

HARD SAYINGS:

**PERPLEXING BIBLE
PASSAGES FOR
ADVENTISTS**

By

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my pastor brother, Stan, who is a rich source for dialogue and discussion on theological matters, and a spiritually encouraging brother in the faith as well.

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Preface

There are many passages in the Bible that are puzzling. Separated in time as we are, by thousands of years from the actual events recorded in the Scriptures creates one enormous barrier. In addition to the barrier of time separation we are confronted with the barriers of different languages, different cultures, and different modes of thinking and practice. Even when these are largely addressed we are still left with the fallible limits of communication itself. It is a wonder and a miracle that we understand as much as we do of the ancient material found in the Bible.

While the things necessary for life and salvation are presented clearly enough in the Scripture and through other means, there remain many unsolved mysteries in the Bible. On this side of the kingdom we cannot expect they will all be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, and it is not necessary that they all be resolved. But it seems, to me, that it can become detrimental to our spiritual experience and our understanding of God's ways and character, if we are not willing to investigate and seek to answer as many difficulties as we can.

Many sincere Christians (and non-Christians) stumble over even prominent texts of Scripture. In many cases they misunderstand them when they wouldn't need to. While we must accept by faith many things we cannot understand this side of heaven, it is not a virtue to always be a skeptic, and willingly remain uninformed and unsatisfied on matters that may have a reasonable answer.

As a pastor I have been repeatedly confronted by certain questions that arise in class studies or as a result of theological discussion. It is for this reason that I know there are certain texts that trouble some adherents of the faith. Often,

flimsy answers are offered that may reflect negatively upon God's character or his actions and purposes. This has greatly troubled me at times and I have often wished to do something about it. While the faith of many survives these questions, and there will always be such questions, one's relationship with God can be negatively affected (to a degree) if that person is continually plagued, troubled, and preoccupied by the perplexities. A sound relationship is built on trust, and if we can't trust God's motives and purposes, our understanding of him will be lessened, and our interest in him damaged.

The following chapters only address a handful of texts of this nature. No one should be foolish enough to think that he could even begin to answer all the texts that cause difficulty in the Bible. I don't presume such a position. But these following chapters, drawn largely from sermons I have given, represent a small attempt to elucidate our understanding of God's great purposes, and to exonerate his ways and his character.

These passages to which we will refer are read by all Christians, yet these comments are made in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist faith, of which I am an excited and committed member. My apologies are offered if certain references or expressions are not understood by the reader who is not familiar with the unique environment of my particular sub-culture. I am anxious to first be known and understood as a born-again, saved by Grace, Christian. This is not a denominational apologetic, but an honest attempt to pursue the truth.

My apologies for the grammatical slips and typographical errors that are sure to be found in this unpolished effort. I indulge your patience and understanding while the editing process continues. I am *so* human, and I hate editing! I hope these slips will not distract too much from my overall purpose, which is to proclaim that God's Word is perfectly inspired even if it too isn't always perfectly expressed.

My hope is that these attempts to elucidate these texts will enrich the reader's understanding, or at least challenge the reader to explore these matters further and give them more attention. My real hope and ultimate purpose is to demonstrate the consistent and marvelous purposes of God and to attempt to exonerate his character and actions. When God's true character is seen, I believe that it will draw the subject to him, who is not only the source of light and truth, but is the great Savior and Friend to all mankind.

1

When God Won't Listen

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” (Psalm 66:18)

Up in north central Washington State I was giving a Bible study to a young couple in their home on the subject of prayer.

I was going through some of the conditions of prayer with them. Many know these conditions by heart. This particular young couple did not. Typically the conditions of answered prayer include the following:

1. Ask according to God's will
2. Ask in faith
3. Persevere continually,

and

4. The condition regarding the removal of “cherished” sin from the life, found in Psalm 66:18. It says:

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18).

Susan, the young wife asked a very searching question that I have been confronted with other times in my ministry. Inquired Susan:

"Does this mean that if I am still sinning I cannot pray? Because I still have not gained the victory over every sin. I am very tempted and attracted toward many sins. Does this mean I cannot come to God when it says 'he will not hear me?'" How can I even ask for his forgiveness when he will not listen to me?"

Have you ever been in this dilemma? You have a strong sense given you from the Holy Spirit about right and wrong. And yet you keep falling into that sin. You may even at times willingly embrace that sin, and you feel that sin separates you from God. You soon feel that praying to God for forgiveness of that sin is now useless, because perhaps you have fallen to it again and again before, and you fully expect to succumb to it again in the future. Therefore, you consider, that you are regarding iniquity in your heart and the Lord will not hear you.

Or it might even be, in a further sense, that you think it is an affront to God to pray about anything else you might genuinely need or desire or believe God is willing to give you, because you realize you are still a sinner in certain other areas.

Then there are texts in the Bible to reinforce the precarious nature of your position. One example is Heb. 10:26:

"For if we sin willfully after that we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." Hebrews 10:26

In every church I have pastored I have had "saintly" little ladies who struggle with such verses. There are men to, of course. In fact, I believe there are probably more people, young and old rich or poor, bond or free, who struggle with this syndrome than any of us might think.

In one of my churches there was a lovely little lady who came faithfully to church. She hadn't been to church that much while her husband was alive, but when he died (a godless man who often attempted to block her involvement in the church) she began coming back to church. I know she loved the Lord. Her name was Iris. But my visits with her were always accompanied by a terrible cloud. She felt God could not forgive her wasted years. Her lukewarm religious experience in her previous years she feared caused her husband to die without the benefit of salvation. No doubt there were personal issues, and other private sins she could not resolve. But as far as we could see she was a wonderful, kind lady. She often asked me if I thought she had committed the unpardonable sin. I pled

with her, read promise after promise to no avail. Tears of despair would roll down her cheeks. She could not believe that even though she had asked for forgiveness, God could forgive her. After all, she was a miserable, “repeat,” sinner. She had proof of that. She regarded herself as one of those described in such texts as the following; especially the one in Matthew 12:32ff:

“Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” Matthew 12:32 NIV

Mark 3:29 “But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.” NIV

Luke 12:10 “And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.” NIV

Poor Iris! Poor sinners all of us! What are we to do with these "texts that trouble us?" Like Paul we cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

Now “perfect” people are o.k. with these texts. In fact they seem to really like them. But what does a person do when he or she realizes they are one of those types who keeps falling and falling?

Well, to begin with, how shall we view these texts in the first place?

Isn't it just the nature of things that we are haunted by these texts; texts that can be largely seen in negative terms. It is human nature to be doubtful, pessimistic, and fearful, and our minds seem to gravitate toward these passages rather than toward the "texts that encourage us."

Why aren't we "haunted" by texts like the following?:

- 1 John 1:9 (*“God is faithful and just to forgive”*)
- John 3:16 (*“Whosoever believes”*)
- John 6:37 (*“He that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out?” etc.*)

1. REGARD INIQUITY?

But now let us look at this principle text more carefully. What is the Psalmist trying to say?

First, what is iniquity? The word here used for iniquity is not just the ordinary word for sin. It is especially not the word for sin, when used in the sense of slipping, or falling into error, or being overcome with temptation. No, it is not this kind of word at all. It is the word for blatant, "in your face," bold and intentional sin. It is the kind of sin we do on purpose and laugh about. It is the kind of sin we plan ahead of time (pre-meditated) and deliberately want to do.

To REGARD iniquity is to cherish it with NO REMORSE whatsoever.

God will not hear

Further, what is meant by the phrase: "God will not hear me?" In the Greek language (this phrase is in Hebrew, however the forces can be similar) I do know that there are two words for "hearing." One is to hear, literally as to audibly hear any sound. The other means more: to "understand," or "heed," or obey. The King James Version often uses this force in the word, "hearken." You see, it is one thing to hear in an auditory fashion what one is commanding, but it is another thing entirely to *understand* and *act* upon it.

This I learned with my five-year old. That is why I had to say sometimes, "Steffy, did you hear what I said?" I already knew that Stephanie had heard the sound of my voice. But I wanted to know that she had processed and given attention to what I had said, and was going to make an active decision concerning it.

Of course, God is able to hear even our thoughts. Read the whole of Psalm 139. So the issue is not whether God hears or not. He always hears. It is whether he will heed and reward the issues of our prayers.

Suppose your diet consists of one thing, and this is the one thing you love most. Let's suppose, ice cream. Let's propose also that you are informed and aware that relying on such a diet, continually and in excess, is nutritionally bankrupt. You know this. But you persist in eating only this because you like it, you think

you should have it, and you resent God and everyone else for suggesting otherwise.

However, despite this, you love God, and you want to be saved in his kingdom someday. Soon you have another great wish. More than anything else right now, you want to be well, and healthy. You are tired of colds, emotional highs and lows, weakness, and headaches. You take God at his promise that whatever we ask he will give it. So you say to God, "Please, Lord, make me healthy." But you persist in eating only ice cream.

Well, it is easy to see how God would handle this absurd, though not unusual approach made by some Christians. God is not going to aid and abet the very thing that is working against your best interest. He will not ENABLE you to evil. He may refuse to answer your prayer with a positive answer; not because he is not listening, but because **YOU ARE NOT LISTENING!** If you regard in your heart something that is at cross-purposes with what God is trying to accomplish in your life, God will not work with you on that matter. God is simply asking that we remove the offense that is blocking the accomplishments of his designs. That is what is meant in this text. If God would answer some of our prayers he would actually be aiding sin, and helping the other side. He is not usually going to do that! Sometimes he has to work hard to overcome our resistance and stubbornness, yet he persists on leading us in the right path.

"In the darkest part of the night, a ship's captain cautiously piloted his warship through the fog-shrouded waters. With straining eyes he scanned the hazy darkness, searching for dangers lurking just out of sight. His worst fears were realized when he saw a bright light straight ahead. It appeared to be a vessel on a collision course with his ship.

To avert disaster he quickly radioed the oncoming vessel. "This is Captain Jeremiah Smith," his voice crackled over the radio. "Please alter your course ten degrees south! Over."

To the captain's amazement, the foggy image did not move. Instead, he heard back over the radio, "Captain Smith. This is private Thomas Johnson. Please altar your course ten degrees north! Over."

Appalled at the audacity of the message, the captain shouted back over the radio, "Private Johnson, this is Captain Smith, and I order you to immediately altar your course ten degrees south! Over."

A second time the oncoming light did not budge. “With all due respect, Captain Smith,” came the private’s voice again, “I order you to alter your course ten degrees north! Over.”

Angered and frustrated that this impudent sailor would endanger the lives of his men and crew, the captain growled back over the radio, “Private Johnson, I can have you court-martialed for this! For the last time, I command you on the authority of the United States government to alter your course ten degrees to the south! I am a battleship!”

The private’s final transmission was chilling: “Captain Smith, sir, again with due respect, I command you to alter your course ten degrees to the north! I am a lighthouse!”

It is in these cases that God does not “heed” our prayer. But when even a part of our inner motives are righteous, he is anxious to reward our prayer. Amazingly, He does even when we have sinned dreadfully. Look at the next verse, verse 19, too often overlooked. “But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer.” Psalm 66:19 NKJV.

The following statements ought to be memorized by every sinner, which, incidentally, is the same as every person I know, God being the only exception: (emphasis supplied)

Steps to Christ, “Faith and Acceptance,” p. 52:

“Some seem to feel that they must be on probation, and must prove to the Lord that they are reformed, before they can claim His blessing. But they may claim the blessing of God even now. They must have His grace, the Spirit of Christ, to help their infirmities, or they cannot resist evil. Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are, sinful, helpless, dependent. We may come with all our weakness, our folly, our sinfulness, and fall at His feet in penitence. It is His glory to encircle us in the arms of His love and to bind up our wounds, to cleanse us from all impurity.

Here is where thousands fail; they do not believe that Jesus pardons them personally, individually. They do not take God at His word. It is the privilege of all who comply with the conditions to know for themselves that pardon is freely extended for every sin. Put away the suspicion that God’s promises are not meant for you. They are for every repentant transgressor. Strength and grace have been provided through Christ to be brought by ministering angels to every believing soul. None are so sinful that they cannot find strength, purity, and righteousness in Jesus, who died for them. He is waiting to strip them of their

garments stained and polluted with sin, and to put upon them the white robes of righteousness; He bids them live and not die."

"The Signs of the Times"- 8-21-1884:

"We are sinful by nature, and so are commanded to be zealous and repent. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us; but the prayer of the penitent, contrite soul is always accepted. When all known wrongs are righted, we may believe that God will answer our petitions. We must do what we can on our part; but our own merit will never commend us to the favor of God. It is the worthiness of Jesus that will save us, his blood that will cleanse us."

In Heavenly Places, p.78:

"We are not to be so overwhelmed with the thought of our sins and errors that we shall cease to pray. Some realize their great weakness and sin, and become discouraged. Satan casts his dark shadow between them and the Lord Jesus, their atoning sacrifice. They say, "It is useless for me to pray. My prayers are so mingled with evil thoughts that the Lord will not hear them." These suggestions are from Satan. In His humanity, Christ met and resisted this temptation, and He knows how to succor those who are thus tempted. In our behalf, He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears."

2. The Sin Against the Holy Spirit

So now what is the sin against the Holy Spirit? Is it a sin so bad that God cannot forgive it? Not at all. Jesus says that every sin can be forgiven but this one. But this is simply the sin that WE refuse to have forgiven.

The Holy Spirit is the only agency through which God can access our minds and prepare our hearts to receive His salvation. If we continue until we habitually regard the promptings of the Holy Spirit as nothing, or we attribute such promptings to the devil, how shall we ever hear God speaking to us? This is the only way. If we grieve the Holy Spirit to the point that we cut the telegraph line to our souls, God no longer reaches us even though he is sending the signals. This is exactly what Hebrews 10:26 and these other texts are about.

If you fear you have committed the unpardonable sin, then rejoice, for it is proof you have not. Because those who have finally committed it do not care whether they have committed it or not. They cannot fear that they have committed it.

Their conscience is numb--seared if you please, and they are not subject to conviction. Please believe this: **No man or woman will ever be lost because he committed any particular sin, but only because he or she has cut himself or herself off from God and refused the saving grace freely offered by the Savior.**

One of the ways we cut off God's voice is by listening to everything the world has to share with us, but seldom getting any input from the Bible and prayer. The route to committing the sin against the Holy Spirit is like the jogger with his headset on. I almost collided with one with my car in Scottsdale, Arizona. He was "tooling" along oblivious to his surroundings and was totally into whatever it was that was playing on his headset. I think such folk are already volunteering to be organ donors! They hear nothing but the "thump, thump" in their ears and run right out onto the street and don't hear you coming.

"A woman came home to find her husband in the kitchen, shaking frantically with what looked like an wire running from his waist toward the electric kettle.

Intending to jolt him away from the deadly current, she whacked him with a handy plank of wood---breaking his arm in two places. Until that moment he had been listening happily to his "walkman."

People who are resisting the Holy Spirit are in this same way plugging their ears to the entreaties of parents, friends, ministers, truth, or whatever form the Holy Spirit is using to reach them. Soon, it takes a solid whack to get their attention. This is what happened to Paul on the Damascus road. But as grievous as was his sin, and his kicking against the goads of the Spirit, he finally let God enter his life. But many become oblivious and do not.

Once, while a youth pastor, I had a man (who was uninvited) go with my youth group into a long mine tunnel in the Snake River canyon between Oregon and Idaho. I'll never forget him complaining that he "couldn't see," and "would someone with a decent flashlight help him see where he was going?" Outside it was a bright sunny day but on entering the mine he had refused to take off his wrap-around sunglasses. No wonder it seemed a little dark!

Writes Ellen White:

"It is difficult to exercise living faith when we are in darkness and discouragement. But this of all others is the very time when we should exercise faith. "But," says one, "I do not feel at such times like praying in faith." Well, then, will you allow Satan to gain the victory, simply because you do not feel like resisting him? When he sees that you have the greatest need of divine aid, he will try the hardest to beat you back from God. If he can keep you away from the Source of strength, he knows that you will walk in darkness and sin. There is no sin greater than unbelief. And when there is unbelief in the heart, there is danger that it will be expressed. The lips should be kept in as with bit and bridle, lest by giving expression to this unbelief you not only exert an injurious influence over others, but place yourselves upon the enemy's ground." (Ibid.)

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DAVID

David, the writer of many of the Psalms, realized in his life the principle that sin separates us from God. And I agree that sinful practices muffle God's voice. It is extremely dangerous to persist in sin.

But David also realized that God's love toward the sinner never wavered, and that the separation is never God to man---but always man to God.

David fell into a terrible sin later in his life. Just how bad this sin was cannot be estimated. David's responsibility was greater, because he was the king, and the leader of Israel, and a national hero. He reached this position because God had especially blessed him. This made his sin with Bathsheba all the more hideous.

In fact, think of the commandments he broke in this incident:

- He placed another God before his Lord
- He indulged in a very subtle form of idolatry
- He took God's name in vain, and thus he blasphemed his God, and degraded his office
- He certainly dishonored his family, for years to come
- He committed murder
- He, of course, committed adultery
- He stole another man's wife
- He committed several acts of deceit and lying to cover it up
- He coveted, and this is what started the whole thing
- He even, you might say broke the fourth commandment too. How could he enjoy a "relationship holiday" of fellowship with his God when he had broken that relationship by violating all the other commandments? In fact, he violated the Sabbath because it is the very sign given that God is sanctifying and making his people pure. (Ex 31:13,14)

This is why James says that if you keep the whole law yet offend in one point you are guilty of all. David was guilty in this one incident of breaking the entire law of God, the law of love. And incidentally, lest one is inclined to argue that

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we are sometimes harder on those who commit adultery than on other sinners, think about this a little bit. Think of David's sin and its consequences. The consequences were comprehensive and enormous.

The consequences entailed more than buying a soda on Sabbath or stealing a grape at *Safeway*. Yet God was willing and ready to forgive it, even though he couldn't fix all the circumstances at that point. That is the nature of sin.

Was David's sin iniquitous? Was it intentional and pre-meditated? You bet it was!

Yet, did God heard David's prayer for forgiveness? Yes. You have the proof in Psalm 51. This Psalm is memory material for all sinners of any genre.

JONAH

Now remember, we are not just talking about how God relates to the sinner who slips accidentally. We're talking about whether God listens to sinners who have "sinned on purpose," you might say. Can God forgive this sin? It depends on whether or not you "REGARD" iniquity in your heart. But God is always reaching out to us, even when we are running away from him.

Jonah, you read in that curious little book in the minor prophets, was asked by God to go to Nineveh. He was a prophet, someone God would talk to on a regular basis. But Jonah disobeyed God. Quite deliberately, don't you think?

He literally "ran away" the Bible says. He thought that if he got out of God's immediate territory he could shake the responsibility God had given him. And for doing it, he got into what I like to call "a whale of a lot of trouble!"

Jonah's own words about his experience in the belly of that great fish are very interesting. Because of his sin, he felt like he couldn't get through to God. He was so rebellious and without hope that he basically volunteered suicide, and so the men on the ship threw him into the sea.

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But even during his deliberate, rebellious, and intentional sin he reached out to God, knowing he had done wrong. What is interesting is where Jonah considers himself calling from:

"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. . . . the deep closed about me. . . the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, My God." Jonah 2:1-10

In other words, Jonah cried to God from Hell itself (Not the popular "hell," of course). He thought it was over forever for him. He thought he had sinned the unpardonable sin.

But he found out how *hard* it is to really commit the unpardonable sin, if you simply cry to your Redeemer. In verse 9 Jonah experienced full forgiveness and says; "I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." Jonah at least had that much together, though he didn't have it *all* together, even by the end of the story.

The point is: there is never a circumstance in which one cannot cry to the Lord and receive absolution and salvation from our gracious Lord. What a God and Savior we have, my friends!

The "Love of God" song says God's Grace "reaches to the lowest hell." When I was growing up there was another popular gospel song entitled, "He." Our congregation banned this song from being performed in our church because some thought it contained poor theology. One of the lines (the "bad" one) says:

"Though it makes him sad to see the way we live, He'll always say, 'I forgive.'"

The thing is, the phrase properly understood *is* good theology. It is very biblical.

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PETER

Remember poor Peter, the disciple who very purposely denied his Lord contrary to his best intentions. It is well for us to review this story often. The book, *The Desire of Ages* (p. 712), poignantly describes how far the love of Jesus reaches toward poor, “sinning on purpose” sinner. Says the author of that book:

“While the degrading oaths were fresh upon Peter's lips, and the shrill crowing of the cock was still ringing in his ears, the Saviour turned from the frowning judges, and looked full upon His poor disciple. At the same time Peter's eyes were drawn to his Master. In that gentle countenance he read deep pity and sorrow, but there was no anger there.

The sight of that pale, suffering face, those quivering lips, that look of compassion and forgiveness, pierced his heart like an arrow. Conscience was aroused. Memory was active. Peter called to mind his promise of a few short hours before that he would go with his Lord to prison and to death. He remembered his grief when the Saviour told him in the upper chamber that he would deny his Lord thrice that same night. Peter had just declared that he knew not Jesus, but he now realized with bitter grief how well his Lord knew him, and how accurately He had read his heart, the falseness of which was unknown even to himself.

A tide of memories rushed over him. The Saviour's tender mercy, His kindness and longsuffering, His gentleness and patience toward His erring disciples,—all was remembered. He recalled the caution, “Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” [LUKE 22:31,32.] He reflected with horror upon his own ingratitude, his falsehood, his perjury. Once more he looked at his Master, and saw a sacrilegious hand raised to smite Him in the face. Unable longer to endure the scene, he rushed, heart-broken, from the hall.

He pressed on in solitude and darkness, he knew not and cared not whither. At last he found himself in Gethsemane. The scene of a few hours before came vividly to his mind. The suffering face of his Lord, stained with bloody sweat and convulsed with anguish, rose before him. He remembered with bitter remorse that Jesus had wept and agonized in prayer alone, while those who should have united with Him in that trying

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hour were sleeping. He remembered His solemn charge, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." [MATT. 26:41.] He witnessed again the scene in the judgment-hall. It was torture to his bleeding heart to know that he had added the heaviest burden to the Saviour's humiliation and grief. On the very spot where Jesus had poured out His soul in agony to His Father, Peter fell upon his face, and wished that he might die."

But Peter, we know, in the end, finally enjoyed the love and approval of his Savior.

God listens!

Never think, that because you sin, that God will not listen to you. The great mistake is to sin, and then let Satan tell you that your own failure and rottenness disqualifies you for a visit with your Savior.

Did Peter fail? Yes. Did Peter sin on purpose. Yes! Usually when you swear, you have some kind of definite purpose! Did Peter sin more than once? Yes. Did Peter do it right in front of God and everybody? Yes. Did Peter ever sin again? Yes! Did Peter enjoy forgiveness and love from the master he had betrayed? Yes. Yes. Yes! And that is the difference. Peter chose to not regard iniquity "IN HIS HEART." Unlike Judas, who committed the very same sin really, Peter sought forgiveness and immediately received it.

God will forgive you too, my friend. He will forgive you even when the sin is *fresh* and *new*. For Peter it came while the oaths *were lingering on his lips*. But Jesus offers you an audience with him, and promises every other blessing. It says that while the prodigal "was yet afar off," the waiting Father ran toward him, and fell upon him, and kissed him. He "FELL UPON HIM."

I remember as a child leaping into my father's arms when he came from work. Though tired, he accepted this expression of love. But here is a picture where the Father, beside himself with joy, throws himself upon the sinner who has not even yet made his confession, with so much love and energy as to knock him almost to

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the ground. Isn't that enough Grace, for you, O sinner?!

How can we think that anything shall be able to separate us from this kind of love? How can we cling to any cheap, and senseless sin? God's ear is open to the slightest sigh, the gentlest wish, the quietest appeal from our heart. He will forgive and he will abundantly pardon. Come to God, with your filthy rags, with your tainted apparel, with your ignoble thoughts. Confess them to him, and he will hear your cry and he will make you into something you are not. Let his righteousness do its work in you. Remove anything that would close your eyes, avert his touch, or block your ears to his Spirit. Give him a broken, and contrite heart, and *know* that he will always listen.

2

What Was Nailed to the Cross?

***“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross.”
Colossians 2:14 (KJV)***

Countless times over the Christian centuries misinterpretation of key scriptures relating to the Law and Gospel has brought abundant confusion. Of no text of Scripture can this be more true than perhaps the comments of Paul in Colossians 2:14-16.

This along with Romans 14:5 is used to prove that the Ten Commandment law, including the Sabbath command, has been done away with. With evangelical zeal the doctrine of righteousness by faith is thus defended against legalism. Properly understood, this would not be a problem, but preachers and writers often go too far by teaching that the eternal Law of God is here abolished.

What is most alarming is that Seventh-day Adventists themselves are now in large groups adopting the same evangelical arguments. Even in the organ of Adventist thought, *The Review* (now *Adventists Today*), there appear articles that don't even mention the ceremonial law as being connected to the central thought

of this passage.* The emphasis on Grace is wonderful, but is this a responsible view of this passage? I believe this view not only constitutes an error, but also robs the text of particular value in informing us on other issues and Christian practices and our obligation or non-obligation to them (such as the modern observance by some, of the Jewish annual feasts).

So, what was nailed to the cross? First let us look at the text itself: (NIV)

Col. 2:11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,

Col. 2:12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Col. 2:13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Col. 2:14 **having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.**

Col. 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Col. 2:16 **Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a sabbath day.**

Common Arguments

The typical argument in Fundamentalist thought is that the entire law was nailed to the cross, including the seventh-day Sabbath (since sabbath day [should be small "s"] is mentioned in vs. 16). This constitutes careless scholarship to say the least.

* (Avery Dick, "Out of Debt," *Adventist Review*, Feb., 2000, pp. 12-14)

Yet the same argument is now being promoted by even many Seventh-day Adventists who teach that the entire law or legal system (including the 10 commandments) was nailed to the cross. The "written code," or "bond" [NOTE OF INDEBTEDNESS *cheirographon*], representing our sinful violation of the law was what was canceled through the cross. No recognition is accorded to a distinctive "ceremonial law" made up of laws and regulations and ordinances strictly connected to the system of sacrifices, feast, and shadows carried on by the Jewish sanctuary economy up until the death of Christ.

These views are incomplete and erroneous for the following reasons:

1. The ceremonial law *definitely* existed as separate ordinances from the moral law. To apply the meaning of a legal note **ONLY** to this passage ignores the greater context as well as the immediate context.

For example, Paul expresses a nearly identical theological thought in Ephesians without making any reference to a note of indebtedness:

Eph. 2:15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.

The KJV says, "even the law of commandments contained in ordinances."

This parallel passage *is not* speaking of a note of indebtedness but rather a system of sacrificial rites and ceremonies. It is absurd to think that the Ten Commandment law could be "abolished," even by its Author's sacrifice. Its principles and precepts are eternal and unchanging, in nature.

This text is not including the Ten Commandments as "principles," or even the "legalistic view" of them. The very context--- Col. 2:16---describes what is being talked about: (i.e.) the feasts, holy days, ceremonial sabbaths, and the new moons. Particularly are meant those sacrifices and rituals attached to these ceremonies that did indeed cease at the cross of Christ.

A Witness Against (beside and against) Us

In addition one must recognize the source passage for Paul's expression: "as a witness against us." This is clearly drawn from Deuteronomy 31 where the phrase is repeated **three times**. (Vss. 19, 21, 26)

Deut. 31:9 So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel.

Deut. 31:19 "Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so **that it may be a witness for me against them**.

Deut. 31:21 And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, **this song will testify against them**, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath."

Deut. 31:26 "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God. **There it will remain as a witness against you**.

When similar words are repeated in a later passage of Scripture we usually reason that they are attributable to the previous source. When the fourth commandment uses the same three Hebrew words that one finds in Gen. 2:3, "rested, blessed, sanctified (or hallowed)," we recognize from whence they came, or at least recognize that a relationship exists between them.

Therefore, it is totally irresponsible to suppose that Paul has invented for this passage a secular "note of indebtedness" (exclusively) to build his argument---and does not have Deuteronomy (i.e. "the second law") in mind. He is speaking in particular of those rites and ceremonies that Jesus' death no longer made necessary, *ipso facto*, the ceremonial law.

Paul elsewhere defines the law of sacrifices and ordinances as shadows:

Hebr. 10:1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming---not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

Hebr. 10:2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins.

Hebr. 10:3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins,

Hebr. 10:4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

The death of Christ ended the ceremonial law of sacrifices and feasts and ceremonial holy days. But it did not end how a man should treat his wife, his neighbor, or his God. There is such a difference! These precepts (the 10) are not "shadows!"

Some argue that the word "handwriting" is appropriate for a "note of indebtedness." The problem is that in New Testament the *word is not used for such a note*, but rather is used for "laws and decrees," such as the one that brought the parents of Jesus to Bethlehem (4X --Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; Acts 17:7; Eph 2:15). In almost every case the context is replete with the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. Paul had other available words for "debt" and "secular monetary notes" but he does not use them. He uses the word for laws and decrees that had temporary and specific significance.

Yes, this term fluidly applied, could generally incorporate the idea of a note or legal demand, and Paul perhaps conveniently uses this *nuance*, but this does not effectively and summarily dismiss the idea of a separate and distinct ceremonial law.

*The argument that "handwriting," (singular) and "legal demands" is plural, therefore means a "note of indebtedness" is a bankrupt argument since the word "law" is both singular and plural.

We call the Ten Commandments, in fact the entire Pentateuch; God's Law (singular), not only the "Laws of God."

The inspired writer, Ellen White, consistently, sees this passage as speaking of a "ceremonial law." (Esp. PP365, 6BC 1094, EW33).

She indicates that those who try to "blend the two systems" (ceremonial and moral law) are perverting the Scriptures. She clearly says of the ritual law of sacrifices; "**It is this law** that Christ 'took out of the way, nailing it to His cross.' Colossians 2:14" (PP365).

It is particularly an inexcusable contradiction for Seventh-day Adventists to take the view that the ceremonial law is not here referred to. Those who see this issue differently have rights to do so, but they do it in blatant contradiction to what they themselves term: "The Spirit of Prophecy," not to mention, several cardinal rules of interpretation.

The very materials and manner by which the Ten Commandment law was given indicate that it was never intended to be abolished or replaced.

1. It was placed safely inside the ark with angels reverently hovering over it. (The ceremonial or handwritten Mosaic Law was placed on the outside of the ark, for a particular purpose).
2. It was written on stone in a permanent fashion.
3. It was written by God's own finger. God does not change.
4. It was apparently written twice: both sides, on two tables, (Cf., Sarah Peck, The Path to the Throne, pp. 164, 165), for the following reasons:
 - a. To show it was established by God (Gen. 41:32).
 - b. To indicate its completeness (no more to be added).
 - c. To create a "carbon/copy" so it would not be lost.
 - d. In ten precepts (the number of judicial completeness).
 - e. Presented in such a manner on both sides so that no commandment could ever be hidden from view and forgotten.

Conclusion

The putting aside of the ritual sacrificial rites is what is meant in this passage. These were indeed abrogated and made obsolete when the true sacrifice had come. The people of God should carefully and clearly understand this text. When rightly divided, this text of truth is not only informative and useful, but also consistent with other Bible truth. Let's keep it that way!

WHAT WAS NAILED TO THE CROSS?

Compare. . .

Colossians 2:14

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us"

Deuteronomy 31:24-26

When Moses made an end of writing. . . put in the side of the ark. . . for a witness against thee. (cf. Eph. 2:15)

TEN COMMANDMENTS

Placed in the **ark**
(see Deut. 10:5)

Written in **stone**
(see Exodus 31:18)
Permanent words are written in stone (e.g. national monuments, gravestones, etc.)

Written with **God's** own finger
(Ex. 31:18)

Sabbath of Ten Commandments a perpetual sign (forever) of creation. (Ex. 31:13-17) (also note context of Verse 18)

The Ten Commandments were "**doubled**" to indicate their immutability Ex. 32:15 Deut. 4:13; Gen 41:32

CEREMONIAL LAW (ordinances)

Placed in the **side** of the ark
(see Deut. 31:24-26)

Written in a **book**
(Deut 31:24)
(the word "bond," (RSV), "written code" (NIV), is literally in Greek: "handwriting" (as in KJV).
-Handwriting on a scroll is not permanent.

Written by **Moses**
(Deut. 31:24, etc.)

Law of witness for days following Moses' death (vs. 27ff.)
"the days to come." This covenant was broken by Israel so it indeed stood against them and condemned them.
---Jesus then **cancelled** it.

The ceremonial law was soon obsolete. (**singular**) Hebrews 10:1-4,6; and Psalm 40:6,7; and 2 Chron 5:10

Upon careful consideration one will find that the real motive hidden behind insistence on the fact that the Ten Commandment law was done away with at the Cross. It will come readily into evidence. It is attributable to one thing. The purpose is not alone to decry as legalism *the honest observance of God's precepts*, but more particularly to dismiss the Sabbath commandment.

Yet, no sensible Christian teaches that the other nine commandments are to be broken on this side of the cross. So neither can the fourth, the very center of the holy ten be broken. It is true, keeping even the Moral Law or the Ten Commandments cannot save one; but neither will one be saved who is living in violation of that Law. That Law will judge all men. How could men be judged by a broken instrument?

The "law" that was nailed to the cross was clearly those sacrificial ceremonies that were a "shadow" of the coming true sacrifice that was prefigured in the Old Testament practices (Heb.10: 1-4). Ceremonial sabbaths (feast days), new moons, sacrificial activities, etc. were no longer needed.

It is recognized that these functions ceased in that form and ritual when the True Lamb was slain and the atoning blood of the real sacrifice was offered in Christ, and the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. But tables of stone cannot be nailed to a cross--- without breaking them.

3

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"Unto two thousand and three hundred days and then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." (Daniel 8:14)

- Does it make any difference whether you believe or don't believe the doctrine of a judgment beginning in 1844? Isn't it an antiquated and moldy doctrine that Seventh-day Adventists drummed up to explain their way out of the Great Disappointment?

Isn't Christ and the Gospel all that matters? Even if the prophecy is valid, what's the big deal? We don't need this to be saved. If we don't need to understand it to be saved, why do Adventists make it so important?

Who cares whether or not a day equals a year in Bible prophecy? 457 B.C. is about as important to us as last week's moldy bread. This is the year 2000 (plus), right?

So go the objections often voiced on this subject.

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Problems with the Subject

- I (the author) find reluctance among even Seventh-day Adventist ministers to talk about such prophetic subjects in the pulpit, especially the 2300-day prophecy. At evangelistic meetings the subject might be heard, but seldom anymore is it heard in the church. There is just too much tedious information; dates, decrees, formulas, and temple rooms.
- A member of my family, who is a dedicated Seventh-day Adventist, even married to a minister, voiced some of the same observations to me not long ago. I have since wondered how many people she represents. Church members, I mean.
- It is a good and fair question, however--- and that is why I am including it in this book about "Hard Sayings."

What is Essential?

Let us begin by asking if any one text *by itself* is essential to salvation? If the answer is yes then we can stick to that one text. (What would it be; John 3:16?)

But if the answer is no, then we can be safe to simply ignore many of them completely. Yet, should we throw out portions of the Bible because those individual parts of it are not *essential*?

I have heard people say this about many things that we hold as doctrines. They will say what one believes or doesn't believe about certain doctrines is not essential to their salvation. What about this idea? I think it depends. Let me tell you what I mean.

An Example

Take, for instance, the state of man in death. Some say, this has nothing to do with knowing Christ and being saved. Well, maybe. But maybe not.

Let's think of it this way. Some say, "Well, the only way it could matter what

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you believed about the state of man in death, is that it could set one up to believe that their relatives who have died can appear to them. Then Satan will use this belief in the immortality of the soul and Spiritualism to later deceive them.”

Now I believe this false doctrine that is being propagated is going to have just this result for thousands if not millions. We have prophetic insight to justify this belief.

But some believe that this possible deception is future, and so it is quite innocent today to believe your relatives are in heaven. And God is gracious, and gives people time to sort things out. But there is a text in the Bible that speaks to this:

It says “there is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is the way of death.”

There can be more to this whole thing, I think.

The possibility of being deceived by departed spirits is one thing, but is that the only danger that comes with the belief that the dead do not die?

Think for a moment on what always goes along with the logically impossible belief of "mortal immortality." You virtually never find this idea separated from it. It is that there is an eternal life of torment in a place called "hell." This is for the wicked, of course. I could say more to validate this but for today let us suggest that this horrendous belief in eternal torment has its root in the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

Now let us look further at one more fact. It is the conclusion of many a writer, that this idea, that God tortures the wicked in the flames of hell for eternity, is the greatest deterrent in all of the reach of Christendom against people accepting Christ. This doctrine has made more infidels and skeptics and atheists than any other doctrine.*

* “It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition clothed with terror.

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Now think about it. To be saved one must know Christ. He is the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Therefore, millions upon millions of souls will go down to Christless graves on the basis of this doctrine alone. So now how important is the correct understanding of this doctrine?

To take the argument further, in India and Pakistan where they have a form of this belief millions are starving to death. They are starving to death because they believe the souls of their relatives are in the cows, and the mice, etc. etc. So they feed the cows and starve their children. They won't eat the cows because they are perhaps a relative. The cows eat the grain, as do the mice, but the mice are other relatives so they do nothing about the problem. In the end nearly half of the people starve to death that would not need to. In addition they don't know Christ so they do not have the promise of sustenance that Christians have. Therefore, millions more die.

Another erroneous idea that comes by default is that many religions teach that there is a second chance, sometimes more, for every individual. The tentative nature and convenience of all these "souls" *moving* around provides countless opportunities for being ultimately saved. Yet the truth is that it is given to men to live and die once, and then comes judgment. This "second chance" idea likely encourages many "would be Christians," or "not so earnest now Christians" to delay preparation of heart and mind to meet God. Many more people will be caught in this delusion. And we could go on.

So millions are being, and will be deceived, by departed spirits; millions will go to their graves without knowing Christ because of the "hell-fire" doctrine, or the transmigration of the soul doctrine, millions more with the "second chance"

When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels." E.G.White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 536.

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doctrine, and millions will literally starve to death first, before finding and knowing Christ, because they believe absolute foolishness.

Now, would we say it matters not what we believe as long as we believe in Christ? Satan believes in Christ, too you know.

I think there are a lot of things that on the surface don't *seem* important to us or our Christian friends. But we must ask, what will be the end of the matter? “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof is the way of death.”

This is said of the text in question today. 1844 doesn't matter. Yet, what it says about God and his ways may matter a lot. So, to state it simply, I believe this prophecy about 1844 may mean more to us than most people initially think.

What is the 1844 Doctrine?

The prophecy of Daniel 8:14 is traditionally understood by Adventists to mean that prophetically, the 2300 days mentioned in the text, stand for years; therefore 2300 years after 457 B.C., the date of the prophetic and historical decree, the sanctuary in heaven “was cleansed.” In effect, Jesus then entered the innermost apartment of the heavenly temple (as in the OT Day of Atonement) to judge who is to be saved out of all those who have professed to know the Lord before Jesus comes. (The cases of those living today cannot be determined, of course, until their earthly probation closes).

This very belief has been a point of departure by thousands from our ranks and has been a point on which all other Christians dispute us. Yet, is it really necessary?

We cannot treat all the intricacies of this verse and this belief system in this document. This is done better in other works, and requires some study for some. I recommend such books as Clifford Goldstein's “1844 Made Simple.” I simply must make some comments relative to this matter in the following remarks. I believe this should not be a text that troubles us, but just the opposite. **I. LEGITIMACY OF 8:14 ITSELF**

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When just beginning my ministry in Alaska my conference administrators in the office where I worked as one of the treasurers invited a world-class Adventist scholar to our camp meeting near Palmer. I was ecstatic for I had read many of the writings of this scholar and had a great respect for his degrees and scholarly standing. I looked forward to his messages that he would give at the camp meeting, and in spite of being involved in the leadership of one of the youth divisions I was able to catch some of his talks to the ministers.

In fact, I was more or less his servant for the week, picking him up and taking him back to the airport, squiring him around in my car, conducting him to and from his living quarters. I enjoyed the opportunity to visit a little with him, and ask him some theological questions. He was very nice, sort of reserved. He insisted on daily walks and ate at regular intervals. I admired his discipline, his reputation.

Maybe I built him up too high, and my expectations were over-rating him. To my surprise, I was secretly disappointed at his somewhat sterile presentations. But then I would think, "Look Steve, this is Desmond Ford! Have a little respect. Something must be wrong with you. You will be sure to be inspired by the Saturday night finale."

It came to that last Saturday evening climax of camp meeting and I remember hearing the message for the evening. It was on the righteousness of Christ. There isn't a more inspiring subject than this subject. The righteousness of Christ is our only hope. It is our salvation. I love that topic.

But I was listening intently to this message and thinking, My! Something is wrong here. It was one of the deadest presentations I have ever heard or ever expect to hear in my life. I do not say this to be critical, or to say that one should judge a presentation according to how you feel at the moment. But there was a great turmoil in my soul. I remember feeling almost guilty that I thought the message was dull and without power. I remember saying to myself two things that I have seldom since said in any religious meeting of this caliber. The first was, if ever the Holy Spirit was absent from a camp meeting message, it was this one. My other thought was, if I can feel this unaffected by a sermon on the

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righteousness of Christ, something surely must be wrong with my own spirituality.

At the end I was about as moved as I am with a bite of plain, cold, unsalted oatmeal mush for breakfast (in my opinion a recipe for concrete!). I believe now that something was wrong with the spirit behind those presentations and it wasn't all me. (But this is only my personal opinion. Please, this is not a personal polemic).

It was I believe only the matter of a couple of months later when the storm broke upon our denomination and Desmond Ford gave his forum presentation at Pacific Union College that started the unsettling of the ranks for years to come. Not only with issue of righteousness by faith, but more particularly just about everything that was Adventist, specifically the concept of a pre-advent judgment and the legitimacy of the traditional understanding of Daniel 8:14 as a prophecy reaching to the year 1844.

Not found in the Bible

It was right after this that I attended the seminary. It was right in the heat of the theological conflict. About one third of the seminary at this time was clearly sympathetic to "Brother Ford." Of course, this wasn't the first time about 1/3 were sympathetic to something. (This, though, is not what makes it wrong, of course!)

I used to talk with some of his "disciples" at the seminary. Sometimes we would argue for hours. These enthusiasts would use every research project or paper as an opportunity to herald Ford's message. Except it wasn't called Ford's message. It was called "the Gospel." "Ford," they would parrot after the popular advertisement "had a better idea."

This is the core what they would tell me: They would say that the idea of a pre-advent judgment was not found in the Bible. Well, I suppose if you don't look for it, then you can't find it. And they would say that the idea of God judging before the end of time was an idea "against the gospel." I'm quoting. This in brief is what they seemed to claim.

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But, of course, let us remember that the Bible doesn't see it that way. I would rather stick with the Bible. It uses the two expressions, "gospel," which means "good news;" and "judgment," in the same verse (Rev. 14:1ff) without the slightest apology. The Bible sees no such contradiction.

However, Desmond Ford wrote, not long thereafter:

"Ellen White borrowed fallacious concepts. . . . My question is: how long will it be before the theologians and administrators of our church are (similarly) honest regarding certain theological views adopted by Ellen White from contemporaries---views that continuing study has shown to be erroneous? I refer to the traditional dogma of the pre-advent judgment beginning in 1844 in the newly-entered Holy of Holies in heaven. Ellen White, of course, did not originate this teaching but received it from Andrews, Smith, etc."
Spectrum, Vol. 16, Number 1, p. 67,68.

Is a Pre-advent Judgment Not in the Bible?

Is the idea of a pre-judgment not in the Bible? For example:

- Adam and Eve, after they sinned, heard the Lord God walking in the midst of the garden in the cool of the day. God spoke to them before he pronounced judgment. He said, "Adam, where are you?" Then he proceeded to give Adam and Eve an opportunity to counsel with him and to explain themselves. God could have just come along and pronounced the sentence. But he first investigated them and reasoned with them before casting a verdict about their fate.

- God does the same thing with Cain after he has slain Abel. God could have simply chucked him in custody, or let the lightning strike Cain himself. But God is always interested in being fair. God doesn't even bring a charge against Cain to pre-prejudice the standing of the accused. Instead, He reasons with Cain, and asks an innocent question, "Where is your brother?" Cain has a chance to respond and explain. Of course, Cain bumbles all over and perjures himself. But God is so kind. He could have said, "Now why did you kill your brother? What am I going to do with you?" "I know what you did!" But even though God

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knows everything he investigates first. One barely gets into the third and fourth chapter of the Bible and there are investigative judgments everywhere. Who really should want to say that the idea of a pre-judgment is "not in the Bible?"

- How about Noah's time? (Cf. Gen 6:1-13) In the story of Noah God comes down and "LOOKS" (vs. 12) at what is going on on the earth and says, "For the good of everyone this has got to stop. I will give a probationary period of 120 years to test this situation. If the wickedness continues there will have to be a flood." Noah builds an ark, men are tested, probation is closed and the door is shut, and the wrath of God falls upon the earth. But God reserved a pre-trial period first. He investigates---then acts in judgment.

- Tower of Babel (Gen 11)

In the tower of Babel story there is a very clear pre-judgment. While I was at the seminary working on my master's degree I found myself trying to find a reason for why in the story of the tower of Babel God is pictured as coming down to see the tower. I thought, "how absurd! Does the writer of Genesis actually believe that God didn't know what was going on and found this out by sheer accident?" (Like, "well, look what we have here!!"). Then I noticed the observation of one astute Jewish commentator by the name of Rashi, who said:

"He did not really need to do this, but Scripture intends to teach the judges that they should not proclaim a defendant guilty before they have seen the case and thoroughly understand the matter in question."

- Abraham and Sodom (Gen 18)

Then there is Abraham and the destruction of Sodom. God not only looks over the situation first (Gen 18), but he even allows others, even the humble Abraham, a man on earth, to "check out" what God is going to do BEFORE he does it! God says, "I'm going to tell Abraham what I am about to do." God doesn't hide behind a lack of evidence but invites all to look in and appreciate and second-guess his actions. (vs. 17)

Abraham, timidly at first, ventures to offer God a little advice on what might be fair. He wants to know if God would destroy Sodom if fifty righteous people

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were in it. God tells him he won't, and Abraham is a little relieved because that didn't seem fair to him either. Then Abraham keeps whittling the figure down a little to 45, then 40, 30, 20, and finally 10. God would not destroy it if there were 10 righteous in it.

Says Abraham:

"That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" vs. 25

God judges carefully, openly, and rightly before judgment is executed. This is his way. Abraham knew this about God. So should we. Let's not heap embarrassment upon ourselves by saying that the idea of an investigative judgment is not in the Bible.

- Jacob endured one.
- Pharaoh and all of Egypt were given one.
- The Children of Israel endured a forty-year one before they entered Canaan's land.
- Nearly the entire book of Ezekiel is about this subject. In the early chapters a seal or mark is placed upon the righteous before judgment is executed on the nation. Read about it in chapter 9.
- Over and over again in Isaiah God gives Israel opportunity to be upheld in judgment. He pleads, "Come let us reason together."
- Then there is Daniel. Daniel is where the furor over this whole doctrine started. And is it not in Daniel? I think it is absurd to not think so. It is in every chapter and permeates the document:

---Daniel 1---The Hebrews are "tested" for 10 days. 10 is a judgment number. That is why we have Ten Commandments, because they are God's judicial laws.

---Daniel 2---Human probation is given to this earth until judgment is executed

---Daniel 3--- Three Hebrews endure a severe testing hour, and are singled out and rewarded.

---Daniel 4---Nebuchadnezzar goes through his own investigative

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judgment for seven years.

---Daniel 5---Babylon and Belshazzar are "pre-weighed" in the balances and found wanting.

---Daniel 6---Daniel is tried, and though guilty according to the wicked plots against him he is delivered in his integrity before God's investigation.

---Daniel 7---This is the investigative judgment chapter of the Bible!

---Daniel 8---so is Daniel 8!

---Daniel 9 is about the investigative judgment on the literal nation of Israel and they are given a specific probationary time determined upon them as a people.

---Daniel 10 and 11 continue upon these themes.

---Daniel 12---Michael the judge stands up for his people even before the final conflict is over, and they are judged ready while standing through the time of trouble.

The name "Daniel" probably means: "God IS my Judge." Not "was," or "will be." Is!

And what about Joshua and the Angel in Zechariah 4? What about every book, maybe even every verse, as it were, of the Bible?

The New Testament knows about this too:

John the Baptist (really should be called "John, the Adventist!"), an "Adventist" in type, proclaims this curious statement: "Even now the ax is being laid to the root of the tree." What does that mean? It means that a tree (person or nation) is given opportunity to bear fruit. But if upon investigation no fruit is found it is to be chopped down. The act of "starting" to chop it down is very much a symbol a pre-judgment going on. Think about it. It is a warning that the tree had better bear fruit soon or its probationary investigative phase will be over. (Matthew 3:10,12)

Jesus told a parable about a man and a wedding garment. He had to have this garment so that he could enter heaven. But during the investigation he is found without one so he is thrown out. This all occurs before the bridegroom comes.

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(Matthew 22) Here is the "pre-advent" judgment again.

You can't escape from this concept in the Scriptures. It surfaces all the time. One of my favorite Bible books is the Book of James. Unlike some others, I like the book of James. A while ago I noticed this famous verse in the first chapter:

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love him." (1:12) (Notice that temptation or testing comes first, then a legal investigation, and THEN the crown of life.

There is nothing to be ashamed of when we believe that it is a Biblical doctrine that God always investigates with OPENNESS before he acts in executive judgment. It is SOLID BIBLICAL TRUTH. God holds a public inquest, not because He doesn't know, but to make transparent his character and fairness. If God has done this always in ordinary history, will he not do it when it is most important of all, just at the end of time, when eternal destinies must be decided?

The apostle Paul wrote, " *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, and workmen that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Tim 2.15)

Those who make such absurd statements that there is no pre-advent or pre-judgment doctrine in the Bible ought to be ashamed. They should be exposed for the frauds they are.

The Bible says that "truth will be our shield and buckler." (Ps. 91:4). A buckler is a belt. Both a shield and a belt are for security.

The apostle spoke of the belt of truth. In Bible times a soldier wore sort of a skirt or robe, really. The belt was quite important as you can imagine. Without a belt he was very likely to become ashamed.

I have often told about an evangelist friend I know who was confronted by several ministers of other faiths at a large minister's gathering in one of the cities of the Northwest (U.S.). He was doing some meetings in the area and he wanted

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to work with---and not against the ministers of the city---so he met with their association. However, they all began to attack his beliefs.

Some of the first ones to challenge him were a couple of our Lutheran brethren. They particularly didn't like what the evangelists said about the state of people in death and, of course, his emphasis on the Sabbath. He asked them why they were so bothered by this. They said that they were Lutherans, and that they believed in the Bible and what Luther said about the Bible.

Then the Adventist minister related to all present some quotes from Luther's own writings. These are quite amazing. Sure, Luther did not have some things straight. But there are some interesting statements that he did make that show that in many ways he was ahead of his time in theological reformation. Anyway, this evangelist quoted to the entire ministerial gathering where Luther states his belief that the dead are asleep and not in heaven, or the "place" called hell, just as the Bible teaches. Luther states in several places that the belief in the immortality of the soul is part of the "Roman dunghill of decretals," etc. Luther also seems to hint in a place or two that the Sabbath could be kept on the seventh day. The outcome was that these ministers were shown that they were not even Lutherans after all, because they did not believe like the founder of their church believed. To say the least they were very embarrassed.

Then a couple more ministers's challenged some similar things and the evangelist showed them from the Bible their error. The meeting soon broke up in disarray, minister's scattering right and left.

You see, when you don't have the truth, you will eventually be embarrassed. This evangelist was not trying to confront or shame anyone. His only comment that I heard was, "Was I ever glad that I did not have to be ashamed of what I believed. I am so glad I had on the belt of truth."

I have an uncle that attended his daughter up the aisle. As a photographer he also wished to take a picture at an appropriate time. The only problem was that the tuxedo measurements were totally wrong and he was wearing pants several sizes too big. He had to give his daughter one arm, and the other arm was occupied with a camera or something. He had a terrible time "making it to home plate," if

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you know what I mean. He would no more go a step but he would have to grab for his sagging apparel, without dropping his camera and all. I will never forget his rich, autobiographical description of this event. My stomach got sore from laughing. It would be well for all of us to supremely value the belt of truth!

Confirmation

We cannot here digress into the textual intricacies and all the arguments for the 2300-day prophecy. These abound. What is sad is that documents and tapes by even former SDA ministers still circulate attempting to debunk this doctrine while totally ignoring the later and significant findings of the Daniel and Revelation committee published in seven volumes, and many other solid exonerative works and discussions.

1. **Arguments:** In these volumes are no less than 23 solid and separate arguments that validate the traditional understanding of this famous passage. Particularly exonerated is the year/day principle. Most of these arguments come from the book of Daniel itself. But there are none so blind who will not see.

2. **Karaite Reckoning--1999** Another interesting confirmation of the Adventist understanding comes in the charge made for years that Adventists didn't even have the right date---Oct. 22, 1844.

The exact date itself is not so important as the fact that a prophetic movement did occur at exactly the time that prophecy said it would. But some have tried to discredit the October 22 date itself as invalid.

The date was chosen by early Adventists not according to traditional Jewish calendars based on fixed cycles much like our Gregorian calendar today, but according to the reckoning of an obscure Jewish sect called the Karaites. The Karaites followed an older lunar calendar, created according to the biblical instructions and according to the yearly barley harvest. Criticism has been made about this because this calendar made the Day of Atonement in 1844 one month later than the traditional calendar. Furthermore, in recent years the Karaite Jews had become all but extinct.

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However, something has occurred recently that is perhaps significant. For one thing, the Karaite Jews are now coming back as a group and are following their calendar faithfully. It so happens that in the year, 1999, lunar events so positioned themselves as to recapitulate what happened in the year 1844. According to the very particular Karaite Jews, the *Day of Atonement* fell in that year on October 22, just as early Adventists had reckoned it. The barley test was even used to determine when the year would start. And this is exactly how the Bible, not modern tradition, directs it should be determined. So what told the early Adventists to use the correct biblical method in spite of the fact that it was an obscure way to reckon it in the 1840's?

Having a personal interest in astronomy and having spent considerable time studying ancient calendars I have noticed that the Hebrew/Babylonian calendar is in many ways superior to almost all other calendars, in that it is closely tied to the "clock of the heavens," and is self-correcting. Though impractical today, it is the calendar of the Bible, and so it is amazing that this calendar was in effect what the Advent people consulted at the time of the 1844 movement.

3. Three words

In addition much has been said about the word *tsnidaq* in Daniel 8:14, translated "cleansed" in the King James Version, and "set right," or "restored," or "vindicated" in other versions. The immediate context demands that all three of these ideas be preserved to maintain the meaning of the text. However, it is now shown that there were Hebrew words for each of these concepts, but only one word which could be taken to mean all of them, and that is the very word *tsnidaq* that we find in this verse. Positively amazing!

(See Richard Davidson, "The Second Advent and the Fullness of Time," *Ministry*, June/July 2000, pp. 41-47)

But now let us turn to why the 1844 doctrine is important. I call these reasons "The Magnificent Seven." I would not want a current theology without them:

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II. REASONS IT IS IMPORTANT

1. IT INFORMS US MORE SPECIFICALLY THE TIME IN WHICH WE LIVE IN THIS WORLD'S HISTORY--The 2300- year prophecy is a marker indicating that we are "almost home." It is unique like nothing else. Where else in Scripture do we have a specific prophecy that gives us a date close to the end of all things? The best we have in the Gospels and the Epistles is "sometime." But this splendid inside view marks the era of history we are in.

My daughter hates to ride in the car. On a recent trip to Arizona (hundreds of miles) she often asked how long or how far it was to get there. Any parent is aware of this phenomenon. A vague answer of "sometime" will never satisfy or prepare the child for the "how long." But specific information like, "three more hours," or "one hundred more miles" makes an incredible difference in the morale of the child. Don't we all read the road signs telling us how far it is yet? Has not God thought of us also? Yes, he cannot give the day or the hour, but he can encourage us and prepare us for the fact that we are almost home. This is important!

2. IT PROVIDES THE CALLING AND REASON FOR THE EXISTENCE OF OUR LAST-DAY CHURCH.

This reason may sound circular. But the fact is that without such an arresting text and prophecy, God's last-day movement would never have come to be what it is today. It gives the church a mission and a purpose. For me, at least, this makes it very important. Writes a certain editor:

"No other prophecy in the Bible is so important to Seventh-day Adventists as the twenty-three hundred days of Daniel 8:14. Our very being as a separate people is dependent on the accuracy of its interpretation. Undermine our teaching on the cleansing of the sanctuary, and you undermine the cornerstone of our message. It is this that makes us distinctive." RH, Jan 6, 1944, p. 4, Editorial.

Our faith, of course, can never rest ultimately on one text. But the very nature and purpose of this prophecy is so important that our faith would not be the same without it. Satan knows this, and that is why it is the subject of attack. But this

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is God's rallying call, his "last warning message." Would that not be important?!

3. ITS A CALL TO MORAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THIS LAST HOUR---The call of the judgment hour; that it has come; is to call us to repentance and to encourage us to prepare to meet our God. Why should such an idea be considered odious by some? God in his mercy calls out as did Jonah, and Noah, and John the Baptist; repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is in this time that we are called by God's Grace to reproduce the character of Christ.

When I was in an academy, lights would go out at 9:30 p.m. We were never ready for this sudden blackness; therefore the dean had the monitor say over the loud speaker, "5 minutes until lights out." When the warning came we knew that it was time to put away our books, locate necessary items, and to prepare for the night. Almost no night comes to this moment when I think just before bedtime, and sometimes even threaten my family with: "five minutes until lights out." Is not God giving us the same merciful warning and call to moral responsibility in these final days?

4. IT TELLS US WHAT CHRIST IS DOING TODAY. Shouldn't that be important to us?

A. **Jesus enters the most holy place:** The book, *Early Writings*, p. 51, describes in detail the very event of Christ's entering the most holy place in heaven and the significance in the heavenly realms of this event. It is also described in Daniel 7 and I have done an exhaustive study comparing both *Early Writings* and Daniel 7. I testify to you that it is describing the very same event, with the same subjects. I cannot see by comparing the two visions, that Ellen White saw any less of what Daniel saw centuries before. There is a harmony in inspiration that must be acknowledged at times.

B. **Important as death on the cross:** "The intercession of Christ in man's behalf is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross." GC489 This intercession should mean very much to us. I am glad we are, through the study of this subject, invited to look at the very work of Christ and know what he is doing for us TODAY not just what he did for us BACK THEN! Daniel 8:14 is not about dates, and decrees, and numbers, and days for years. It is about CHRIST, and what he is doing for us today! We have a High Priest who is interested in us and is entering the inner rooms to effect our eternal

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salvation. Now what could be more important to us than that? Please tell me.

5. THE PROPHECY GIVES US A UNIQUE WINDOW ON HOW GOD WORKS--The doctrine of the judgment and the plan of salvation tells us what God is like and how he works. This is very important in a world that is dark in misapprehension about God. The judgment theme shows how God is fair, how he listens and looks before he leaps, how he gives all a chance to know his will. The great controversy is about the character of God, and understanding the process of judgment, investigative, explanatory, and executive, provides a marvelous window into God's character and informs our questions about God.

Suppose there were no investigative judgment and some mistakes were made. What if you would meet Hitler, Mussolini, Idi Amin, Count Dracula, Nero, and Charles Manson on the streets of gold? Might you be a little troubled?

Now you say, "That is absurd, God will never let that happen." Aha!---that is just why he has a judgment that marks the righteous. However, he does it out in the open so that the whole universe can see that God doesn't make mistakes, and he is willing to submit his whole system to an inquest and to scrutiny. What modern secular government is that completely open? This is very important information we are being given about God in this doctrine. It is as important because it is destiny-producing knowledge. It is very important what people think of God and his ways. Such knowledge can lead the seeker to reach for eternal life.

6. IT PROVIDES US WITH AN EXAMPLE OF HOW GOD WANTS TO BE ON OUR SIDE After all, the investigative judgment should be good news to the Christian. We are always thinking of judgment as against us. But this is not the doctrine of the investigative judgment in its purest form.

The very chapter most given to this subject (Daniel 7) tells how Jesus, before he comes in his kingdom gives judgment "in favor of the saints." Some wish to observe that this only means that they are given the right to judge. But why would they ever be given this right if they didn't pass their own bar examination?

God is not anxious to condemn. He is anxious to save.

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That is why we are told we have an *advocate*. (1 Jn 2:1). A *parakletos*, meaning “one called along side.” In real life this was a partner, or battle comrade. He shared and risked his life with his buddy. He was responsible for him in thick and thin. In the great heavenly court martial, I want my “buddy,” who was there, to stand by me. Especially because he knows that I am ultimately innocent though his blood.

7. AND THIS DOCTRINE GIVES US THE PRIVILEGE TO STAND UP FOR GOD. And after all it is not our judgment only, but it is "his" judgment. The doctrine of Daniel 8:14 is about us standing up for God in this controversy of the ages. Says the Revelation; Fear God and give glory to him..... for the hour of his judgment is come. I want to be one of those who give glory to God. Don't you? Isn't he worthy of glory? That too, is what the investigative judgment is all about. God is investigated too, and found to be everything positive we think him to be and much more. God is important. Therefore recognizing him is of supreme importance.

I'm so thankful God gave us Daniel 8:14. In it are the same three numbers as we find in the year 1844. That matters little, but I think this verse and what it means matters a lot to us.

Don't you want to be ready for his coming? Don't you want to know that God has judged in your favor and that you can have assurance in him? Don't you want to know how God works and what he is planning to do? Don't you want to know when it will be time to go home? Don't you want to know how far it is the heavenly home? Don't you want to give him glory? Well, I think that is what this verse is all about. It is about Jesus. It is about what he is doing. It is about why he is doing it. It is even about “when” he is doing it. It is most about his wonderful character and how he judges our hearts in fairness and in mercy.

Thank the Lord Jesus for this prophecy! Thank him for his love. Thank him that he has everything under control. It is in his gracious hands. Give your heart to him today, while the door stands open. Give glory to him for the hour of his judgment is come!

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4

Which Veil—and Why?

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.” Matthew 27:51 NIV

When Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, died as a result of a Roman crucifixion in Jerusalem in (circa) 31 A.D., the Bible reports that the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). The common assumption that has been taken by subsequent writers and expositors who believe the Gospel story is that this temple veil was the famous veil that separated the holy and most holy places of the Jewish temple constructed by Herod. The preponderance of this view has been thought to be overwhelming. That this inner veil was the veil that rent is generally considered by most as unassailable and well established.

Initially one might not consider the matter to be significant. However, several significant theological issues revolve on which veil it might have been. Seventh-day Adventists have experienced a rupture or theological rift as a result of Desmond Ford’s challenge beginning in the 1980’s. One of his major contentions is based on the premise that some certain judgment occurred with the Christ-event in AD 31. Undergirding this whole view is the fact that this event marked the beginning of the gospel era and the end of the sanctuary atonement. The ripping of the inner veil represents to modern Christians the completion of

salvation and negates any need of a future “*Day of Atonement*” in the most holy place of any temple.

Dissent to the established view does exist and it is for this reason that I wish to address this in the foregoing article. If it is possible, it would be helpful to solve this riddle. We won’t pretend to do that here. But if the established view is correct then it is paramount to enumerate more completely the reasons for it. If that particular view is correct, or even if not, the ultimate goal is to find a more complete answer as to the meaning of this particular event than has been offered heretofore.

Facts From the Biblical Account

Synoptic Texts—

“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split.” Matthew 27:51 NIV

“The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” Mark 15:38 NIV

“For the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.” Luke 23:45 NIV

It is very significant to recognize in an unbiased fashion that **the Gospel accounts are not specific as to which veil**. The terminology does not say “the inner curtain.” The accounts do not specify that it was the inner veil. It is a *sequiter* assumption that it was the inner veil.

It could be that the Gospel writers simply had no knowledge that there were other veils, and made the comment on the basis of this fact, but this would be hard to establish. The Jews of Jesus day, and the disciple writers that frequented the temple often, were not ignorant as to the general construction of the temple edifice and the lore and interest surrounding it.

Scholarly Opinion

By far the greatest surprise in my investigation over the years on this issue is the balance of the scholarly opinion. At first I had expected and taken as has the Christian majority, that scholars as a whole would be preponderantly favorable to the “inner veil” view. I was stunned to notice that many scholars take the dissenting view---that it was an outer veil that tore! This was not expected. In

some cases, it seems like perhaps half of the scholars cited take this position. This was astounding to me^{*}.

Now this is not true at all when considering Evangelical works. The determination is not so evenly divided in this regard, and this is no surprise. But there seems to be a much more unbiased view in the general scholarly field.

Strangely, this fact is not given ample consideration by certain critics of late who ought to have acknowledged this--- but largely kept silent on this fact. It seems they are prejudicial in not considering any view that cannot be exploited to support their “evangelical” theological bias.

Textual Considerations

Dictionaries and reference works generally *assume* that this curtain under consideration is the inner curtain. (Cf. TIDB, Vol. 4, p. 748; *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, Geoffrey Bromiley, p. 420). But again, this is an assumption based on the majority usage of terms and especially on the basis of theological pre-suppositions.

It is true that the Hebrew, *parcoth*, is used exclusively in the Old Testament of the inner veil dividing the holy and most holy place of the sanctuary or temple. Commonly the term, *mesech*, is used for the curtains of the outer court (Num 3:16), and the entrance to the sanctuary or holy place (Ex 26:36,37).

But the LXX (Septuagint) uses the New Testament word (Gr.) *katapetasma* (6X) to translate BOTH words; and in referring to BOTH veils; that is, both the outer and inner veil. (Cf. LXX; Ex. 26:31ff with Ex. 26:37). Therefore, we must admit that the *first and outer veil is not necessarily excluded* as a possibility in the New Testament passages. In fact, a case could be made that NONE of the six passages in the NT (Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45; Hebrews 6:19; 9:3; 10:20) refer to the second veil at all!

* Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, Doubleday, 1994, Vol. II., p.1111, lists some proponents of each view going back to certain of the church fathers. An example of a commentary which indicates it was the outer curtain thus representing access for all see: The Gospel According to Luke, Robert J. Karris, O.F.M., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy, editors, p. 719.

The Problem With the Inner Veil Interpretation

There are some seemingly insurmountable problems attending the view that the veil that tore was the inner veil. These are as follows: 1) The architecture of the temple itself, 2) The testimony of the Rabbis, 3) The theological meaning of the inner veil tearing, 4) The outline of Salvation History and how it relates to the various temples. These will be addressed, one at a time.

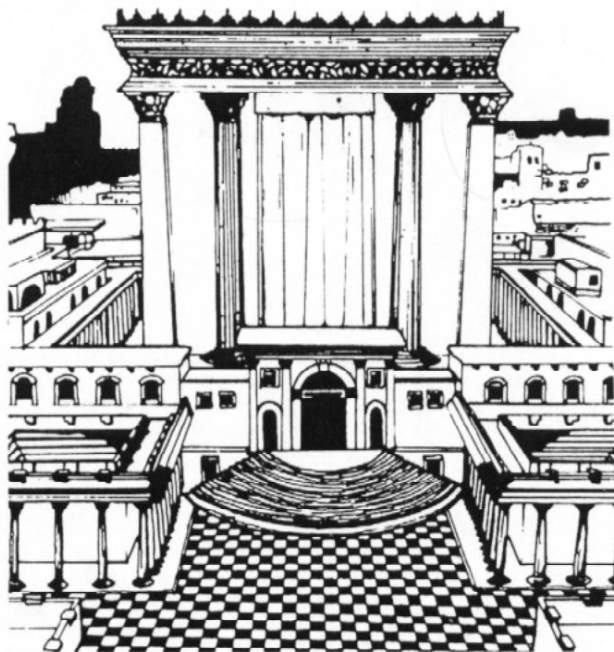
1. The architectural features of Herod's temple.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes the temple complex in detail. Apparently there was first a large "gate" area open for all to look into. But beyond this were two enormous golden doors. In front of these doors was a massive curtain, approximately 55 feet in height and described in considerable detail. Beyond this was the holy place and finally between the next and inner room was another large and ornamental Babylonian curtain. (Cf. Josephus, Wars of the Jews, V., 5.4; Others: i.e. Edersheim: concerning the doors, Life and Times, Vol. II, pp. 610,611.)

Herein is presented an enigma then, which requires some careful thought. Few bother to consider this:

It would have been impossible for the people witnessing the slaying of the evening lamb beside the altar in the court to have seen into the most holy place within the temple, without the concurrent removal of the outer veil, then the two doors, and also then to be able to see through the darkness of the nave and finally through the holy place! Think about it!

Ernest L. Martin in his books "Restoring the Original Bible," and "Secrets of Golgotha," describes the layout of the temple rooms. It is his opinion that the centurion (at the Cross) was able to see this tearing of the veil from the crucifixion site immediately East of the temple, and that the centurion made comment to this effect. Most useful are his two illustrations, one borrowed and cited here:



This is a general view of the Temple looking directly westward into the Court of Israel, showing the circular steps leading up to the Nicanor Gate and then beyond into the grand area of the Holy Place itself. Between the two Corinthian pilasters on each side of the entrance to the Holy Place was the enormous curtain that was suspended from a stone lintel which was at least thirty feet wide and weighing about thirty tons. This curtain was the one which tore from top to bottom at the time of Christ's death on the Mount of Olives. It was perfectly feasible to view the whole of this gigantic curtain from the top of Olivet. Drawing by Norman Tenedora.

Martin's contention, however, that the centurion "saw" the veil tear from the summit of the Mount of Olives is not conclusive. It is true that the tearing of the veil was concurrent to the phenomena described. But the most glaring reason this might not have been visible is that the land at this moment was veiled in thick supernatural darkness! Curtains of blue, purple, and scarlet at a distance of nearly half a mile through impenetrable darkness would not likely be seen.

Of note is the consideration, however, that the only way in which the event of Jesus' death could have been verified as happening simultaneously with the tearing of the veil is for eyewitnesses to have been able to see both happen concurrently; or because the ripping of the veil was seen as directly related to an earthquake. (Thus Matthew, and the *Gospel to the Nazarenes* (Martin, Secrets, p. 19). People then did not have two-way radios or watches to check the time and compare later).

2. The availability of concurrent historical testimony

- a. The Rabbis even say the (outer) lintel of the temple fell “forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem.” *Gospel to the Hebrews*.
- b. This was the lintel that supported the outer veil (Cf. Martin, Secrets, p. 18)

This testimony is significant.

3. The inappropriateness of the theological meaning of an inner veil tearing.

The ripping of the inner veil and not the outer strains for theological understanding. While the outer barrier remains, it is inappropriate to say that the way into the holiest is laid open, because still only priests could access the temple, and the temple system is yet closed. No one could then see this phenomenon either (maybe a priest, but the sacrificing priest was at this moment at the outside altar slaying the lamb), the obvious purpose God had in mind. If anything, the ripping of the inner veil would seem to signify the cessation only of the yearly service and not of the daily, continuing, and abiding priestly ministry. But Jesus was to be the end of this also, in fact, this particularly. He was the “everyday Lamb of God, the one continually taking away the sin of the world.” (Cf. John 1:29 full translation)

4. The Paradigm of Salvation History

- a. Both apartments represent heaven and the heavenly ministry of Christ.

- b. Says Josephus: “Now the whole temple was called the Holy Place; but that which was within the four pillars, and to which none were admitted, was called the Holy of Holies.” *Antiquities of the Jews*, III., vii. 4. (Cf. Josephus statement). When Jesus passed through the veil of his flesh (his earthly appearance and ministry) he passed into the heavens to assume his high priestly ministry. He didn’t go into the most holy place at his ascension but into both apartments (*ta hagia*; *ta hagon*) of the heavenly. (Rev.1, 4, 8, etc.)
- c. The outer court represents the earthly ministry of Christ. It was the site of the altar (this earth) and the articles of sacrifice made of brass (always representing this earth as opposed to the golden objects of the inner parts of the tent that related to heavenly concerns). The holy place must be passed through first. Josephus taught with the Rabbis that the Holy Place represented the firmament or heavens. Thus the heavenly ministry of Christ began, and the **earthly** ministry ceased, when he passed through the first veil. A priest “disappeared” when he passed into the temple proper. This is what happened when Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist, did not readily reappear to the consternation of the crowd. If the crowd didn’t know what had happened to Zacharias, how could they know what happened in the inner rooms at Christ’s death?

Thus it seems that the tearing of the outer veil would have more OBVIOUS “historical,” and “theological,” significance than would the tearing of the secret inner veil.

Further Argument About the Outer Veil

Of particular note are the passages in the book of Hebrews. Again, while the *common understanding* for the three references to these veils in the book of Hebrews often favors the inner veil, this too is based on pure assumption.

Let us note the often-used passage of Hebrews 6:19,20. “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*”

1. First the original language does not say as do the translations, “the inner sanctuary” or “inner shrine.” It says literally that Jesus “went within” or “inside.” (To the *esoterion*) That’s all. To translate it otherwise is a convenient, opportunistic translation, but not an accurate one.

2. In addition, the idea in the context is “prayer” and the representation of the sinner’s needs by Jesus, the high priest. “Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.” (4:16) While the “throne of Grace” is in all likelihood the mercy seat upon the ark, the idea is daily prayer as it was offered in the incense at the altar “which was before God,” in the Holy Place.

Prayer was offered “before” the throne. (Rev. 8:2) The present tenses show us this is an ongoing privilege, not a once for all time ministration.

Continuing ministration was strictly not applied to the inner shrine or most holy place. Please note the first verses of Leviticus 16. Aaron is actually forbidden to come into the ark continually.

“The Lord said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain” 16:2 (underline supplied)

While Christ is beyond the Levitical rules, a point in Hebrews, He does not defy the *types* but rather fulfills them.

3. In the previous verse, verse 18, we find these words: “We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us.” Laying hold is not something that even a priest did to the ark in the most holy place. No one, not even a priest, would “lay hold” of the ark. But---one could lay hold of the horns of the altar, the place of priestly prayer. This brings to mind an interesting Old Testament story.

In 1 Kings 1:51, Adonijah, the son of David, who was in grave political circumstances at the time did just this to escape punishment and death. The horns of the altar were where atonement was made and blood was sprinkled through the daily service. It was the place of salvation, thus the prayer of Zechariah the father of John the Baptist: “he has raised up a horn of salvation for us” (Luke 1:69).

A few verses later, Joab, in similar distress, also “fled” and laid hold of the horns of the altar. (1 Kings 2:28) He felt this was his best refuge.

A point of interest missed is this, however. Adonijah, our first subject indeed laid hold of an altar to seek deliverance in time of need. But most likely this altar was the altar of sacrifice in *the court*. It seems like this is the case because the Hebrew word for “horn” is not the typical word for an animal “horn” but is rather, “pillars,” *masseboth*. This expression is equated in meaning with something made of stone or the like. This then would likely be referring to the altar of burnt offering in the court.

However, Joab specifically flees INTO THE TENT! (Cf. context, where it is repeated). The word given there is literally, *keren*, or “horn.” This fascinating difference perhaps sheds light on the present passage we are considering. This passage places approaching the throne of Grace with boldness in an interesting light.

Joab was not a priest and should not have entered the sanctuary or holy place proper in any case. But in desperation for salvation he runs to this safest of all “city of refuge.” He goes even farther than did Adonijah (who, unluckily, was slain anyway). Unfortunately it didn’t work any better for Joab, but the idea was right. Better for us, we are invited to run boldly to Christ, who WILL save us in our similar desperation and hope.

This, it must be observed, is all basically *Holy Place imagery*. The Ark of the Covenant did not have horns designated for this purpose. The ark could not be touched by anyone except on pain of death. But prayers were offered *before it* at the altar of incense, which had horns of salvation.

4. Finally the operative *type* is that Jesus (at his ascension) has disappeared into the “heavenly places” (Eph.). The priest thus typically disappeared when he entered the FIRST apartment. (Cf. the story of Zechariah in Luke, etc. The onlookers did not see the angel Gabriel through the door, etc.). Jewish lore applies properly the idea of both apartments as belonging to “heaven.” Jesus could here be seen “in the flesh” when he was in the court of this earth. But now “through the curtain of his flesh he has passed into the heavens.” The outer veil is the only veil that makes real sense.

The furniture of the holy place is most appropriate to represent in linear fashion the last 2,000 years of the Christian era. The table of Bread and Wine represents the Eucharistic celebration carried on since Christ's ascension. The burning lamps represent the work of disseminating the light of the Gospel by the church (Cf. Revelation, chapter 1). The altar of prayer represents the continuing priestly ministry of Christ who awards his merits to the prayers of all saints. This all is in the foremost sense the work that followed the transit of the first veil and not the second.

Ellen White

It is apparent from the statements in the book The Desire of Ages that Ellen White reiterated the position that it was the inner veil that tore (DA 757, 775). However, in this particular context she does not comment on it beyond what the Scriptures seem to say or what other writers have assumed. It appears that she was not instructed of this particular event specifically, in vision, as obviously she was in regard to the other events of Passion Week. It happened in darkness, and was not readily discernable even by witnesses at the time.

This would indicate that she simply echoed the opinion or words of other writers such as Edersheim and Hanna on this. This she would often do when no particular light was given on a certain subject. There was no reason at that time to not think that the inner veil tearing could still adequately represent the great cessation of the earthly temple sacrifices.

What would be interesting is what she might have said on this point if the Desire of Ages had gone through a later revision such as the Great Controversy did. The book Desire of Ages was written before the Ballenger defection (ca. 1900-1905). As a result of the issues raised by Ballenger that Christ went directly into the Most Holy Place at His ascension it would seem that some corrective prophetic light would have been given on the particular issue. In any respect, the position of Adventism was further defined at that time and clear light was given to the effect that Ballenger's theories were shown through the visions to be on the wrong track.

Ellen White is clear on the Holy Place ministry of Christ following the ascension, however, and one must not be mistaken about her consistent position in this regard:

“The ministration of the priest throughout the year in the first apartment of the sanctuary, “within the veil” which formed the door and separated the holy place from the outer court, represents the work of ministration upon which Christ entered at His ascension. It was the work of the priest in the daily ministration to present before God the blood of the sin offering, also the incense, which ascended with the prayers of Israel. So did Christ plead his blood . . . Thither the faith of Christ’s disciples followed Him as He ascended from their sight. Here their hopes centered, “which hope we have,” said Paul, “as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever”. . . For eighteen centuries this work of ministration continued in the first apartment . . .” Christ in His Sanctuary, p.98.

Conclusion:

Though the problem remains difficult and we cannot claim that it is solved here, it seems there is ample evidence to entertain more open views regarding this particular event. The greatest evidence actually comes down on the side of the outer curtain as the veil that tore, both theologically and historically. Those who have taken the side favoring the outer veil have been too easily dismissed in the past.

The evidence for the inner veil is really scanty, cannot be proven, and is more the result of favored opinion than of fact. At the very least, it was both veils that tore, in that the multitude could not see and verify the occurrence without such a circumstance. The best position it seems at this point is to find it most plausible that the outer veil tore, opening to view the work of Christ and bringing to closure the sacrificial system on this earth. Jesus as a high priest, passing through the “veil of his flesh” (earthly appearance), disappeared into the heavens to minister in a new sanctuary. The sanctuary symbolism in total, was not ended at the Cross, as would be indicated by an inner rupture, but rather took a new heavenly phase with Christ the minister of a new tabernacle, a blessed mediator, and a new and living way for all.

5

Who Were the Spirits in Prison?

1 Peter 3:18,19

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit, by whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water."

Introduction:

Popular teachers and Christian expositors of our day use this text to argue that man in his nature has a "soul" or "spirit" separate from the body. This text they also use as a foundation for the following doctrine:

“In the period between his death and resurrection Christ descended into the underworld where supernatural evil powers, the spirits, were held imprisoned; these powers were those who had enticed women to sin before the flood (Genesis 6:1-4); to them Christ offered salvation, but we do not learn whether they accepted it or not; it was also at this time that Christ preached to the dead

(4:6)” ---The doctrine as described by Ernest Best, 1 Peter, *New Century Bible Commentary*, p. 140.

It is true that beliefs similar to this are not new. In many of the ancient Jewish writings such a view was held concerning the fallen angels. But we are inclined to ask, did St. Peter embrace such a preposterous doctrine and are we also expected to embrace such a doctrine? Has God placed in the Bible itself such a concept? Is it indicative that the writer of 1st Peter was crude and backward in his theology or that this extraordinary concept comes accidentally into our Bible through the apostle's ignorance?

FIRST LET US LOOK AT THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THIS STATEMENT IS MADE. THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO THEMES FOUND IN THE IMMEDIATE AND GREATER CONTEXT:

1. *Baptism and a good conscience* are in the immediate context:

Note especially vs. 21:

"There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (vs. 21)

2. Secondly, *Patience and faithfulness in the midst of persecution*-- is the theme of the entire book of 1st Peter. Please examine the following texts:

Texts:

•1Pet. 3:17 *For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.*

•1Pet. 1:7 *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*

•1Pet. 2:20 *For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.*

•1Pet. 2:21 *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:*

1Pet. 2:22 *Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:*

•1Pet. 2:23 *Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:*

1Pet. 3:12 *For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

1Pet. 3:13 *And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?*

•1Pet. 3:14 *But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;*

•1Pet. 3:15 ***But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:***

1Pet. 3:16 *Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.*

1Pet. 4:1 *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;*

•1Pet. 4:12 *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:*

•1Pet. 4:13 *But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

•1Pet. 4:16 *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

•*1Pet. 4:19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

The book itself closes with the illustration of the devil as a roaring lion walking about. The story of Daniel comes to mind, and the gladiatorial contests and persecutions of the Roman world as well.

FLUIDITY IN TERMS

In our study it is also important to note the FLUIDITY OF MEANING IN THE GREEK TERMS used:

•**spirits**= persons sometimes (3:20; "souls," *pseuche*), especially that part of a person that goes beyond his physical state (3:18).

•**prison**= captivity, bonds, to keep or guard (not just "prison," or "jail").

•**preach**= exhort, encourage, preach (not just "preaching").

WORD ORDER

Word order is also very important in determining the meaning of this passage:

ONE MUST RIGHTLY DIVIDE THE WORD OF TRUTH--- (e.g., God is nowhere OR *God is now here*) 2 Tim 3:15.

Please note how some of the text is scrambled, as normally found in Greek language:

1Pet. 3:18 Οτι και; Χριστος απαξ περι αμαρτιων απεθανεν, δικαιος υπερ αδικων ινα υμας προσαγαγη τω θεω, θανατωθεις μεν σαρκι ζωοποιηθεις δε; πνευματι

For Christ also for our sins died, just for unjust so that us he might bring to God, put to death in the flesh, made alive in the Spirit

1Pet. 3:19 εν ω και τοις εν φυλακη πνευμασιν πορευθεις εκρυξεν,

In which also to the ones in prison spiritual he went and preached

1Pet. 3:20 απειθησασιν ποτε οτε απεξεδεχετο η του θεου μακρωοθυμια εν
who did not obey. In former times when it waited God's patience in

ημεραις Νωε κατασκευαζομενης κιβωτου εις ην ολιγοι τουτ εστιν οκτω ψυχαι
days of Noah was building an ark in which a few that is eight spirits (souls)

διεσωθησαν δι' υδατος.
were saved through water

1Pet. 3:21 ο και υμας αντιτυπον νυν σωζει βαπτισμα ου σαρκος αποθεσις ρυπου
αλλα συνειδησεως αγαθης επερωτημα εις θεον δι' αναστασεως Ιησου Χριστου

Baptism corresponds to this, not as a simply a cleansing of the flesh, but rather the answer of conscience to God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Spirits and Souls

It is also evident from the New Testament that the word for “souls” (ψυχαι) can also be taken to mean “persons,” “lives,” and “spirits.” In 1 Peter 3:20 the same word is used to indicate the “persons” *who entered the ark of Noah!*

The same is true in the *Book of Acts*.

Acts 2:41 Οι μεν ουν αποδεξαμενοι τον λογον αυτου εβαπτισθησαν και προσετεθησαν εν τη ημερα εκεινη ψυχαι ωσει τρισχιλαιοι

“Those who received the word and were baptized that day were about three thousand souls” (That is: lives, or spirits).

Interpreting the passage

The puzzle in this passage can be solved by using the correct word order and word meaning as noted above. Then all one has to do is simply ask who Jesus visited and encouraged in former times, who were persecuted, were in prison or captivity, and who had the characteristics of “spirits”?

There is only one instance that fits the facts and context of our text in question. That is the story recorded in the book of Daniel:

*Dan. 3:12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, **have not regarded thee:** (LXX “obeyed”) they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up....*

Dan. 3:25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

Dan. 3:26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire.

Dan. 3:27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

Dan. 3:28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

Important Comments Regarding The Story of the Three Hebrews

Jesus himself is pictured in the story of the three Hebrews as coming in "spiritual" form (not affected by fire) and encouraging the captives who publicly refused to obey the command of the heathen king to worship the golden image.

The disobedience spoken of in this case is not disobedience in the sense of rebellion and delinquency, but is "positive disobedience;" standing for God in the face of abusive human authority and ridicule. This is the very theme of First Peter.

In this way Peter is using two Old Testament examples of courage and faithfulness to inspire the Christians to whom he is writing to stand faithful in their commitment to Jesus in the midst of certain persecution. Both the story of Noah and the flood and the story of the three Hebrew children illustrate this perfectly:

COMPARISON

Noah

passed through the water

persecuted/ridiculed for doing right

were a few/ a minority stand/8

pure conscience/perfect before God

saved by God's favor

Three Hebrews

passed through the flame

persecuted for doing right (did not obey; LXX)

were a few/minority stand/3

pure conscience

saved by God's favor

In addition, the present experience of the persecuted Christians can find its greatest inspiration in the sufferings of Christ himself. He is one who understands their position and "knows how to deliver the godly out of trial:"

Christians addressed by Peter

passed through waters/baptism

persecuted by authorities for their stand (fiery ordeal)
(just a pinch of incense;
say: "Caesar is Lord")

Jesus

baptized

persecuted

faithful few/minority	stood alone
kept a pure conscience because they would not deny Jesus	faithful and true martyr/ pure
will be saved through baptism by God's grace	baptized through suffering
(die and buried in baptism/ resurrected to new life) Romans 6:4	died resurrected by the Spirit

The True Meaning of the Passage

The traditional meaning taken of this passage that Jesus preached to evil spirits or angels really has nothing to do with the subject of baptism. One must ask how "baptism" corresponds typologically to Jesus preaching to departed spirits? But when the subject of baptism and a pure conscience is related to a "stand for the right," as exemplified by the three Hebrews and by faithful Noah, then this passage makes right and perfect sense.

To be baptized as a public confession of faith in Jesus required great courage in the days of Peter. It could mean ridicule and death. Fear of persecution no doubt tempted many to go against their conscience and avoid the open step of baptism. The three Hebrews and Noah's family had to make a similar courageous stand in the face of such odds. The same is often true today.

In my files is the story of a young girl in South America who felt convicted to be baptized and join the faith. But her father was greatly incensed that she should become a Christian and threatened her with death if she and her pastor should proceed to have her baptized. The young girl, like thousands before her had to make a decision whether she was going to have a "good conscience" toward God or whether she would buckle to the threats of her family. Even though the father brought a rifle to the baptism she did not hesitate to move forward into the watery grave knowing it would mean the end of her earthly life.

The three Hebrews faced such a test. They were saved through fire. Noah and the few in his family also stood such a test and were saved through it. They were likewise saved through water. And it is through these two elements, both symbols of cleansing, that one is to be saved. They are both symbols of the Holy Spirit. Outward water baptism is not enough, however. There must also be a baptism of fire, and of the Spirit.

Unless one is baptized by water and by the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. There must be fire and water, and both of these elements are found in the passage we have been examining and are found in other passages that carry these same themes as well:

Matt. 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

Luke 3:16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

Peter here also alludes to a famous passage from the prophet Isaiah to illustrate the work of Christ in saving those who are "spiritually" captive and "bound" by the bonds of sin:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, TO PROCLAIM (the word is "to preach") LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." Isa 61:1.

But the passage demands a literal fulfillment and example of this as well. And no doubt, the three Hebrew captives were aware of this passage from the writings of the prophet Isaiah, as well as the one in Isaiah 43:2 where some it was predicted "would walk through the fire and not be burned." These would have been the promises that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have "claimed." The early Christian community no doubt applied this passage to the story of the three Hebrew children as well.

CONCLUSION

Therefore I would like to propose that this passage has nothing to do whatsoever with the idea that Jesus left the tomb in between the time of his crucifixion and his resurrection and preached to lost spirits in hell. I also suggest that more is illustrated here than just the fact that Jesus freed captives from the “spiritual” captivity of sin (the typical Adventist interpretation).

The suggestion is further supported by this fact. I have wondered, that if this is indeed what Peter meant, why aren't the Hebrew captives referred to in specific terms in other places as "spirits" or as having a "spiritual form" that could not be affected by fire?

But note carefully the translation of the Hebrew of Daniel 3:25:

The king's words are: "Look, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form (the "spirit" *ruach*) of the fourth is like the Son of God." NKJV

Thus Nebuchadnezzar referred to them as "spirits!" They were then, the literal “Spirits in Captivity.”

Therefore, we conclude that the meaning of the passage includes the idea of faithfulness despite persecution. We ought to obey God rather than men. Faithful ones like Jesus, Daniel, his three friends, Noah, and others are examples of living with a true conscience before God despite being in the minority.

Baptism is more than a ritual, but is bold stand; a public confession of faith. It represents the cleansing and saving of our souls and the freedom through Christ from the captivity of sin. It is the badge of a Christian. Though we might in this life be put to death in the flesh, if faithful, we will someday be made alive with Christ in the spiritual body that cannot be destroyed (1Cor 15). We are called to stand firm for God today; and "may all who come behind us, find us faithful."

FURTHER NOTES:

1. Alexander Noble—For a powerful illustration of baptism in the face of persecution read “I Will Die Free,” an awesome story of faithfulness lived out in all circumstances.

2. Baptism and Persecution/Death are equated in the NT:

Matt. 20:22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

Matt. 20:23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

6

Commandments or Robes?

The Genuine Reading of Revelation 22:14

The two different readings of Revelation 22:14 have been the cause of much discussion. The dilemma is more textual than theological when the phrases are studied carefully. However, the genuine retention of at least one of the readings we feel can be convincingly and certainly proven.

Some readers are greatly distressed to find their Bibles read differently in this passage. Typically the dilemma is usually dismissed by proposing that the “traditional” reading must be jettisoned in light of the manuscript evidence. This can be even more troubling to some. The two variant readings are as follows:

Rev. 22:14 *“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”* (KING JAMES VERSION)

Rev. 22:14 *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”* (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)

Unfortunately, going to the Greek text does not elucidate the incongruity at all, but rather complicates it. In fact, this is why the difference is made in modern versions. Quoted and transliterated the Greek variants read as follows:

Μακαριοι οι ποιουντες τας εντωλας αυτου

Μακαριοι οι πλυνοντες τας στολας αυτων

HOI POIUNTES TAS ENTOLAS AUTOU (KJV; some late mss., few greek texts) (**COMMANDMENTS**)

HOI PLUNONTES TAS STOLAS AUTON (NIV, RSV, etc.; majority and earlier mss.; Most Gr. texts) (**ROBES**)

The latter is generally chosen as the correct reading textually because:

- 1) Better manuscript support seems to appear; the earlier and generally considered more reliable mss. such as the Sinaiticus use "robes," while the "commandments" renderings seem to appear in later and inferior mss.
- 2) Often the more difficult or unusual reading is assumed to be the correct one. It can be easily seen how this could have been a copyist error, either by sight-reading or by listening.
- 3) Direct verbal parallels appear in *Revelation* such as, "wash their robes," Rev. 7:14, etc.

However, the evidence for the "robes" reading is not entirely conclusive, therefore it is fairest to look beyond the accepted results of textual criticism and at other evidence as well.

One must ask, "What about the book of Revelation itself and the larger context?"

The Context of the Book of Revelation

There is definitely outer contextual evidence for the "robes" reading. The following passages are particularly influential:

Rev. 1:5 "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved

us, and *washed us from our sins in his own blood*, " (KJV)(Albeit this reading carries a dilemma of its own, in some manuscripts "washed" is translated "loosed," from an almost identical Greek word). [λούω, λυω]

Rev. 7:13, 14 "And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have **washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** "

Conversely, however, for the "commandments" reading we find

Rev. 12:17 "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, **which keep the commandments of God**, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Rev. 14:12 "Here is the patience of the saints: **here are they that keep the commandments of God**, and the faith of Jesus." (Though in each case τηρεω is used and not ποιεω).

NON-BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

Not finding a definitive answer in the context of the book itself, scholars have looked outside the Bible for evidence as well. This is also divided, though overall it might favor the "commandments" translation.

The following is quoted from Problems in Bible Translation, p. 262:

Extracts From the Church Fathers:

Tertullian, A.D. 145-220:

"Blessed (are) they who act according to the precepts, that they may have power over the tree of life, and over the gates, for entering into the holy city."---
Tertullian, *On Modesty*, chap. 19, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, p. 96.

Cyprian, A.D. 200-258:

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have power over the true life."---Cyprian, Treatise 12, "Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews," bk. 2, sec. 22, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, p. 522.

However, the "robes" reading also has some testimony in its favor:

Athanasius, A.D. 298-373:

"Blessed are they who make broad their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life."----"Discourses Against the Arians," IV, 28, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV, 2d series, p. 444.

Primasius, A.D. about 500:

Refers to "robes" in Rev. 22:14 in his book on Revelation, lib. V, ch. XXII; Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 68, col. 933 A.

In this case the oldest evidence actually supports the "commandments" translation though evidence appears for both readings quite early in history. But the quotes from Tertullian and Cyprian, being clear references also, are significant in that they for all practical purposes *pre-date the oldest manuscript evidence*.

Evidence not often cited are the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal writings. One reference that I have noted in reading is the following:

"Faithful is the Lord to them that love him in truth,
To them that endure his chastening
To them that walk in the righteousness of his commandments
In the law which he commanded us that we might live.
The pious of the Lord shall live by it forever;
The paradise of the Lord,
the trees of life, are his pious ones. ---Psalms of Solomon 14:13.

(R. B. Wright dates this work to the first century A.D. Cited from The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 2, Ed. by James H. Charlesworth, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, N.Y., 1985. p. 640.)

But in writings outside of the Bible, neither reading awards us conclusive evidence for its survival.

MODERN PROPHETIC TESTIMONY

Of interest to some is the commentary of Ellen G. White. The way this prophetic writer handles this passage is quite interesting. First let us carefully attempt to follow the background thought of the following quotes: (emphasis supplied)

1. In support of "commandments"

Spiritual Gifts, Vol. 3, p. 88

"By transgressing God's commandments a curse fell upon Adam and Eve, and they were deprived of all right to the tree of life. Christ died to save man, and yet preserve the honor of God's law. He says *"Blessed are they that do his commandments that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the City."* **The Son of God here presents the doing of the commandments of God as the condition of a right to the tree of life. The transgression of God's commandments deprived man of all right to the tree of life.** Christ died, that by virtue of his blood, obedience to God's law might make man worthy of the heavenly benediction, and grant him a right again to the tree of life."

S.D.A. Bible Commentary, Vol. 1, p. 1086:

"Transgression of God's requirements excluded Adam from the Garden of Eden. A flaming sword was placed around the tree of life, lest man should put forth his hand and partake of it, immortalizing sin. **Obedience to all the commandments of God was the condition of eating of the tree of life.** Adam fell by disobedience, forfeiting by sin all right to use either the life-giving fruit of the tree in the midst of the Garden, or its leaves, which are for the healing of the nations.

Obedience through Jesus Christ gives to man perfection of character and a right to that tree of life. The conditions of again partaking of the fruit of the tree are plainly stated in the testimony of Jesus Christ to John: *"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and many enter in through the gates into the city"* (MS 72, 1901).

S.D.A. Bible Commentary, Vol. 7, p. 990:

"None who have had the light of truth will enter the city of God as commandment breakers. His law lies at the foundation of His government in earth and in heaven. If they have knowingly trampled upon and despised His law on the earth, they will not be taken to heaven to do the same work there; there is no change of character when Christ comes. The character building is to go on during the hours of probation. Day by day their actions are registered in the books of heaven, and they will, in the great day of God, be rewarded as their works have been. It will then be seen who receives the blessing. *"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city"* (RH Aug. 25, 1885).

"Jesus threw open the gates of the golden city and led us in. Here we were made welcome, for we had kept the "commandments of God," and had a "right to the tree of life." Early Writings, p. 35.

"Those who have been obedient to God's commandments will unite with the company of the saints in light; they shall enter in through the gates into the city, and have right to the tree of life." TM, pp. 234,235

The "commandments" translation makes considerable theological sense.

In Ellen White's writings, evidence is generally tipped in the favor of the commandments translation; this very rendition of the verse sometimes quoted by angels *in vision*. Indeed, the issue at the tree of life was obedience, therefore any reference to the tree of life again would again speak of obedience.

But interestingly, and conversely, Ellen White also is not silent concerning the necessity of the white robe of righteous character for entrance into the city:

2. In support of "robes."

" And they were all clothed with **a glorious white mantle** from their shoulders to their feet. Angels were all about us as we marched over the sea of glass to the gate of the city. Jesus raised His mighty, glorious arm, laid hold of the pearly gate, swung it back on its glittering hinges, and said to us, "You have washed

your robes in My blood, stood stiffly for My truth, enter in." We all marched in and felt that we had a perfect right in the city." Early Writings, p. 17.

S.D.A. Bible Commentary, Vol. 7, p. 960

"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 (HS 138)?"

(The General Conference Bulletin)

04-06-03

#04

"This is our character in the blood of the Lamb. John says, "Behold the Lamb of washing and ironing time,--the time when we are to cleanse our robes of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." I thank Thee, my heavenly Father, I praise Thee, that Thou hast given us Jesus, to take away our sins. Shall we not let Him take them away? Shall we not let our sins go?").

Some Evidence Regarding the “Robes” Reading

Therefore it can also be noted that white robes are worn as a symbol of purified holiness and as badges of admission to the holy courts. The parable of the wedding garment (white= righteousness) in Matthew 22:1-14 (cf. also COL 307 ff.) highlights this theme. In addition, when Adam and Eve sinned (broke the commandments) in Eden, they lost their "white robe" (garments of light). The restored white robes are a reward of truthful living and obedience. The robes represent character, a character of righteous obedience.

Both ideas are often melded together:

Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers

pp. 91,92:

“The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones.[* SEE APPENDIX.] This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the **righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God**. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes. . . .”

The presence of both ideas in the passage and in related passages almost makes it impossible to extricate and separate them, one from the other. To wash our robes means to remove the spots of sin from our lives. When this is done, one is keeping or living the commandments. Jesus imparts his righteousness to the believer, and they are made to be "right-doers." Anyone who is truly cleansed by Christ's blood *will be* a commandment keeper.

The reverse is true also. If in love and faith one obeys all that God asks of him he will be clean before God. He will be covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness."

TWO FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. There are two more parallels in the **immediate context** of 22:14 that also must be considered. The first seems to support both the "robes" and the "commandments" translation:

It is taken from Revelation 22:11 (just the third verse back):

"He that is *unjust* (unrighteous; *that is*, does not do right; or obey the law) let him be unjust still: and he which is *filthy* (*ruparos*, having spots, dirty; *that is*, has smudged and dirty robes), let him be filthy still"

And then correlate opposites:

"and he that is *righteous* (obeys law; does right), let him be righteous still: and he that is *holy* (clean, pure; white-robed), let him be holy still."

-----Therefore the contextual evidence still finds support for both distinct ideas!

2. Secondly, however, the case is to be made that according to careful textual analysis, the "commandment" translation is certainly not to be discarded as some so readily do. For the internal syntactical evidence demands its inclusion. The key is in comparing vs. 14 and 15 diagrammatically:

“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”

- The two verses are necessarily related owing to the connective "For," in vs. 15.
- The two verses are set in obvious contrast---one to another.

Diagram of Revelation 22:14,15:

Blessed are they that DO His commandments. . .	“For”	Outside are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters and whosoever loveth or DOETH a lie.
Inside City		Outside City
Blessed		(Cursed)
Place of Life (Tree)		Place of Death (Outside garden; or city, criminals, foreigners)
Keeping Commandments		Broken Commandments: Lying, immorality, murder, etc.
Commandments= Truth		Sorcery, Lying=Falsehood
Greek word: Doing the truth; ποιεω		Greek word: Doing Falsehood; ποιεω

The intentional contrast between those "doing" (**ποιεω**), the commandments and those "doing" (**ποιων**, plural of **ποιεω**) falsehood, is an obvious and intentional counterpoint; and is a capstone upon a recurrent theme in Revelation between the true (i.e., faithfulness, the Amen, truthfulness, testimony, true witness, etc.) and the false (i.e., apostles which say they are Jews, Satan, his synagogue, false prophets, blasphemous names and powers, Balaam, Jezebel, and all liars).

CONCLUSION

Though not an exhaustive study, it has been seen that evidence is available to support both views or readings of Revelation 22:14. Although the reading "wash their robes" has received the nod by modern translators, and boasts the greatest manuscript evidence, taking all things into consideration I would submit in my thinking, that it is instead the "inferior reading." The commandment reading must be retained, for both the earliest known testimony favors it, the greatest physical numbers of manuscripts favor it, and the internal evidence we have just noted authenticates it. In addition, modern prophetic testimony corroborates most powerfully the reading of commandments.

We should therefore continue to legitimize the reading "do his commandments" as an authentic phrase, and not make it the product of transcriptional error. By contrast, the "robes" reading, the other variant; despite being favored by the general feeling of scholarship, has placed upon it the burden of proof for its existence. It has been largely preferred perhaps because of the anti-Judaistic and anti-legalistic bias of later translators.

But should we now dismiss the robes reading? Absolutely not. It has too much merit and evidence in its favor to readily discard it, for it is unlikely that such a reading could have survived so easily and accidentally have so much relationship theologically, inferentially, and textually with Revelation 22:14.

Naturally, it has been the assumption of scholars that the reading has to be one or the other, and that it is a transcriptional error that created the difference. There is one more possibility that is not traditionally forwarded, however: the possibility of the *autograph* or original writing having or alluding to both phrases purposely. Intentional and double entendre word associations were often known and used in New Testament times. It is known that word plays were popular in New Testament times, especially in the Jewish writings (Matthew 16 and the "Peter and the Rock" passage is an example of this). Rhyme and repeated verbal sounds were not unknown in Jewish and early Christian songs. Intentional, double entendre' word plays occur elsewhere in Revelation as well. It is very likely that the author of Revelation *intended* for the reader to simultaneously hear and perceive both ideas.

What happened might be close to this:

A document containing both phrases would have been considered by even by the very first transcriptionists as suspicious. They no doubt recognized what scholars have noticed since and assumed, that the previous translator was unsure and so left both readings. Each later transcriptionist then, had to become his own textual critic and made a choice according to his own judgment in light of the other similar statements in the book or according to his favorite theological leanings. This would account for the creations as well of two streams of variants on this text.

Whether or not this was the case cannot be certain, but the purpose of this writing is to attempt to restore validity to the traditional translation as being at least equally authentic, and to elucidate the glories of the this text for our greater understanding.

In the end, as we have seen, the theological difference between the two readings can actually be minor. But the repudiation of the "commandments" reading has been license for some to demean the importance of commandment keeping as relevant in the final days of history. This is simply not the case, for not only will the saved wear the white robe of Christ's righteousness, but they also will be found keeping his commandments because of their love for Him. (Rev. 12:17; 14:12; John 14:15). In the end, both readings are theologically valid anyway!

7

The Generation That Will Not Pass

“Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” Matthew 24:34.

In Matthew 24 Jesus predicted that following his departure there would come a time of great distress. There would be signs in the heavens so dramatic that even the heavenly bodies would be shaken. After this would appear that sign of the Son of man in the heavens (Matthew 24).

Then Christ gave a parable:

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: as soon as it’s twigs get tender and its leaves come out you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”
Matthew 24:32 to 34

When Jesus said, “This generation will certainly not pass away,” what did he mean? Skeptics look at these words of Jesus and use them as an indication that Jesus was mistaken about when he was going to come back. Liberal Bible scholars teach us that these words indicate that Jesus announced that he would

come back to earth in his own contemporary generation, or spiritually only. History has since demonstrated, they say, that Jesus either lied or was mistaken.

Is this so? Is the second coming of Jesus a hoax? Was Jesus wrong about his own coming? Of course, we don't think so.

Over the years I have personally struggled over this text. My faith is built on more than one text and so I still believe that Jesus is coming soon and I believe that his words are true, and that as he said, they will never pass away. Yet we at times are given to wonder how to understand or defend some verses like this. I believe that God wants us to examine his word carefully to see if we can understand it. I don't think it always pleases God when we ignore a biblical problem that doesn't have an easy answer and just say, "Well God said it, I'll believe it," or "Sometimes even God allows a mistake to appear," or the most common "catch all" for the questionable passages we encounter, "it was *culturally relevant* to think so at the time."

Several common explanations are given for this text:

1. One explanation that is given, and that I have heard on college campuses in forums and in particular literature that I have read, is that the generation that Jesus describes is not a certain prescribed blank of time such as 40 years. What he is referring to is the *race* of Jews; the identity of the Jewish people themselves. In other words, Jesus was saying that there would always be a generation of Jews; Jewish people, right up until he came. And it is true that we still have around people who claim, at least, to have pure Jewish blood.

The problem with this explanation, I think, is that it doesn't fit the context. Look at the words all around this. Jesus is talking indeed about how to tell the nearness of His *parousia*. Jesus says when the twigs of the trees are tender, or at least begin to sprout, that one knows summer is near. Jesus says that there would be signs accompanying His coming. There are other races or generations that exist from old other than Jews. Paul wrote to the Romans that the Jewish nation *as a nation* would be cut off (Romans 9-11). Why would Jesus be making just the opposite point? It doesn't fit.

2. Another similar explanation is that what Jesus meant is that "this generation" is referring to all who have at any time rejected the message of the gospel. For instance, Jesus referred to the Jews of his day as "this adulterous and sinful

generation,” and “this unbelieving generation” (Mark 9:19; Matt. 12:39; 17:17; See especially Matthew 23:36).

In other words what Jesus is telling us here is that there would always be those down through history that would be evil and unbelieving and unprepared for his coming. Dr. C. Mervyn Maxwell gives this explanation (*God Cares*, Vol. 2). I don't think this is what Jesus meant, though, either. Because the verse we are considering is meant to illustrate the “nearness” of Jesus coming in relationship to certain “signs.” It is about the likelihood of his coming and not the unlikelihood of it.

3. Another way in which this text has been looked at traditionally is expressed in the following way: *All of those who saw these particular signs, i.e.: the falling of the stars; the moon turned into blood; and the dark day--- would be the generation that would see Jesus come.* One can see why the early Adventist believers thought this. But there is a problem isn't there? How many of the people who saw the stars fall in 1833 are still alive today? As you can calculate we don't have very many people who are 170 plus years old in our world today.

4. There is yet, another explanation to observe (while there are many more than these):

I call this one the “H.M.S. Richards explanation theory.” Richards simply believed that Jesus was not referring to our generation in the last days at all, but to the Jews of his day and events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. Maybe Elder Richards wasn't far from the truth because Jesus did mingle the description of the destruction of Jerusalem with the description of the events and climate in the last days of this world history in Matthew 24 and elsewhere. And indeed many of the things that Jesus described are indeed what happened in the next few years. Jerusalem was encompassed with armies, and there was distress, and there were even signs in the heavens. There were lots of signs indicating the imminent fall of old Jerusalem (See below; and cf. Ernest Martin; Restoring the Original Bible, p. 199-208). Most of the things mentioned all happened before forty years had elapsed. And forty years was what the Bible calls a generation in referring to the story of the children of Israel in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:9,10). It took forty years for God to remove the evil and adulterous generation of Moses' day.

How Should We Understand This Text?

Well, how should one deal with this interesting text? Does it matter? Well again, I am not requiring any to agree with me, or to, without reservations adopt one of the above explanations. *What is important I believe is that we see that Jesus' words should not be summarily dismissed as false when we simply 2,000 years later do not fully understand them.* I think it is important also of that we seek to understand these texts in such a way that our current belief in the coming of Jesus is not abandoned or dismissed. When we recognize a problem we should not hasten to “throw the baby out with the bath water.”

Dr. Hans LaRondelle published a wonderful article in the *Ministry* magazine (Sept. 99). And I appreciate his willingness to look candidly at this text. Most gloss it over or avoid it entirely. In summary this is what he says, and I would like to leave it with you for your prayerful consideration. We should look at all the evidence.

Much of his article deals with the phrase “all of these things.” Jesus does not tell us that he would come when there were wars, because there would always be wars. Jesus didn't say he would come when there were times of distress. There would always be times like this. What Jesus does say is that when you see all of these things, . . .that this generation will certainly not pass away. The key is in the word “all.”

Has any generation seen all of these things? We know the shaking of the powers of heaven hasn't happened yet. That is still future. The sign of the son of man in heaven has not been seen yet. The abominating sacrilege (in its last day application) has not yet been set up. And there are, we believe other specific signs and events that must still take place. Many of the signs have been seen “in the bud,” but they have not yet been seen in their full maturity. But when all these things are seen, that generation will be the generation that welcomes the coming of Jesus. And we could be that generation. It seems to be that way now. But, of course, we know not the day and hour of his coming.

Therefore, Jesus, is saying that a lot of things were to happen while we waited for him to come. Any one of these things have been happening for a long time so we can't find the time of his coming from those particular signs. But we can be warned by them. And we can use them to prepare to see him. Yet someday, when the “summer” arrives, and the fruits and signs are mature, we can know he

is at the door. But only when ALL these things are fulfilled should we be expecting to actually see him.

The ultimate fulfillments will be sudden, so we must always be ready. It may be a morn. It may be at midnight. Let us watch. Let us watch and be ready! He will come!

Footnote:

Martin reports from the Babylonian Talmud information that indicates that for forty years, four recurring signs were observed:

1. On the *Day of Atonement* the right hand of the officiating priest took a stone to select the Lord's goat. There was a white stone and a black stone. A black stone was an omen of evil. For the forty successive years, following the crucifixion of Jesus, the priest pulled out a black stone. The odds of this happening this many times in a row is mathematically 1: 1,099,511,627,776.
2. The western light of the lamp stand in the temple went out mysteriously at night—apparently for the same period. The lamps were designed to never go out, yet this one kept going out causing unending frustration.
3. The thread around the scapegoat was said legendarily to turn red or white. For forty years it “turned red.”
4. The doors to the temple were opened mysteriously at night. Other signs, including a vision of armies surrounding the city in clouds are chronicled in Josephus, *Wars*. 6.5.3. According to some several celestial signs occurred similar to those described by Jesus particularly in the years between A.D. 66-70.

Some of these strain credibility, of course, but there is probably at least some kernel of truth in some of them.

8

How Soon is Soon?

“And behold, I come quickly.” Revelation 22:12.

Introductory Story

“When we went to visit an old friend in Orlando recently, she told us a thrilling story. She said that her neighbor’s friend, who is the wife of a pastor, was driving down Interstate 4 in Orlando two weeks before Christmas when she saw a young man hitchhiking. Although she had never stopped to pick up a hitchhiker, this time she felt compelled to stop.

After the young man had settled himself in the front seat, the pastor’s wife resumed driving on down the highway. The young man turned to her and said, “You know that Jesus is coming soon, don’t you?” Startled at this type of conversation opener, the pastor’s wife turned and looked at him, then back to the road. As she opened her mouth to answer, she glanced over at him, but he was gone. He had vanished!

Very shaken up, she hurried to the next exit and, seeing a policeman, stopped to tell him what happened. After she had told him the story, he remarked, “That’s

the seventh time such an incident has been reported this week. It's always a young man, and he always says the same thing.”*

Such stories proliferate partly as a result of the teaching derived from such Scriptures as Revelation 22:20, that seem to promise that the coming of Jesus is guaranteed to “soon” take place. The truth of these stories cannot always be verified. In the case of the above story that circulated through the country, I am told, upon further investigation, that the story has proved to be false.

While the conviction that Jesus' coming is soon is commendable, and is certainly the present conviction of many of us, it may carry with it some hazards as well. Prominent preachers and evangelists herald these words with enthusiasm, but may not be as responsible as they should be in how these texts are to be used and understood. “Crying wolf” too much may harden the hearts and dull the ears of sincere Christians and would-be Christians. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, and damage has likely been done as well to the integrity of God's words by even the well-meaning misuse of these second coming texts.

A recent survey of Adventist college youth brought the following responses to the question about the “soonness” of Christ's coming:

“We have mixed thoughts and feelings from hearing predictions that the second coming might happen in the next 10 years or that it might not happen in our lifetime at all.”

“We are a generation of non-conviction when it comes to Jesus' second coming.”

“I can't imagine it happening in my lifetime.”

A Union College student recently admitted in a *Review* article: “I really don't think we can have any idea of when he'll come.”**

For several reasons these sentiments trouble some of us. While it is important to believe in the nearness of Christ's coming serious difficulties arise as a result of certain predictions, whether they carry a specific date, or if they are “rounded

* *Finish the Work Ministry News*, Vol. 2, #1, 1st quarter, 1994, by Jean Anderson.

* (Quoted from *1888 Glad Tidings*, “The Soon Coming of Christ: Has “Soon” Lost Its Meaning?” Robert J. Wieland, Vol. 16, no. 3, June-Aug 2000).

off” to “soon.” The issue is one of credibility, and this credibility is connected to a subject of supreme importance.

The most compelling Bible statements typically use the words, “quickly,” “at hand,” and “near.” Some examples are included in the text of this article:

Rev. 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Rev. 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Rev. 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Rev. 11:14 The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

Rev. 22:7 Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

Rev. 22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Rev. 22:20 He which **testifieth** these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

IN GREEK (Final two):

Rev. 22:12 *Ιδου ερχομαι ταχυ, και ο μισθος μου μετ εμου αποδουναι εκαστω ως το εργον εστιν αυτου.*

Rev. 22:20 *Λεγει ο μαρτυρων ταυτα, Ναι, ερχομαι ταχυ. Αμην, ερχου κυριε Ιησου.*

Coming Soon?

IS JESUS A LIAR? The fact is it's been nearly 2000 years since these words were spoken through prophecy. What is most troubling is that the promise is given in the context of another promise: "My words shall not pass away"(Matthew 24:35).

In the mail we receive circulars that feature explanations of the Trumpets of *Revelation*, or that quote the newspapers, or expose ecclesiastical movements that heighten the predictive climate. Emphasis shifts to imminence rather than preparedness and responsibility, which is where Jesus would rather have us put it. While I do believe the coming is near and it is my personal opinion that it is near, it is also my opinion that teachers and preachers are too careless in their use of these passages. Yes, the prophetic word is sure, and the coming is near---but how near is perhaps not for us to determine. As a pastor I have preached sermons on the nearness of Jesus' coming. In the preparation of one sermon I began listing what I considered solid reasons to believe that the coming is to happen soon. I thought I would be stretching it to find ten good reasons to believe thus. I was amazed when my list passed thirty-seven good reasons to believe it will be soon, and I was not done. But despite all of this the fact is that the coming will be a surprise to many and we are not given the day or the hour. And Jesus has not come. We must be responsible with ALL of God's words.

Understanding The "Soon Coming" Statements

It is true that in several passages in the New Testament and especially in the *Revelation* are found statements that clearly seem to state the immanent return of Jesus. Most notable are those which say for example, "... Behold, I come quickly." (Rev. 22:7,12,20; 3:11)

The problem, to reiterate, is two-fold:

1. These statements have been applied by Christians for nearly 2,000 years and Jesus has not come.
2. These statements are made by Jesus particularly in contexts where Jesus is described as the true and faithful witness, the Amen (The Absolutely Truthful One), the one whose words never pass away. The seriousness is this, in that the God who claims to be "truth," seems to be mistaken or is lying outright. If God knows the end from the beginning

why is he wrong in his predictions, or if he has promised to come soon why has he not appeared?

Various explanations for this enigma are offered to date by preachers and expositors. They suggest the following:

1. That “soon” means "soon" only in God's time, who is himself eternal.
2. That God deliberately represents his coming as soon whether it really is or not so all might be ready for his coming.
3. That the soon coming statements only apply to the last generation and are only to be understood as such.
4. That the statements like many of God's threatenings are conditional and would have come true had man correctly responded.

Though there might be elements of truth in all of these explanations they are not entirely satisfying and certain parts of them ring hollow to the skeptic, for certain, if not even the faithful, waiting saint.

The view that the soon coming is to be seen as soon according to God's standard of eternal time wants for the fact that these messages are not for God's benefit but are expressed to humans for the very purpose of instruction to them. God would be expected to honor the meanings of words and expressions, as they are understood by man.

That God deliberately lies for effect or that he bends the truth even for good motives does not harmonize with the picture of God as absolutely truthful and open. Yet many preachers in effect take this position. In their view, God overstates the truth of the matter to keep people honest. Therefore the end justifies the means. This does not seem fair and open, and typical of God's ways, however.

That the statements are made only to those living in the last days can hardly be supported in light of other statements made to indicate that these messages are for all ages and were to be applied in all ages until Christ should come. That these warnings are perhaps most important to last-day Christians who will see the return of Christ is certainly to be recognized. But these same passages have been

understood and read by Christians down through the ages as applying and having relevance to them as well. Thus they are to be understood with this in mind.

The idea that the statements are conditional may have some merit, but some believe that God will at last come, whether man is ready or not. However, these statements are made by the Alpha and Omega, the one who knows the end from the beginning and knows the time of his coming. Therefore they cannot be entirely conditional. The context does not always clearly state the conditions either.

Then what is to be made of this problem?

The fact that saints, apostles, and prophets have since the time of Jesus' first coming believed that they were on the verge of the age to come cannot be denied. Thus thought Peter, Paul, and even, no doubt, the seer of Patmos. They commented out of the limit of their hopes and their understanding of God's time. Yet if they were wrong perhaps in their anticipation, they were not wrong in their expectation, for Jesus did not reveal to them how long his coming would be delayed, but that they were to be in constant expectation. However some, like Paul, left warnings also that their hopes and expectations were not predictions and that caution should be exercised regarding the time of the *Parousia* (2 Thess. 2:1 ff.)♦.

The nearness of the coming of Christ is expressed in many ways, but the most enigmatic are probably those types mentioned above where some form of the word "tacu" (ταχυ) is used. Other terms used are in words such as "near" or "at hand."

In Revelation, it must be observed, expressions of imminence sometimes applied to the coming of Christ *are really not speaking of the coming at all*, but rather concerning the parameters of the prophecy and its message. The statement in 1:3 and 22:10 that the "time is at hand" is teaching that the prophecy itself is immediately active and applicable (not the Coming). By examining the verses one finds that it does not necessarily mean that the coming of the Lord is said to

♦ 2Ths. 2:2: "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand."

be near. The book of *Revelation* was not to be sealed because it had immediate relevance, even in John's day.

However there are statements that irrefutably seem to report that the coming is to be expected *immediately*. Jesus says, "Certainly, I am coming *quickly*" (22:20).

Suddenness, Not Nearness

A study of the use of the word "tacu", (found in some form or another about 30X in the New Testament) shows that in some contexts it has the definite meaning of soon in time (These passages are listed below). However, in most instances another force of the word can also be emphasized, meaning not so much the passage of time as much as the manner or speed of the subject within time.

To further demonstrate, there are two ways in which the expression can be understood. Sometimes these meanings can hardly be separated one from another; but sometimes in certain contexts they must be separated.

1. The first meaning, then, is soon in time; that is, happening immediately after the first point in chronological time.
2. The second meaning relates not so much to the passage of chronological time but rather to the speed in which a certain action is accomplished.

Therefore one might say to another person over the phone line, in modern English: "I am coming fast." Now what does the speaker wish to emphasize most? Is he meaning that he will be there "right away" or does he mean that when he comes he will come with haste; or both? The context is crucial. If the discussion is about the near arrival of a guest then one might take it to mean that he will arrive "right away." But the discussion may be about a man who has bought a new sports car and as soon as he is able; perhaps in a day or so he will be speeding to his destination. He may not arrive for hours, days, or even more time than that; but when he does come, he will be coming "fast." The context in which the two ideas cannot be separated easily is when coming "fast" also creates the phenomenon of arriving quickly. Thus when Mary "rose up hastily" and came to where Jesus was (the resurrection of Lazarus) she both acted with speed and so arrived soon at Jesus place of waiting. (Jn 11:29,31).

Another example is if we might say of another person, "He eats quickly." Do we mean that he will eating moments from now, or do we mean that whenever he eats he does it very eagerly and quickly.

All of these uses of the word are found in the New Testament but the *shade* of meaning or the emphasis given can vary according to the context and the tense. CONTEXT is the essential ingredient. TENSE is also crucial.

Paul the Apostle, for example often makes it clear that he is planning to come shortly to a certain destination (1 Tim.3:14). This clearly means "soon," in time.

But in other contexts the immediacy is not so apparent as is the sudden and decisive manner in which it takes place. To illustrate one must look at Luke 18:8 where the unjust judge is described in parable. Then follows this verse:

"And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily" (ἐν ταχει)

Here it appears that even though the great judgment day is seen afar off, and is not particularly near in anticipated time (God bears long with the wicked, day and night continually hearing the appeals of the righteous), that the final avenging comes "speedily." How then can "speedily" or "quickly" be understood but in the sense of meaning "sudden?" This is comparable to the verse: *"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief"* (1 Thess. 5:3,4).*

When my wife (the author's) waited through her pregnancies, the time until the actual birth seemed forever prolonged to her. She languished, and it never seemed near enough. But when the babies came to labor---things suddenly went into high gear! That seemed very sudden for both of us. There is nearly perfect genius in Paul's metaphor.

* (The word "sudden" is used only once in the N.T. in 2 Thess. 5:4. However, it is here purported that the idea of "suddenness" has to be found more often than this and is found in many if not all of the "tacu" expressions.)

In several passages the idea of *suddenness and haste* rather than the particular "nearness in time" is emphasized though the two concepts are such close cousins that they often complement one another. Nevertheless the idea sometimes is clearly one of *speed and dispatch*. "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem," (Acts 22:18); "Go quickly, and tell his disciples.... and they departed quickly" (Matt 28:7,8). Even though they go "immediately" the fact that the action is done in haste also is prominently expressed.

Of a truth this is exactly the content of most of Jesus' warnings about his coming. The consistent warning is *not* its "soon-ness" so much, but rather its sudden and unexpected nature.

Matthew 24 and 25 describe the watching attitude all must have. The emphasis even comes of being prepared for the **delay** (Parable of 10 virgins, faithfully using talents, etc.). One does not know the hour so he must always be ready. Signs may indicate nearness, but the only reliable attitude is watchful readiness.

The typical example Jesus used of his coming was the coming of a thief:

"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev. 16:15).^{**}

*

* **AS A THIEF:**

2Pet. 3:10 *But the day of the Lord will come as a **thief in the night**; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

Rev. 3:3 *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a **thief**, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*

Rev. 16:15 *Behold, I come as a **thief**. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*

Matt. 24:43 *But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the **thief** would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*

Now it cannot be said of a thief that he always comes "soon." If it is known that a thief always comes "soon," many would be prepared for him. But a thief comes early, middle, or late, depending on when he calculates he can best surprise the possessor of wealth. What makes the thief successful is that he comes suddenly, unexpectedly, quickly snatching his prize and leaving. To the weary and those not vigilant, so will it be at the Lord's coming. And, incidentally, the hour is pictured as late in this world's history and not early.

It is this sense that is so prominent in the Revelation and in the New Testament and for this reason it seems expedient to understand according to the golden rule of context that this is how the "soon coming" statements made by Christ himself are to be understood. God does not lie and we need to be responsible with His words. In fact history itself may now prove that this is what Jesus meant, for hundreds, yes, thousands of years have passed since He was here. Yet the time is nearer than when the early Christians first believed, and all other indicators do show that the coming is near, at hand. This truth must be sensed and entertained without making Jesus honest only in the present and dishonest about the past.

Without the context of other statements that Jesus has made we could easily conclude that "soon," and only soon, is what Jesus meant. But by carefully comparing each metaphor and examining the nuance present in the expressions regarding the time of his coming we must qualify the statements according to the context. *These tend to highlight the sudden and unexpected nature of his coming.*

Nowhere does Jesus say he is coming "immediately" or that his coming "is at the door." (Some may point to certain problem passages but these passages have other explanations). He could have used these other words if he wished. But he apparently used a common expression denoting suddenness.

Such circumstances played themselves out in the time of Noah. The day did not particularly come "soon" to many. The ark was in building for years, decades. But *suddenly* one day the flood came, catching the unbeliever off guard. So shall the coming of the Son of Man be.

The Tense of "Quickly"

One last observation is that the Greek tense of the verb and the associated adverb is very significant, especially in the passages under consideration. No student of Scripture can be responsible and ignore this evidence. Unfortunately, carelessness in this regard may have led to the problem we are discussing.

In the text, “behold, I come quickly,” the verb, “I come” is in the *present* tense. The present tense in Greek is always understood in a continuous sense. Therefore properly translated the phrase would read, “behold, I am continually coming, quickly.” As one can immediately see, if “soon” is meant, this phrase makes absolutely no sense. Christ cannot always be coming “soon.” But he can always be seen as coming “suddenly,” when he does come, as a thief, and without warning. This is the meaning of these expressions. If he used the future verb forms, saying: “I will come quickly” it then *could* sometimes mean “soon in time.” But not necessarily always, even then.

Conclusion

Therefore, certain texts commonly used by Christians to teach the “nearness” of the second coming should never be used purely in this sense. They are placed in the Scripture to emphasize the *suddenness and unexpectedness* of Christ’s coming and the need for constant readiness, not its imminent nearness.

Other valid prophetic passages and signs are available to teach the nearness of Christ’s coming. The attitude of expectation and nearness should indeed be taught through these means. But to quote repeatedly from certain passages that seem to promise nearness is unwarranted, even at times detrimental, to the integrity of the Christian message.

Properly understood, these passages do not make Jesus and the Apostles dishonest or mistaken. The integrity of God’s word is preserved. The lessons intended by Christ and the apostles retain their instructional value, relevant to the faithful of all ages.

Many of the New Testament passages using “near in time” expressions are listed below:

Quickly; ταχυ: Matthew 3:25; 28:7,8; Mk 9:39; Luke 15:22; Jn 11:29; Rev 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7,12,20.

Quickly, with speed; ταχεως: Luke 14:21; 16:6; Jn 11:31; 1Cor. 4:19; Gal 1:6; Phil 2:24; 2:19; 1 Tim 5:22; 2 Tim 4:9.

Quickly, within a little time; εν ταχει: Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rom 16:20; 1 Tim 3:14; Rev 1:1; 22:16.

αιφνιδιος—"sudden destruction." 1 Thess 5:3.

or

εξαιφνης; Mark 13:36—"suddenly find you sleeping."

(There are also several uses of "near," ενγυς, and "at hand.")

An example of the sometimes-inseparable meaning---Matt. 21:20: "And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!"

9

The Prodigious Numbers of the Israelite Encampment

THE PROBLEM

The seemingly impossible numbers assigned to the humble people of Israel who left Egypt as recorded by the biblical record has caused fervent discussion for centuries if not millennia. Skeptics use these dubious numbers to illustrate the Bible to be inaccurate and exaggerated. Fundamentalist inerrancy advocates and biblical apologists have regularly risen to loyally defend these numbers in one way or another.

The enigma of the numbers can be represented in several scenarios; but the principle objection seems to ride on the simple fact that such numbers (2-3 million people, i.e., 600,000 fighting men plus women and children) leaves one incredulous when one considers the general circumstances as well as the following more specific considerations:

- a. The estimated populations of their counterparts or contemporary ethnic groups in history.
- b. The seeming impossibility of such an enormous crowd surviving in a wilderness.

c. The physical proportions of such a congregation in the geographic setting.

d. The improbability of Israel biologically multiplying this prolifically in the historical and genealogical framework.

For example such a large number of soldiers as 600,000 was not common in the ages to which the account is commonly assigned. Hundreds of years later a field army of the great world kingdom of Assyria numbers a mere fraction of this (132,000). The actual Egyptian army at the time of the Exodus probably paled in comparison to this number. Yet Israel, who are in bondage as a slave minority number in the hundreds of thousands. Modern armies of populous countries on the earth today hardly reach this comparative magnitude.

The problems of managing a crowd this size are also impressive if one thinks about it. Without doubt Israel indeed owed their comfort and existence to divine intervention and aid. However, one who gives the subject worthy consideration recognizes monstrous logistical and tactical challenges in understanding these numbers to be what is commonly taught.

The physical demands of moving this number of people would be staggering, especially under the conditions described. One commentator calculates that such a multitude traveling under normal circumstances would have easily reached the border of China (E.L. Martin, *101 Questions*). Even if traveling several wagons or groups abreast the "King's Highway" could not have reasonably accommodated Israel within its bounds.

Questions also appear if one accepts as valid the genealogies listed in the Pentateuch. The growth of the tribes appear to be quite contemporary and recent or else the genealogical record leaves enormous gaps, making a problem there. (The Levite's genealogy has considerable detail tracing back only three or four generations). How did the population of Israel go from seventy to 3 million in 3-5 generations?

A principle difficulty that compounds the problem is the disproportionate numbers given for the first-born who are also numbered in the general census. When matched with the other numbers one can quickly calculate and determine a result demanding immense single-family units of anywhere from 25-30 and even up to 60 or more children per nuclear family.

Several solutions have been suggested by the various sides for one or both of these problems. Some might be expressed as follows:

1. The word "thousand" *eleph*, is ambiguous and is purported to have various translations and meanings. Thus it may not mean "thousand" but rather "family," or as some suggest "chieftains," or something else entirely.
2. The numbers were simply exaggerated by later Jewry to seem impressive. Thus the Bible account has simply been altered. (The person who altered them was not consistent thus we have the problem with such passages as those that discuss the firstborn.)
3. The numbers are accurate as stated, except in the case of the firstborn who should be understood in the context of only those who were born to that date in the wilderness.
4. The numbers do not include only the living but their dead ancestors as well.

Etc.

Parts, at least, of the above solutions are simply not satisfactory. The numbers can hardly be construed in any other way to make sense with the rest of the account of the wilderness journeys. The calculation of the half-shekel tax correlates mathematically with the stated number elsewhere (603,550). The numbers appear to be right in themselves in certain ways. If the word for "thousands" means families or chieftains then the calculations would not harmonize. Of course, some argue that the ancillary passages were doctored to fit the context.

The notion that biased editors later made such sweeping emendations is too common and plays into the hands of the critics and makes the Bible an unreliable farce. In addition, it takes away any proposed significance for these numbers.

To hold that the number is accurate still leaves us with enormous difficulties; even if the firstborn are thought to be only those born in the wilderness since the Exodus. That the numbers include the "pedigrees" or includes the dead ancestors of the children of Israel is little help when one considers that mathematically it would not make much difference. The sum of all dead

forebears back to Abraham would be quite small comparatively and would not change the overall number significantly.

TOWARDS A RESPONSIBLE SOLUTION

Here is an attempt to address this problem:

To begin with, the general firstborn redemption took place at the Exodus, therefore the number of firstborn listed in Numbers may be given only of those born after "crossing over" the Red Sea.

(Cf. Numbers 3:13; Exodus 12:29; 13:1)

It also may be incorrect to assume that the calculation of the firstborn in the book of Numbers is based on the entire population. This is often automatically assumed. But even if the case is made that the 22,000 firstborn represent the entire camp the following consideration might make this a mute point.

SUGGESTION:

I would like to suggest that the numbers given in the census INCLUDE THE FLOCKS AND HERDS OWNED BY THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD OR FAMILY WHO WAS REGISTERED.

This is not easily apparent from the way the census is taken or chronicled in Numbers, or at least, in the way it is generally translated. This conclusion must be reached deductively. However, it may be necessary to include livestock in order to do justice to several passages we will consider in the following:

FIRST AS REGARDS THE FIRSTBORN ONLY---Both man and beast were to be redeemed with *shekel* taxes.

- Therefore the census of the firstborn apparently included "man and beast" (Exodus 13:1).
 - Ex 13:12,13,15: (includes oxen, cattle, sheep, goats--- donkeys reckoned differently)

-----Therefore with regards to the firstborn, at least, animals had monetary redemption value as well as humans. As property, in some instances, they are even considered to have *equal* tax value to human offspring.

FURTHERMORE, ONE CAN NOTE HOW BOTH MAN AND ANIMAL FIRSTBORN ARE TRADED FOR OTHER MAN AND ANIMAL FIRSTBORN:

(Cf. Numbers 3:11-13 and 3:40-43 ff.)

Is it possible, therefore, that THE SAME PRINCIPLE WAS TRUE OF THE GENERAL CENSUS? This possibility is very important and central to the whole argument. And, there are many reasons to believe so.

The Hebrew account literally asks not for every "man" but for every "**male**" (*zakor*; רֹאשׁ). They were counted literally, Exodus says, by the "head" (lit: *head by head*). Thus any mature male creature was counted--human and animal.

Texts: Exodus 38:25,26, also ex. 30:14,15

Note: RSV, KJV, etc., uses "men" in vs. 26, but the word "men" is not in the text. It is supplied.

Even today we speak of so many "head" of cattle or livestock.

WE MUST REMEMBER ALSO THAT THE STANDARD VALUE OF ANIMALS IN THE ACCOUNTS IS SOMETIMES THE SAME AS MAN: i.e.: 5 shekels (Lev. 27:6, Num 3:47,50, Num 8:16).

Here is the premise: If animals were given this significant redemption value, yet were not included in the total census figure, God would then have been robbed of the rightful redemption value owed to Him. Notice that in the book of *Numbers*, in the redemption of the firstborn, the cattle or livestock are mentioned but not numbered separately. We are not told their specific count. But if they are commonly assigned a value of five shekels, even as a man is valued, and thereby God is owed of their property value, why are there not figures of census revenues reported for them also? This proves that at least some cattle are included in the

firstborn census figures. Let us suggest that in the general census, therefore, all male animals with inherent tax value are also included in the half-shekel calculation (Cf. Numbers 3:47; re: cattle and firstborn).

Today, when the government (United States) assesses tax, it does so on the basis of monetary income. But the nomadic camp of Israel was not as commercially active at that time as they could be when settled in Canaan with shops and artisans and trade with other nations established. As an agrarian culture, income and tax would have been assessed primarily from their current PROPERTY. And property was to be measured according to the male offspring, including the livestock.

According to Ex. 12:38, Israel had huge flocks. They were shepherds by occupation. This is why they stayed in Goshen. It is not inconceivable that each family head of household owned several, at least 5 or more male animals and the same female. It may have been on the average more or less than this. The point is, consequently, that if animals are included in the census we thereby decrease significantly the expected number of human adult males, whose names were registered together with the male "property" they owned.

These adult males were registered by name as the book of Numbers says. These men, 20 years old and over, were of military age and the age of civil responsibility. For every male in their "household" or personal "community" they were to pay a ransom. Some might therefore pay several half shekels. The key is understanding that it is not only the males twenty years old and upward that are counted, but rather that each male HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD, 20 years old and upward, are assessed and taxed by family units on all of their property as thoroughly as the IRS will scrutinize one's total taxable property to this day. Their "armies," were their household and livestock.

To smooth up the translation of the passages in the first chapter of Numbers we might simply say to clarify: "Assess every named head of household, 20 years old or upward, according to the number of his male offspring."

One can clearly see by the context of the census that the half-shekel tax was primarily for the purpose of supporting the sanctuary service and not simply for civil tax or military draft. The "bekah," or half-shekel was used for a cultic purpose; not for military defense. Sure, the census may have served several purposes, both organizationally and militarily, but this is not alone why it was

instituted. This can be seen in the fact that the *bekah* tradition continued in Judaism in Jesus' day even when Israel had no army, yet had a temple to support.

It seems that the reason why the phrase, "able to go forth to war," is used in this context was not primarily for the purpose of forming an army, but rather to define the standard of how one was to be classified as a "head of household," and how one was to determine the standard census unit. To this day, census bureaus have to define a head of household, and a household unit. Otherwise they will count some people more than once.

A nation usually will have an age of accountability at, 18, 21, (etc.), when a boy or girl reaches adult status, and is eligible for military duty or adult privilege. This practice remains to this day.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

This conclusion, if valid, offers some valuable light. First, since the purpose of the census was perhaps primarily cultic rather than political and military, one might better understand why God punished Israel and David the king later in Israel's history. David instituted a census of his kingdom. Apparently David was wishing to ascertain his political and national might from the census. However, in Israel's wanderings it was not to make a determinative number *per se*, since the animals and men were lumped together, and no priority made as to how many "fighting men" there really were. Certainly, though each fighting man was probably registered, by name. But what was important to God was that an honest reckoning was made and a return was made to the religious system he was instituting, much like we would encourage the return of an honest tithe today. David prostituted this idea of a census for national interest and pride, and probably failed to collect the ransom payments required by God. It was made clear by God to Israel in the Law of Moses (Exodus 30:11-16) that if no ransom was collected during a census that the nation would be summarily rewarded with plague. David, it appears, made the mistake of using the church system for a recruiting agency.

This deadly plague came indeed upon David's kingdom. It resulted in the death of 70,000 "men." The plague was finally stayed after David pled with God and made sacrifice.

This harsh story is troubling for many. But I believe, the solution alluded to above as it pertains to the first Israelite census, resolves much of this difficulty as well. I would like to suggest that the seventy thousand were not all *human* males, but were mostly sheep.

The word used for the victims of this plague is the word for adult males, particularly used for military maturity, and often translated “warriors.” But again, this word is the same word as used other places such as Exodus. I think it means “fully mature adult males,” and is not restricted as applying only to humans. Just because the translators chose “men,” or “warriors” does not mean we in modern times understand the fluidity of meaning in these words known to ancient Israel.

Even David complains to God and says, “But these *sheep*, what have they done?” We take this as symbolic for innocent men. But the word is “sheep.”

My deduction is that David should have by law returned a census tax to God as required in the Law of Moses. When David did not do this, plague resulted. In taking the lives of these livestock God got the sacrificial *value* of what was due him. David, when he sensed what was wrong, knew that atonement for this oversight was to be made through sacrifice. Therefore he finally tried to do what God had directed he should do (set up a place of sacrifice) and the plague was halted. However, the taking of the lives of 70,000 innocent men because of David’s mistake does not seem God-like, and we naturally wonder if this is what really happened.

When a few men of Beth-Shemesh looked into the Ark of the Covenant when it was returned from the Philistines they were punished with a similar number of deaths. Over fifty thousand died “out of the people.” However, it is doubtful that the village of Beth-Shemesh in those days would have had fifty thousand people. It is also doubtful that fifty thousand looked into the ark. The verses (I Samuel 6:19ff.) suggest that “some” human people died in the plague, but it is stated in a way that separates them out from the greater number. No doubt, these were the men who gazed into the ark. But this would have been a relatively smaller number than 50,000. It seems there must be some accounting that includes sacrificial animals.

Jonah 4:11 suggests that livestock were awarded great property, monetary, and redemptive value along with the human population. A curious phrase comes at

the end of the book of Jonah following the human census information for the city of Nineveh—which reads: "and much cattle." Men have puzzled over this strange ending to the book. It cannot be thought that God is necessarily concerned with the souls of the cattle. They cannot repent and thereby live. But they are treated as innocent and valuable property attached to the Ninevites who would be potentially lost. Here we must have a typical census statement, considering animals as significantly valuable and attached materially to their owners.

Israel's Approximate Population

My estimate to Israel's total human population would be closer to 12,000-20,000 HUMAN male adults per tribe. It could have been more than this, but taking this number to build a total male population of closer to 150,000 (144,000) and doubling this to include females makes a human crowd of about 300,000. This is still a large number, but closer to reality than 3,000,000--- plus great flocks and herds. The number of males in the flocks and herds works out to be about five per family, taking into consideration sheep, goats, cattle, etc. This might be a reasonable average, at least, for these agrarian Israelites who were reported to possess "great flocks and herds."

This in every way fits the picture, too, of a more manageable group, which can, for instance, take "Jericho" miraculously. The army that took Jericho was recorded as being 40,000, very proportionate to a total male population of maybe more than three times that size. It might help also with the problem of the firstborn,* since the ratios are lessened to more reasonable amounts. Perhaps about 1 in 3 adult males might be firstborn if the families were on the average large enough. The firstborn of the animals might exhibit a much larger ratio since livestock can reproduce quite prolifically. An increased ratio of firstborn to regular born would result with large litters in the flock. For animals there would probably be fewer firstborn *per capita*.

Conclusion

* The firstborn calculation and the census of the Levites in Numbers seem to include of the livestock *only cattle* and not other animals. This must all be considered when calculating the proportions of the firstborn to the total congregation.

Thus, a grown Israelite man was considered responsible for *all* his "dependents" or offspring (see Numbers 1). As a head of "household" he was taxed fairly, according to the assessment of his total property. Upon reaching the military age of 20 he was considered a citizen and was categorized with his living property in a religious tax unit. This was the basis of the numbering system.

This solution I propose does greater justice to the integrity of the numbers in the account, as well as the to the integrity of Inspiration. The beauty is that also that these numbers now offer us a more credible fit to the natural and actual historical situation. The demands and questions can be met in a more satisfactory way and yet maintain the historicity of the Exodus story.

ENDNOTE:

The Midianites

Of interest is the report of Israel's conquest at the end of the 40 years in the wilderness, of the Midianites. This rival nation might be considered a worthy comparison in size to Israel. Midian was probably the nation derived from the son of Keturah (Gen 25:2,4; Gen 37:28; I Chron. 1:32).

Keturah was Abraham's concubine. Thus the people of Midian begin as an ethnic group parallel in time to Abraham and his descendants. They would be in terms of population in the same approximate developmental stage as the people of Israel.

The Midianites are avenged by Israel in Numbers 31. As booty, the army returned with about 808,000 livestock (675,000 sheep; 72,000 beeves; 61,000 donkeys). They also bought many women back against the counsel of Moses. These were then summarily executed except for the virgin girls whose number tallies at 32,000.

If there were this many girls less than 20 years old, or maybe 15, we can roughly estimate that the rest of the women of greater age might have been as great as three to four times this number. It is difficult to determine exactly. With the

way population growth works the younger age group may have represented many more in comparison with their elders and thus they could have been a little less than half of the total female population. But if we multiply this number about four times which should be an outside estimate, we reach about 128,000 women. Double this figure for the male adults and we have a number between 250,000 and 300, 000 people.

The relative proportions of the livestock and the human populations between Israel and Midian are what is interesting. The booty of this war is not taxed in the same way as in the former Israelite census; in other words the livestock are not broken down between male and female. But the size of the two animal groups are perhaps very similar.

If there were 600,000 Israelite "males" leaving Egypt "on foot," we might estimate according to our previous findings that between 150,000 and 200,000 of these were human. This leaves 400,000 or more male offspring in the flocks and herds. Double this, adding in the females of the flocks and herds and we reach 800,000 as an estimated total. This is in most aspects perfectly commensurate to what we find in the Midianite encampment, to whatever degree they were conquered as a people.

The proportions of human population according to these very general estimates are also roughly equivalent in our estimates regarding Israel and Midian. These estimates were between 250,000 to 300,000 people including both genders. These are precisely the general proportions we should expect to validate our comparison.

This determination is not without flaw or question, and I am not insisting on the accuracy of these estimates. What I am suggesting is that including livestock in those that came out of Egypt "on foot" offers a more reasonable basis on which to calculate and validate the numbers given us in the Pentateuch. The exact computation of Israel's numbers is not necessary to retaining a high view of the general reliability of the biblical text.

10

Jesus' Rebuke of Martha

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41,42)

In the *Gospel of Luke* is recorded a story of Jesus' visit to the house of his friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. When Mary left the hospitality service to her sister and sat at Jesus feet, her sister Martha complained to Jesus. Jesus told Martha that her servitude was too burdened with anxiety, and that Mary had taken the more commendable position in sitting luxuriously at his feet (Luke 10:38-42).

Why was Jesus so cool to Martha when she was “breaking her back” for him? It seems like Jesus is rewarding lazy and selfish behavior. In other places Jesus considers humble service the highest of pursuits. We get the point—we should all be listening to Jesus—but Jesus seems to be rebuking Martha for being responsible, faithful, and dedicated in service.

This passage has troubled some of us. It really troubled my own mother, who was a consummate hostess and many times had the Sabbath speaker home for a meal or slaved faithfully her entire life to produce wholesome, attractive meals for her family or others in need. In our home we were taught to help with the dishes and entertainment. When guests in another home we were taught to do our part as much as possible for our hosts.

Prodigal Son, Prodigal Daughter

To better understand this story I have noticed a helpful parallel, also featured in the book of Luke (15). The story of Mary and Martha, two sisters, is in many ways similar to the parable of the prodigal son, or the two sons:

1. The elder son complains about his brother's failures. In a similar way Martha complains about her younger sister.
2. The father seems insensitive to the first son who has been faithful. The story of the Prodigal Son can be misread in the same way as well.

Not until put the two stories together does part of the meaning of the encounter between Jesus, Mary, and Martha come clearer to us. In each of the stories:

- a. One was elder (responsible), the other prodigal (younger, and irresponsible).
- b. One was naturally a sister or brother, and elder and younger.
- c. One was self-righteous, and one was careless and profligate.

There are some differences too, of course. But the two stories I believe bear some kind of relationship. In both cases, the younger sibling finally comes to know his or her spiritual condition, but the elder does not seem to fully know his or her true condition.

“Mary hath chosen that good part”

We are misunderstanding and not appreciating this encounter if we do not recognize the genius in how Jesus handles this very sensitive situation. On first glance it appears Jesus is rebuking Martha and praising Mary. But I think this, by itself, is not the case.

The twist in this passage is in how we understand the phrase, “that good part.” Literally, this phrase is: “the better portion.” We assume this means “good” in the spiritual sense. However, this is likely talking about a preferred helping of food. In modern vernacular we might say, “the big piece,” or “the drumstick.”

When young I had an uncle (who is now no longer living) who probably would rate as the most selfish man I have ever known. There are a thousand reasons for saying this. However, there is one instance, which comes to mind.

We were a poor family, and when my uncle’s family came to visit my parents splurged and bought a watermelon for our picnic. This was a luxury for us in those days. Before our meal we went for a short hike at our favorite mountain retreat. However, Uncle Walt did not go (He was lazy, too!).

When we returned, hungry and thirsty from our hike, we found that Uncle Walt had already cut the melon and eaten a fair share of it. However, not only had he done this, but he had eaten the entire “heart” of the melon, of course, the *best* part.

This reminds us of the story of the little boy who always took the biggest piece of pie, or cake, or whatever. Clandestinely, his parents finally set him up so that when he took the biggest piece of pie, it was found to be hollow, and he was inclined to learn thereafter not to be so selfish.

The point is, is that I think that Jesus was not favoring Mary or Martha, but took the opportunity to address both of them. I think that both were “rebuked” and that both were given an opportunity to learn a great spiritual lesson.

I believe that Jesus was indicating to Mary that she had chosen the “big piece” by not helping her sister and basking in the luxury of being with Jesus. She probably should have not been so selfish. But once she had eaten of the better portion, it was ruined for everyone else, and it would do no good to give it back. I wasn’t interested in the heart of the melon, or any of the rest of it either, once my uncle had slobbered all over it. Indeed it was *gone*, and would not “be taken away from him.”

What Mary did right was recognize the privilege of learning from Jesus. In this her priority was right, and for this she was commended.

Martha, on the other hand had become so anxious and responsible that she let earthly matters eclipse a once in a lifetime opportunity to sit at Jesus feet and receive much needed spiritual instruction.

What Martha did right was to be faithful in service to her Master. And I think Jesus actually commended her in this. He recognized that Martha made great efforts to be a good hostess and to do things right. What she did wrong was not to be found in her service but in her attitude. Jesus simply desired that Martha recognize that pervading her service and work should come a spiritual interest and motivation. Jesus, the master teacher, even addressed Martha in a way appropriate to her serving of a meal, using a culinary illustration to teach his spiritual lesson.

What do these stories teach us today?

1. I think the first thing is--it is not “works” that save us.

This was what was wrong with the elder brother, and with Martha. Martha was depending on her works, her good behavior to get her through. This is not what Jesus really wanted from her. He wants us to do good works, but not grudgingly because we SHOULD, or HAVE TO!!

Without a change of heart our outward compliance and correctness will not save us.

Worse yet is the abuse that this pre-occupation with “correctness of behavior” causes us to do to others. The critical attitude of the older brother and of Martha is as soul-destroying as the errant ways of the prodigal son or the prodigal daughter. (Cf. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 210). Criticism, correcting others, being judgmental, is a dreadfully destructive practice used by Christians in this world. Untold damage is done by “pharisaical” religionists in how they “spiritually abuse” others.

2. What Jesus really wants is our love and devotion.

Both sons and both daughters were prodigal in a sense. The elder siblings simply stayed home. They gave outward service *without* the heart. This is in part the

Laodicean problem. Neither sibling seemed to fully appreciate the availability and necessity of the love and righteousness of Christ.

The first and eldest son in the parable should have considered himself the most fortunate all the way along. Instead he was jealous. In his heart he wished he could have been the prodigal. He wished he could have had some of the RIOTOUS LIVING.

Really RIOTOUS LIVING is greatly inferior to RIGHTEOUS LIVING. Unfortunately, the elder brother did not completely believe this. But his greatest problem was that He didn't have love for his brother, like God does. If there had been true love for his brother, his response would have been totally different. He was doing what was right, but his heart wasn't in it. The younger brother was not doing what was right, but he really wasn't satisfied with his position either.

God is not so worried about our behavior, as he is WHY we are doing what we are doing.

The father in the parable doesn't question the prodigal; he doesn't require that he first become righteous to come to him. He simply wanted first a changed heart of love and loyalty in his son. With that in place the rest would come easily.

He simply LOVES THE PRODIGAL SO MUCH THAT HE FALLS UPON HIM AND WELCOMES HIM HOME. The father is ecstatic, not just to see his son, but that his son is indicating by his return that he loves his father and his home. God watches a long way off for the sinner to come home. Yes he wants us to forsake our sins. But that is not the focus. He wants us to love him, to be in fellowship with him, to be with him where he is. He wants us to sit at His feet, because there we are with him, appreciating him. Jesus really says, "JUST LOVE ME!" But Christians either get all caught up in the plague of self-righteousness (the love of self), *or* the love of the world.

This is what Martha was needing—a deeper appreciation and love for Christ and her wayward sister. There Christ was, right in her home, and she was worrying about details. She was worrying too much about *how* the household of faith was run and not enough about the evil in her own heart (This typifies a number of modern church members). All along, Jesus was trying to get her **heart's** attention, to no avail.

Martha was so concerned about correcting the behavior of someone else, that she was ignoring the very reason for right behavior, the LIVING AND PRESENT LORD! She was trying to impress Jesus when Jesus wanted to impress her to the value of truly spiritual things. And Mary to the contrary saw the value of learning from Jesus, yet forgot perhaps that in helping others and being unselfish is how we demonstrate our true love to Jesus.

3. Grace should not be hoarded, but shared.

Martha was not the only one, though, to receive a loving rebuke. Remember, Jesus said of Mary that she had rather greedily taken the “better portion,” which I believe represents the Grace of God.

While, God wants us to indulge freely in His Grace, and do we ever need to, he does not wish us to sit and do nothing but “soak up” these privileges, and not put them into active service. This is so true of many in the church today. We must not be merely “religious prodigals.” Mary was not sharing this “Grace,” but was hoarding it to herself. Faith without works is dead, and when truly imbued with the Grace of Christ we will turn it into active service. We will rise quickly to help our sister and our brother so they too will have a chance to be with Jesus.

What every sister or brother, younger or older, needs, is a full appreciation of God’s love and grace. This will bring balance to our service to Him, and to our necessary indulgence in His wonderful forgiveness. When unselfish love and appreciation for Christ pervades every act and every experience, we will become truly effective and faithful. We will truly become brothers and sisters in Christ. We will truly become the children of God.

11

Uzzah's Loving God

One of the most problematic stories in the Old Testament is the story of Uzzah. This story possibly arises in religious discussions on the love of God more than any other. Many sincere Christians simply repress the story rather than dealing with it. Some doubt that the same God who died on the Cross could be the same God who made the breach upon Uzzah. Such severity on God's part is difficult to reconcile with the gentle Jesus of the New Testament.

While we are not always able to understand God's ways, and while we may not be able to explain every mystery in the Bible, we should be careful to digest what information is available and fit it into the bigger and clearer picture.

The story of Uzzah is found in 2 Samuel 6:1-11 (and I Chron. 13:5-14). King David had made his capital in Jerusalem and nobly wished to establish the sanctuary complex in the center of his kingdom. The most important piece of furniture in all of Israel was the Ark of the Covenant. Apparently, there was also a need to find a place for the ark, because it had most recently been sheltered in an Israelite's house somewhere not far from Jerusalem.

A grand celebration is planned for bringing the ark into the city of Zion. It is to be brought amidst singing, dancing, and fanfare. A great procession made its way toward the city.

The two sons of Aholiab, Uzzah and Ahio, took the responsibility of attending the ark as it is transported by cart and oxen. We are told that Ahio went ahead, leading the oxen, and that Uzzah was beside the ark, apparently taking special watch concerning its welfare.

When the procession reached a certain spot, the Bible reports that the oxen stumbled, and perhaps the sacred ark teetered as if about to fall to the ground. Uzzah reached out and touched the ark, and immediately fell to the ground, dead.

In fear, David himself, apparently angry at God for this breach upon Uzzah, directs that the ark be kept at a nearby nobleman's house until more cautious plans could be devised on what to do with it.

Facts Often Overlooked

Too often this story is left here, without further investigation. It is obvious that the ark should not have been transported in this fashion for specific directions for carrying the ark are given in the Levitical laws and these directions should have been followed. But the apparent severity of God toward a man who seems only to have wished to rescue the ark from danger seems incomprehensible.

To be fair to God and the whole situation there are some considerations that should be investigated in seeking to understand this event. A look at these will hopefully enlarge our understanding and elucidate God's purposes in what he did or allowed.

1. The most significant observation, repeatedly overlooked has to do with Uzzah and Ahio themselves. Who were these men?

A closer look at the text reveals these men were apparently *not even priests*. We must ask why this possible fact is not investigated by expositors?

The ark had been residing in the section of the country inhabited by the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of King Saul.

The book of Chronicles may indicate that quite certainly Uzzah and Ahio were themselves Benjamites and not Levites. In one of the genealogies the names of Uzzah and Ahio appear together in the lineage of Benjamin, though their father appears by a different name (Cf. 1 Chron. 8:7).

At any rate, a few chapters later in the story when plans are made for the ark to finally complete the journey to Jerusalem the words of David are revealing. After seeking for answers for this disaster, David and the kingdom apparently understood exactly what had been the problem. To quote:

“Then David said, “No one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the Lord chose them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister to him forever. . . . So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord.” 1 Chron. 15: 2,14.

It is inferred quite clearly that part of the problem was that in the case of Uzzah it had not been attended by Levites. The first violation was not in Uzzah’s touching the ark. It starts when Uzzah and his brother arrogantly and boldly presumed on a privilege that was not theirs in the first place.

If anything is clear, then, the ark should have never been in the care of Uzzah and Ahio from the beginning. God might have been just to have struck them down for assuming that they could be guardians of the ark when they had no Levitical credentials. But please notice that God held restraint and was patient in even this. But at one point it apparently went too far, and God was compelled to do something to protect the ark’s sacredness, and more particularly *his* sacredness.

Finally, the ark did rest for a few months at the house of a priestly family, and that family was blessed particularly. God showed this particular favoritism to indicate that he wished for the sacred article to be administrated by the priestly ministry, like it should have been in the first place.

There is a great lesson here. It amazes me, at least, how easily men and women presume on their own opinions when it comes to handling the sacred office of the ministry or priesthood. Like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram they say, “We are all holy, and can bear the censer of intercession.” There is little regard for God’s specific directions or for the precedents of Scripture. Trying to be culturally relevant, they audaciously ignore scriptural authority and substitute their human ideas. And to a point God tolerates these sentiments. But there is a point at

which he can no longer bless and tolerate the humanization of the church, at least if it remains in reality HIS church.

While all men and women are equal with regards to the opportunity for salvation, they are not equal in terms of sacred function and the priesthood and the sacred order God has ordained. Wouldn't it always be better for the church (especially as pertains to the subject of ordination) to act upon the authority of a direct "thus saith the Lord," rather than impose our own modern opinions upon the system that God has devised and set up for reasons perhaps he only knows? Any significant change of venue should not be settled by the opinions of church councils but by the clear leading of the Holy Spirit and direct indication by God. This direction should be humbly, prayerfully, and carefully sought for; and should respect the historical and scriptural precedents.

2. Secondly, we must consider the matter of the new cart:

Of course, we all know that a cart shouldn't have been used in the first place. That is obvious, and was in direct violation of the laws concerning it. This error was committed not out of ignorance, but out of a blatant disregard of God's requirements. It was step two in the irreverent attitude and consequent behavior referred to above. These actions betray an attitude. And I believe it was this attitude that God was reacting to in the story of Uzzah more than the actual act of touching the ark itself.

But there is a further elucidation that must be explored. It is the matter that the cart was "new." There is a reason this detail is recorded.

We might think that if a cart were to be used it would be most appropriate for it to be a new one. But there may have been operative a different motive than this.

The oxen and cart were apparently the property of Uzzah's family and in those days could have been considered an object of pride. If we take the "t" off the end of "new cart" we may come closer to the truth. It was probably Uzzah's idea to use the cart so that he could "show off" his prized possession in an ostentatious manner. This is a reasonable conclusion because we know that these brothers had already assumed for themselves the most honored position in the whole procession. It would not be the only time in history someone would drive his own limousine through the parade. Even though the cart was new, and therefore dangerously unproven, these men could not resist the privilege and the

opportunity of using their handsome cart, rather than carry the ark in the old-fashioned way.

There are echoes in this story of the offering of Cain. God did not accept Cain's offering. He refused to accept it, not because Cain's offering was in itself flawed, or that it was not valuable, but because it was not according to God's direction. To Cain he said, "If you do well (or right), will you not be accepted?" But Cain insisted on an offering of his own devising and creation.

There is a lesson here as well. We cannot come to God on the basis of our own works, no matter how well crafted or beautiful they may seem to us. We must come to him on the basis of His Grace, and worship him in the manner that he approves. This is a supreme test for all Christians. The manner of worship is very important for this reason. Disregard of these principles seem to have motivated these two brothers, Uzzah and Ahio, in what they did.

3. Next, we must consider the matter of what really happened. Was this really an attempted rescue?

While this is a difficult matter to establish with certainty from the scanty information offered us in the passage, we can deduct that Uzzah's act was not a noble one; in fact it may have been a selfish one.

Some expositors read the story in a manner that teaches that Uzzah put out his hand to rescue the ark from falling to the ground. In light of what has gone on before this we cannot be sure this is the case. Uzzah up to this point has not been treating the ark like the sacred treasure it was. If Uzzah's act was a heroic rescue, he should have been made a national hero instead.

The fact is that it does not really say that he attempted to steady the ark. It does not say it fell, or even tipped. It literally says that he "took hold of it," something not even a priest was to do.

The report says that when the ark came to the threshing floor of Nacon that the oxen "stumbled." The word translated in the RSV, "stumbled," can actually have several related meanings, and so it is uncertain which idea we should take. It can mean, "shook," "stumbled," or even "balked."

I think what happened is that when the animals came to the threshing floor they stopped. Oxen were used to tread the grain, and the law prescribed that they could not be muzzled when they were working in this fashion. To the oxen there was the prospect of food and they may simply have gone on strike. Anyone who works with animals knows that they do this. This was at cross-purposes with the procession and Uzzah and Ahio were probably attempting to urge the animals forward. At this stage it is likely that to force the issue Uzzah attempted to help by pushing the cart forward.

Threshing floors were usually a slab of stone or hardened clay and it required effort to get up onto the floor or to pass over it. Especially if the cart came to the “bump” at an awkward angle, Uzzah’s tipping or stranded cart would have suddenly not seemed like such good an idea, and would have been the cause of embarrassment. No doubt, to save face, Uzzah tried to ease the situation by helping out. His worry was not the ark, but rather himself.

Even if this is not the scenario, in no case should have Uzzah taken hold of the sacred article equated with God’s very person. He knew this. Yet it had been in his house for months and no doubt he came to regard it with some familiarity. Even if the ark had fallen off of the cart, or was about to fall, it should have only been picked up by the staves. If the staves were not present, it is yet another careless omission in this comedy of errors.

The thing we must realize, whatever the case, is that in all likelihood, Uzzah’s act was not a noble rescue, but rather an attempt to preserve his own pride.

4. Lastly, we must consider what would ultimately have happened if God had overlooked this reckless behavior.

Uzzah’s act was not carried out in a corner, but before all of Israel. In the light celebration (maybe a little bit too carelessly festive), reverence was forgotten. One has to wonder how often this same attitude prevails in some forms of worship today. The irreverence manifest in some of today’s forms of worship need checked as well, for in them God is not only degraded, but even at times mocked.

If God would have allowed Uzzah’s last irreverent act to pass unchecked we can be sure that respect for the ark and the whole sacred economy would only have gotten worse. When God’s laws are not honored, anarchy and abuse of human

freedoms prevail as well. It is the ultimately the lack of respect for the Law of God that is to blame for the crime and hurt that is taking over the nations of the earth today.

Therefore, with all things considered, might it not have been an act of a **merciful** God to interrupt and terminate the breach that Uzzah had made *toward him*? I believe that a God who stands by and does nothing about growing abusive behavior, or even about bold and brash irreverence in a theocracy or a church, is not ultimately a loving God. There has to be some limit for even divine patience.

God actually showed incredible patience toward Uzzah and all of Israel, but there was a line that apparently could not be crossed among his own covenant people. The Philistines might touch the ark and live, but they were not expected to be as responsible as those who possessed the oracles of God. It appears that Uzzah's final act was only the last straw of a string of unrequited acts, any of which God would have been just in punishing. But God's patient love is seen in what HE DOES NOT DO as well as in what he does.

Many acts against God are punishable, even to the degree of death. But God does not often inflict this penalty, because such a response is not in his character, and is to him a strange work. It sends the wrong message. One way God tries to demonstrate the importance of loving obedience is to inflict the severest penalties only occasionally, and he often does this at the beginning of a reform movement. While he would be just to inflict penalties in many cases, *he limits these to the fewest necessary* to demonstrate the life preserving importance of faithful and loving obedience to him:

- At the very beginning God punished Cain because of his improper worship.
- At the time of Exodus God inflicted punishments on Nadab and Abihu for their irreverent trespass.
- At the beginning of the occupation of Canaan and the time of the Judges God gave an example to Israel in the matter of Achan.
- At the beginning of the time of the kings God punished Uzzah for his impropriety.

- At the beginning of the Christian era God spoke to the church in the matter of Annanias and Sapphira.

Through all of these incidents, and others, God is really displaying his love. He knows when enough is enough, and he gives loving warning in all of these. He loves with an everlasting love even those who he is forced to punish. Unfortunately, none of these plaintiffs loved him more than they loved themselves. They selfishly sought to advance their own interests using association with the church of God as a cover for their evil designs and ambitions. God in his wisdom knew that it was necessary to address each of these situations in the way he did.

Conclusion:

I think there is evidence enough to maintain that Uzzah may not have been as innocent and noble as many presume. God may be thought to be harsh and severe at times in his treatment of men, but on fuller reflection he consistently is not. Whom he loves, he too rebukes and chastens. A God who will not stand up to evil and growing abuse is not a God of love.

We are called to trust a God who does not act on impulse, but does only what is necessary to ensure obedience to the same laws that are the laws of life and success. The God of Uzzah is still the God of Calvary. He will accept all who show their love by obeying him. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. One cannot do better, consequently, than to enter a covenant relationship with this all wise, all knowing, ever- loving Friend.

Appendix A: *Fallen Angels and the Sons of God*

“The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. . . . There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.” Gen. 6:2, 4

There is no doubt that for centuries, even going back into early Judaism, that there was a tradition that the giants of Genesis 6:2ff. were created from a union of fallen angels who had co-mingled with antediluvian women. This view has spawned a number of incredible ideas and interpretations represented in various ancient writings. Some interpreters suggest that this idea occurs also in the Bible (Gen 6:2,4; 1 Peter 3:19-21; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

This author has read extensively on this subject in some of the pseudepigraphical and apocryphal writings, but he is not convinced that this is necessarily the interpretation that the apostles and Bible writers understood. The idea should not be supported as biblical for at least some of the following reasons:

1. Nearly all of the ancient races probably began as "giants," anyway (and not as pictured in modern anthropological works as awkward and ignorant cave dwellers). The text of Genesis 6:1-4 does not necessarily teach in its purest meaning any such thing as regards fallen angels and women. My opinion is that this idea is a perversion.

The term found in the original Hebrew means simply "rephaim;" that is "giants." It comes from the same root as the typical Old Testament word for giants.

"Nephilim" is actually a word whose meaning is noted as uncertain in lexical works. To automatically equate them with fallen angels is simply an assumption. True, angels are called "sons of God," but likewise Adam is called a "son of God," 4,000 years after his existence on earth (Luke 3:38).

2. To picture angels (spirits) as sexually motivated toward human women of the flesh contradicts the teaching of Jesus who clearly stated that angels are not inclined to perform sexually (cf. Matthew 22:30).

3. There are many things written in non-inspired literature that should not be allowed undue influence upon what we read in the inspired accounts. I simply believe in the process of inspiration and believe that there is a reason why certain then current beliefs were not allowed to enter the main corpus of Scripture. Through God's direct intervention and wisdom I think a clear delineation of this belief about fallen angels, women, and giants was not allowed to enter the Bible, even though it is found in many non-inspired sources. What remains in the Bible can be easily explained in other ways (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 81). The Bible writers were not as ignorant as is commonly supposed by critical scholars.

4. There are references that are legitimate in the Scripture about fallen angels, who definitely exist, and are part of Satan's legion of demons. The devil has an army who were expelled from heaven (Rev. 12:1-4). They are figuratively held in chains and reserved for judgment. The word "demon," literally means "little gods" but I believe they can consistently be shown to be Satan's angels.

An example of writings that are not in their totality inspired or are not considered worthy for the canon of Scripture is the book of *1 Enoch*. If possible get an opportunity to read this at a library or seminary library. It isn't always easy to find but I own a copy that I have read for interest many times. The book of 1 Enoch is in a 2-volume work edited by C.H. Charles, called the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Doubleday Publishers. Enoch has like 108 chapters so all of it may not be interesting enough to read. But the reader can tell for themselves by some of the preposterous and fanciful concepts and stories in it why it is not in our modern Bibles.

However, I believe that a genuine copy of the book may have existed, or that part of 1 Enoch is perhaps genuine. It is virtually quoted in Jude, Peter, and Revelation. However, what we have today I am convinced has suffered great corruption through additions or from great license by pseudonymous pretenders.

Anyone is certainly free to come to any conclusion he thinks is true after looking at all the evidence and we must all be open minded about all of this. But my opinion after looking at this concept of angels, giants, and demons is simply that the races of men of old were giants, many of these survived up until the time of the Davidic monarchy, that the angels that sinned are Satan's angels who are destined even yet for the final judgment (Rev 20), and that the "sons of God" who married the women before the flood were simply followers of God who became intermingled by marriage with worldly associations and thus the early faith was corrupted. The wickedness of man eventually became so great that God found it necessary to cleanse the earth with a flood.

Appendix B: *The Problematic Identity of Nabonidus*

“Oh thou king (Belshazzar), the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar, thy father a kingdom, majesty, and glory, and honor.” Daniel 5:18

Comments Pertaining to the Relationship of Nebuchadnezzar, Nabonidus, and Belshazzar:

A. THE HISTORICAL DATES AND TIMES OF DANIEL

Recent findings in the field of Near Eastern studies, and the finding of archaeological treasures have greatly advanced the understanding of the Babylonian empire. Though I am no authority on such data, certain details provided by those who are students of antiquity are available. The authority of many of these facts we cannot question, but we can perhaps question some of the conclusions adopted as a result of those facts.

One area of discussion is the problematic and mysterious Nabonidus, known in history as the last king of Babylon, of whom the Bible says nothing. Belshazzar, the king in charge when Babylon falls is reported by the book of Daniel to have been the son of Nebuchadnezzar, while Babylonian texts refer to him as the son of Nabonidus.

Another particular area of question comes from the regnal years recorded in the book of Daniel and what dates should be accorded to these regnal years: These are particularly Daniel 4; (the beginning and ending of the seven-year exile of Nebuchadnezzar), Daniel 7; the first year of Belshazzar, and Daniel 8; the 3rd

year of Belshazzar. The question is then who were the kings for the times of the book of Daniel and when did they reign?

The typical timeline for the kings of Babylon (see DARCOM, Vol. 2, p. 108) is supplied as follows:

Nabopolasar	626-605
Nebuchadnezzar	605-562
Amel-Marduk	562-560
Neriglissar	560-556
(Labashi Marduk --3 mos.)	556
Nabonidus----Belshazzar	556-539

Babylonian history now presents Belshazzar as the son of King Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.). That Belshazzar acted as a "king" sometime during the reign of his father is now quite well accepted, though for many years it was not. Through the compilation of Babylonian inscriptions, such as the *Prayer of Nabonidus*, the *Harran stele*, and other court records we have in addition these quite well established facts:

1. Nabonidus reigned for about 17 years, beginning in 556 B.C. to the fall of Babylon in 539. He is considered in official Babylonian records as the last king of Babylon. Records indicate he was probably in his sixties when he assumed kingship.
2. Somewhere between his 6th and 7th year Nabonidus retreated (probably a second time) to Tema in Arabia where he spent much of his reign. At this particular time it is said that he gave "kingship" and the auspices over the army to his son (Belshazzar). This is believed to be very close to 550 B.C.
3. Nabonidus spent about 10 years in Tema. There is evidence that this started in the third year of his reign, ca. 553. Certain records bemoan his continual absence from Babylon and his neglect of cultic celebrations and edifices. It is also believed, that he did not die when Cyrus entered Babylon, but died when he was returned to the city sometime after the invasion and fall.

It is commonly accepted that Belshazzar's first year was Nabonidus' six or seventh year. Therefore, summarily, as concerns the date for the 3rd year of

Belshazzar; G. Hasel and others place it quite certainly at 548/547 B.C., his first year being 550/549.)

B. OTHER ANCILLARY MATERIAL OF INTEREST CONCERNING NABONIDUS AND BELSHAZZAR

Before addressing the matter of Nabonidus and Belshazzar some ancillary material now exists that may shed light on the matter. These are quoted for convenience:

Prayer of Nabonidus

"The words of the prayer said by Nabonidus the king of [the Land] Babylon, the [great king, [when he was smitten] with malignant boils by the ordinance of [God Most High] in [the city of] Tema: [With malignant boils] I was smitten for seven years, and so I came to be like the animals; but I confessed my sins] and He pardoned my sins. He had a diviner, who was a Jewish [man of the exiles, and he] said to me: Make a written proclamation that honor, gr[eatness and glor]y be given to the name of G[od Most High. Thus he wrote: When] I was smitten with ma[lignant] boils. . . in Teman [by ordinance of God Most High] for seven years, [I] prayed [and gave praise to] the gods of silver and gold, [bronze and iron] wood, stone and clay, since . . . that th[ey] were gods. . . ."

Prayer of Nabonidus, p. 103, DARCOM, Vol. 2

Babylonian Fragment:

Lines 2-4

Nebuchadnezzar . . . "his life appeared of no value to [him, . . .], and "[h]e stood and [took] the good road to [. . .]"

Lines 5-8

"And (the) Babylon(ian) speaks bad counsel to Evil-Merodach [. . .] Then he gives an entirely different order but [. . .] He does not heed the word from his lips. . . ."

p. 106, DARCOM, (Vol. 2)

C. THE OFFICIAL REGNAL YEARS OF BELSHAZZAR

As clear as the dating of the first year of Belshazzar (550 BC, cf. DARCOM, p. 122) seems, I presume to question it for the following reasons:

1. Although Belshazzar is given "kingship" and absolute leadership over the army in 550 BC this does not necessarily indicate that he was in the fullest sense made "king," to permanently replace Nabonidus; or does it prove he was considered co-regent in the most complete sense.

Nebuchadnezzar was given similar duties back in ca. 605 BC by his father Nabopolassar yet he was not made "king" until his father was dead and he supposedly hastily returned to Babylon to claim the kingdom.

We are not told how long Belshazzar's "kingship" lasted; whether for days or years. Obviously something unusual was going on with Nabonidus, sickness apparently.

2. Daniel, in his book, familiar with the affairs of state, uses the "first" and the "third year of Belshazzar" as definite REGNAL dates. Daniel, familiar with court legalities would not use official terms for a token or temporary "kingship."

3. The following available from the Anchor Bible Dictionary is manifestly important here: The official records of Babylon indicate a pattern that is more certain as to when Belshazzar received official status. This starts in the 11th year of Nabonidus, where Belshazzar now "co-signs" official documents. These "co-signatures" continue for two more years, then discontinue again. Before this time period, Belshazzar does significant errands of state, but is not particularly referred to as full co-ruler. These (11th-13th) are the only three years where we have definite evidence of full co-regency, or kingship as reflected in government documents. This is significant. These years are the eleventh through thirteenth years of Nabonidus, that is: 546/545, 545/544, and 544/543.

D. A THEORETICAL SOLUTION

The problem then is, that history says that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon, yet the Bible seems to make Belshazzar the last king of Babylon. Besides this Daniel says that that Nebuchadnezzar was the father of Belshazzar, not Nabonidus. It is usually explained that a grandfather can sometimes be

referred to as the father of his grandson, and so on. But the Bible still seems to be in error nonetheless, and so it has been charged.

But is this really an erroneous contradiction? I wish to suggest and argue a theory that the Nebuchadnezzar of chapter 4 of Daniel is the one and the same person as Nabonidus. This might be possible for the following reasons:

- a. Numerous names were given for one individual in ancient times. Often the change of one letter or syllable was made when a change in the subject's life or official status changed. (Saul to Paul, Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, etc.)
- b. Sometimes the entire name was changed: Jacob to Israel, Joseph to *Zaphnath Paneah*, Hananiah, Misahel, and Azariah, to Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego, Hadassah to Esther, etc.

Daniel himself was also known as *Belteshazzar*.

Nabonidus then, could simply be a name used which differentiates him from the former Nebuchadnezzar. For we know from the biblical account that Nebuchadnezzar had two reigns, before and after his seven-year illness. If recording officials in the second kingship period made any official reference, such as: "the fourth year of Nebuchadnezzar," for example, it would be incredibly confusing. Which "fourth" year? It could ostensibly refer in this case to specific years that were as far apart in elapsed time as fifty years (suppose 601 and/or 552).

- c. When one thinks about it, it is highly unlikely that Nebuchadnezzar, who has his kingdom restored to him after his embarrassing illness, would want to be associated with the stigma of being the same king who "lost his mind." A name change would have been quite necessary.
- d. For governmental purposes, and for official records and dating purposes, it would be essential to differentiate the two kingships of Nebuchadnezzar with different official names.

BUT HOW COULD NABONIDUS POSSIBLY BE NEBUCHADNEZZAR?

Objections can naturally be made to the mutual identity of Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus. But are these objections entirely valid? The *Prayer of Nabonidus*, for instance, is incredibly similar and harmonious to the Danielic account.

Here are some possible observations that might dismiss certain objections for applying the *Prayer of Nabonidus* to the experience of Nebuchadnezzar:

1. No public Babylonian prayer or document would clearly state that the king had formerly lost his reason anyway. Therefore the description in official records lacks the forthright honesty of the Bible text.
2. The description of Daniel 4 would not negate the possibility of the infliction of boils as found in the prayer of Nabonidus. Would not such an ailment "drive one from among men" and would not the feverish infection of boils, plus the extreme pain and itching, bring with it delirium, seen as madness? All one needs to do is refer to the book and the experience of Job.

In addition, Deuteronomy, chapter 28 associates boils with madness. In this lengthy chapter Moses enumerates the blessings and/or the curses that those who accept or reject God's sovereignty and guidance will experience. As a direct result of failing to obey God's voice and commandments, the subject will receive God's judgment upon himself:

"The Lord will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish. And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. . . . (vs. 22, 23)

The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart. . . . (vs. 27, 28)

So you shall be driven mad because of the sight which your eyes see. The Lord will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head. . . . (vs. 34,35)"

We must note that these punishments from God; boils and inflammation and like symptoms are associated with fever (wet with the dew of heaven; Dan 4:15, 33); with madness (Dt. 28:27,28, 34,35); with brass and iron (Dan 4:15; Dt 28:23;

yoke of iron vs.48)); and inferentially with punishment due to idolatry and the worship of gods of wood, and stone (Dt 28: 36,64, etc.).

3. Someone with this affliction could experience it in both Babylon and Tema. The fact that it is associated in the tablets with Tema does not prove that he wasn't first struck with the difficulty in Babylon. Nor can one prove that Nebuchadnezzar did not at any time travel back and forth between the two.

The facts fit the following suggested scenario quite well:

1. 605-562 --First reign of Nebuchadnezzar
2. 562-556 --Interim kingships beginning with Amel-Marduk
3. 556-553 --Nabonidus (Nebuchadnezzar) back in Babylon; kingdom restored to him as in Bible account.
4. 553 --Nabonidus retires to Tema in his third year
5. 550 -- Belshazzar assumes some military duties
6. 546--Belshazzar fully elevated to full officialdom.
7. 543--Belshazzar disappears from official documents because the ten years of Nabonidus' retirement in Tema are ended and Nabonidus is perhaps able to resume some local responsibility. However, Belshazzar is not ultimately demoted, and probably in the end takes the most of the kingdom's duties for his aging father, who is called his father correctly in Daniel 5:11,18.
8. 539-- Fall of Babylon

Of paramount importance are the following considerations that have influence with this theory:

1. The time of "interim kingships; i.e., Evil-Marduk, Neriglissar, etc., add to exactly seven years.
2. The death of Nebuchadnezzar is usually assumed in 556, B.C., but is this a proven historical fact? His madness and demise could easily have been treated publicly as "death."
3. Nebuchadnezzar was "but a youth" when he became king, yet he was of military age, leading the army. (Josephus: quoting Berosus; *Against Apion*, i.19; Walker, p. 614).

An archaeological tablet apparently exists which provides a horoscope for Nebuchadnezzar, which astronomically fixes his birthday as June 15, 624, B.C.

Therefore he was likely older than 14 but younger than 20 in 605 B.C. when he began his reign.

Consequently, if he was about 15 in 605 B.C., he would have been about 65 in 556 B.C. If he was about 19 in 605 B.C. he would have been about 69 years old in 556 B. C., still in his sixties. These are exactly the age parameters assigned to the military general Nabonidus at this time (His "sixties;" *Harran Stela*, cf. *IDB*, vol. 3, p. 494)).

4. The Bible is simply telling us what the truth of the matter is. Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus are the same person, thus the Bible simply says: "I, Nebuchadnezzar." Scholars typically assume that the Bible is wrong and the Babylonian records are right. In this case, both actually may be right because they are perhaps the same person with different names.

5. The book of *Daniel* could then be correct in saying that Belshazzar was the son of Nebuchadnezzar.

6. The reference to the queen mother familiar with the life and experience of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel, chapter 5 bridges the whole picture together.

The queen mother mentioned would have been a wife of Nebuchadnezzar, and probably the mother of Belshazzar. Her death is not recorded, but the death of the mother of Nabonidus is.

Records indicate the death of the mother of Nabonidus came in 550 B.C. She was 104 years old. Thus accordingly, this woman would have been the grandmother of Belshazzar. She was from near Haran, probably the birthplace and home of Nebuchadnezzar and his parents. She was therefore born in about 654 B.C. and would have been about 30 when Nabonidus was born. This might have been about 624; which is, as we have already seen, when Nebuchadnezzar would have been born (Cf. Price, *The Greatest of the Prophets*, p. 44).

7. The failures of Nabonidus to fully support the festivals and idolatrous gatherings is explained by his knowledge of the true God of heaven, which is

recorded as fact in the *Book of Daniel*. Babylonian history naturally would represent this differently.

CONCLUSION

I would like to suggest that Nabonidus and Nebuchadnezzar were the same person. Nebuchadnezzar who became king early in his life, lost his position in ca. 562 due to his illness.

Yet we note that apparently he is not “dead” when he “gives bad counsel” to Amel-Marduk. During the next seven years the kingdom goes through a troubled period with several rulers. Upon the restoration of his health effected by the Jewish prophet Daniel, the kingdom was restored to Nebuchadnezzar. The public may not have been fully aware of how an elderly general of the army (sixties) could so easily receive the kingdom; except that he was the former king, who never was of royal stock anyway, nor was his father before him.

Belshazzar, who is the son in line, or even the firstborn son of a more recent queen, shares at times the responsibilities of the kingdom. His first real regnal year was near 546 BC. Nebuchadnezzar is about 18 when he becomes king, about 61 when he goes mad, and about 68 when he has the kingdom restored to him. He lives to the age of 85, consistent with the information regarding the age of Nabonidus at his death. The proclamation by Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel makes sense in this light, in that the reason for his proclamation (chapter 4) is made manifest; to explain to the populace who he is and all of what has happened to him. Naturally, however, it was not in the best interest of the political entities in the kingdom to preserve this proclamation and knowledge.

In the great prophecy of Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar is identified as the great head of gold. As one king he represents the Babylonian kingdom. The inference is that his reign is inclusive of the full duration of Babylon’s dominance. If the scenario offered in this treatise is correct, then the puzzle pieces fit. The seventy years of Babylon were basically the seventy years of Nebuchadnezzar.

We cannot say if information will be forthcoming to prove the truth of these assumptions. As further light shines on the past it would be no surprise to me to

find that these assertions are true. Even if not, the validity of inspiration will not ultimately be damaged just because we didn't have all the necessary information, or because *we* have accidentally misinterpreted the truth of the matter.

At the very least, we can be sure of one thing. The great Word of God will stand tall at the end of the investigation. The integrity of God's Word and his ways should never be questioned simply because we do not understand some things or because our own reasoning is not satisfied. In spite of our questions and challenges, the Word of the Lord will stand forever.