

"September 11 and God's Mysterious Mercy"

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

For many subscribers this newsletter may come as a surprise and a disappointment. Surprise to find a perceptive essay on God's mysterious mercy, even in the tragic event of September 11. The essay is written by a guest scholar, Jon Paulien, Ph. D., who is serving as Professor of New Testament at Andrews University Theological Seminary. I will introduce him and his work more fully later on. Disappointment to discover that my long-awaited Bible study on the 1260 days prophecy, is still postponed. Let me explain what has happened.

During the past five weeks I spent over 200 hours researching and writing the essay entitled "An Amazing Sevenfold Prophecy." This study is designed to examine the seven Bible texts (two in Daniel and five in Revelation) mentioning the prophetic period of three and a half times/1260 days/42 months. I began the research at home and I did some of the writing in Singapore and Malaysia. While overseas I declined all the invitations to do sight-seeing, in order to devote every spare moment to this project. I was determined to complete the first installment and email it you as soon as I returned from overseas.

The first draft of this Bible study dealing with the three and a half times prophecy of Daniel 7:25, was completed about three weeks ago. The study shows that this sevenfold prophecy has a great message of hope and reassurance for God's people today. It is a message of reassurance that God is in control. Persecution, suffering, and false worship will not last for ever. Those who are waging war against God, His people, and His laws, will be judged and annihilated, while the faithful will inherit God's eternal kingdom.

Upon returning to the USA, I was eager to post this study as ENDTIME ISSUES No. 90. But I changed my mind when I opened my mail box, because I found some very offensive messages, accusing me of departing from the Adventist faith. One message informs me that at a campmeeting in the Northwest, "the Friday evening sermon addressed the emerging attack by Samuele Bacchiocchi against the Seventh-day Adventist prophetic interpretation."

When I saw how my newsletters were misconstrued by some fellow believers, I decided to postpone the posting of the study I had worked so hard to prepare. Rather than adding fuel to the fire, I felt it was wiser to ask 8 competent and committed Adventist scholars to evaluate the first installment of my study. Their comments will be mentioned shortly. At this point I wish to express my gratitude to each of them for making time in their busy schedule to read my 25 pages paper and to offer me valuable constructive criticism. My plan is to re-work this study during the next few weeks on the basis of the comments received.

Saddened by False Accusations

The false accusations have greatly saddened me, because throughout my life I have paid a high price for remaining faithful to our Adventist beliefs and practices. As a teenager I faced ridicule and rejection for refusing to attend school on Saturday. During the five years I spent at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, on numerous occasions I stood up to defend our Adventist doctrines. In fact, I labored persistently with my Adviser, Prof. Vincenzo Monachino, to lead him to accept the Biblical and historical validity of the Sabbath. On the day of the defense of my dissertation, it was thrilling for me to hear Monachino admit publicly that after spending two years with me he had changed his mind and come to accept the origin of Sundaykeeping as a post-apostolic phenomenon.

Why am I being accused of departing from the Adventist faith by few conservative fellow believers? Primarily because of what I wrote in Endtime Issues 86, 87, and 88. In these three newsletters I submitted two proposals. The first proposal is to broaden the prophetic scope of the Little Horn mentioned in Daniel 7, 8, 9, and 11, by including also the important historical role played by Islam in persecuting God's people and promoting false worship. The intent of this proposal is NOT to weaken the prophetic role of the papacy in persecuting God's people and promoting false worship, but to recognize the larger scope the anti-god power symbolized by the Little Horn.

There is no question in my mind that the papacy has played THE major prophetic role of the Antichrist. I spent many months in Vatican libraries looking for papal documents showing the theological, social, and liturgical methods used by the papacy to lead Christian away from Sabbathkeeping to Sundaykeeping. You will find this documentation in chapter 6 "Rome and the Origin of Sunday" of my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*. There I am showing how the papacy fulfills the prophetic role of the Little Horn in "changing times and laws" (Dan 7:25).

Instead, the intent of the newsletter no. 86 was to propose a broader fulfillment of the prophetic scope of Daniel's Little Horn. This proposal is based on a careful study of the relevant Bible texts. In a month or so I hope to post this study, after revising it and expanding it in accordance to the constructive criticism received from 8 competent scholars. You will see that the Little Horn is like a monster with several tentacles, that have manifested themselves in different ways during the course of human history. The ultimate intent of this study is to strengthen our Adventist interpretation, by making it more credible.

A Plea for a Balanced Understanding of Ellen White

The second proposal that has stirred up considerable controversy, is the appeal that I made in the newsletters no. 87 and 88, to develop a balanced understanding of Ellen White's gift of prophecy, in accordance to the NT teachings on the limitations of such a gift. In his letters Paul urges to test Christian prophecy and to retain what is good (1 Thess 5:19-22; 1 Cor. 12:10; 14:29). Such testing suggests that sometimes there can be inaccuracies in the messages of the prophets.

The plea for a balanced understanding of Ellen White is not intended to discredit her prophetic gift, but to provide a legitimate defense for her use of sources and assistants in the production of her publications. The failure to develop a balanced understanding of the prophetic gift of Ellen White is largely responsible for the countless number of websites and publications attacking her as a false prophet.

An increasing number of Adventists are telling me that they are badly shaken by the attacks against Ellen White posted in so many websites. In most cases the attacks come from former Adventists who feel the church has deceived them by leading them to believe that everything Ellen White wrote was under the "pen of inspiration." The solution to this alarming problem is to be found in developing a balanced understanding of Ellen White's prophetic gift. This indeed was the intent of my newsletters.

Dealing with False Accusations

It came as a shock to me to see how some of my fellow believers who in the past praised me as a “hero” for defending the Sabbath truth at the Pontifical Gregorian University—the most prestigious Jesuit university in the world—all of a sudden they came to view me as a “heretic” for proposing a broader interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy and a balanced understanding of Ellen White’s prophetic gift. This experience taught me that popularity is transitory. The same people that one day acclaimed Jesus as King, at a later time they shouted “crucify Him.”

How should I deal with those who are accusing me of departing from the Adventist faith? Many of you readers have told me to ignore such accusations, which after all come from a relatively small number of people. Comparing to the over 2000 messages of appreciation received for the latest newsletters, the negative messages were relatively few, amounting to no more than forty or fifty of them. The vast majority of the subscribers to this newsletter are people with an inquiring mind who appreciate being challenged with new ideas. I consider it a privilege to minister to these people.

The fact is, however, that I cannot ignore the negative criticism coming from concerned fellow believers, who are easily threatened by any new idea. The attempt of the recent Sabbath School Quarterly on *The Great Apocalyptic Prophecies* (April, May, June 2002) to propose that the number of the beast “666” in Revelation 13:17, may be “a symbol of humanity separated from God” (p. 85), rather than the numerical value of *Vicarius Filii Dei*, generated a flood of negative responses. I received many messages from concerned fellow believers who felt that the authors of the quarterly were departing from the Adventist faith. For them a committed Adventist is one who accepts traditional teachings and interpretations without any questioning. This mentality fosters intellectual and spiritual stagnation rather than growth.

How can I reassure my concerned fellow believers that I am not departing from the Adventist faith by proposing an expanded interpretation of the sevenfold prophecy of the three and a half years/1260 days? The answer is not easy, because no matter how I present this study, some will find a way to attack and defame me.

The best solution that I could think of to try to minimize the negative criticism, is to ask competent and respected Adventist scholars to evaluate the study and offer me some constructive suggestions. This is exactly what I did. During this past week I received the feed back from 8 Adventist scholars who have read the paper. On the basis of their valuable comments, I am currently reading studies which I had ignored with the intent of expanding the paper and modify it where necessary. My ultimate goal is to encourage some fresh thinking on how to make our interpretation of this sevenfold prophecy more credible.

THE EVALUATION OF 8 ADVENTIST SCHOLARS

Let me briefly introduce the eight Adventist scholars who have graciously taken time in their busy schedule to evaluate my paper. With one exception, their comments were rather favorable, though each reviewer raised important questions for me to consider.

The first one to respond was Hans LaRondelle, D. Th., who is a retired Professor Emeritus of Theology at Andrews University Theological Seminary, and author of several publications, including the pivotal book *How to Understand the End-time Prophecies of the Bible*. This enlightening book has been of great help to me. Unfortunately the book is out of print, but an abridged version is available under the title *Light for the Last Days*. I highly recommend this book to interested readers. You can order a copy by contacting directly Dr. LaRondelle by phone (941) 355-0037, fax (941)358-0162 or email <hansemprof564@cs.com>. He lives with his gracious wife, Barbara, in Florida, but he is still actively teaching extension schools in different parts of the world. He will be contributing some essays to our newsletter in the very near future.

LaRondelle's review of the essay was very positive. He wrote: "I have read your essay and thank God for the breath of fresh air. I have been waiting for such a breakthrough for many years. The traditional interpretation of Dan 7 and 8 became almost too tortuous for me. You have spoken well of me—thank you—and have read my intentions (concerning the year 538) correctly. I have met quite a few of our thinking Adventists here and in Europe who are questioning the traditional exegesis of Daniel 8. I will tell them now about your essay by E-mail. . . . I fully concur with your academic method to let the sacred text speak for itself."

Another reviewer is Jon Paulien, Ph. D., who is serving a Professor of New Testament at Andrews University Theological Seminary. He has authored of several books, including *What the Bible Says about the End-time*. He has contributed the essay of this newsletter. The essay is excerpted from his newly released book *The Day that Changed the World*. This is a book you will love to read and share with your friends, especially those who do not profess to believe in God. You can buy single copies at any Adventist Book Center for only \$2.49 or by the case of 100 copies for only \$159.00. This is great value for Christmas giving! If you do not live near an ABCs you can order the books by calling toll free, 1-800-765-6955.

Paulien has been of great help to me. He spent several hours, not only to read my paper, but also to counsel me on how to deal with this controversial time prophecy. He advised me to read and interact with the research done by the DANIEL AND REVELATION RESEARCH COMMITTEE (DARCOM) of the General Conference. He wrote: "I think you did a terrific job inductively, but you have not yet interacted with the wealth of secondary literature that addresses the same issues you address. Particularly I would have expected much more interaction with DARCOM, particularly volumes 2 and 3." This is what I intend to do during the next few weeks. To make time for this project, I am asking some of my colleagues to contribute some timely Bible studies to this newsletter.

Another reviewer is Ranko Stefanovic, Ph. D., who is serving as Professor of New Testament at Andrews University. During the past two years Ranko worked hard to write the newly released impressive commentary on the Book of Revelation, entitled *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. This is by far the best commentary on the Book of Revelation that our Adventist church has ever published (645 pages). This commentary is an outgrowth of his doctoral dissertation on Revelation chapters 4 and 5. The information on how to order a copy of this important study from Andrews University Press is given at the end of this newsletter.

Ranko is preparing an essay excerpted from his commentary for our very next newsletter. I want our subscribers to benefit from his scholarship. By capitalizing on the contributions of some of our leading scholars I hope to accomplish two objectives: (1) To introduce them to you by offering you a taste (“appetizer”) of their research. (2) To relieve my pressure to prepare the next few newsletters, so that I can devote more time to study the amazing sevenfold prophecy.

In his review Ranko wrote: “The information presented in your paper are factually documented and the evidences are weighty. I find the concerns you have expressed to be very similar to mine while I was writing my commentary on Revelation. Also, your perception regarding my position is very correct: I avoided assigning any date to the threefold time designation [of the three and half years/1260 days/42 months] in Revelation. I agree with you that A. D. 538 has been exaggerated; in order to get that date, the year 1798 was established first, and then the 1260 years were deducted from it.

“Especially enlightening for me was the way you have clarified historically the origin of the Little Horn (pp. 7-8). I wished I had known these informations earlier to incorporate them into my commentary (as you know I am not a church historian). I am totally in an agreement with you about the method of studying the Bible prophecies.”

Another reviewer is Zdravko Stefanovic, Ph. D., who is a Professor of Biblical Languages and Literature at Walla Walla University. Zdravko is Ranko’s brother. To avoid competition the two brothers have specialized in two different books of the Bible, Zdravko in Daniel and Ranko in Revelation. Zdravko’s dissertation is entitled “Comparison Between the Old Aramaic Inscriptions and the Aramaic of Daniel.” A book based on that research was published by Sheffield Academic Press, in England.

For the purpose of my research on the three and half times prophetic period of Daniel 7:25, Zdravko recommended me his article “The Presence of the Three and a Fraction: A Literary Figure in the Book of Daniel,” published by the Andrews University Institute of Archeology in the symposium entitled *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*. I found this article most helpful. It offers a compelling explanation for the origin of the “three and half times” prophetic period, based on the literary structure of the book of Daniel. Three and a half times is a broken numerical sequence that expresses progression and sudden termination of the power of the Little Horn. Essentially this is my interpretation of the symbolic meaning of this prophetic period.

Another reviewer is Roy Gane, Ph. D., who is serving as a Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Languages at Andrews University Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books. His latest one, *Altar Call*, offers a popular and insightful study of the relevance of the sanctuary for our Christian life today. You will find this book a delight to read. It will open your mind to the deeper meaning of the message of the sanctuary for today. You can order this insightful book directly from the author by calling (616) 471-6345 or via email at <gane@andrews.edu> I have asked him to repackage four of the chapters of this book for one of the forthcoming newsletters.

Gane’s comments on my paper were very helpful. He agrees with me that the Little Horn of Daniel 8 has an earlier origin and broader scope of that of Daniel 7, but he feels that the symbolic nature of the prophecy does “not rule out the possibility that a real, delimited span of time could be in view.”

Another reviewer is Robert Johnston, Ph. D., who recently retired as Professor of New Testament at Andrews University Theological Seminary. He has served as Chairman of the NT Department and contributed numerous articles to scholarly journals. He is highly respected for his keen analytical mind.

Johnston's reaction to the paper was quite positive. He wrote: "I have read your paper and find nothing shocking about it. Your approach may well be a way forward in prophetic interpretation, and I am not uncomfortable with it. One may find this or that detail with which to quarrel, but the overall concept seems reasonable to me. Staunch traditionalists, however, will most likely react negatively. But a traditionalist by definition is one who fears anything new. If you are willing to face their wrath you may want to send this paper abroad, though it needs some polishing." Frankly, I wish that a way could be found to expand and strengthen our prophetic interpretations without stirring the wrath of our concerned fellow believers.

A Reviewer Who Openly Disagrees with My Study

Another reviewer is Jacques Doukhan, Ph. D., who is serving as Professor of Hebrew Old Testament exegesis and Jewish studies at Andrews University Theological Seminary. He has authored several books, including two on the book of Daniel: *Daniel, The Vision of the End* and *Secrets of Daniel*.

Doukhan recognizes the problems mentioned in my paper regarding the beginning and end of the 1260 years prophetic period, but he chooses to defend the traditional interpretation. He candidly wrote: "Sorry, I can't agree with much of what you wrote in your paper." The major reason for the disagreement is his belief that "the papacy or more generally the 'Christian Church' remains the main object/focus of Daniel's prophecy about the Little Horn."

Doukhan firmly believes that Daniel's three and a half times prophetic period, refers exclusively to the time of papal supremacy from 538 to 1798. He writes: "A study of prophetic chronology brings us to the year C. E. 538. Italy is completely rid of the Arians, especially the Ostrogoths. . . . From now on, the church has no more adversaries and is free to do as it pleases" (*Secret of Daniel*, p. 109).

This description of the papacy with "no more adversaries and free to do as it pleases" from the sixth century onward, can hardly be substantiated by the historical records. The reality is that the papacy struggled through the centuries to maintain its political and theological independence. Emperor Justinian's triumph over the Ostrogoths in 538 on behalf of the pope, hardly marks the beginning of papal supremacy, as many Adventists believe. Let me mention three reasons.

First, under their new leader, Totila, the Ostrogoths quickly recaptured most of their lost territories and they continued for several years to harass the papal territories. Second, Justinian was a totally authoritarian emperor, who controlled the pope, the Catholic church, and its doctrines. Whatever recognition he gave to the pope, it was for the sole purpose to accomplish his political objectives.

POPE VIGILIUS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PAPAL SUPREMACY IN 538

Adventists who believe that in 538 Emperor Justinian established the supremacy of the papacy by giving to the pope imperial recognition, freedom, and protection, ought to spend some time reading the history of this period. A good source I would recommend is the recent 10 volumes series of *History of the Church*, translated from the German edition and edited by Hubert Jedin. The publisher is Seabury Press and the cost of the series runs close to \$500.00. I have this expensive collection in my own library because it is acclaimed as the most scholarly series of church history of our time.

The second volume discusses with considerable details how Justinian selected first Pope Vigilius (537-555) and then Pope Pelagius (556-561) to do his bidding. After the removal from office of Pope Silverius (536-37), Justinian through his general Belisarius elected Vigilius as pope in 537, that is, one year before the prophetic date of 538, which marks the beginning of the 1260 years of papal supremacy. The question is, What did Pope Vigilius do to enhance the power of the papacy? Apparently very little.

Emperor Justinian summoned Vigilius to Constantinople where he stayed for eight years. During this period Justinian “played a repulsively cruel game with Vigilius’s spiritual misery” by forcing him to sign a controversial doctrinal decree supportive of monophysism—the teaching that Christ’s nature was only divine (*History of the Church*, vol. 2, p. 628). On his part, Pope Vigilius, “weak in character, changed his opinion with the lengthy pressure from the Emperor and entered into a secret, compromising agreement with him [on a decree supportive of monophysism]” (p. 628).

Vigilius’ signing of a doctrinal compromise caused a stormy protest by some western bishops who excommunicated him at an African episcopal synod. “Spiritually and morally broken, Vigilius died at Syracuse on the return journey [from Constantinople] to Rome” (p. 628). This picture of Justinian pressuring Pope Vigilius to sign a doctrinal compromise, which resulted in the excommunication and humiliation of the pope, hardly suggests the beginning of the prophetic papal supremacy when the pope “had no more adversaries” and was free to do as he pleased.

A third fact which discredits the claim that beginning from 538 “Italy is completely rid of the Arians” and consequently the papacy “had no more adversaries,” is the invasion of Italy by the Arian Lombards in 568, that is, three years after Justinian death. The Lombards, invaded the Italian peninsula and for the next century they weakened the Papal power. The Pope repeatedly appealed for help to Constantinople, but the appeals were ignored because in the East the people were tied down by the Persian war.

After a century of suffering, in desperation the pope turned for protection to the Frankish rulers north of Italy. In 754, when the Arian Lombards had occupied the papal territories of central Italy and were pressing Rome itself, Pope Stephen (752-757) journeyed in person to France to plea for help from the Frankish king Pepin. The Pope crowned Pepin in the church of St. Denis at Paris as “Patrician of the Romans.” In return, Pepin brought his army to Italy in 754 and 755, forcing the Lombards to return their conquests to the pope. This marks the beginning of “The States of the Church,” that is, the temporal sovereignty of the papacy that was to last until 1870, and then renewed in 1929 in a much smaller scale by the creation of the State of Vatican City.

These bits and peaces of historical facts are simply designed to show that Doukhan’s attempt to apply Daniel’s prophetic period of three and a half times exclusively to the period of 538 to 1798, when the papacy had “no more adversaries and [was] free to do as it pleases,” lacks adequate historical support. As a church historian by training and profession, I feel that it is wise for us Adventists to avoid fabricating history to support our prophetic schemes.

The Advice of my Former Chairman

The last reviewer I need to mention is Keith Mattingly, Ph. D., who is currently serving as Professor of Old Testament and Chairman of the Religion Department at Andrews University. He is my former beloved boss and a most gracious Christian gentleman. He stayed up until very late one night to read my paper and offer me some very helpful, practical advice.

I specifically asked Mattingly if I should sent out the study. His response was twofold. First, he felt that postponing or canceling the emailing of the paper would be counter productive, because I have started the ball rolling with the previous newsletter. He felt that at this point it is better for me to clarify my position, especially for the benefit of those who are attacking my interpretation. Second, he advised me to adopt a gentler tone, supporting the traditional SDA interpretation, while at the same time suggesting an alternative interpretation.

Mattingly's wise advice came at the right time, because I had already decided to give a sabbatical rest to this project and perhaps publish it 10 or 20 years from now when the climate may be more receptive to new ideas. I felt that I would only add fuel to the fire by posting at this time a lengthy study on the three and a half time prophetic period of Daniel 7:25 and 12:7. But Mattingly encouraged me to post it anyhow, after making the necessary modifications, both in style and content. His advice made sense to me and I am planning to carry it out during the next few weeks.

Truly I can say that I have greatly benefited from the constructive criticism offered to me by the above mentioned 8 scholars and Christian friends.. What a privilege to live at Andrews University where we have the largest international team of Adventist Bible scholars!

At this point in time my plan is to spend the next four to six weeks reading some of the significant studies that I had ignored and reworking the content and style of the paper. My goal is to encourage the consideration of alternative interpretations, without stirring the wrath of our concerned Adventist believers. This is a most difficult task. Please pray that the Lord may grant me the wisdom and grace to write in a gracious, loving way. To make time for this project, I have asked several brilliant and respected Adventist scholars to contribute essays for our next two or three newsletters.

THE RECENT VISIT TO SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA

From September 13 to 21 it was my privilege to minister to our fellow believers in Singapore and Malaysia. This was truly an unforgettable experience. Singapore is an amazing city, known for its cleanliness, order, and spectacular high rise buildings. The whole country consists of a small island about 30 miles wide, where about two and half million people live, mostly in high rise buildings.

We have 7 churches in Singapore. I spoke in the largest one, called the Balestier SDA Church which can seat about 500 people. The church was packed not only on the Sabbath but even on Sunday. In fact, we had tree meetings on Sunday, at 10:30 a. m., 2:30 p. m., and 7:30 p. m. The church was full at all the three sessions. In his letter, Pastor Danson Ng, President of the Singapore Mission, wrote: "This was indeed the most inspiring and eye-opening seminar we ever had for a long time. For the first time we saw our church packed full on Sunday to listen to your messages. Our members experienced a revival and a reformation in their Sabbath observance."

The invitation to Singapore was extended to me by the officers of the ASI (Singapore). These Adventist business people are among the most gracious individuals I have ever met in my life. When I arrived, they took me to a prestigious Chinese vegetarian restaurant, where we ate, talked, and fellowshiped for three hours. I had never been treated to a ten course meal in my life. Before leaving they all came to the hotel where I was staying to bid me farewell. I will treasure the pleasant memory of these dedicated and most gracious Adventist business people.

In Malaysia I spoke Tuesday and Wednesday , September 17-18 at the Sabah Mission and Friday and Saturday at the Sarawak Mission. The response was overwhelming. I shall never forget the meeting on Wednesday afternoon, September 18, at 3:00 p. m. at our secondary school in Goshen. The school auditorium that seats about 1000 people was packed with several hundreds standing outside. It was hard for me to believe that so many people would leave their work place early in the afternoon to drive to the meeting in the oppressive, humid, 95 degrees weather. I do not recall having ever sweated so much in my life. On the last Sabbath in Kutching, I had to excuse myself and go to the guest room three times to change my underwear after each presentation. I was completely soaked.

Our fellow believer in Malaysia live in a predominantly Moslem country where they face considerable restrictions. One of their problems Sabbathkeeping, because Saturday is a school day. During the question/answer period, many asked me how they should deal with their Sabbath problems. Let us remember them in our prayers.

The Sabbath is being challenged also in Poland. The Ministerial Secretary of our Polish Union, Ryszard Jankowski, called me and faxed me an invitation to speak at their campmeeting from July 8 to 19, 2003. A major reason for the invitation is that a Jesuit scholar is challenging publicly my dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday*, and they would like me to dialogue with him during the visit.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THIS NEWSLETTER

At the end of this newsletter you will find three announcements that you may not want to miss:

- 1) The schedule of my weekend seminars, with the date, location, and person to contact for information.
- 2) A special offer on my books and recordings.
- 3) Information on how to purchase one of the finest video projectors at a special price through an Adventist supplier.

A THANK YOU NOTE

Words fail to express my appreciation to all of you who share these newsletters with your friends and encouraged them to subscribe. As a result of your efforts, I receive an average of 200 new subscriptions a week are added to the list of about 20,000 subscribers.. Thank you immensely for sharing these newsletters with your friends. Be sure to let them know that it is a free service. All what they need to do to subscribe, is to email their request to <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net>

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION ABOUT JON PAULIEN'S ESSAY

The essay that you are about to read addresses the very question that many are asking today: Where was God on September 11? The suffering and death of innocent people has troubled Christian thinkers throughout the centuries. With refreshing Biblical insights Dr. Jon Paulien looks at September 11 from the perspective of that Friday in Jerusalem when the ultimate terroristic act was committed in the murder of the incarnate Son of God. Paulien shows how that Friday was indeed the day that changed the world—the day that can help us understand how God can transform evil into goodness.

The essay is excerpted from his newly released book *The Day that Changed the World*. Dr. Jon Paulien wrote this book specifically to reach the secular mind—people who do not profess to believe in God. If the reading of this essay brings spiritual enrichment to your life, be sure to email a note of thanks to Jon. His email address is <jonp@andrews.edu> Let me know if you like his style and content, because I plan to invite him again as a guest contributor. Tell me what you think.

“SEPTEMBER 11 AND GOD’S MYSTERIOUS MERCY”

**John Paulien, Ph. D., Professor of New Testament
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For many people on September 11, survival seemed to be an accident of location and timing. George Sleigh was a manager at the American Bureau of Shipping, on the 91st floor of the North Tower of the WTC. He was on the phone in his office when he heard the roar of jet engines. Looking out of his window, he had just enough time to think, “The wheels are up, the underbelly is white and man, that guy is low.” It was 8:46 AM and a Boeing 767 airplane was headed toward him at 500 miles per hour, with 92 people and more than 50 tons of jet fuel aboard. The jet exploded into the building at floors 93 through 98 just above him. The walls, the ceiling and bookshelves in his office crumbled.

Crawling out from under the rubble Sleigh looked up at the exposed beams and concrete underside of the 92nd floor. What he didn’t know at the time was that his concrete ceiling was the floor of a giant tomb for more than 1300 people. Not a single person survived on any of the floors above him, but on his floor and below nearly everyone lived to see another day. The line of survival was as thin as a steel beam or a concrete slab. All of those on the 92nd floor died and everyone on the 91st floor lived.

Counting heads, Sleigh discovered that 11 of the 22 employees at his office were on duty at the time. None were injured. Other than Sleigh’s area the office was largely intact. Sleigh went back to his area to get his briefcase. The closest stairway was blocked, but the second was open. Heading down for several floors, Sleigh and his colleagues found the going quite peaceful. There was nobody behind them. By the time they reached the middle of the tower, Sleigh’s office was engulfed with flames. Fifty minutes later, having become separated from his colleagues in the increasing press on the staircases (more and more people were evacuating and room had to be left for the firemen who were charging up to fight the blaze), Sleigh left the building and was loaded into an ambulance; bruised, bloody, and covered with dust. “Get out, get out,” a policeman yelled, “The building is coming down.”

It was 9:59 AM. The South Tower was collapsing. The North Tower’s highest survivor was on his way to Beth Israel Hospital. “Sometimes, I think it was God’s providence that spared me,” Sleigh said. “Other times, I wonder why me and not others. I realize I am a very fortunate man.”

Like George Sleigh, many survivors of the tragedy at the World Trade Center wonder why they were spared that day, while so many of their friends were lost. They often believe that their survival was a call to a new level of commitment to God and to right living. But why did God go out of His way to preserve some lives and not others? What did that say about God?

The Problem With Miracles

In the March 21, 2002 issue of *Adventist Review*, Stephen Chavez reflected on the arbitrary nature of the events of September 11 and what that had to say about God. Chavez stated that there are two problems with miracles. For one thing, it is hard to tell the difference between a miracle and a coincidence. If a commuter plane goes down and half the people are killed, how many of the survivors were saved miraculously and how many were saved simply because they were sitting in the “right” section of the plane? No doubt those who survived would be inclined to consider their survival a miracle.

Which raises a second problem with miracles. Why didn’t God miraculously preserve everyone’s life? Or to put it another way, why would Jesus heal one man in a crowd of sick people, leave the rest where they were, and then never return to the pool (as far as we know)? Tragedy is difficult enough to take by itself. But the preservation of even one person in the midst of slaughter, as wondrous as that may be, serves as the frame for a giant question mark regarding the loss of so many.

In the tragedies of September 11 thousands were killed and even more thousands were spared. There is no detectable pattern among the saved or the lost that would offer any explanation. Sometimes it was as simple as who got up and who slept in, or who was located on the 91st floor and who was located on the 92nd. Chavez concludes by suggesting that survivors need to be careful how they celebrate miracles. "Not everyone survives a terminal illness or an automobile accident; not every lost child (tool, dog, wallet, watch) is found."

A Contemporary Job

On September 12, Sister Regina Palamara spoke to residents of Roosevelt Island near Manhattan at the start of a non-denominational prayer service held at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd. She told them that in ten years of praying at the Chapel, she had never seen or heard anything like what she had witnessed a few minutes earlier, just before the prayer meeting began. A man had walked up the aisle, knelt down, raised his arms and yelled at God for over fifteen minutes. "I witnessed someone really experience the prayer of Job," she recalled, ". . . the man who has nothing left." Concerned, she called Public Safety officers, who stood by and later escorted the man out of the Chapel.

The man's name was Anthony Deligia. He had witnessed the carnage at the World Trade Center earlier in the day, then had walked to Roosevelt Island with a colleague who lived there. "I worked on a U.S. military submarine from 1980 to 1992," said Deligia. "I slept on missiles and realized that fifteen minutes was all it took to blow everything away. I left the service when the Cold War ended, and I thought that really was the end of the war. Today, I saw it start again."

Since his release from the military, the 43-year old Deligia had worked as a Unix programmer for a Japanese bank located on the 50th floor of one of the now-demolished World Trade Center Towers. He said he saw women with their skin peeling off as he descended 49 floors to the street. "Once I got outside, I saw people jump out of the building. They looked like toys falling into a ball of smoke. It was unreal, like a game," said Deligia. "I am angry with God, who let all this happen."

As hinted by Sister Regina, the Bible does not leave the issue of tragedy and suffering unaddressed. The biblical story about a man named Job, drawn up in the genre of a Hebrew play, wrestles with the issue of why bad things happen to good people (Psalm 73 addresses the issue of why good things happen to bad people). This story has had such an impact on the world that even in today's secular environment, nearly everyone has heard of "the patience of Job."

The Story of Job

The story begins in the land of Uz (Job 1). Job was a very wealthy man, perhaps the richest in the world. But his greatest treasure was his children, seven sons and three daughters. Every morning before the sun rose he prayed that God would protect them through the day. But one day, while Job was praying, his case came up in the heavenly court, although he was not aware of it.

Satan, the prince of evil and darkness, sneaks into the heavenly court with a crowd of "the sons of God." After noting his presence, God offers Satan a challenge, "Have you noticed my servant Job? He worships me faithfully and is careful to do nothing wrong." Satan counters, "Big deal. He's into religion for what he can get. You've given him everything. No wonder he worships you. But mark my words. Take away all he has and he'll curse you to your face!" God responds, "OK, we'll see. . . Everything he has is in your hands, just don't hurt Job himself."

The scene moves back to earth, where one disaster after another falls on Job's estate. Bandits, fire, marauding armies and storms destroy Job's animals, servants and possessions, and eventually even his children, leaving him destitute and childless in a moment. Job's response? He falls on the ground, worships God and says, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has

taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised” (Job 1:21).

After this the scene in the heavenly court reconvenes. God challenges Satan, pointing out that Job’s faithfulness has not diminished, in spite of the great losses he has experienced. But Satan isn’t finished yet. “Big deal,” he exclaims, “Skin for skin! A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

God responds by placing Job in Satan’s control, with only one limitation. Satan must spare Job’s life. So Satan goes out and afflicts Job with loathsome and itchy sores from head to toe. Even his wife turns against him and urges him to “curse God and die.” But Job is not left alone. Three “friends” hear about his troubles and come to console him in his sorrows.

The Debate Over Job’s Presumed Guilt

This begins a long section of the story in which Job’s friends try to convince him that God is not arbitrary (Job 4:7-11; 15:17-35). If things have gone wrong for Job, he must somehow be to blame for it (8:1-22; 15:5-6; 22:1-11). God is trying to get his attention (Job 5:17-27). So if Job would just turn to God and humble himself, things would get better (22:21-30), but if he blames God for his troubles he will end up just like the wicked (11:13-20). Great friends!

In response, Job denies the charges, crying out to God to be a friend in his emptiness (Job 7:7-21). He insists that he is an exception to the rules, that he is innocent of anything that would justify his great losses (6:24-30; 13:13-23; 31:1-40). Under harassment from his friends (6:14-23), he begins to accuse God of injustice and oppression (9:13-35; 10:1-22; 27:1-6). Job rails at the silence of God (23:1-9; 29:2-5) and mocks his friends’ theological arguments (12:2-3; 13:4-5,12; 16:1-3). Their theories that good is always rewarded and evil always punished just doesn’t square with reality (24:1-25). In the real world the wicked prosper and the righteous die (21:7-34). And God sits there and watches it all (28:24). He wishes he had never been born (Job 3:1-19).

After a lengthy, and at times tedious, debate covering 29 chapters in the book of Job, the four men fall silent and a fifth appears, named Elihu. He had been listening respectfully, but now he can hold it in no longer (Job 32:6-10, 18-22). Although he is human, he has come to speak in defense of God. Elihu starts out by mocking the failure of Job’s friends to convince him that he is wrong (32:11-17). He then goes after Job directly. Job was wrong to accuse God of being silent, God is not silent, human beings just don’t pay attention (33:14-18). Pain is one way God uses to get people’s attention (33:19-28). God never does the wrong thing, He gives people only what they deserve (34:1-15). Even suffering has a purpose, it is a discipline by which God teaches those He loves (36:22-23). God is far from silent, He is present whenever it rains, whenever the thunder roars or the lightning strikes (Job 36:24-33; 37:1-20)!

God’s Unanswered Questions

As if on cue, a mighty thunderstorm approaches the small group of men. Elihu seems to recognize the presence of God in the storm (Job 37:21-22). And sure enough, God speaks out of the storm and addresses Job and Job alone (38:1 - 42:6). At first God seems to support all that the four companions of Job had said to him. He accuses Job of questioning Him with ignorant, empty words. Then He throws a series of unanswerable questions Job’s way. “Where were you when I made the world? You know so much, tell me about it. Have you ever commanded a day to dawn? Have you ever walked the floor of the ocean? Can you guide the stars from year to year, or change their orbits?” And so on.

After Job admits his ignorance for the first time, God pelts him with another series of unanswerable questions. “Do you gather food for the lions? Did you teach the hawk how to fly? Can you tie up a whale like a pet bird? Are you trying to put Me in the wrong

so you can be right?" Job offers the only possible response to overwhelming rightness and power. He offers plaintively, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." God didn't answer any of Job's questions, rather He asked Job questions. Nevertheless Job's attitude has totally changed. Out of his new understanding and relationship with God he is satisfied that God is just. Knowing about God is not the answer to his questions. Knowing God is.

Then a fascinating thing happens. God turns from Job to his three "friends" and declares that he is angry with them because they didn't tell the truth about Him, as Job had done (Job 42:7-9)! This is startling, of course, since Job has just endured nearly five chapters worth of rebuke himself. The story winds down to a strange and puzzling conclusion (Job 42:10-17).

What was God doing on September 11? On the surface the book of Job offers no answer, only more questions. The arguments of Job and his friends sound familiar, but they do not satisfy (especially when you know they have absolutely nothing to do with what actually happened between God and Satan). Then Elihu comes along and criticizes both Job and his three friends, yet says many of the same things they had said! Finally God comes along and rebukes Job for speaking out of ignorance, only to end up telling his friends that they were wrong and Job was right!

So anyone who comes to this biblical story expecting all the answers to the problem of suffering is likely to be disappointed. Job's friends are full of answers, many of which are still offered today, but all of the answers get mocked at some point in the book. When God appears, He offers no answers but just a sense of His overpowering greatness.

A Cosmic Perspective of Human Suffering

Perhaps the main point of the book is that none of the general answers to the problem of suffering had anything to do with why Job was suffering. The real reason Job suffers has to do with a wager between God and Satan in the heavenly court. No statement in the earthly part of the book (chapters 3-42) ever returns to that issue, not even the statements of God Himself. So the point of the book seems to be that the limited context of human experience does not allow a satisfying intellectual answer to the problem of suffering. We just don't have the context to understand, even if the one doing the explaining is God.

Don't get me wrong here. I'm not saying that our lives on this earth are hostage to cosmic wagers God is making out there somewhere. After all, Job is only a story, not a detailed explanation of the ways of God. But the point of the story is that our lives are affected by wider issues in the universe as a whole, things that don't make sense from the perspective of a single planet alone. God's will is not always done on this earth. As God asserts in the book of Job, to try to explain September 11, the Holocaust and similar events is like commanding a day to dawn, roping a whale or walking on the floor of the ocean. It is just not a realistic enterprise for humans confined to the limited context of this earth.

Why then was Job satisfied with God's answer, even though it was not a real answer? If nothing else, it was because God cared enough to answer. After all, if God answered all of Job's questions, how could the story be a comfort to those who don't get any answers to their questions? But as it stands, Job's story can be a comfort to those left in the dark. While Job doesn't get any answers from God, he does encounter Him, and that is enough. To know God is to trust Him. The real reason for suffering is hidden in the heart of God. Job's foolishness, as pointed out in God's speech at the end, was the assumption that if he couldn't come up with a reason for his suffering, God didn't have one either.

Perhaps the best news in the book of Job is that undeserved suffering will not last forever. It ended for Job and it will one day end for the human race as a whole. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "The earth is like a stage and we are merely players." One day a much bigger picture will be revealed.

But that is not the end of the story. The book of Job is not the Bible's last word on the matter of suffering. There is a much more decisive response to the issue in the New Testament. According to the gospels, there was another day that changed the world, a day whose reverberations have continued to travel down the course of time to our own day.

One Friday in Jerusalem

Almost two thousand years ago there was a Friday in Jerusalem that changed the world. All the elements of September 11 occurred within the experience of a single person, but that experience had implications that affect every person who ever lived. Jesus' death was more than just the execution of an innocent man, it was designed by God to unite the human race and ultimately the entire universe (John 12:32; Col 1:20).

This is, perhaps, the fundamental difference between Islam and the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Bible. For Muslims, Jesus is a great prophet who spoke for God, but he is merely a man, a very good man. But according to the Bible, Jesus is much more than a man, much more than a prophet. He is God come to earth, but in disguise, housed in a human body (John 1:1,14). His mission did not end in a tomb, but continues to change the world today.

This central aspect of Christian faith was perhaps best explained by C. S. Lewis, the great British scholar and novelist. According to his book *Mere Christianity*, Christians believe that behind events like September 11 is a universal war between the principles of good and evil. It is a civil war and this world is being held hostage by the rebel forces. Evil exists here because the world is enemy-occupied territory. On the other hand, the good we see in the world is evidence that God has not abandoned it to the Enemy. He continues to exert His influence with any who are willing to follow Him.

Good and Evil in the Context of Free Will

How did this evil get into the universe? Lewis argues that God created beings with free will. If we are free to be good we are also free to be bad. So free will has made evil possible, even though God did not choose to create evil. Why make people free then? Because the same freedom that makes evil possible is also the only thing that makes love, joy or goodness truly worth having. True happiness can only occur in the context of loving choice. Evidently God thought that the pluses of freedom were well worth the risk.

But what if God's creatures used their freedom to go the wrong way, what if they used it to turn from Him, what if they used their freedom to produce unspeakable horrors like September 11? What then? Does this mean God Himself is evil, or perhaps powerless? The Bible says no to both options. Evil exists not because God is a tyrant, but because He prefers openness and freedom. Evil exists not because God is powerless, but because He wanted human beings to be powerful in ways that mirrored His own freedom of action.

But what has God done to start overcoming the evil in the world? According to Lewis, God has done several things, and these are outlined in the Bible. 1) He has provided the conscience, an inner sense of right and wrong that few humans are without. 2) He has provided some, from Abraham to Moses to Paul, and perhaps Mohammed and others outside the Christian sphere, with visions and dreams that helped clarify the central issues of good and evil. 3) In the Old Testament He provided the story of a people (Israel, the Jewish nation) and the struggles through which God sought to teach them more clearly about Himself.

But then came something special, something surprising. 4) Among the Jews appeared a man who went around talking as if He were God. He claimed to be able to forgive sins, something only God can do. Jesus could not be simply a good man. If a mere man claimed to be God he could not be a good man. To quote Lewis, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."

So the Muslim picture of Jesus is at odds with His own claims and teaching. If Jesus is merely another prophet, a man among many, He is a fraud. But if He is what He claimed to be, God Himself taking on human flesh, then the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the greatest events that ever happened in the course of human history. That Friday in Jerusalem would then be the day that changed the world.

The Implications of the Cross

I believe that the cross changed the world in at least three ways. First, it changed the way we look at our personal lives, particularly our mistakes and failures. Second, it changed the way we find value and meaning for our lives. And third, it changed the way we look at suffering and tragedy. We will take up each of these changes in turn.

1) Turning Your Life Around

According to the Bible human beings are not simply imperfect creatures that need improvement, we are rebels who must lay down our arms. The only way out of our human condition is to "lay down our arms," acknowledge that we are on the wrong track and allow God to work whatever changes are needed in our lives.

This "repentance" is not fun. Accepting the reality of our brokenness is something we naturally shy away from. Acknowledging failure is humiliating and repugnant. But it is the necessary path toward redeeming our lives from the downward spiral of the evil that besets us all. It is the only way to bring our lives into the sunshine of reality. This "repentance" is simply recognizing the truth about ourselves. The day that changed the world can never change us unless we are willing to be changed, unless we recognize that change is needed.

The neat thing about God's plan is that He understands what this struggle for authenticity is all about. In submitting Himself to the humiliation of the cross, Jesus experienced the kind of surrender we need. In the Garden of Gethsemane He struggled to give Himself up to God's plan. And the Bible teaches that if we follow Him in His surrender and humiliation, we will also share in His conquest of death and find new life in our present experience (Rom 6:3-6).

September 11 was more than just the work of a few kooks and fanatics, it was a symptom of deeper issues that plague us all. The struggle toward authenticity is not an occasional necessity, it is fundamental to the human condition, whether we acknowledge it or not. Within the larger context of terrorism many people are discovering with horror that evil lies also within. But there is no reason to turn away from that image. Acknowledge the truth of that evil is the first step toward a life that exceeds expectations.

2) Our Value Before God

But how do we reconcile an awareness of personal evil with the fundamental human need to be valued for who we are. We need a sense of worth, yet the more authentic we become the less we see value in ourselves. How can we elevate our sense of self-worth without escaping from the dark realities within? That's where the cross comes in.

How much is a human being worth? It depends on the context. If they were to melt me down into the chemicals of which my body is made, I understand I would be worth about twelve dollars (make that thirteen, I've added a few pounds lately). The average American, however, is valued by his or her employer at a much higher level than that, something like \$50,000 dollars a year. But suppose you were a great basketball player like Michael Jordan. Suddenly the value jumps to tens of millions of dollars a year. And if you were the nerdy designer of the software everyone in the world uses, you would be valued at tens of billions of dollars (Bill Gates)!

You see, we are valued in terms of others. But according to the Bible human value is infinitely higher than the value we assign to each other. According to the Bible, Jesus was worth the whole universe (He made it), yet He knows all about us and loves us as we are. When He died on the cross, He established the value of the human person. When the Creator of the universe and everyone in it (including all the great athletes and movie stars that people often worship) decides to die for you and me, it places an infinite value on our lives. And since the resurrected Jesus will never die again, my value is secure in him as long as I live.

So the cross provides a true and stable sense of value. This is what makes the story of that Friday in Jerusalem so very special. The cross is not just another atrocity. It is about God's willingness to take on human flesh and reveal Himself where we are. It is about the value that the human race has in the eyes of God. It is about God's plan to turn the human race away from evil and hatred and violence. The original day that changed the world, therefore, provides hope for a better world in the aftermath of September 11.

It is clear that religion as we know it has failed. Islam has produced numberless jihads and now suicide terrorists. Its followers have brutally tortured and even executed people who were born into an Islamic society but felt the call of God to grow in their faith (many Islamic countries exercise the death penalty on any Muslim who converts to another faith). Christianity, on the other hand, has produced its Crusades and its Inquisition. In our time it has failed to make much of a difference in Rwanda and during the Holocaust. The Middle Ages in Europe, where Christianity was the dominant faith, were a nightmare of repression and brutality in the name of Jesus. Now even Jews, fresh from the horrors of the Holocaust, have crushed the legitimate hopes of the Palestinian people, many of whom have lived all their lives in the temporary housing of refugee camps.

It is clear that none of the great faiths have lived up to the ideals of their sacred texts. Followers of each have, at one time or another, succumbed to the temptations of earthly power and wealth. Followers of each have thought so highly of their thoughts as to feel justified in destroying individuals who thought differently. After September 11 we must beware our own personal tendency to judge others, to despise those who think differently, to marginalize those who look different, talk different, and pray different.

The best hope for this world after September 11 is an authentic walk with God that not only takes the "terrorist within" seriously but sees in others the value that God sees in them. If every one of us is flawed yet valuable, all other seekers after God become potential allies in the battle to create a kinder and gentler world. Armed with a clear picture of reality and a sense of our value, we can become change agents in the world. And the seeds of that change were planted one Friday in Jerusalem.

3) The Suffering God

The cross is also the New Testament's final answer to the problem of suffering we began to address at the beginning of this essay. The cross is the most powerful response to the question, "How can I believe in God after September 11? How can I believe in a God who allows thousands of innocent people to suffer when He could have done something to stop it? If God exists and He is good, why doesn't He do something at times like that?"

These questions are directly related to what happened to Jesus on the cross. As Jesus was dying on the cross, His greatest suffering had little to do with physical pain from the spikes through His hands and feet, the thorns piercing his forehead, or the torturous effort to breathe enforced by crucifixion. His greatest suffering arose from the apparent absence of God in the midst of His suffering.

Jesus knows from experience what it is like to suffer undeserved suffering and pain. He did not deserve to be whipped, beaten, slapped and spit upon. He did nothing to deserve a sentence of death, a hateful mob, or the torture of crucifixion. To the victims of September 11 the cross says: "God knows, He understands, He has tasted what it is like to suffer without having caused it in some way."

Like the book of Job, the cross offers up no definitive answer to the problem of unjust suffering. What it does, however, is offer companionship in suffering. The times when we experience undeserved suffering and pain are like our own Friday in Jerusalem. We feel as if our experience were unique, as if no one has ever been more alone. But Jesus Himself went there in depth on the original Good Friday. He understands what it is like to be totally alone, totally rejected and abused. He's been there and done that. And in a sense He tasted just a bit of everyone's experience (1 Pet 2:20-24).

But for Jesus the story didn't end on that Friday. It seemed to and He Himself seemed to see no hope for the future when He cried out to God, "Why have you forsaken me?" But His suffering and abandonment turned out to be a prelude to the incredible affirmation of Easter Sunday. When He was raised from the dead His acceptance with God was re-affirmed. In some sense the whole human race stands in a new place with God. The cross has turned human suffering into a prelude.

What difference does it make to believe in the cross today? For me it changes everything about suffering. Some have used undeserved suffering as an excuse to disbelieve in the existence of God. But atheism has not lessened human suffering one iota. If anything it makes it worse, because one is all alone in the suffering and it has no meaning and no future.

But the cross tells us that we are not alone, even though it may feel that way. It tells us that suffering doesn't mean that God doesn't care, He cares ever so much, but he doesn't always intervene to avert pain. God's absence in suffering is not a hostile one or a helpless one, it has a higher purpose. In the light of the cross we have a reason to endure, even though we may not know the particular reason why. When we suffer without deserving it, we share in the experience of Jesus. When we feel the absence of God in our pain, we share in the experience of Jesus. He went there before us and understands how we feel.

The Ultimate Act of Terrorism

Why September 11 and similar tragedies in the course of history? There is no satisfactory answer at this time. Yet it is possible to discern a merciful hand in the events, in spite of their horrific nature. The toll at the World Trade Center could easily have been tens of thousands dead— if the planes had struck a few hours later in the day, if they had struck the towers at a lower level, if the towers had collapsed more quickly, if evacuations hadn't started so quickly and efficiently in the south tower. As horrible as events were, it could have been, in a sense should have been, much worse.

For those of us who experienced it, September 11 was an unimaginable expression of evil at its worst. It fundamentally altered our perception of the world and our own role in the world. But September 11 was not the most evil act of all time. The Holocaust, as chillingly brutal and unfair as it was, was not the most evil act of all time. The Inquisition, the Crusades, the genocides of Armenians, Russians, Rwandans, and Cambodians in the 20th Century, the slave trade across the Atlantic, all of these qualify as acts of systematic pre-meditated evil. But none of them qualify as the most evil act of all time.

The cross was the most evil act of all time. When human beings, for temporary and limited political advantage, crucified the God who came down and lived among us, they acted in the most incomprehensible, unfair and evil manner possible. In rejecting Him, they were doing more than just condemning an innocent man to death, they were destroying the source of their own life and rejecting their own place in the universe. The cross of Jesus Christ is an evil act of infinite proportions. If the human race is capable of such an act, no evil action is unimaginable.

But there is a silver lining to the dark cloud of human evil. God has turned the cross into a powerful act of reversal. The greatest evil ever done has been transformed by God into the most powerful act of goodness ever performed. By death God brings life. Through defeat comes victory. Through shame, humiliation and rejection come glory, grace and acceptance. Through the cross God has turned the tables on evil and death. The greatest evil has become the basis for the greatest good.

That suggests to me that all the good that has come as a result of September 11 is not just an accident. God's hand was there, guiding, saving, helping, even in the midst of tragedy, suffering and death. As a result of this evil act, millions of people have made fresh commitments to family and service to others. As a result of this evil act, many people are turning away from greed, corruption and empty display. As a result of this evil act, many who had forgotten God are turning to Him with a passion not seen in decades.

What difference does all this make in practical terms? If you live in the United States you know that people are torn between two tasks in the wake of September 11. We are told to go about our lives "as if nothing has happened or will happen," yet we are constantly warned to be vigilant or everything we have can be blown to smithereens in the next moment. Many Americans are perplexed. They don't know how to prepare for future attacks, they don't know how to relax, they feel helpless.

The cross, however, shows us how to live in conflicted times. In the light of the cross there is plenty we can do in the face of terrorism. We can learn to love our neighbors the way God does. We can help to build bridges between groups in our communities. We can make a daily effort to project love and care into the world, and not return evil for evil. We can visit the sick, feed the hungry, and comfort the suffering. We can even learn to love our enemies the way Jesus did! The cross demonstrates that in the grace and power that come only from God evil can be transformed into good.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of August 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special weekend seminar in your area. I still have a three weekends open in the latter part of 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style is now presented with attractive PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

OCTOBER 4-5: CALGARY CENTRAL SDA CHURCH

Location: 1920 - 13 Avenue NW, Calgary, AB T2N 1L3, Canada
For information call Pastor Randy Barber at (403) 547-6786 or (403) 289-0196

OCTOBER 11-12: PARADISE VALLEY SDA CHURCH, PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Location: 2727 E. Cactus Road, Phoenix, Arizona 85032.
For information call Pastor Paul Gibson at (602) 971-6010 or (602) 493-0818

OCTOBER 18-19: LOMA LINDA CHINESE SDA CHURCH

Location: 25665 Van Leuven Street, Loma Linda, CA 92354
For information call Pastor Onn Liang at (909) 799-1060 or (909) 824-0274

OCTOBER 25-26: HOLLOWAY SDA CHURCH, LONDON, ENGLAND

Location: 381 Holloway Road, London, N7 0RN, England.
For information call Pastor E. Osei at (020) 8581 8311 or (079) 5634 4085

NOVEMBER 1-2: SDA CHURCH IN ROME, ITALY

Location: Via delle Gondole 35, Ostia-Roma
For information call Pastor Pino Castro at (39) 06 5674055

NOVEMBER 8-9: THOUSAND OAKS SDA CHURCH

Location: 480 W. Gainsborouh, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360
For information call Pastor Michael Brownfield at (805) 368-6377 or (805) 376-2961

NOVEMBER 15-16: MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Location: Lilydale SDA church, Hull Road, Lilydale, Melbourne
For information contact Dr. Neil Watts, 3/6 Kitchener Road, Croydon 3136, Victoria Australia

NOVEMBER 19: NUNAWADING SDA CHURCH, MELBOURNE

Location: 169 Central Rd, Nunawading, Melbourne.
For information call Pastor Norm Hardy at (61) 3 8812 2804

NOVEMBER 20: GEELONG SDA CHURCH, MELBOURNE

Location: 8-10 Little Myers Street, Geelong, Melbourne
For information call Pastor Des Potts at (61) 3 5272 3300.

NOVEMBER 22-23: DANDENONG POLISH SDA CHURCH

Location: 100 James street, Dandenong, Melbourne
For information call Pastor Marek Ignasiak at 03 95038840 or 04 15683735.

NOVEMBER 29-30: HAGLEY PARK SDA CHURCH, KINGSTON, JAMAICA

Location: 114A Hagley Park Road, Kingston 11, Jamaica
For information call Pastor Adrian Cotterell at (876) 924-1061

IS YOUR CHURCH LOOKING FOR A GOOD VIDEO PROJECTOR AT A SPECIAL PRICE?

If your church is looking for a good LCD video projection at a reasonable price, I would be glad to put you in contact with an Adventist brother in Texas, who is able to sell HITACHI CP-S370W video projectors with 2200 lumens at a special price of US\$2700.00, instead of the suggested factory retail price is over \$6,000.00.

I bought one of this projectors myself, after I discovered that it outperformed my new IN-FOCUS projector, which I purchased few weeks ago. I made this discovery in Gentry, Arkansas, where I was invited to speak. Tim Rosenburg, the church pastor, showed me the HITACHI projector that their church had just bought. In fact they bought four of them, for the youth, elementary school, and academy. We set up both projectors and to my surprise I found that the HITACHI provided a much brighter and sharper picture. Pastor Tim Rosenburg placed me in contact with the Adventist brother in Texas who buys these projectors from HITACHI for our churches.

If your church is planning to buy a video projector, I would be glad to place you in contact with our Texan brother. Just email to me your name and phone number and I will pass it on to him. He will contact you directly and you can made all the necessary arrangements with him.

I am extremely happy with this new HITACHI projector that I use every weekend. The image is bright and clear, even when some lights are on. It is small, weighs only about 5 pounds and I can put both the projector and the lap top computer in my brief case, with space left over for my Bible and two books. If your church is looking for a good video project at a reasonable price, you will be very happy this one.

NEWLY RECORDED SABBATH SEMINAR NOW AVAILABLE IN AUDIO CASSETTES, VIDEO TAPES AND DVD DISKS

The many messages of appreciation for the newly SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR, have led me to extend the special offer until November 30, 2002. The seminar was recorded last March 15-17, 2002, at the First Fort Worth SDA Church in Texas by the TEXAS MEDIA CENTER. We spent a lot of time and efforts preparing this new recording where I use about 100 PowerPoint slides for each presentation. The response has been very gratifying. Church leaders in different parts of the world are expressing appreciation for the blessings of these timely Sabbath messages. Your personal effort to share them with your congregation is much appreciated.

The new SABBATH SEMINAR consists of a total of 8 one-hour lectures covering the following topics: the gripping story of my search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University in Rome; the discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity; practical principles on how to keep the Sabbath to experience Christ's rest and peace in our lives; an update report on the most recent Sabbath/Sunday developments; and a sacred concert with two outstanding tenors entitled THE SABBATH IN SONGS. The concert was recorded in a television studio in South Bend, Indiana.

This new SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR is now available in THREE FORMATS:

- 8 AUDIO cassettes
- 4 VIDEO tapes
- 3 DVD disks.

Each of them come in a nice plastic album with an artistically designed jacket. Your special introductory offers until August 31, 2002, are as follows:

- 1) **SABBATH SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO CASSETTES** at the special introductory offer of only \$40.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$60.00. The 8 audio cassettes come in a nice album with an artistically designed color jacket. The special introductory offer will last until November 30, 2002
- 2) **SABBATH SEMINAR IN 4 VIDEO TAPES** at the special introductory offer of only \$60.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00. The price is the same for both the American and the overseas PAL system. Specify which system you need. The 4 video tapes come in a nice album with an artistically designed color jacket. The special introductory offer will last until November 30, 2002
- 3) **SABBATH SEMINAR IN DVD DISKS** at the special introductory offer of only \$80.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$120.00. The DVD disks are compatible with all TV systems overseas. No conversion is necessary. The 3 DVD disks come in a nice triple Jewel case with an artistically designed color jacket. The special introductory offer will last until November 30, 2002

The easiest way to order the new AUDIO cassettes, VIDEO tapes, or DVD disks, is with your credit card. You can order by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

SPECIAL OFFER ON *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*

During the past three years *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* has helped about 200 pastors to accept the Sabbath. This has been the result of the outreach efforts of many churches that have mailed the book to their local ministers,

To help your church participate in this project, we offer this timely book by the CASE OF 32 COPIES FOR ONLY \$170.00, POSTAGE PAID. This translates to \$5.90 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00.

You can order a case of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

AN INCREDIBLE OFFER ON ALL MY PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDING

Every Saturday night I offer to those who attend my seminar the complete package of all my publications and recording for ONLY \$280.00, instead of the regular price of \$825.00. I decided this time to extend the same special offer to the subscribers of our ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER.

THIS IS THE LIST OF ALL THE ITEMS INCLUDED IN THIS SPECIAL PACKAGE

1. All the 16 BOOKS: regularly retails for \$305.00
2. SABBATH SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: regularly it retails for \$60.00
3. ADVENT SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: regularly it retails for \$60.00
4. CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE SEMINAR IN 8 AUDIO cassettes placed in an artistically designed album: regularly it retails for \$60.00
5. SABBATH SEMINAR IN 4 VIDEO cassettes or 3 DVD disks: regularly they retail for \$120.00 and \$140.00 respectively. Both of them come in an artistically designed album. You need to choose either the VIDEO or the DVD for the package.
6. TWO CDS: one with all my BOOKS and ARTICLES and the one with all my SEMINARS. The two CDs retail for \$100.00 each.

Your special offer for the complete list of all my books, cassettes, videos or DVDs, and CDs, is ONLY \$280.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$825.00.

You can order this SPECIAL PACKAGE by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

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