

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



# *The Word and Work*



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

November-December, 1999

## **The Revelation of Jesus Christ**

part 2

*Revelation* teaches about *persecution*;  
*persecution* teaches about *Revelation*

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Can this book help improve  
the *worship* in our churches?

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Learn more about *holiness* -- God's,  
ours, and the churches'

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The seals, the trumpets, and the bowls

## Some Major Themes in *Revelation*:

### God's Kingdom . . . Evil . . . Cosmic Redemption

"God is not an indifferent spectator of human affairs. Nor is he merely interested in the salvation of individuals. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has already acted to bring **his Kingdom** -- his reign -- to men in history, and he will act again in the return of our Lord to bring history to his Kingdom....

"God is the Lord of history; but there are **opposing forces** which seek to frustrate God's rule. Evil is not merely absence of the good. Nor is it a stage in man's upward development. It is a terrible enemy of human well-being and will never be outgrown or abandoned until God mightily intervenes to purge evil from the earth. Evil is greater than man, and greater than men.

"Judgment must fall upon the present natural order not to accomplish its dissolution but that out of judgment might emerge a new redeemed order. The biblical idea of **redemption** always includes the **earth**. Biblical thought sees an essential unity between man and nature. The earth is not merely the indifferent theater on which man lives out his life but is an expression of the divine glory .... therefore the earth must also share in God's final redemption." --George E. Ladd

\* \* \* \*

**Revelation is the Overcomer's Manual.** "In the end when all is said and done there are just two kinds: the overcomers and the overcome. Should the Lord come today in which class would I be found? Overcoming implies difficulty and resistance. There is no land of spiritual ease where we may follow holiness without hindrance or conflict. 'Sure I must fight if I would reign.' God wants you to overcome where you are, in the difficulties and trials in which you find yourself today. Do not imagine you would do better if your situation were different. Overcoming is to be done **here and now.**" --R. H. Boll

# THE WORD AND WORK

*"Declare the whole counsel of God"*

**Alex V. Wilson, Editor** •

**Dennis L. Allen, Missions**

**Bennie Hill, News & Notes**

The Word and Work (USPS 691-460) is published monthly except December under the auspices of the Portland Ave. Church of Christ, Inc., Louisville, Ky. Subscription: \$8.00 per year, bundles of 10 or more to one address = \$7.50 per subscription. Address correspondence to Word and Work, 2518 Portland Avenue, Louisville, KY 40212. Second class postage paid at Louisville, Ky.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Word and Work, 2518 Portland Ave., Louisville, KY 40212.

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**Vol. XCIII**

**NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1999**

**No. 11**

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# Why Not and Why

Alex V. Wilson

Let me emphasize what we are *NOT* trying to do as we publish two issues in a row on John's book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. In *no* way do we wish to over-emphasize either prophecy in general or the book of Revelation in particular. And in *no* way are we pushing the view that 2000 A.D. has any special prophetic significance. (We have several times denied that fanciful idea.) Also, in absolutely *no way at all* do we hope to revive the prophecy wars that plagued the Churches of Christ from around 1915 till around 1950 and even later. In *no way at all* do we believe (nor has WW ever believed since its beginning in 1908) that walls of disfellowship should be built due to differing interpretations of prophecy. We have in the past run articles with which we disagree on some of these matters, and will continue to do so if they are written with a loving attitude and have teaching that merits consideration, based on the Bible as God's Word.

We *are* focusing on Rev. due to its intrinsic worth as part of divine Scripture. And *also* because in some quarters it is sadly ignored. And *also* because in some other quarters it is grossly over-emphasized and wildly interpreted. Not that we think we've solved all the problems and avoided all the pitfalls! -- though that is our desire. Rather, both last month and thus, we are sharing, from a variety of sources, various viewpoints which we feel are worthy of study. The ideas can't all be right, for they sometimes contradict one another. So we trust you will read with prayer in your heart, a Bible in your hand, and discernment in your mind. **We aim to stimulate study, not replace it.**

We mentioned above that in some quarters Rev. is neglected. A few months ago I heard a lecture about prophetic views in the Stone-Campbell movement at the *start* of the 20th century. An important book back then contained a section surveying the message of the New Testament. That section was brief, to be sure, but at least several pages were devoted to explaining the gospels, Acts, and the epistles. Then it "summarized" Rev. in one sentence! Also a set of commentaries on the Bible was published, but somehow they never got around to the one about Rev. Another book covered the whole Bible; it contained close to 700 pages, but gave hardly any attention to Rev.

So maybe these two issues of WW are needed to try to bring balance to our study and teaching. For our goal is not to make study of Rev. unnecessary, but to promote it. And always with love. Recently I received a letter from a preacher on another continent, a man I'd never heard of. But he had heard of us, and wrote asking for literature about prophecy. "I want to make a war of words here in ---, and before I do that I must study from different angles." Oh brother! We don't aim to help anyone make a "war of words" regarding various interpretations of the Bible, unless there are errors involving the Gospel itself -- the person and work of the Lord and His salvation (Jude 3-4). Regarding prophetic teaching, let us neither ignore it, nor over-emphasize it, nor fight over it.

# Are you Sure you Want to Understand this Book?

There may be a Price Involved

"Throughout the age of persecution at the hands of imperial Rome, for well over 200 years after its publication, Rev. spoke its central message unambiguously to the majority of Christians, even if they were rather vague about some of the symbolism. The identity of the beast ... was not in doubt [that he stood for the persecuting emperor], nor was there any doubt about the victory which awaited those who were faithful unto death. With the peace of the church in the early 4th century [when Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal and even favored it] this clear **insight into the message of the book was inevitably obscured. But it has returned in other persecuting ages.**

"In more comfortable times Rev. may be degraded to the unworthy status of a book of puzzles, a battleground for conflicting schools of interpretation, or it may be briefly dismissed as a putrid backwater, cut off from the main stream of Christian faith and life. But 'when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word,' the book becomes once more what it really is, a living word from God, full of encouragement and strength to those who find that 'all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' .... Above all, this book reminds them that He with whom and for whom they endure these things is the triumphant Lord of history, and that His victory is theirs." --F.F. Bruce in *The International Bible Commentary* [plus inserted comments by avw]

\* \* \* \*

"...A Romanian pastor, exiled from Romania because of his stand against the government, told me that the favorite book in the Bible, so far as the Romanian church is concerned, is the Book of Revelation. But he said it is not [their] favorite book...for the same reason that it is one of the favorite books of the church in America. He said that the church in America seems to be studying Revelation because it is sort of interesting -- intriguing -- the way things are going to work out. The American church is trying to make sure that it will never suffer. The church in Romania, on the other hand, is not interested in that aspect -- because they *are* suffering and *have* suffered. They love the Book of Revelation because, first of all, it was written by John...after he had been sent into exile. The Romanian churches know what it is to have their pastors imprisoned and exiled.

"Then he added this. Romanian Christians are suffering *unjustly*. They are being desperately abused and subjected to all manner of cru-

elty. Thus the message of Revelation to them...is this: God is God, and He is committed to seeing that good is ultimately rewarded. He is committed personally to seeing that evil will not finally triumph." -- Stuart Briscoe in *Taking God Seriously*

\* \* \* \*

### Put Yourself in Their Place (1st century disciples)

"The gospel had been preached throughout the Roman province of Asia (as elsewhere). Some had believed and become Christians. They had been taught that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of God. Being divine, He was fully in control of all situations. He had indeed been rejected ... and crucified. But that was simply the way in which He brought salvation to men .... He rose triumphant now to die no more. He went back to heaven, but in due course He would return ..., destroy the kingdoms of this world and set up God's perfect kingdom. It was an inspiring faith and the little group of Christians embraced it with fervour. They looked and longed for the promised consummation when God's will would be perfectly done throughout the whole earth.

"And nothing happened....

"The Empire continued on its wicked way. Oppression and wrong abounded. Evil men prospered. Idolators persisted in their idol-worship .... Because they would not conform, the tiny band of Christians found themselves the object of suspicion and sometimes outright persecution....

"What had become of the message which had induced them to become Christians in the first place? Where was the promise of His coming? If God was active in the world it demanded a very strong faith to perceive it. Had they been mistaken in coming to Christ in the first place? Was it all a delusion? Was real power in the hands of the emperor?"

"To a church perplexed by such problems Rev. was written. We must not think of it as a kind of intellectual puzzle (spot the meaning of this symbol!) sent to a relaxed church with time on its hands and an inclination for solving mysteries. It was sent to a persecuted, frustrated church, one which did not know what to make of the situation in which it found itself. John writes to meet the need of that church."

--Leon Morris, *Revelation -- An Introduction and Commentary*

# Thought-Provokers on Rev. from Various Sources

## Three-in-One

The preceding article's final quotation, from Leon Morris, shows that Rev. was written very much as a **pastoral letter**, dealing with the doubts, fears and other struggles of the disciples in the seven churches to which it was addressed. Verses 4-6 of chapter one are written in typical letter form -- except that it is from God! Then in verse 11 He gives John the seven addresses where to send it.

Yet we saw last month that Rev. is also an **apocalypse**, written with the dramatic symbolism and sense of cosmic conflict which marked that style of literature. The book's two opening words are "The revelation..."; the Greek word used is *apocalypsis*, meaning an unveiling or disclosure. The unveiling was "made known" (literally, "signified") by Christ to His people (1:1) -- showing that it would contain many signs and symbols.

But we notice that John also calls Rev. "this **prophecy**" and "the prophecy in this book" (1:3; 22:7,10,18,19). How does prophecy differ from apocalyptic? Most (but not all) of the apocalyptic writings outside the Bible gave "small attention ... to ethical teaching. [Their authors saw] evil as overcome, not by better living, but by God's mighty intervention" (Morris). *Biblical prophecy, on the other hand, is full of moral demands*. The recurring call for wayward members in the seven churches to repent fits the style of prophecy much more than of apocalyptic.

The important point to note here is that Rev. fits into **all 3 categories**. Any interpretation that omits one or two of these styles may overlook some important insights. --avw

## Another Distinction: God's Working in History

"Keep in mind the difference between the prophetic and the apocalyptic view of history. The **prophetic view of history** was that *God and people work together to bring history to an end, to a goal*. This was the view we find in the former prophets .... After the return from exile, and especially during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-168 B.C.), it looked like the more godly, the more righteous the people were, the less they succeeded and the more they suffered. So there grew up a different view of history known as **the apocalyptic view**. It held that *the world would become so evil and corrupt that God would intervene from without*. He would break into history from outside and would accomplish his purpose dramatically *without the*

help of man. These two views were different in emphases" (Ray Robbins).

The writer of Rev. combines the apocalyptic view and the prophetic view. There is the apocalyptic: Christ breaking into history from without (in His first and second comings). And there is the prophetic: Christ working with his people, the church, to bring history to its victorious end. The apocalyptic message of God's intervention in history needs to be balanced with the prophetic message of man's responsibility as co-worker with God -- and also with Rev.'s pastoral-letter message of the divine possibilities for constructive activity through the church, *your* congregation. (Adapted from *Revelation: Three Viewpoints*, by Beasley-Murray, Robbins, and Hobbs. Published by Broadman.)

## INSIGHTS From VARIOUS TEXTS In REVELATION

*"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead," Rev.1:17.*

"A notable OT parallel is the vision of God in Ezek.1:4ff. John, like Ezekiel, falls on his face before the glory, and like Ezekiel is raised to his feet. **It is the man who has fallen prostrate before God and been raised to his feet by God who can henceforth look the whole world in the face as the fearless spokesman of God.**" --F.F. Bruce

\* \* \* \*

### The Behind-the-Scenes Enemy

Don't forget your enemy. In the letters to the seven churches, "note the **many references to things of Satan**: twice we read of "the synagogue of Satan"; at Pergamum was "the throne of Satan"; in the letter to Thyatira mention is made of "the deep things of Satan"; in connection with Smyrna, the warning is given that the devil would cast some of them into prison" (Wilbur Smith).

Yes, "Evil is real! The agents of evil use real bullets!" (Morris Ashcraft). The conflict between good and evil, God and Satan, is not make-believe. Terrible casualties, moral wreckage, and lives ruined for time and eternity result from this war.

Yet both Evil and the Devil are limited, too. *At the end* of the contest, God stands as the clear winner. Satan will wear chains: his wrists and ankles will be scarred with shackles! (20:1-2) And his final destiny is the lake of fire. As one writer said, **Satan "carries a lash, but wears a leash!"** *Even now*, he can go so far but no farther. His days are numbered (12:12; 13:5). Yes, his attacks inflict real pain and cause

real tragedy. Yet the Lord overrules them. (See later section on God's providence.) And we can conquer our fierce foe. Read on.

\* \* \* \*

### How to Defeat a Dragon (Rev.12:11)

Rev. 12 shows **three of Satan's major weapons**, but v.11 reveals how to be triumphant over each of them. Notice our three means of victory.

“They have conquered [the Dragon]  
through *the blood of the Lamb*,  
and through *the Word to which they bore witness*.  
*They did not cherish life even in the face of death!*”  
(J.B. Phillips N.T. in Modern English).

a)When we sin, Satan constantly **accuses** us (v.10). But we can overcome his accusations by **the blood of the Lamb**. In his first letter John had stressed that fact: If we walk in the light with God, confessing our sins, the blood of Jesus goes on purifying us from all sin. Of course John urges us not to sin; but if we do, we have an advocate, a defense attorney, one who speaks in our defense -- Jesus Christ, who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 Jn.1:7,9; 2:1-2).

b)Satan is not only an accuser but also “the **deceiver** of the whole world” (v.9). He leads astray all the unconverted, and seeks to beguile us believers too. Our defense against this is **God's Word** to which we testify. By arming ourselves with the truth of Scripture (and making it known), we can avoid Satan's deception.

c)The Devil also **persecutes** us as a devouring Dragon. Enraged, he wages war against “those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” (v.17). But if we are **willing to give up our lives and die for Christ**, martyrdom simply sends our spirits to heaven. That's no loss for us!

By God's strength we can triumph over the Evil One. In fact, we have no excuse for *not* doing so. But don't expect to conquer him painlessly. Notice that **victory cost the Lamb His blood, and it may cost us ours!** --avw in WW

\* \* \* \*

### The Providence of God, Rev. 17

Just as God's providence was in full effect when His Son was nailed to the cross (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28), so will it be during the reign of the Antichrist or “beast.” Rev.17:12-14 & 16-17 says, “*Ten kings...for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority*

to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings.... The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin.... For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule. **until God's words are fulfilled.**" In the New Bible Commentary, George Beasley-Murray writes thus about those verses: "**The sovereignty of God is never more apparent [to us believers, that is] than during the rule of Antichrist!**"! --avw in WW

\* \* \* \*

### Distinguish Things which Differ

Regarding Rev. 3:10, "...The hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test *those who live on the earth.*" John always uses this latter term to designate the ungodly, never to refer to believers. F.F. Bruce counsels us to **differentiate between divine wrath** against the ungodly, **divine chastening** of wayward believers, and **Satanic/human tribulation** or persecution of believers: "In the interpretation of Rev. it is important to distinguish between the tribulation which comes by way of divine judgment on the ungodly (as in 3:10) or on unfaithful Christians (as in 2:22) and that which comes in the form of persecution upon the faithful (as in 2:10; 7:14)."

Again he writes, this time on the expression, "they who have come out of the great tribulation" (7:14): "This great tribulation is different from that of 2:22, [and] from the 'hour of trial' of 3:10, and from the wrath against which the elect were sealed in 7:3-8. In all these places it is divine judgment against the wicked which is in view .... The tribulation of our present passage is the persecution of the followers of Christ which broke in such intensity in John's day and continues until the ultimate triumph of Christ. (We western Christians may forget too easily that the present day is one of intense and large-scale persecution of the church.)" --F.F. Bruce

\* \* \* \*

### Prophecy: Motive for WORSHIP, Not Arguing!

Bible-loving Christians differ among themselves over interpreting Rev. There are disagreements over the meaning and time of the millennium -- the reign of Christ (see July '99 WW); contradictory views about the "great tribulation" -- the reign of Antichrist; etc., etc. Due to these differing interpretations, many Christians fall into one of two errors. Some ignore prophecy entirely. "Why bother? Nobody can understand it anyway." Others cling to their cherished view with minds made up and clamped shut. They never consider the possibility that they might profit from learning more (and maybe even un-learning a

few things). Some of them regard anyone who differs from them as arch heretics.

In contrast to such attitudes, **Rev.11:15-19** provides a healthier outlook. This wonderful passage mentions important prophetic truths or events on which almost all Gospel-Christians **agree!** It shows that while the Lord even now *has* all power, He has not yet *taken* it and begun to reign openly (17; compare Heb.2:8c). But He will do so: He will make the kingdom of the world His own and *will reign forever* (15). The dead will be resurrected and *judged*. Upon the unrepentant will fall God's righteous *wrath* and *destruction*. But for God's people there will be *rewards* (18). The blessings of *God's covenant* will be fulfilled (19). And all these events will occur according to God's sovereign schedule, when *the time has come* (18).

May our response to these great facts be like the 24 elders' response. *Let us fall on our faces and worship God.* --avw

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## Revelation, chapter 5:

### Behold the LION of God

*I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne  
a scroll...sealed with seven seals.*

*And...a mighty angel [proclaimed] in a loud voice,*

*“Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”*

In John's day a seven-sealed scroll signified an official document, most often *a will, telling how to distribute a person's inheritance when he died*. Scripture often uses “**inheritance**” to represent the future blessings God will give us because Christ died. We shall inherit *eternal life* (Mt.19:29), *salvation* (Heb.1:14), *God's glory* (Rom.8:16-18) and *God's kingdom* (Jas.2:5, Eph.5:5). Thus Rev.5:1-2 seems to mean, Who is qualified to fulfill God's purposes by bringing salvation to its completion -- by establishing God's eternal kingdom in its fullness of glory for His people to inherit?

But no one could be found! In despair John wept and wept, overwhelmed with grief. For unless someone was worthy to open and carry out this official “will and testament,” all John had hoped for would turn out to be only empty delusion! All he'd believed in was false. All his sacrifices were in vain. All his sufferings were foolish. All his work was wasted. There would be no salvation-to-come, no eternal life, no future glory, no conquering kingdom of righteousness and peace. The cause of Christ was a lost cause. If, after all, no one could bring God's promises to consummation, John and his fellow-believers had been total fools, totally fooled.

But WAIT -- The Worthy One is found! An elder tells John,

*"Don't weep! Look,*

*the Lion of the tribe of Judah,*

*the root of David,*

*has triumphed. He has won a victory!"*

How ecstatic John became. Yes, there is a Conqueror after all, someone qualified to carry out the Lord's eternal purposes. This One was the fulfiller of ancient prophecies. He was a king descended from David (2 Sam.7:12f), a lion from royal Judah (Gen.49:9f). Listen as A.W. Tozer preaches on this scene:

Judah was the ruling tribe of Israel. The lion was the symbol of the tribe of Judah, and meant courage, strength and dominion. Christ, says the Scripture, has conquered. We used to sing, "Jesus is victor. His work is complete, crushing all enemies under His feet." If I didn't believe in the final, complete, glorious victory of Jesus Christ the Lord, I'd shut my Bible, run out the side door and never preach again as long as I lived. I believe that I'm sent by One who never lost a battle and never will. This is Jesus Christ the Lord, the lion of the tribe of Judah.

And John heard this announced and whirled around to see the lion ... and saw a lamb. The lion conquers by tooth and nail, so John turned in fear and hope to the lion, but instead he saw only a little white lamb standing there, as if it had been slain.

Now what could this mean? That God's ways and men's ways are different. It could only mean that *when God wanted the lion to conquer the world He sent a lamb to die for the world*. I know of nothing as wonderful as this in all the world. I've read Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, but no one has conceived of anything so wonderful as this. *When God would send a lion to rule the world He turned Him into a lamb and let Him die for the world He was sent to rule*. Not by Jesus' fists is the world saved but by His nail-pierced hands -- not by His muscle but His love. Not by vengeance but forgiveness. Not by force but sacrifice. Our Lord surrendered in order to win. He destroyed His enemies by dying for them. He conquered death by letting death conquer Him. (HIS magazine, 2/65)

Another has written, "The world believes that it controls history and destiny by *outkilling* others. Christ offers the true victory which comes only by *outdying* others. The *Cross* prevails over the *sword*; *giving* life prevails over *taking* life." (Frank Stagg)

Yes, that's true, and may our response be "Hallelujah -- what a Savior! What mercy -- beyond imagination! What grace -- oh that all might embrace it!" But then we ponder the fact that when divine mercy is persistently, stubbornly *rejected*, no alternative exists but divine *justice*. When rebels refuse a pardon graciously offered them by the Judge at great cost to himself, they are in effect asking for judg-

ment. This thought hits home when we reach chapter six and read that startling phrase, "the wrath of the lamb." The *wrath of the lamb*! Ponder that, and also the following meditation.

## The LAMB who LEADS and DEVOURS

**"See, the LION has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll.'  
Then I saw a LAMB, looking as if it had been slain." --Rev.5:5,6**

**"...the Wrath of the LAMB!" --Rev.6:16**

**"The LAMB will be their SHEPHERD." --Rev.7:17**

*Jesus is the LION:*

In that coming wrathful hour  
He it is that will devour  
Evil with His mighty jaws;  
Pride and greed will feel His claws.  
He it is who takes the scroll  
And with strength fulfills the whole:  
For He conquered in the past  
And will smash all wrong at last.

*Jesus is the LAMB:*

He now strong was once so weak  
That He died in patience meek;  
Without protest gave His life,  
Thus by losing Won the strife.  
Trespass-offering lifted up --  
Drank the Judge's bitter cup.  
Offers peace -- an open door --  
Before earth shall hear Him roar.

*The LAMB is the SHEPHERD:*

Those who would escape His wrath  
Ought to follow in His path,  
Listen and obey His voice,  
in His shepherd-care rejoice.  
Those who tend to stray He guides,  
Living water He provides.  
LAMB of God, and SHEPHERD too,  
Mighty LION -- we worship You!

--avw

*“To Him Who Has an Ear”:*

## **LISTEN TO REVELATION AS A BOOK OF WORSHIP**

Darren Johnson

Revelation. At the sound of its name, the popular imagination conjures images of chaos and cataclysm: devastating earthquakes, incurable epidemics, exploding asteroids and nuclear holocaust. Such perceptions, though derived in part from the mysterious, apocalyptic imagery of Revelation, owe more to Hollywood sensationalism than a faithful reading of the text.

Those attuned to the Revelator, Jesus Christ, will decode a much different message, resonating with beauty, hope, and gospel power. It is a message so riveting that it inspired the likes of Handel and Wesley to new creative heights, composing stirring oratorios and hymns for the glory of God and the edification of the church-at-worship. It is a message so compelling that it has emboldened millions of persecuted believers to gather and pray at risk of death. Yet, it is a message so often distorted and neglected that it begs to be heard anew in the worship assemblies of the modern American church.

Revelation, it should be remembered, is primarily a word “to the churches” (2:7, etc.), to be read and heard within the worship service. The introductory blessing presupposes such a setting: “Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein (RSV).” The book concludes, moreover, with the traditional Maranatha prayer (“Come, Lord Jesus”) and the congregational Amen (22:20-21), the closing elements of early Christian worship. In between, Revelation repeatedly speaks to us in the vocabulary of praise: in doxologies and beatitudes, in prayers and psalms. Such language is hardly incidental, considering that the Revelation was given on the day of worship, the Lord’s Day (1:12), to an exiled prophet homesick for the communion of the saints.

These simple considerations should have enormous impact upon how we “hear” Revelation. It is in the setting of worship (not a movie theater) that Revelation’s message is best heard, understood, and taken to heart. United in worship, we lay aside petty dogmatism as we jointly set our hearts on the contemplation of more “worthy” objects. A scholar from our own movement, R. H. Boll, said it best when he concluded his exposition of Revelation with an elegant prayer for “humility...obedience...service and loyalty and love.” With his prayer on our hearts, let us reconsider Revelation as a book of worship and hear what the Risen Christ says to His worshipers today.

## Worship: The Church's Vocation

Worship was a theme dear to the heart and pen of the prophet John. In the Greek text of Revelation, the word *proskyneō* (the most common NT verb for worship) is used a whopping 24 times. A second word for worship (*latreuo*) is employed on two occasions. That worship was of immense concern to the author is clear not only from his vocabulary, but from the structure of the book as a whole. Interludes of song and praise punctuate the action at critical moments (11:15-19; 15:2-4; 19:1-2, 6-8).

Through the high calling of worship, the church participates in the outcome of God's eternal purposes; it's not just something we "do" on Sunday mornings between the hours of eleven and noon. On the contrary, worship is what we "are" all about! The church, like Israel of old, is a "kingdom and priests" (5:10), liberated from the tyranny of sin "to serve our God" and mediate His blessings to all creation.

This tremendous accent upon Christian worship is quite understandable once we recognize that worship is the one activity of the church that will undoubtedly continue for eternity. Think about it! What opportunity will there be for evangelism once the full harvest has been gathered into the storehouse? And what need will there be for pastoral care when the Good Shepherd Himself is there to wipe away every tear (Rev. 7:16-17)? But the praises of the redeemed will not be wiped away; they will continue to resound to the glory of God (cf. Rev. 7:15, 14:1-3; 15:3-4; 19:1-8)!

Obviously and sadly enough, many churches in John's day and ours have failed to take the "high calling" of worship very seriously. The loveless legalism of the Ephesians, the compromised worship of the Thyatiran church, the corpse-cold devotion of the saints in Sardis, etc.: none lacks a contemporary counterpart. Let us, then, give careful and prayerful forethought as to how we approach God in worship. How much time and spiritual reflection are we investing in preparation for worship: in the songs that are selected; in the words that are spoken over the Supper, in the prayers that are offered up to God? And, on a more personal level, What am I doing to prepare my whole person for the confession and adoration of the Lord? Speaker and sermon aren't the only components of the service that need preparation. What is our corporate worship, after all, but "heaven practice," our eternal vocation!

## Worship: an "Out of this World" Experience

If, as Revelation stresses, the worship of God is indeed the church's peculiar calling, then our worship should be anything but routine. May our corporate experience of God never cease to summon a fresh array of worshipful responses, as intensely moving and deeply reverent as those glimpsed through the eyes of John.

As we follow John into the divine court (chs. 4-5), the scene unfolds like a drama. Angelic creatures cry "Holy, Holy, Holy"; the twenty-four elders lift their voices in song; angelic hosts join the heavenly choir; and the *Amen* isn't pronounced until every life-form in the cosmos has taken part. (No one is a mere spectator in this service!) Each element beautifully complements the God whose presence the Church invokes: a God of Order (1 Cor. 14:33), Majestic and Holy, approached in solemnity and celebrated with dignity.

Yet, the reader must not forget that the God of Order is also the Living God, whose surprising and gracious deeds repeatedly arouse fresh acts of praise. The portals of Paradise cannot contain the voices of those boisterous choristers (5:12; 7:10; 19:6), lifting "new" songs to the God of their salvation (5:9, 14:3). Contrast these scenes with the beginning of chapter 8, where the exuberant praise of heaven is hushed for about half an hour (v.1). Did the Quakers hijack the service? Nah! Quite often, God's presence is most appropriately met with still lips, listening ears, and hearts poised for His next move!

What did John's "out of this world" worship experience have to do with the worship of first-century churches? Plenty. When John pondered the simple services of this persecuted "sect," huddled in their makeshift sanctuaries, it was as though he were peering through luminous pin pricks in the canopy of heaven. Worlds blurred and merged when frail humans assembled in the Presence of Christ (1:12-13). The prayers of the church, like clouds of incense, intermingled with the praises of heaven (5:8; 8:30); and God's sovereign will was acknowledged on earth even as in heaven! With this realization, the church in Asia (chs. 2-3) was called to embody, however feebly, every crescendo and cadence in the throne room of God.

The breathtaking array of worship displayed in Revelation can be an important resource for churches today. Revelation helps us see that true worship—be it in the first century or the twentieth or beyond the bounds of time—is a dynamic encounter of the Divine, not the static, perfunctory performances of men. This is an important insight, lest the church nuzzle over the "pattern" of worship to the neglect of the "Person." By fixing our attention more and more upon the God we encounter in worship, we will be better able to incorporate a broader spectrum of worshipful expressions without losing our upward Focus.

### **Worship is Worth-ship**

In the hallowed precincts of heaven, the worship is always focused. Glorifying God is the church's only business, day and night (4:8; 7:15), and no one dozes off or dashes out to beat the Presbyterians to Ponderosa. The worshipers never tire of casting their crowns before the throne and recounting just how "worthy" its Occupant is!

It is worth noting that our verb "worship" is derived from two Old English words (*weorth* and *scipe*), meaning "to create worth." While we cannot "create" God's worthiness, we can certainly ascribe to God the worthiness that is inherently His own. This definition of worship accords well with the goings-on in the divine court: "Worthy art thou, our Lord and God..."(4:11). And "worthy is the Lamb..." (5:12). Herein lies the whole rationale for worship: to give glory to the God of our creation and the Lamb of our redemption. Father and Son are the object of our worship, the reason for every syllable of our praise, the ultimate criterion of each utterance and act (5:13).

Revelation strongly reiterates that no one else in the whole universe, not even an angel of God (19:10; 22:8-9), is worthy of such honor. "Worship God!" But in John's day, another watchword was operative among the powers-that-be. "Worship Caesar!" The worship of deceased, "divinized emperors was widespread, but proved particularly strong in Asia Minor, where local officials, eager to court Roman favor, vigorously enforced the cult of the Emperor. Thus, when Emperor Domitian (reigned 81-96 A.D.) audaciously declared himself "Lord and God," most residents of Asia happily acquiesced to the imperial demands. But how could Christians square such claims with the exclusive worship of their Lord and God? Could one swear by "Lord Caesar," throw a teeny pinch of incense on the altar, and still remain a servant of the True King?

John warns that compromise is no option. In chapter 13, he foresees how the idolatry of the state will culminate in a wicked personage, the "Beast," who demands to be worshiped as God (Rev. 13:8; 2 Thess. 2:4). With the aid of his religious right-arm, the "False Prophet," the Beast succeeds in seducing the "inhabitants of the earth" into a counterfeit system of worship (13:12). Why would anyone pay homage to this hideous monster? To those whose priorities are shaped by the world, the Beast's agenda is quite appealing, he offers safety, financial security, a better way of life (13:14-17). The delusion is so strong that when God reveals His righteous verdict against such idolatries, only a remnant repents and gives Him worship (11:13); the vast majority of people stubbornly continue to curse God, even as His wrath intensifies (9:20-21; 16:9-11, 21).

The question confronting the church of John's day was urgent: Where does your worship lie? Have you given your allegiance to the "King of Kings," soon to return in glory, or to the kingdoms of this world, on an imminent collision course with the Kingdom of God? Those who uncompromisingly confessed the worthiness of God and Christ found in their corporate worship vivid reassurance that a glorious banquet awaited them (19:9; cf. Mt. 26:29). However, worshipers like those at Laodicea, who accommodated their faith to the value system of

the culture and regime, were on the verge of encountering judgment in their common meal. The Risen One was pounding on the door—on the outside looking in, but still pleading for table fellowship (3:20).

Perhaps the Living Christ is probing our churches today, asking of us, Who is worthy in your worship? To answer this question properly, we must be on guard against those insidious influences that shift focus away from the worthiness of our God and Christ. Consider, for example, that seemingly innocuous trend of going to worship to “get something out of it,” to “receive a blessing,” to “have my needs met,” etc. While there is certainly nothing wrong with expecting and receiving a blessing when one worships, should this coveted blessing be the primary motivation of the mature worshiper? By adopting such an attitude, are we not saying to God, “I am the reason for my worship; I am the measure of every sermon and song; meeting my personal needs is the bottom line: out with Christ, in with self”? Only by reaching upward and outward in our worship can we encounter the One worthy enough to satisfy our deepest needs: “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me (3:20).”

The message of the Revelator is urgent “listening” for a church too often obsessed with selfish, trifling issues and too little concerned with those worthwhile pursuits that really matter, like the worship of the Alpha and Omega. If the congregation you serve seems to have lost its focus in worship, or perhaps selfish interests have prevented you from experiencing the corporate presence of God, hearing Revelation anew, as Christ’s message of worship, may provide an opportunity for renewal. May we all claim Revelation’s upward vocation, sing its praises, pray its doxologies, and ascribe all worth to the God it proclaims!

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## Holiness in *Revelation*

Kevin J. Gilbert

### *Introduction*

Holiness is the Christian word *par excellence*. It stands at the heart of the Faith. All the contents and acts of faith are connected to the holy. Revelation may not be among your first picks for a “holiness” text. However, in it the reader will find tremendous manifestations of the holiness of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Its colorful language also paints portraits of individual human holiness and of congregational holiness. One will also find there the consequences of holiness or unholiness. The prophetic, future aspects of John’s Apocalypse have been greatly emphasized. However, John also has a unique message of holiness for contemporary Christians and churches. This article surveys that message. I make no claim to treat the subject exhaustively. Rather, my purpose is

to promote further investigation of the topic, thus promoting self-discovery. Therefore, if any reader is moved to pursue further study and development of any thought suggested here, the article will be successful.

### *Defining Holiness*

When we speak of holiness, we may be speaking of God, of things consecrated to Him, or of believers, both individually and as communities. In the Old Testament holiness is spoken of principally in relation to God, and especially of his divine nature (e.g., “the Lord is Holy,” Ps. 99:9; “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts,” Isa. 6:3). It also invokes God’s majesty and awesomeness (Exod. 3:5; 15:11; 19:18, 24; Ps. 96:9). These qualities quite naturally denote His superiority to and separateness from His creation (Hos. 11:9). Hence, since God’s creation is prone to sin, God’s holiness is His moral perfection (Isa. 15:16; Hab. 1:13). These themes find repetition in the New Testament. It follows, then, that every *thing* associated with God is holy (e.g., sabbaths, assemblies, temple furniture and utensils, Zion), and every *person* or *community* associated with God is holy (e.g., Ex. 12:17; 16:23; Deut. 7:6; Lev. 11:44). As such, that which is consecrated or sanctified as “holy” is called to be used or to behave in the special way God instructs. Holy people are called to a particular standard of moral behavior in the community of God. Living up to those standards constitutes the mark of holiness, and it is the highest expression of the covenant relationship between the holy God and his people. Hence, Christian holiness may be summed up as the devotion and purity of life associated with Christian discipleship. It includes worldview and lifestyle distinctives which portray a person as unique, one who lives according to God’s will and exhibiting that obedience in all areas of behavior. To be sure, it has in view the progressive sanctification of individual believers and is quite often defined in terms of personal character traits. Moreover, it also includes the sanctification of congregations in terms of social and communal character traits. In Revelation, the common words translated by the English noun “holiness” are not found. However, God and the saints (holy ones) are abundantly described with the adjective “holy.” Hence, holiness is a powerful theme in the narrative of the Apocalypse.

### *Holiness as Uniqueness*

We have spoken of holiness as separateness. To be separate means to be a unity by one’s self, to be disconnected from others. This idea of a separate unity appropriately speaks of God’s transcendence, or his “being other” than his creation. Since God is this “other,” and specifically the *only* one of His kind, His holiness legitimately may be spoken of as his uniqueness. Furthermore, since believers are called to be separate from the world, a distinct and holy people, Christian holiness may be spoken of as uniqueness in its distinction from the world. John describes many aspects of human and divine uniqueness.

### *The Unique Trinity*

In the prologue to his description of his Patmos vision, John proclaims a message of grace and peace which comes from each member of the Godhead equally. It proceeds from the eternal Father (1:4a), from the Holy Spirit (1:4b), and from the risen Lord (1:5-7). At this point, John dwells on the uniqueness of Jesus. Speaking of the Son last provides a transition from the Patmos vision's prologue to the vision itself. For the Lord becomes the primary character as mediator of the vision (1:8, 13, 17; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

### *The Unique Christ*

Christ is unique as the protagonist of this unfolding drama: he is *the* faithful witness; *the* firstborn from among the dead; *the* ruler of kings; and *the one* whose blood unshackles us from sin (1:5). He molds us into the kingdom and the priesthood of God (1:6). He is God who comes on the clouds in power to commence the next dispensation of salvation history (1:7). In Him exists the fulness of the triune Godhead (1:8; compare 1:4). John describes this appearance of deity in terms of Daniel's Ancient of Days and Ezekiel's vision of divine glory (compare Rev. 1:13-17 with Dan. 7:9-13; 8:6, 18, 10:5-16; and Ezck. 1:7, 24, & 26). Jesus is decked in a long robe with golden sash and His whole head is like snow; His eyes, fire; His feet, bronze; His face, like the sun. He thrusts a sharp sword from His mouth, and His voice thunders like a waterfall or the pounding surf (1:12-16). The unique Person of Christ is the one who walks among the churches and holds their evangelists ("angels" or "messengers" of the churches) in his right hand (1:16, 21-21). There is none like Him! He is *the* "holy one" (Rev. 3:7). Hence, He may instruct the churches with authority, for He is certainly worthy to be heeded.

### *The Unique Christian*

Revelation 20:6 says that those who have a part in the first resurrection are "holy" because the second death has no power over them. They have been made unique in that God forms them into a people who will never be threatened by hell. (For the sake of brevity and to maintain my focus, I assume here, without argument, that the resurrection in which these holy ones have a part is the bodily resurrection of the righteous at the Lord's return, rather than the believers being raised to new life from the waters of baptism, as some suggest. See 7-99 Word and Work re: the millennium.) Those who have a part in this resurrection are made unique by God. It is a gift from Him and it involves being shielded from any power the second death might have. But how do Christians arrive at this point?

While the holiness of 20:6 refers to the state of the resurrected saints, 20:4 indicates that they had heeded the call to be a holy, unique people even to the point of natural death or martyrdom. Some "had been be-

headed because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God." Others "had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead or on their hand." These believers had remained unique, refusing even the coercion of persecution and the death penalty. They continued to practice righteousness and justice, and they continued to keep themselves holy (22:11). In other words, they remained faithful (2:10). In the case of these Christians, holiness seems to be the result of progressive sanctification. It was motivated by the love and promises of the Lord and developed throughout their lives.

### *The Unique Community*

While the study of holiness in Revelation has been seen to stress individual responsibility (22:12), the Bible also speaks in terms of the call to communal holiness and responsibility. I use the term communal to refer to that which inheres in a local community of believers: a congregation. Just as Israel was blessed or cursed as a community, so also a congregation may be blessed or cursed as a community. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus promises continued communal blessing to the churches contingent upon continued or renewed holiness. A curse awaited those who shunned His call to divine uniqueness. But how is congregational holiness distinct from individual holiness?

Congregational holiness seems to mean that holiness which generally characterizes a church. While individuals will bear responsibility for their actions, whether good or evil (Revelation 3:4; 22:12), each congregation will be judged and rewarded according to that which characterizes them as a society. Negatively, the judgments a church may suffer for congregational unholiness may be God's removal of the church (2:5); divine war (2:16); great tribulation (2:22-23); an unexpected visitation of judgment (3:3); or God's violent rejection (3:14). Positively, continued holiness or repentance would avert such judgments and maintain the churches in a blessed relationship with God. Further, a number of rich blessings await members of the congregations who restore or maintain their unique posture (those who "overcome," 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The characteristics of communal holiness include communal action. Such social activities include working together to identify false teachers by some test and, as a community, refusing to tolerate them (2:2, 14-15, 20-21). It also includes remaining unique *as a church* even in the midst of persecution (2:3, 9-10, 13, 19; 3:8-10). And a holy church will be one in which most of its membership will be characterized by self-denial rather than self-delusion, avoiding superficial or nominal (in name only) Christianity (3:1-2, 6, 15-17).

### *Conclusion and Prospects*

Revelation portrays holiness as divine and human uniqueness. It describes the consequences awaiting human holiness and unholiness. And its depiction of human uniqueness is divided into individual and commu-

nal holiness. The church is quite familiar with the holiness of God and his call to individual holiness. But the communal aspect of holiness is one which, in my experience, is in need of attention in churches. I hope that readers will give it that attention. The church is called to be an exemplary society, the "city set on a hill" (Mat.5:14). That call has continuity with the call of the prophets to Israel: to exemplify divine relationships in interpersonal and social justice (righteousness). That call has been too often neglected. Let me focus on one example and ask you to be sensitive to other communal responsibilities as you study and live in your context.

My example is communal conflict resolution. The justice system of the United States often has been more just than that of the kingdom of God. While professing to "speak where the Bible speaks," I have experienced no church who had, or was willing to develop, a system of conflict resolution (or "church court") like that depicted in 1 Cor. 6. Why? The negative results, in my experience alone, have included the painful separation of hundreds of faithful members from their congregations as they sought justice in other churches. The Lord's messages to the seven churches of Asia involved blessings for *congregational* holiness and curses for *congregational* neglect. Therefore, as you constantly pursue the goal of greater holiness, help your church see the need to pursue communal holiness as well, defining it, planning for it, and acting upon it.

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### *The Seven Seals*

## WORLD JUDGMENTS

R. H. Boll

As one by one the Lamb opens the Seals of the Seven-Sealed Book we see first of all four symbolic horsemen; then two visions (under the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> seals, respectively)--the one calling for vengeance upon the dwellers on the earth; the other a vision in which we see the Day of the Lord breaking in upon the world. These six seals set forth in a general way the great cleaning-up process of God's judgments, culminating in the great day of Wrath. Then the Seventh Seal reveals under the seven trumpets, and under the symbolism of the seven bowls of wrath (which follow and complete the work of the seven trumpets) the step-by-step progress of God's preparatory judgments. The seventh Seal reveals the Seven Trumpets; and the sounding of the seventh Trumpet involves the Seven Bowls of wrath, "which are the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God."

These series of judgments constitute the backbone of the book of Revelation and, with some supplementary visions, form the bulk and body of it. It is well therefore, to take a wide outlook upon the meaning and purpose of these staggering calamities.

First of all, these judgments are not only just, but they do not come till due and overdue. Our attention is called to the fact that men have filled up their cup of iniquity to overflowing. (Comp. Gen. 15:16.) So long has God waited and kept silence, bearing and forbearing, that many have come to think Him slack (2 Pet. 3:9) and others assure themselves that God would never do anything, one way or the other. (Zeph. 1:12.) Not till the grain is dry (Rev. 14:15, margin) does He rise up to the harvest; and the grapes are dead ripe before they are gathered into the winepress of the wrath of God. (Rev. 14:18-20.) Patience and grace have had their full day; now dawns the Day of Vengeance blood-red, and all the more terrible for the long delay. Upon that generation will fall the full meed of judgment: for they are heirs of all the light and lessons of the past, heirs also to the accumulated accounts of generations gone by. (Comp. Matt. 23:35, 36.)

Secondly, the judgments are for a stated purpose — “to destroy them that destroy the earth.” That purpose will be fully accomplished. God will finish His work, His strange work, and cut it short in righteousness. “Behold the tempest of Jehovah, even his wrath is gone forth, a sweeping tempest: it shall burst upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of Jehovah will not return until he have executed, and till he have performed the intents of his heart: in the latter days ye shall understand it perfectly.” (Jer. 23:19, 20.) Once begun, the searching vengeance will not cease until the forces of evil are subdued, and man, who is of the earth, shall be terrible no more, and Jehovah alone is exalted in the earth. When we reach the twentieth chapter God has set righteousness in the earth. The settlement is thoroughgoing and terrible; but beyond the smoke and din of it shines a fairer sun, and the whole earth breaks forth into singing.

Lastly, the judgments are mingled with mercy, (Hab. 2:3.) They do not come in one fell swoop, but step-wise and progressively till a climax is reached. There are lulls in the storm in which men may have time to collect themselves and think. There are even voices calling men to belated repentance, for that “the great hour of judgment is come,” and regretful mention of the fact that “they repented not.” What can be salvaged will be salvaged. As a matter of fact, many will avail themselves, and amid terrific sufferings and persecutions will wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb—of Israel a great company, and of the nations an innumerable multitude. “When thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.” (Isa. 26:29.) The rest, by the very mercy of the judgments, are hardened, as in the plagues of Egypt.

### Opening Of The Seven Seals

The Lamb proceeds to break the seals. The first four seals are distinguished from the rest, as we shall see: the next two follow in succession; and the last, the seventh, after an intervening vision. (6:1-8:2.)

“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder COME.” At this summons there comes forth a white horse. He that sits upon it has a bow; a conqueror’s crown is given him, and he comes conquering and to conquer.

At the opening of the second seal, and at the challenge of the second Living Creature, proceeds a red horse. Its rider is empowered to take peace from the earth, “that they should slay one another.” There “was given unto him a great sword.”

The third seal is opened, the third Living Creature cries, Come! And a third, a black horse, appears, whose rider holds balances in his hand. From amidst the four Living Creatures a voice announces famine-prices of the staples of life.

When the Lamb breaks the fourth seal, the fourth Living Creature cries Come! And, behold a pale horse of ghastly greenish hue. He that sits upon it is Death; and Hades (which “swallows up what Death destroys”) follows with him. To these two authority is given (but limited to the fourth part of the earth) “to kill with sword and with famine and with death (i.e., pestilence), and with the wild beasts of the earth” — which are God’s “four sore judgments.” (Ezek. 14:21.)

### **The Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse**

What, then, are these strange horses and horsemen? What is meant by their going forth into the earth? In the prophecy of Zechariah we find the same kind of symbol used, and there they are seen to be Jehovah’s messengers going forth on missions of Judgment. (Zech. 1:8-11; 6:1-8.) They are called “the four winds (or spirits) of heaven which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth.” (Zech. 6:5. Comp. Dan. 7:2; Rev. 7:1.) They have no other meaning here. At the signal given in heaven these four go forth on the earth to execute the righteous decrees of God.

The first, the white horse and its rider, has occasioned some dispute. Some (influenced by Rev. 19:11-14) are quite certain that this is Christ Himself; others aver that here we see the Antichrist. Others think that the triumphant progress of the white horse represents the success and spread of the gospel....This horse is white, which in the Bible, is always a symbol of purity and righteousness. His bow betokens far-reaching conquest, and the crown (“stephanos,” the conqueror’s crown) signifies victory. In keeping with the obvious meaning of the other three horsemen, this one, then, is to be regarded as a potent force for righteousness as the color signifies, which breaks in upon the earth: and, in consequence, many far and near are humbling themselves before God. (Comp. Isa. 26:9; Dan. 12:10.)

The other three horses are also spirits ("winds") and forces sent forth into the earth — the one stirring up war and vast bloodshed; the other breaking the staff of bread and bringing in famine; the third representing all powers of death and destruction combined, and sweeping the fourth part of the earth with every plague.

### The Souls Under The Altar

The fifth seal is very different from the first four. Here John beholds in the heavenly sanctuary the altar (at the base of which, in the Old Testament type, the blood — "which is the life" — of the sacrificial victims is poured out, Lev. 4:7); and under the altar John sees the souls of some who have been martyred "for the word of God and the testimony which they held." These cried with a great voice saying, "How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" A strange cry, indeed — for had not their Lord prayed, "Father, forgive them" when they nailed Him to the cross? So did Stephen also—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." But these cry for vengeance. Yet vengeance is not revenge. The sense of justice lies deep in the heart of man and it is also the unchangeable attitude of God. Even the Lord Jesus "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23), even while He "bore our sins in His body on the tree." Justice finally must intervene, and the whole creation will experience a relief and joy in God's righteous judgments. (Ps. 96:11-13.) For judgment do these souls pray. And they are not so much concerned for their own satisfaction as for the honor of God—for judgment time at last has come. (Comp. Luke 18:7,8.) But they must bide a little longer in rest (cp. 14:13) until another contingent of martyred ones should be added to their number. "The white robe assigned each of these martyr-spirits is a pledge of future and final glory, and a consoling proof that no judgment awaited them."

### The Great Day Of Wrath

The opening of the sixth seal shakes the whole world. The earth rocks in convulsions; the sun turns black as sackcloth; the moon is red as blood; the stars fall; the heaven is removed as a scroll; and every mountain and island is moved out of its place. Among men reigns the wildest consternation. All those who "dwell upon the earth" (a term used seven times in this book, always with a bad significance) are shaken out of their composure. In frantic fear all classes of people, high and low, great and small, now fully convinced that this is the hand of God, flee to the rocks and caverns for refuge (comp. Isa. 2:10,11, 19:21), and terror-crazed they entreat the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them "from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." For (say they) "the great day of their wrath is come and who is able to stand?"

Some are convinced that this seal marks the end of all things; and to account for what follows after, they regard the other judgments as a reiteration of the judgment of the six seals. But this is not the end. We are not to take the expression "the stars of the heaven fell to the earth," or "the heaven was removed as a scroll," in an astronomical sense; but, as always in the bible and in common human speech also, in a phenomenal sense — describing the appearance as it strikes the eye — just as we say, for example, "the sun rose out of the sea and set behind the hill." This is surely that convulsion of nature, foretold by the Lord Jesus: "signs in sun and moon and stars and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the billows; men fainting for fear and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." (Luke 21:25, 26.) But it is not the final wind-up: things move right on and into "the great and terrible day of the Lord."

### Note On The Sixth Seal

The sixth seal is the vision of the final catastrophe, which occurs just before the Lord's glorious appearing with His saints. The signs in sun and moon and stars which are seen at the opening of the sixth seal cannot be distinguished from those foretold by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Olivet sermon (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24, 25; Luke 21:25, 26); and of those celestial portents Christ told us that they follow immediately after the Great Tribulation. They precede the "Day of the Lord," Christ's coming in power and great glory (Matt. 24:29-31; Acts 2:20). The seventh seal, however, goes back and opens to view the successive steps (the seven trumpets, afterward followed by the seven bowls) by which this climax is reached.

The seven seals therefore comprise the whole great judgment-drama of the Apocalypse. They reveal the forces and prevailing conditions during that period of unexampled trouble, but do not portray definite events in temporal sequence and order. The first four seals—the four horsemen—stand in a certain relation to one another and follow each other in order, each being called forth in turn by one of the "living creatures." They symbolize the release of four forces sent forth into the world preliminary to the final cataclysm. The fifth seal indicates that the persecution of God's people is raging throughout the period. In the sixth, the convulsions of the earth and the heavens herald the great day of wrath. But the seventh tells of the seven trumpets that must first be sounded, and the seven bowls that must first be poured out before the scene of the sixth seal is realized. Careful study will make it clear that the seals are not the first of three co-ordinate and consecutive series of judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls) but that the seals take in the whole sweep of the time of trouble up to the glorious coming of the King (Rev. 19:10) and that the trumpets and bowls mark certain details within that time of trouble.

# THOSE THREE SERIES of SEVEN DISASTERS

It is especially difficult to interpret the 3 series of calamities John mentions -- the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls of wrath. Here is a sane and safe suggestion: "The question will now arise *whether the descriptions of those trumpet judgments are to be taken literally, or whether they are symbolical.* The literal interpretation -- that is, the plain, grammatical sense -- always has first claim to consideration. Nothing is to be taken as 'symbolical' or 'figurative' without valid reason. **If we cannot decide whether the language in any particular case is to be taken at simple face value or whether it is a case of symbolism, let us see first what the plain meaning would be; then let us ascertain, as far as possible, what the symbolic import would be.** If after that we cannot decide, let the matter stand as it is until further light is available. Instead of taking a dogmatic position, let us only **examine the statements of God's Word in the light of either possibility, and leave it at that**" (Boll; emphasis added).

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**More about the 7 Trumpets:** "If they are to be understood *literally*, it is hard to comprehend how any life on the earth could survive their terrible onslaught. If they are to be regarded as *figurative*, the basis of interpretation is not clear. For example, what would 'trees' and 'grass' in 8:7 represent? If, as Mauro argues, trees are a familiar symbol in Scripture for human greatness, for persons of importance (Ezek. 31:2ff; Dan. 4:20-22), one might also say that grass represents the masses (Isa. 40:7). The symbolic use of trees and grass in the passages just mentioned is undeniable; but must that symbolism be used in Revelation? If so, it must extend to all the 7 trumpets if it is to be consistent; and the judgments which profess to affect the world of *nature* become really judgments on the world of *men*" (Tenney).

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## *The First Series: Are those Horsemen Riding NOW?*

The first four seals (Rev. 6) are four horsemen. Numbers two through four portray **war**, then **famine** or at least great scarcity, then deaths that result from killings, famine and **plague**. Then the fifth seal reveals the **martyrdoms** of many disciples. Notice the **many similarities between this scenario and Christ's predictive "sermon" in Matt. 24** (paralleled in Mark 13 and to some extent in Lk.21). His teaching there and His unveiling here in Rev. 6 both present the following:

<b>Wars</b>	(Mt.24:6-7a)
<b>Famine</b>	(Mt.24:7b)
<b>Pestilences</b>	(Lk.21:11)
<b>Martyrdoms, earlier &amp; later</b>	(Mt.24:9 & also 21-22; the latter refers to the great tribulation or "distress" under Antichrist)

Due to these repeated similarities, a number of interpreters believe that the 7 seals of Rev. 6 are a dramatic re-run of Christ's teaching on the Mt. of Olives. If so, the first horsemen, riding the white horse, might represent the one and only *good* feature of this present age which our Lord mentioned on that occasion -- **the worldwide proclamation of His good news!** (Matt. 24:14, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations). In which case, not all of the "sevens" are "disasters"! The seventh *trumpet* isn't either.

But, you ask, is there any strong *evidence for this close parallel* between Matt.24 (Mk.13/ Lk.21) and Rev. 6? Or is that view a premature jumping to conclusions? How can we know? Well, what does Matt.24 say will happen *after* the characteristics of this age which we listed above? Listen: Immediately after the distress of those days 'the **sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.**' (v.29,NIV)

Okay, what does Rev. 6 say will happen *after* the wars, famines, deaths, and martyrdoms of seals #1-5? Listen to seal #6: "There was a great earthquake. The **sun turned black like sackcloth...the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth...The sky receded like a scroll...**"

Bingo! The two passages match in detail after detail. It's awfully hard for me to believe that these repeated parallels are just a coincidence. Michael Wilcock observes that "these passages correspond" and goes on to elaborate:

The two passages are most clearly linked at the events of Seal 6 (Rev.6:12-17 = Mt. 24:29-30), but there is no difficulty in connecting those of Seals 2, 3 and 4 also with the earlier part of the Gospel passage. In fact we do not have to strain the text in any way to postulate that Christ is not only expounding the same subject, but expounding it in the same order, in both places. The two chapters engage at point after point like the two sides of a [zipper]....

In view of the frequent misunderstanding which takes the "wars and rumors of wars" passage [Mt.24:6] to be a prediction of the end, it is worth stressing that that is precisely what Christ said they are not. ["Such things must happen, but *the end is still to come.*"] The terrifying events of the first four Seals, which those who live through

them might imagine to be signs of Christ's return and of the close of the age (Mt.24:3), are in fact the commonplaces of history. The four horsemen have been riding out over the earth from that day to this, and will continue to do so. (The wiping out of a quarter of the human race [Rev.6:8] sounds like a disaster of the first magnitude, until one realizes that nothing has been said to indicate that this is a single catastrophic event. After all, every man dies sooner or later, and what is probably meant here is that a sizeable proportion of those deaths are the unnecessary ones caused by war and famine and kindred evils.) -- *The Message of Revelation* [emphasis added, as is often the case in these quotations]

\* \* \* \*

The question of **Timing** arises again. Are the 3 series of calamities (seals, trumpets, bowls) *successive or simultaneous*? That is, do they occur one after the other, or do they overlap in time -- either fully or partially?

To me the 3 series seem to **start** at different times but to **end** at about the same point--the final conclusion of this present age. (Review the last part of brother Boll's article that precedes this one.) The *seals* conclude with the *endtime Day of the Lord* (6:12-17; seal #6 brings the cosmic signs that introduce that Day, and v.17 specifically mentions "the great day of [God's] wrath"). The *trumpets* end at the start of *God's kingdom being established in fullness of power* (11:15-19). The *bowls* end at the preparation for the *battle of Armageddon and God's wrath poured out on Babylon* (16:12-21). All these are part of the climax, the grand finale, of this present evil age.

On this question Carl Kitzmiller wrote, "I have likened the portrayal to the kind of *camera action we might see on our televisions*. The seals are a more distant shot, the trumpets are a closer view showing more detail, and finally the bowls are a still closer, still more detailed account of certain facets of the period." (1/82 *WW*) I find this analogy helpful. Compare the coverage of a horserace on TV. The *seals* seem to be a long-range re-run of *the whole race* (i.e., from Christ's ascension to the End of this age). The *trumpets* appear to zero in on "the stretch," the final leg of the race (perhaps crises leading up to Antichrist's reign, for -- interestingly -- he is not mentioned in the trumpets). The *bowls* seem to show the "finish line" (the Day of the Lord that brings Antichrist's rule to a close right after the great tribulation time).

Robert Gundry also supports this idea of the series overlapping but all ending about the same time. "The sweeping *summary of a complex of events with later regressions to add more detail* is a well-recognized feature of narrative style in Semitic literature."

James McConkey sees the 7 Seals and Matt.24 the same way as explained above: "Did Christ ever tell this Revelation Story before? [If so,] it would naturally furnish us the Story-Thread to this later and more complicated story of the Revelation .... [Yes, earlier] Christ did tell this very same story of the End of the Age and of His Coming again. And He told it to His same servant John. For *on the Mount of Olives years before, Christ sat and told to John and three other disciples the same story, in great brevity and simplicity, which He told in all its fulness years later to John alone upon Patmos.*

**"The Olivet story of Christ's Second Advent is the clue to the Book of Rev. It is the Master's pencil-sketch of which Rev. is the complete painting. [Matt.24] is the seed of N.T. prophecy, of which Rev. is the full-blown flower...."**

"[In Matt.24:3b, the disciples asked Jesus, 'What will be the sign of ... THE END of the age?' In verse 15, He answered by putting] His finger on one supreme, vital fact which foreruns and determines the end. 'When ye shall see the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by Daniel ....' [In Dan.12:11] we note that centuries before, Daniel had asked the Lord the same question the disciples had just put to Christ. 'O my Lord, what shall be THE END of these things?' And God placed His finger upon this same strange figure to which Christ has referred, and says to Daniel that 'From the time that ... the Abomination that maketh desolate is set up, until the end shall be a certain period of somewhat over 3-1/2 years ...."

"The parallelism between the Matthew story and the Revelation story is as complete as it is remarkable. Set opposite to each other those stories stand like this --

**Matthew**

*General signs of the whole age:*

The Gospel

War

Famine

Pestilence (death)

*Special Signs of the End*

Tribulation

Signs in sun and moon

Advent of Christ

**The 7 Seals**

*General signs of the whole age:*

1. The Gospel (white horse)

2. War

3. Famine

4. Death (pestilence)

*Special Signs of the End*

5. Tribulation

6. Signs in sun and moon

7. Advent of Christ

"Some one may wonder how these seals could occupy a place of such importance since they are almost confined [to Rev. 6]?" The answer brings us to one of the most significant facts: The whole framework of Rev. is built upon the framework of these seven seals. It is not

that the seventh seal ends and the trumpets then begin. Quite the contrary. The seventh develops into these seven trumpets. That is, the trumpets are sub-heads, as it were, of the seventh seal. The seven trumpets do not *follow* the seventh seal; they *form* it .... [And] as the seventh seal has under it the seven trumpets, so also the seventh trumpet includes the seven bowls as parts of itself.”

“The seventh seal extends over all the trumpets. But the seventh trumpet extends over all the bowls. Thus the seals include both all the trumpets and all the bowls. And both seals, trumpets and bowls climax and end at one and the same great crisis-moment, the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

\*            \*            \*            \*

Here are John Stott’s insights regarding the 3 series, with an emphasis not on their *timing* but on their *purposes*: “John sees the Lamb open the seals one by one, and as a result a series of catastrophes overtakes the world .... But none of these misfortunes befalls the earth *until* the Lamb breaks a seal of the book, for they are subject to His permission ....

“When the seventh seal is opened...another series of visions begins, each introduced this time not by the opening of a seal but by the blowing of a trumpet. The calamities which result are similar to the previous ones, but more severe. It is suggested that the trumpets give the clue to their meaning. **When an event occurs after the opening of a seal, it is to be viewed as permitted by Christ, but when it occurs after the blowing of a trumpet, it is to be viewed as a divine warning** (cf. Ezek. 33:3 [also Isa.58:1, Joel 2:1 -- avw]). **The seals reassure the Church and beget faith. The trumpets warn the world and beget repentance. At least, that is their purpose** (like the plagues in Egypt which they intentionally resemble), although it is written (9:20) ‘the rest of mankind ... did not repent’ ....

“The seven bowls of wrath in chapter 16 give a panorama of the final overthrow of evil in its many forms .... **The eye of faith which sees in the opening of the seals the permissive will of God and in the blowing of the trumpets the reformative purpose of God, sees in the pouring out of the bowls the retributive justice of God.** The bowls introduce events which are final and irrevocable” (*Basic Introduction to the New Testament*)

**Writers and Writings Often Quoted,  
or Recommended in General**

**(which does not at all imply agreement in all points!)**

- Baxter, J. Sidlow. *Explore the Book*. Six volumes in one. Zondervan.
- Beasley-Murray, George. "The Revelation," in *The New Bible Commentary*, Inter-Varsity Press. [He wrote other helpful books in this field too.]
- Boll, R. H. *The Revelation*, 3rd edition; 1946. Word and Work.
- Bruce, F. F. "Revelation," in *The International Bible Commentary*, Zondervan.
- Chambers, Stanford. *Conquering and to Conquer*. Published by the author; out of print.
- Cole, Alan. *A Christian's Guide to the New Testament*. Hodder and Stoughton.
- Crow, G. R. *The Lamb and the Book* [later edition entitled *The Last Tomorrow*]. Gospel Literature Service. Bombay, India.
- Ladd, George E. *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*. Eerdmans. [He wrote other helpful books in this field too.]
- McConkey, James H. *The Book of Revelation*. 1921; out of print.
- Morris, Leon. *Revelation* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries). Eerdmans.
- Newport, John. *The Lion and the Lamb*. Broadman Press.
- Smith, Wilbur. "Revelation," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. Moody Press.
- Stott, John R. W. *Basic Introduction to the New Testament*, 1st edition; 1964. Inter-Varsity Press. Also. *What Christ Thinks of the Church* (concerning chaps. 1-3 only). Lutterworth Press.
- Tenney, Merrill. *Interpreting Revelation*. Eerdmans.
- Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Revelation*. Inter-Varsity Press.

[The writers listed above differ among themselves in their views about the millennium, the great tribulation, and other points.

But they all love the Lord, honor His word, and  
yearn for His coming and glory.]

## "DR. FORCADE" GOES HOME

On Oct. 21st our brother J. Miller Forcade fell asleep in Jesus his savior. He was 91 years old, and had recently suffered from cancer. For many decades he served the Lord in many ways: disciple, husband, family man, evangelist (on a one-to-one basis and in preaching meetings too), Bible teacher, writer of tracts and articles, editor of one or more small papers, missionary in two continents, promoter of unity among believers, generous donor, and encourager. He recently finished writing his memoirs: that will be an interesting book!

For his birthday in March '98, I wrote him the following, which gives some sketches of his character and ministry: "You have packed a lot of living into your 90 years of life. And I am thankful to God that our paths have crossed in various ways at various times. I wish it had happened more often. You have been an inspiring example and a source of practical help to many.

"Ruth and I remember visiting with you and your dear wife at the Keimeï Academy when we passed through Japan en route to Manila for the first time (1963). We also have pleasant memories of your visiting the Philippines while we lived there. At least two young ladies, Leonor and Erlinda, were brought to Christ through your preaching there; you baptized them. You and I visited the town of Camiling, north of Manila. Visits were made and meetings held. As we traveled there and back, I enjoyed hearing of your experiences serving the Lord through the years. You also spoke in chapel at Central Bible Institute. I still remember the topic! — 'Don't be sheep in wolves' clothing.'

"Here are other things I remember and appreciate about you: Your emphasis through the years on the grace of God, and the unity of His people. Your emphasis on faith and prayer, and on 'soul nourishment first'....as George Muller put it. Your emphasis on mastering the Bible by reading and re-reading its books till its themes and principles master us.

"Your use of literature to spread God's truth, in the homeland and around the world. Your gifts to literature ministry in the Philippines, enabling tracts in the local languages to be printed. Many other generous donations to the work of the Lord.

"Early in my editorship at Word and Work, we ran your pamphlet on personal evangelism with its 3 main points: "Contact. Convert. Confirm." You have been so good at doing those practices.

"For these holy memories, and others too, we praise God and are thankful to you. And we rejoice in the blessed hope we share—the Lord's return. Maranatha!" -- avw

# NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill

## **Keep Sending News! (Bennie Hill)**

As we begin the year 2000 - let me encourage more of our good brethren to send us "News & Notes" **early in the year** to be published! Include revivals, special happenings at your church, ordinations, youth work, outreach, missions, etc. My e-mail address is [bhill40482@aol.com](mailto:bhill40482@aol.com) or regular mail: P.O.Box 54842, Lexington, KY. 40555.

**A Fine Christmas Gift**, especially for your preacher, church officers & Sun. school teachers, would be a copy of *R. H. Boll, Controversy and Accomplishment*. Bro. Boll was an outstanding Bible teacher & leader, but was hotly opposed by some influential editors. Perhaps the best part of this book are chapters containing many quotes from his own writings on various subjects. \$12.00 + tax in Ky.; write to W&W office or call Louise Wells, 502:775- 8243.

**Salem, Ky., Homecoming.** An excellent day of worship and fellowship was had by about 200 people who celebrated Salem's homecoming on Sunday, Oct. 17th. The morning speaker was Bro. Buford Smith, a former minister at Salem. After a fellowship dinner and tour of the grounds including the church cemetery, an afternoon service began at 2:30 p.m. The Portland Ensemble led by Rick Folden presented a concert followed by congregational singing. Bro. LaVern Houtz, another former minister at Salem, reminisced very fond memories. Bro. Mike Chapman, Salem's present minister, testified to all the Lord is doing currently. Several years ago the elders and he agreed with the Lord concerning Salem's purpose being five-fold.

Member surveys were conducted concerning talents and team leaders were appointed. From this came twenty-five ministries and a body that is active and busy in the Lord's work.

On a lighter note everyone in attendance will have no trouble recognizing a "Salemite" - thanks to Darren Johnson's "21 characteristics." Everyone enjoyed the day and the building's new look and comfort -- new carpet and new pews and furnishings. (BH)

**Waterford, Ky. (Joe Stone)** reports that Robert & Joy Garret were there the first of October giving an update on the work in Zimbabwe and speaking on Evolution. One young lady came and confessed Christ as her personal Savior and was baptized. After much prayer a youth leader was chosen to assist in the work. He is Joe McPherson who is married and has two children. Joe is a high school guidance counselor in Jefferson Co. Our revival with Bro. Bud Ridgeway was a blessing - great messages from the Word.

**Bohon, Ky. (Kenneth Preston)** reports a revival with Rick Murphy the first of October. There was one response for rededication. Excellent messages with good crowds. On Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> Nathan Burks was at Bohon to assist in the ordination of Kenneth Preston & Jerry Burns as elders & Paul Preston Jr. as a deacon.

**Jennings, La. (Paul Estes)** Attendance growing! The first Sunday of October saw an increase in attendance. Morning worship was 143. About 100 came for evening worship, and about 75 were here for Wednes-

day Bible study. Do your share of telling the Good News, and bring your loved ones to Christ.

**Locust St., Johnson City, TN (Richard Lewis, elder)** We continue an active search for a minister at Locust St. David Fulks, Admissions Director at Emmanuel is doing an interim here. Also Jose' Martinez, from Dominican Republic is a student at Emmanuel and doing part time work here. Keep us in your prayers as the Lord continues to show direction. (For information, call Dick Lewis, 423:477-3707.)

**Gallatin, TN. (Julius Hovan)** This past Sun. (Oct.3) was awesome and inspiring as we viewed a slide/video presentation of the work performed this summer in Honduras by our missions group. Every individual present should have been motivated to do more for the Lord wherever and whenever we have the opportunity. Many of you gave money to furnish a kitchen at a healthcare clinic there for the purpose of training women to cook. This training will raise the level of nutrition for their families and will give them a skill so they can help support themselves and their families.

Comment by Julius Hovan in Gallatin bulletin: "Claudia and I are fortunate to have ministered with such a great congregation for 25 years (as of Jan. 9, 2000)."

**Updates on Missionary Addresses:**  
Tim & Dawn Yates, 5 Dudley Rd., Charlestown, NSW 2290 Australia. Email: yatesfamily@hotmail.net.au Website with pictures: www.jbc.edu/missionaries/yates

Paul & Virginia Kitzmiller's treasurer's address: Russian Mission, c/o Hamburg Church of Christ, 8921 Newberry Road, Sellersburg, IN

47172. Do not use the old p.o. box address. The treasurer is Steve Hill.

**Compliment, problem, solution:** From a letter to WW: "May God bless you and keep up the outstanding work on a great publication. My copy gets passed around all over church." --David Brown, Bicknell IN Christian Church

Here's how to solve that problem. **Order a bundle of WWs** for the church. While an individual subscription costs \$8 (a bargain), bundles of 10 or more sent to the same address cost only @ \$7.50 per mag./yr. (a bigger bargain).

**Beware--A growing addiction:** A newspaper reports that "almost 6% of internet users suffer from some form of addiction to it. Marriages are being disrupted, kids are getting into trouble, people are committing illegal acts, people are spending too much money. The 6% is lower than some estimates of 10% or more stemming largely from research on college students."

**A Good Quote:** "It's not so much that you **have** to be baptized but that you **get** to....We could compare baptism to endorsing a check given to us as a gift. Endorsing the check is *not a 'work' that earns the gift*, it's simply the *means by which we accept the gift.*" --Carl Bridges, Jr.

**Fisherville** (David Tapp) Homecoming and Revival commemorated 172 yrs of ministry. The week of activities was well attended and enjoyed by those who attended. Great, scriptural, powerful, and challenging messages were delivered each night by Bro. Kenneth Preston.

**Tell City** (David Johnson) ordained three new Deacons in November. They were: Jim Basham, Charles

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Fisher, and Eddie Olberding. Pray for these men along with the other leaders at Tell City.

**Central Louisiana Fellowship** celebrated it's 25th year Nov. 15-18 in Glenora. The program was a tremendous blessing and a great opportunity for fellowship with God's people and the study of His word each day. The meeting was bathed with prayer and God poured out His Holy Spirit. Tapes are available by contacting: Donald Stump, 1720 Plum Creek Rd., Taylorsville, KY 40071

The singing was especially uplifting and is included if you purchase the whole set.

**Sugar Creek ...** The Sugar Creek Church at Warsaw, Ky. will celebrate 50 on Dec. 5, 1999. --Dartha Dance, Box 194, Walton KY 41094

**New Missionary** Anna Yates was born Nov. 15 to Dawn. She weighed 6'14" and was 19 inches long. She, Dawn & Tim are doing fine.

**Louisville Thanksgiving** 508 people gathered to thank God and encourage one another in the area Thanksgiving service. Robert Garrett spoke, Jim Broadus led congregational singing, the Portland Christian School Chorus sang worship songs, & over \$6000 was donated for PCS.

**A Splendid Idea** Stanley Paher, a writer & publisher of Christian literature, not only renewed his sub to WW but sent an extra \$16 "to pay for 2 additional subscriptions for those who can't afford it."

**Salem Church of Christ**, Cynthiana, KY is looking to hire a fulltime minister beginning in January, 2000. Salem is a rural congregation of 60-70 members. Anyone interested please contact Mike Marsh at 1-606-234-4560 or Chester McCauley at 1-606-234-6464 or email crmcc@se-tel.com

**Words of Life News** The government tax system allows for charitable gifts. Most of us fail to use the full extent of that offer. Now is a good time to think about giving gifts to help promote the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Giving to our local congregations must be first. After local obligations, many valuable options are available to us. One of them is this program! "Words of Life" radio reaches millions of people around the world with the gospel plan of salvation. We hear from people in Switzerland, Italy, Lithuania, the Philippines and many African nations. Many listeners write, thanking us for "Words of Life," and pleading with us to continue sending out the powerful message of Jesus! -- Buford Smith