

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 140
“THE ISSUE IN THE FINAL CRISIS”

John Paulien, Ph. D.,
Chairman, New Testament Department
Andrews University Theological Seminary

REFLECTIONS ON THE YEAR 2005

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
Retired Prof. of church History and Theology
Andrews University

As the year 2005 is fast coming to an end, it behooves us to pose for a moment to reflect on the major events that have impacted mankind during the past 12 months. At this time various media organizations present THE YEAR IN REVIEW, by pasting together highlights of all the major stories that have captured world attention.

For the purpose of this newsletter, I wish to focus only on two major developments, both of which have prophetic significance. The first is the sufferings and disasters that dominated 2005. The second is the death of Pope John Paul II followed by the election of Pope Benedict XVI that has shown the influence of the papacy upon mankind.

2005: THE YEAR OF SUFFERINGS AND DISASTERS

This past year may go down into the annals of history as a year filled with tragedies, sufferings, and death. The year started when disaster relief efforts were just beginning for the millions of people in southern Asia whose lives were devastated by one of the worst tsunamis in history that struck December 26, 2004. Thousands were added daily to the official death toll which eventually reached a staggering 230,000 victims.

At year's end Louisiana and Mississippi are still in the early stage of the recovery from the floods that followed after Hurricane Katrina hit on August 29, breaching the levees along Lake Pontchartrain. When the levees broke, the water rose, and the country watched for a week a great American city reduced to ruinous scene of looting, shooting, fires and

bloated corpses floating in the reeking, toxic muck left behind by the storm.

The hurricane also devastated towns and cities along the coast of Mississippi. At year end, the victims of Katrina still remain scattered across the United States, unsure when or whether they want to return to their homes.

The hurricanes kept coming. Four weeks after Katrina, came Rita, with menacing winds gusting to 185 mph that tore through east Texas and west Louisiana. Then Wilma slashed through Florida, leaving 6 million people without electricity.

In Central America Hurricanes Stan killed far fewer people, but the resultant floods and mud slides affected about two million people. In the meantime, in the Sahel region of Western Africa, a terrible food crisis has unfolded, afflicting about 3.6 million people in Niger alone. A similar food crisis is ravaging parts of Southern Africa where 10-12 million people are facing severe food shortage.

Late in the year a severe earthquake hit Pakistan, affecting also India to the south and Afghanistan to the north, and leaving more than 80,000 dead and an estimated 3 million homeless.

We can add to the list of disasters the ongoing wars in Africa, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the terrorists attacks in Britain, France, and elsewhere.

On July 6, cheers broke out on the London subway as news spread that London had been awarded the 2012 Olympic Games. But 24 hours later, the cheers turned into screaming as those same subway cars were filled with smoke and blood and panic. During the morning rush hour, terrorists killed 52 commuters and injured more than 700 in the worst attack on London since World War II.

In Darfur, Sudan, about 200,000 people have died from the violent conflict that erupted in 2003, and persistent insecurity still displaces 2.3 million people in the Democratic Republic of Congo and up to two million in Northern Uganda.

The war in Iraq raged for a third year and the war against terrorism entered its fifth, while Americans are pondering if and when it will ever end. American deaths in Iraq topped 2200. The steady military deaths in Iraq, leave behind grieving families and a nation increasing distressed and bitter over the war.

What is the Lord Telling Us Through Disasters?

This past year has been filled with disasters, tragedies, and death. Thoughtful Christians who reflect on the magnitude of disasters experienced during 2005, are seeking for answers. They want to know, What is the Lord telling us through the recent rash of disasters that have reached epic proportions? The answer is found in Christ's words uttered in the face of the tragedy that killed 18 persons when the tower in Siloam fell upon them: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). Christ did not spend His time arguing about who was to be blamed for the tragedy. Instead, He reminded His listeners that tragedies are a wake up call to repent.

The present intensification of natural and man-made disasters must be seen as clear signs of God's final warning to mankind of the impending divine judgment. These disasters tell us that, as in the experience of ancient nations, God will not allow human rebellion and wickedness to continue much longer (Gen 15:16). Soon Christ will come to bring an End to the colossal crises that are engulfing our fragile planet (Rom 8:19-22). Since these things are about to happen, "What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God"? (2 Pet 3:11:123).

2005: THE YEAR OF PAPAL POPULARITY

The Religion Newswriters Association rated the death of Pope John Paul II, followed by the election of Pope Benedict XVI, as the top two stories in religion for 2005. Participants also overwhelmingly picked John Paul as the year's top "religion newsmaker."

In the history of the papacy, the year 2005 will be remember as the year when the popularity of the pope reached a new level of worldwide

admiration. This became evident especially during the unprecedented TV coverage given to John Paul II's last days, his funeral, and the election of his successor. These events brought the Vatican, the papacy, the splendor of St. Peter's basilica, and the pomp and pageantry of the Catholic liturgy, into the home of countless millions around the world.

The Popularity of John Paul II

Never before mankind had seen three United States Presidents kneeling for about five minutes in front of a pope's casket, heads bowed, as choral music filled the majestic St. Peter's Cathedral. Joining the American delegation were first lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice.

More than 100 official delegations attended the funeral, including four kings, five queens, and more than 70 prime ministers. Countless dignitaries, cardinals, bishops, and over 700,000 people rubbed shoulders in St. Peter during the three hours ceremony of John Paul II's funeral.

Beyond St. Peter in the streets of Rome an estimated 4 million pilgrims watched the funeral through large screens. Around the world it is estimated that over 2 billion people watched the funeral in stadiums, churches and private homes. Flags were flown at half-mast in many countries, including Cuba, that declares three days of mourning. Never before in human history so many people of all political and religious persuasions honored, not a rock star, or a king, or a queen, or a president, but a pope: JOHN PAUL II.

The gathering was a rare display of religious plurality with "Catholic cardinals, black-clad Orthodox clerics, Arab head scarves, Jewish skull caps, Central Asian lambskin hats, and black veils worn by some women." It seems as though the whole world came to Rome to pay tribute to a man who had touched their lives.

An editorial in USA TODAY captures the unprecedented outpouring of sympathy for John Paul II with these vivid words: "In life, Pope John Paul II reached out to the world as no pope ever had. This week, the world reached back with a dramatic outpouring of respect and affection.

An unprecedented flood of presidents and prime ministers, royalty and religious leaders and at least 4 million simple pilgrims swept into Rome to celebrate his life and mourn his death. They came to attend Friday's funeral, to view his three-day lying-in-state or to feel they had gotten close, at least one last time, to the man they felt they knew personally. Scores burst into tears when authorities cut off the line. It was dramatic testimony to the powerful impact of the onetime quarry laborer from Poland who became the larger-than-life leader of the Roman Catholic Church."

The Strategy of Pope Benedict XVI

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, elected on April 19, 2005 as the new Pope Benedict XVI, is continuing to boost the popularity and power of the papacy achieved by his predecessor. For the past 25 years Ratzinger was the power behind the papacy, and now he is exercising himself the papal power. He has served unwaveringly as enforcer of Catholic doctrines and moral values. He laid down strict interpretations of Catholic religious teachings, speaking out against divorce, gay marriage, women ordination, abandonment of celibacy, and other liberal concepts.

In his first Mass as pontiff, Benedict XVI outlined the goals of his papacy, which include the unification of all Christians, reaching out to people of other faiths, restoring unity and identity to the Catholic Church, and fostering peace among the nations. During 2005, Benedict XVI has already shown how he is achieving these objectives. We shall take a brief look at his ecumenical, ecclesiastical, and political endeavors.

Politically, Benedict XVI is influencing the political process by mobilizing bishops and priests to promote the Catholic church agenda. During the U. S. election of 2004, he wrote a memo to Cardinal Theodore of Washington, indicating that priests were to deny communion to supporters of abortion rights. The result was that Catholic John Kerry was denied, not only the communion, but also the votes of many sincere Catholics.

Another example is the emotionally charged referendum intended to dismantle Italy's strict law on assisted fertility. The referendum was

conducted on June 12-13, but failed to pass largely due to the influence of Benedict XVI. The Pope urged the Catholics to boycott the referendum behind the slogan: “Life cannot be put to a vote: Don’t vote”.

During the two days of voting, less than 26 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot, leaving the referendum far short of the 51% needed to pass. This is most unusual for Italy, where 80 to 90 percent of the people usually turns out to vote. Benedict commended the bishops and the priests, calling them “truly good pastors,” for influencing the moral choices of the Italian people.

The referendum is seen as a test of the Catholic Church influence in Italy and Europe as a whole. It shows that even in Italy, where over 90% of the Catholic go to church only three times in their lives—that is, when they are hatched, matched, and dispatched—they still listen and follow the dictates of their church leaders.

Benedict XVI is determined to win the heart and minds of people everywhere. He believes that the Catholic Church has the right to influence the political process by leading people to believe that what is right for the Catholic Church, is good for the country and the world. The initial results of Benedict XVI’s strategy suggests that he is winning major victories.

Ecumenically, Benedict XVI intends to follow the footsteps of John Paul II who fostered his role as the moral and spiritual leader of mankind, by reaching out to people of all faiths. For example, church leaders of different denomination were invited to attend the 24th Eucharistic Congress that was held in Bari, Southern Italy, from May 21 to 29, 2005. The theme of the congress was “Without Sunday, we cannot live.” This was an important congress that promoted in an unprecedented way Sunday observance. Benedict XVI himself closed the congress by delivering an important homily on the importance of rediscovering Sunday observance as a way to revitalize “the harsh wilderness” of Western Christianity.

The response from some Protestant church leaders attending the congress, is very revealing. For example, Bishop Eero Huovinen of the Finnish Lutheran Church, told the Eucharistic Congress: “We Finnish

Lutheran wish to be part of the Catholic Church.” He expressed agreement with the theme of the congress by affirming that “Lutheran cannot live without the sacrament of the Eucharist.” He closed saying: “From the bottom of my heart, I would like to anticipate the day in which Lutherans and Catholics, together, unite in a visible way.”

Bishop Huovinen’s statement is significant for two reasons. First, it shows that the Catholic promotion of Sunday as the day of the eucharistic celebration, serves as a rallying point for Christian unity under the leadership of the Catholic Church. Second, it reveals that the historical doctrinal differences that have divided Protestantism and Catholicism are largely ignored. Part of this development is due to the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which is an important agreement between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Incidentally, Ratzinger played a key role in the formulation of this document which minimizes the differences between the Catholic and Lutheran understanding of justification by faith.

It is worth noting that the Vatican is currently engaged in dialogues or consultations with the major Protestant churches, including our own Seventh-day Adventist Church. The primary objective is not to convert these churches to Catholicism, but to create a climate of respect and mutual acceptance. The success of the Vatican in softening the anti-Catholic teachings and prophetic interpretations of Protestant churches, can be seen in the evangelical acceptance of Roman Catholicism as a legitimate Christian religion. Writing for *Christianity Today*, Timothy George affirms: “Roman Catholicism is not a cult, and the pope is not the Antichrist” (May 26, 2005). It is evident that Protestants are not protesting anymore against the fundamental heresies embedded in Roman Catholicism.

Ecclesiastically, Benedict XVI is determined to continue the tireless efforts of John Paul II to restore unity, and identity to the Catholic Church. Though he describes himself as “shy and unpractical,” his impact on Catholicism has been greater than that of any other contemporary leader, with the notable exception of late Pope John Paul II, his long-time mentor and religious ally. He laid down strict interpretations of religious teachings, silencing left wing theologians and speaking out

against divorce, gay marriage, women ordination, abortion, and other liberal concepts.

Revival of Sunday Observance. To combat the moral relativism and indifferentism of many Western Catholics, Benedict XVI wants to revive liturgical practices, especially the Sunday Eucharistic celebration. Since his election, he has emphasized several times the centrality of the Sunday Eucharist. Speaking of the 2005 Sunday Eucharist year that was inaugurated by John Paul II, Benedict XVI said: “In a very significant way, my pontificate starts as the Church is living the special year dedicated to the Sunday Eucharist. How can I not see in this providential coincidence an element that must mark the ministry to which I have been called? The Eucharist, the heart of Christian life and the source of the evangelizing mission of the Church, cannot but be the permanent centre and the source of the petrine service entrusted to me.”

In several speeches Benedict XVI has emphasized that Sunday observance is a biblical imperative rooted in God’s law. The problem with this view is that Sunday observance is rooted in Catholic traditions, not in God’s law. Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days have a different origin, meaning, authority, and experience.

Revival of Marian Worship. The Pontificate of Benedict XVI during this past year has been punctuated by constant appeals to pray to Mary for guidance and protection. The website “The Marian Thoughts of Pope Benedict VI, “lists over 90 appeals to pray to Mary that Benedict made between April 19 and November 6 (<http://www.udayton.edu/mary/popessaying.html>).

For example, on the day of the Feast of the Assumption, Benedict XVI said: “Mary was taken up body and soul into Heaven: there is even room in God for the body. Heaven is no longer a very remote sphere unknown to us. We have a mother in Heaven. And the Mother of God, the Mother of the Son of God, is our Mother. He himself has said so. He made her our Mother when he said to the disciple and to all of us: ‘Behold, your Mother!’ We have a Mother in Heaven. Heaven is open, Heaven has a heart.” Does this mean that without Mary God does not have a heart?

It is hard to believe how the Catholic Church has succeeded in twisting Christ's words to John: "Behold, your mother" (John 19:27). By these words Jesus entrusted Mary to the care of John, and not mankind to the care of Mary. This is clearly indicated by Christ's statement to Mary: "Woman, behold your son" (John 19:26). By these two statements Jesus first entrusted John to Mary and then Mary to John. In these verses there is no exaltation of Mary as the mother of God and of mankind. the latter is a pure Catholic idolatrous fabrication.

Idolatrous Worship. Worship through Mary, saints, objects, shrines, icons, crucifixes, or statues, is condemned by the Scripture as idolatry. This is the fundamental problem of Catholic worship. It is an idolatrous worship largely depended upon human creatures and objects used as worship aids. Believers are deceived into believing that through Mary, the saints, the Eucharist, holy relics, images, sacred shrines, they can experience the divine. Worshipping God through creatures and objects ends up upstaging preaching, which is God's chosen means for communicating the faith and nurturing the spiritual life of His people.

The Apostle Paul explains that "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ (Rom 10:17). This means that saving faith comes through the reading, preaching and hearing of the Word of God, and not through the partaking of the physical body of Christ or the veneration of "holy" objects.

Church history teaches us that when the preaching of the Word was gradually replaced by a visual worship consisting of the staging of the Mass, Passion Plays, veneration of images, relics, processions, and pilgrimages to holy Marian shrines, the apostasy of the church set in, ushering in what is known as the Dark Ages. The sixteenth century Reformers overwhelmingly rejected the veneration of Mary and of objects as a violation of the Second Commandment. They relied on the preaching of the Word to save souls and the Gospel made significant advances.

Benedict XVI's strategy to revive the Catholic faith by encouraging people to participate actively in the veneration of Mary and the

adoration of God through the rituals of the church, must be seen as part of the end time conflict between the true and false worship of God. The dramatic description of this end time promotion of false worship found in Revelation 13 and 14, is being fulfilled in an unprecedented way today.

To help us understand more fully this prophetic scenario, I am posting chapter 11 of Prof. Jon Paulien's book *What the Bible Says About The End Time*. The title of the chapter is "The Issue in the Final Crisis." You will find this chapter to be a most timely study that relates to our previous two newsletters on the mark and number of the beast as well as the preceding comments on the role of the papacy in promoting end time false worship.

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THE RESPONSE TO THE NEWLY RELEASED CD-ROM ON *THE MARK AND THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST*

The new CD-ROM on *the Mark and The Number of the Beast* was released on December 8, 2005. The response has surpassed our fondest expectations. Students at the Theological Seminary snatched in no time the supply of albums I delivered at the NT Department. Pastors, evangelists, church leaders, and ambitious Adventists have been emailing and calling in their orders from different parts of the world. We have been busy filling your orders.

The vast majority of comments are very positive. What many appreciate is the structured and visual presentation of both the numeric and symbolic interpretations of the mark and number of the beast. Some Bible teachers informed me that they are eager to use this resource for the next class they will teach on *Revelation*.

When I accepted the invitation from Prof. John Paulien to investigate the question of the mark and number of the beast and to share my findings on November 8, 2005 with three seminary classes, I never imagined that I would be embarking on an intriguing study that would captivate me for 15-17 hours a day over a period of three months. What proved to be time consuming, was not only the investigation into the past and present interpretations of the mark and number of the beast, but also the search for pictures of the items mentioned: documents, inscribed tiaras, books, popes, Reformers, Adventist pioneers, and recent scholars who have examined this subject.

I wanted to make this powerpoint presentation as visual as possible, because “seeing is believing.” The 162 powerpoint slides should prove to be a valuable resource for evangelists, pastors, Bible teachers, and anyone engaged in sharing the prophetic message of *Revelation*.

Of all the end-time prophecies found in the Bible, the prediction found in Revelation 13 about the dragon, sea beast, and land beast, working together as a false trinity to enforce false worship upon mankind, stands out for its clear description of the issues in the final conflict.

The CD-ROM album will help you understand that key issue in the final conflict is the proper worship of God. The conflict is a battle for the human mind. John’s reference to the mark and number of the beast, calls for believers to recognize, not external markings or papal titles, but the deceptive worship promoted by a variety of agencies, including the papacy.

If you have not ordered yet your CD-ROM album on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, you can still purchase it until December 31, 2005, for only \$35.00, postage paid, instead of \$50.00. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS

Several subscribers have suggested me to place all the announcements at the end of each newsletter. This is a valid suggestion that I intend to follow in this way. At this juncture, I will only list each announcement. The details of each announcement are given at the end of this newsletter

1. A SPECIAL ONE-TIME HOLIDAY OFFER ON THE PACKAGE OF ALL MY RECORDINGS CONSISTING OF 5 ALBUMS, including the newly released CD-ROM album on *The Mark and the Number of the Beast*. The regular price for the package of the 5 albums is \$450.00, but the **SPECIAL ONE-TIME HOLIDAY OFFER IS ONLY \$100.00**. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

2. A WEEKEND SEMINAR AT YOUR CHURCH: Information on how to invite me for a weekend seminar in 2006.

3. CALENDAR OF UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS.

4. HITACHI PROJECTORS: Recently I received a special overstock discount from HITACHI on the volume purchase of four projectors models: 2000 lumens, 2500 lumens, 3200 lumens, and 4500 lumens. See the details at the end of this newsletter or call me at 269-471-2915

5. TOSHIBA LAPTOPS: Special 30 to 40% discount on Toshiba laptops computers for Adventists. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

5. REMOTE PRESENTER: The smallest and most powerful REMOTE powerpoint presenter by Honeywell. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

7. DA-LITE SCREENS for your church at 30% discount. See the details at the end of this newsletter.

“THE ISSUE IN THE FINAL CRISIS”**John Paulien, Ph. D.,****Chairman, New Testament Department****Andrews University Theological Seminary****Editorial Introduction****Samuele Bacchiocchi**

Professor John Paulien is no stranger to the readers of our END-TIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS. He has contibributed perceptive Bible studies on several occasions. Currently he is serving as Chairman of the New Testament Department and Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Andrews University Theological Seminary.

Besides teachings and writing, Prof. Paulien travels extensively throughout the world, presenting seminars with the help of his wife, Pamela. He has authored over 100 articles and several books, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, *The Book of Revelation, Too Good to be False*, *Present Truth in the Real World*, *What the Bible Says About the End Time*, and *The Deep Things of God*. These books are available in Adventist Book Centers, by calling 1-800-765-6955.

Prof. Paulien is rightly regarded inside and outside the Adventist community, as a foremost authority in Johannine literature, especially the book of *Revelation*. Students have told me that listening to his lectures, is a mind-opening experience. Personally I esteem Prof. Paulien as the leading Advetnist authority on the prophetic books of the Bible.

If you wish that you could go back to school and seat in Prof. Paulien classes, I have good news for you. You do not need to worry about your age or your financial limitations. You do not even need to enroll at Andrews University and spend thousands of dollars of tuition to benefit from Prof. Paulien's instruction.

All what you need to do is simply to order his lectures which have been professionally recorded and packaged in FIVE ALBULMS, EACH CONTAINING 12 CD-ROMs, for a total of 60 CD-ROMs. The set is called THE BIBLE EXPLORER SERIES ON REVELATION and takes

you verse by verse through the whole book of *Revelation*. These lectures are the equivalent of four Seminary courses (about \$2000.00 of tuition), yet they are presented in a way that lay people can understand. Each lecture concludes with spiritual lessons for everyday life.

You can order for the next month (while supply last) the complete set of FIVE ALBUMS WITH 60 CD-ROMs for the incredible special price of only \$125.00, plus \$10 for mailing in the USA or \$25.00 for mailing overseas. Send your order with your personal check to:

Mureli Nunes
Office Manager/Administrative Assistant
New Testament Department
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan 49104

For further information or clarification call the office at (269)471-3219. Sister Nunes will be glad to assist you.

“THE ISSUE IN THE FINAL CRISIS”

John Paulien, Ph. D.,
Chairman, New Testament Department
Andrews University Theological Seminary

When the world faces the consummate deception at the End, is there a simple way that God’s people can tell whose side they are on? Traditionally, Seventh-day Adventists have pointed to the Sabbath/Sunday issue as the central focus of the final crisis. Adventists tend to feel that those who keep the Sabbath will not be deceived when the End comes.

This traditional position, however, is being increasingly rejected by younger Adventists for two primary reasons. For one thing, the word Sabbath doesn’t even appear in the book of Revelation. How could Sabbath worship be the central issue in the final crisis when the word doesn’t even appear in the book of Revelation?

Second, the Sabbath/Sunday issue carries no relevance in today’s world. If you were to tell a secular person, “You ought to go to church on

Saturday rather than on Sunday,” she would likely respond, “What kind of people would argue about such foolishness? Why should I bother to go to church at all?”

Many Adventists, as a result, wonder if our emphasis on the Sabbath/Sunday issue is merely a vestige of the church’s experience with the national Sunday law that was debated in Congress in the 1890s. Now, a hundred years later, states are increasingly removing Sunday laws from their statute books, and the secular environment largely scoffs at such concerns. Is it possible that the environment of the 1890s caused Adventists to misread Revelation? Is the day of worship really the central issue at the End, or are Adventists living in fantasyland?

The Issue in Revelation 13 and 14

The best place to begin answering the above questions is to go back to Revelation 12:17:

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman
and went off to make war
against the rest of her offspring,
those who obey God’s commandments
and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

This text suggests two identifying characteristics of the remnant at the End. They obey the commandments of God and they hold to the testimony of Jesus. These characteristics are echoed in Rev 14:12:

This calls for patient endurance
on the part of the saints
who obey God’s commandments
and remain faithful to Jesus.

In both texts the remnant at the End is made up of people who obey God’s commandments. This characterization of the remnant implies that the commandments of God will somehow be an issue between God’s faithful people and those who are deceived. But since many of the commandments (such as the prohibition against stealing) are com-

monly acknowledged, it is pertinent to ask whether Revelation narrows the focus of conflict to one or more commandments in particular. This is in fact the case.

The locus of the conflict between the dragon and the remnant centers on a single word that appears over and over in Rev 13 and 14, “worship.” In Rev 13:4, “Men worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast.” In Rev 13:8, “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast.” In Rev 13:12, the inhabitants of the earth are forced to worship the first beast, and in Rev 13:15, they are forced to worship the image of the beast. And so it goes (cf. Rev 14:6,9-11).

Eight times in Rev 13 and 14 attention is called to worship. It is the crucial word throughout this section of the book. At the End the testing truth for the world is centered on the matter of proper worship. This is nothing new. Right from the beginning, the brothers Cain and Abel divided over the issue of worship (Gen 4:3-9). On Mount Carmel the issue was worship (1 Kings 18:16-46). When Satan tempted Jesus in the desert the crucial issue was worship (Matt 4:8-10). Does the focus on worship call our attention to any commandments in particular? Without a doubt. The first four commandments--the so called first table of the law--are directly concerned with our relationship to God and with worship.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the unholy trinity described in Rev 13 not only offers a counterfeit of the persons of the Godhead but of the first four commandments as well. The first commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before me,” but the sea beast takes the place of God by receiving worship of itself (Rev 13:4,8). The second commandment warns against the worship of images, yet the land beast raises up an image to be worshipped (Rev 13:14,15). The third commandment says, “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God,” but the sea beast has the names of blasphemy written all over it (Rev 13:1,5,6).

The fourth commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath day.” Ancient covenant tablets (contract documents) were stamped in the cen-

ter with a seal of ownership and authority. Since the ten commandments follow the form of ancient covenant tablets we should not be startled that they too have a seal of ownership and authority in the center, the Sabbath command.

For in six days
the Lord made the heavens
and the earth,
the sea,
and all that is in them,
but he rested on the seventh day.
Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day
and made it holy. (Exod 20:11)

The above statement is the only place in the ten commandments where the basis of God's authority over all creation (He is the creator) is stated. This concept of a seal is important in Revelation as well, the 144,000 are sealed on their foreheads (Rev 14:1, cf. Rev 7:3,4; Exod 31:13,17). The unholy trinity offers a counterfeit to the seal as well, the mark of the beast (Rev 13:16,17). Thus, all four commandments in the first table of the law come under attack by the unholy trinity of Rev 13. The first table of the law is at the center of the battle between the dragon and the remnant.

This emphasis on the first four commandments is underlined in other ways in Rev 13 and 14. Followers of the beast are marked on the forehead or on the hand. This concept recalls what many Jews consider to be the most important text in the Hebrew Bible:

Hear, O Israel,
The Lord our God,
the Lord is One;
Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and
with all your soul and
with all your strength. (Deut 6:4,5)

Jesus considered these words a nutshell summary of the first table of the law (see Matt 22:37-40). If you love God with all your heart, you

won't serve other gods, you won't set up idols, you won't blaspheme His name, and you won't worship on another day. In that light notice the words of Deut 6:8:

Tie them (commandments) as symbols on your hands
and bind them on your foreheads.

Clearly the mark of the beast is an intentional counterfeit of the first table of the law.

A further pointer to the first table of the law can be found in Rev 14:6,7. This passage offers the same motivations for obedience that can be found in the first table of the law. What is a motivation? It is an incentive to do what one is asked to do. My wife and I spent nearly ten years potty-training children. People would suggest all kinds of motivations to get little ones to do what you wanted them to do. An example of the positive motivations suggested was graham crackers. "Do that (the right thing) and you will get this!" An example of a negative motivation was a wooden spoon. "Do that (the wrong thing) and you will get this!" Needless to say, I consider myself far less expert in potty-training now than I did before I had children of my own.

The first motivation for keeping the commandments is related to salvation, a positive motivation. "Since I am the One who brought you out of slavery in Egypt, why would you want to serve someone else?" (Exod 20:1-3) The second motivation is more negative, the motivation of judgment. "Since I am a God who punishes idolaters, please take these commands seriously!" (Exod 20:4-6) All parents have had to use this type of motivation at one time or another. The third motivation is in the fourth commandment, "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth." (Exod 20:11) This is the motivation of creation. "Since I made you, I know what is best for you."

Rev 14:6-7 sets these same three motivations in the context of the End. The first angel has the "eternal gospel" (Rev 14:6), the motivation of salvation. He also warns that "the hour of His judgment has come." (Rev 14:7) And he calls on everyone to worship the Creator (Rev 14:7). The first angel's message, therefore, contains the same motivations as the first table of the law. The text of Revelation thirteen and fourteen,

therefore, offers a number of indications that how one relates to the first table of the law is the primary issue at the End.

I want to digress for a moment. In chapter seven, I noted that Adventists often seem to be less caring and less ethical than the average secular person. We can be more interested in saving a dollar than in the welfare of the person we're doing business with. The usual excuse people give when Adventists fall short ethically and relationally is something like "Satan works harder to make God's people look bad. He doesn't need to work so hard on those who don't serve God." That is probably true. But there may be an additional explanation.

In the book of Revelation the great issue at the End is related to the first table of the law. Those who are waiting for Jesus to come will be concerned about proper worship. On the other hand, in the Gospel of Matthew the big concern at the End is the second table of the law. Those who are waiting for Jesus to come will be concerned about people. They will treat others the way Christ has treated them. Matthew has an ethical emphasis, Revelation has a theological emphasis. Context is the reason for the difference. In Matthew the disciples are being spoken to. For them the testing truth at the End is how they treat people. In Rev 14 the message is for the world. For the world the testing truth at the End has to do with one's fundamental relationship to God.

Now when Adventists look for their marching orders in the Bible the first place they go is not to Matthew but to Revelation, especially Rev 14:6-12, the passage we are dealing with in this chapter. The central emphasis of the Advent movement, therefore, is direct loyalty to God rather than the more ethical emphasis of Matthew. Both emphases are clearly of major importance. But those familiar with Adventist evangelism know that the ethical aspect of the New Testament gets very little play in comparison with our emphasis on the Sabbath, the Mark of the Beast, tithing and other aspects of our direct relationship with God. Is it any wonder that some Adventists give the impression that they would find it easier to cheat in business and to abuse spouse or children than to eat a piece of pork? Is it possible that as a people we have been offering "testing truth" for the world (the first table of the law) for so long that we have overlooked the "testing truth" for ourselves (the second table of the law)?

The Sabbath in Rev 14

Coming back to the main point of this chapter, it is clear that the crucial issue for the world at the End is how it relates to the first table of the law. But is it possible to go a step further and say that the Sabbath command is in some sense the ultimate issue in the final crisis? I believe it is. But in order to demonstrate the centrality of the Sabbath command, it is necessary to briefly discuss the relationship of the Book of Revelation to the Old Testament.

Although the book of Revelation is filled with references to the Old Testament, it never quotes the Old Testament. It merely alludes to it with a word here and a phrase there. Figuring out what Old Testament texts the Revelator is referring to at a given point can be a complex matter, which I have addressed at some length in an earlier book. There are only a handful of places in Revelation where you can find as many as four, five, or six words in common with an Old Testament source. These are, of course, among the clearest allusions to the Old Testament in the Apocalypse. One of these places is the last part of Rev 14:7:

Worship him who made
the heavens,
the earth,
the sea, and
the springs of water.

What Old Testament background text is in mind here? In my scholarly Greek text (United Bible Societies, third edition), which is certainly not biased toward Adventism, the margin indicates that the above sentence is an allusion to Exod 20:11, the fourth commandment.

What is the significance of this quotation? Simply this: seven times in Revelation 13-14 the word “worship” is applied to the unholy trinity. “They worshipped the dragon.” “Worship the beast.” “Worship the image of the beast.” Only one time in this whole section is there a call to worship the true God. If true versus false worship is the central issue at the End, this passage (Rev 14:7) is the central text of the section, perhaps of the entire book. When Revelation finally gets around to calling on people to worship the true God, it does so in the context of the

fourth commandment, the Sabbath command. In a special sense, therefore, the author of Revelation understood the Sabbath to be THE crucial issue in the final crisis.

In both texts (Rev 14:7 and Exod 20:8-11) the call to worship takes place in the context of creation. One of the best reasons to worship God is the fact that He created us (this is also the theme of Rev 4:9-11). As the memorial of creation, the Sabbath points continually to God as the object of worship. The issue in the final crisis, therefore, is not limited to the Sabbath, but the Sabbath is an integral part of the issue.

The Relevance of the Sabbath

Who cares, on the other hand, what John the Revelator thought? His inspired opinion does not settle the matter of relevance. Is there anything about the Sabbath issue that makes it worth bringing to the attention of the whole world in spite of the fact that it seems out of touch with the average person today? Why would God pick an issue like this as the central focus of the End-time crisis? I would like to suggest three reasons.

One of these reasons is that the Sabbath, rightly understood, is the ideal response to the gospel. The gospel tells us that Jesus Christ has earned for us what we could not earn for ourselves; a right standing with God (Rom 3:21-24). God alone is holy (Rev 15:4), yet because of His mighty acts in Christ, His people are able to stand righteous before Him, by faith now and by sight at the End (Rev 15:2-4 cf. Rev 12:11). While the Bible encourages us to serve God and one another (Matt 25:31-46), we can add nothing to that perfect work of Christ that makes us right with God. The only appropriate response to that perfect work is a repentant spirit that rests in His finished work.

The Sabbath is the ideal response to the gospel because it is founded on the principle of rest after a finished work. As in the first creation God worked and then rested, so in the new creation Jesus did His work of perfect righteousness, died on the cross (declaring, "It is finished"), and rested in the tomb on the Sabbath day. When individuals discover the gospel the Sabbath can be a constant reminder to rest from the endless struggle to measure up. It is so natural and human to try to earn our

salvation. We need a regular reminder that the first work of the Christian is to rest in what Christ has done.

There remains, then,
a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;
for anyone who enters God's rest
also rests from his own work,
just as God did from His.
Let us, therefore,
make every effort to enter that rest. . . (Heb 4:9-11)

A second reason why the Sabbath commandment becomes the center of attention at the End is that it is an ideal way to test whether people are truly loyal to God. The Sabbath command is different from the other nine commandments. All the others have a certain basis in reason and self-interest; after all, the principles of the second table of the law (how we relate to others) are the foundation of government in most countries. "Thou shalt not kill" is logical to anyone who does not wish to be killed. "Thou shalt not steal" makes sense to anyone who wants to protect his or her hard-earned possessions. If I exhibit a pattern of lying, it makes it hard for other people to be honest with me. Commands like these are reasonable and even contain a certain amount of self-interest. The same goes for the first three commandments concerning our relationship with God. If God is Who He claims to be, it makes no sense to worship someone else. It makes no sense to worship a lifeless idol. It certainly makes no sense at all to blaspheme His Name.

The one part of the Ten Commandments that is not logical is the command to worship on Saturday rather than on some other day. Such a command is so lacking in logic and self-interest that secular people find it easy to ignore. After all, no one has been able to scientifically demonstrate a significant difference between Saturday and any other day of the week. The sun shines and the rain falls in the usual amounts. The earth continues to spin and revolve around the sun. The only difference between Saturday and other days is that God Himself made a distinction between them. To keep the Sabbath is to take God at his word in spite of the fact that the five senses can perceive no evidence that to do so is reasonable.

It is this very “irrelevance” that makes the Sabbath an ideal test of loyalty at the End. There can be no real test of loyalty where self-interest is involved. If I were to say to you, “I want to see how loyal you are to me. I have placed \$1000.00 under a bush outside your house. If you are really loyal to me, you will get up right now, get that \$1000 and spend it on yourself.” Is that a good test of loyalty? I don’t think so. Most of you would gladly do what I said even if you didn’t like me! Why? Because it is in your self-interest to do so.

The real test of loyalty comes when there is no self-interest involved. God simply says, “Do it because I asked you to.” The Sabbath test reminds me of the original test in the Garden of Eden. A piece of fruit. I’m sure it was tasty. It was probably also nutritious. The only reason not to eat was because God said so.

At the End, the Sabbath becomes the ideal test to see if we serve God because of who He is, or if we serve Him only for what we can get from Him. When Sabbath keeping comes at the expense of job, family, or even life itself, the universe will know that God’s people serve Him with whole hearts. And God’s people will know the full price of loyalty.

Finally, I believe the Sabbath is important at the End because it is part of following Jesus all the way. When Jesus was on this earth, He never kept Sunday; He kept Saturday. He set an example of Sabbath keeping. If we want to follow Jesus all the way, we will follow Him also in His observance of the Sabbath. And we can know that His perfect Sabbath keeping covers our honest failures to reach the ideal of resting in His finished work.

Having said this I should probably offer some cautions regarding the presentation of this message in a secular world. Although the Sabbath will become painfully relevant at the End, that relevance is far from obvious to those who have not invested in the kind of Bible study that we have done in this book. As I pointed out in an earlier book, putting the Sabbath/Sunday issue up front in our dealings with secular people will usually cost us any credibility we may have with them. Knowledge of Sabbath/Sunday issues is not a felt need in the secular environment. But

as people develop in their understanding and appreciation of Scripture, they usually begin to develop a corresponding willingness to follow God wherever He might lead them. I have never known secular people to balk at Sabbath keeping once they have come to know and love God in the context of a vibrant relationship with an Adventist Christian or congregation.

The Bible tells us, therefore, that the Sabbath command in Rev 14:7 is the purposeful counterpart to the deceptions described in the previous chapter. Those deceptions are so severe that the full evidence of the senses indicates that the unholy trinity is correct and God's people are wrong. In a time of great deception a seemingly arbitrary test of loyalty such as that offered in Revelation has particular force. Only those totally committed to God and His commandments would obey Him in spite of the evidence of their senses.

When the world is falling apart and every wind of doctrine is blowing, full loyalty to God will prove to be the only sensible way to live.

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As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of January 2006. It is always a privilege and pleasure for me to ministers to our fellow believers in England. The reception and response is always very encouraging. I wish to extend my personal, warm invitation to all who are able to attend one of the followings rallies.

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Location: Old Westbury SDA Church, 211 Jericho Turnpike, Old Westbury, New York 11568.

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Location: 3291 North St. Johns Lane, Ellicott City, MD 21042

For information call Pastor Ben Boggess at (410) 461-7691 or (410) 465-6864

JANUARY 20-21: DENVER: ARVADA SDA CHURCH

Location: 7090 West 64th Avenue, Arvada, Colorado 80003

For information call Pastor Gordon Anic at (303) 437-6636 or (303) 422_2369.

JANUARY 25: ANDREWS UNIVERSITY: TAPING OF LECTURE ON *THE MARK AND THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST*

Location: Michiana Fil-Am SDA Church, 8454 Kephart Lane, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103.

For Information call Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi at (269) 471-2915.

FEBRUARY 3-4: LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY CHURCH

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Christian regards

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
Retired Professor of Theology and Church History, Andrews University
4990 Appian Way
Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Phone (269) 471-2915 Fax (269) 978-6898

E-mail sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com

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