian | 15,500,000 | 170 | 7,780 |
| Franco-Belgian | 65,441,000 | 138 | 10,124 |
| German Dem. Rep. | 16,644,000 | 284 | 9,425 |
| Italian | 57,591,000 | 88 | 4,929 |
| Mozambique | 13,961,000 | 401 | 40,179 |
| Portuguese | 10,229,000 | 72 | 6,711 |
| Romanian | 23,017,000 | 526 | 56,557 |
| South German | 30,509,000 | 208 | 13,127 |
| Spanish | 38,818,000 | 53 | 5,313 |
| Swiss | 6,442,000 | 57 | 4,087 |
| West German | 30,511,000 | 174 | 11,829 |
| Division Totals | 384,852,000 | 2,651 | 266,541 |

Statistics as of Dec. 1986