

CONTENTS

What's in a word? Apocalyptic / Editor..... 1

ARTICLES

The Next Paradise / Jefferson Vann 3
Baptism in the Book of Acts / Oral Collins 7
A Humble but Firm Approach to Prophetic
 Considerations / Earl Waterman..... 12
How Many Tribulations in Matthew 24?
 / David E. Dean 18

ADVENT CHRISTIAN HERITAGE REVIEW

“What Is An Advent Christian?” (Adventist
 Heritage Sunday) / Floyd McIntyre..... 22
Pledge of Allegiance to One's Mother Church /
 Vivian Fransen 32
Do Advent Christians Spend too much Time on
 Conditional Immortality? / Robert Warren 34
Two Cents Worth on the Question of Denominational
 Distinctives / Keith Wheaton 36

CONDITIONALIST REVIEW

Kudos to Three Prominent Conditionalists:
 Pinnock, Stott and Fudge

 Clark Pinnock: Rest in Jesus / Edward Fudge 39
 Remembering John Stott / James Emery White 41
 Hell and Mr. Fudge / Claude F. Mariottini 42
 Thinking outside the Box / Al Maxey 43
 (on Edward Fudge)

BOOK REVIEWS

- Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, by Rob Bell. Reviewed by Jefferson Vann. 47
- On the Incarnation*, by Athanasius.
Reviewed by Melodie Dean. 50
- **The Tree of Life: A Biblical Study of Immortality & New Creation*, by Paul Sellman.
Reviewed by Jefferson Vann. 53
- Exegetical Fallacies*, by D. A. Carson.
Reviewed by Gary Stevens. 55
- Untamed: the Bible, God, and Natural Disasters*,
by Terence E. Fretheim.
Reviewed by Freeman Barton. 57
- **Earth's Final Dawn*, by Clinton E. Taber.
Reviewed by Jefferson Vann. 59
- (*new books by Advent Christians)

Works Cited in This Issue 61

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What's in a word?

APOCALYPTIC

What is the difference between prophetic and apocalyptic literature? The prophets, speaking forth for Yahweh, condemned and threatened. The apocalypticists were inspired to exhort and encourage. The prophets were called to afflict the comfortable; the apocalypticists set out to encourage the afflicted. “The prophets proclaimed God working in and through the course of history. The apocalypticist anticipated a radical intervention by God at the end, beyond history” (Joel Green, *How to Read Prophecy* 62).

The prophets, although they use figures of speech and colorful symbols, write straight forward prose, which is generally comprehensible. The apocalypticists use weird designs and cryptic images. Every word of the prophet should be considered carefully. The pious reader is tempted to do the same with apocalyptic literature — a mistake. Its images are closer to a political cartoon or an impressionistic painting.

The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, a century apart, confronted Israel with its corruption and promised divine judgment.

Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. (Isaiah 1:4)

I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made (Jeremiah 1:16.).

Jeremiah is so noted for his descriptive denunciation of Judean behavior that jeremiad has become a common word for the vigorous critique of the moral level of a society.

Daniel in contrast, although acknowledging Israel's sin (9:5-19), presents an encouraging word from God and a positive view of his people. The interpretation of dreams, the fiery furnace, the lion's den, the preeminence of Daniel in the Babylonian and Persian courts present a positive, encouraging outlook for the people of God. The seventy year exile was ameliorated by Cyrus' decree allowing a return to Jerusalem, and the Messiah will "put an end to sin" after seventy-sevens of years (9:24).

Revelation, with all its strange symbols, is a reassuring, encouraging book. In the cosmic battles between Christ and Satan, Christ always wins. After a final historical battle, the divine kingdom is established. Pain and sorrow are no more. In light of certain victory, John assured his readers, "Blessed are the dead who die from now on in the Lord. ... They will rest from their labors for their works follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

The distinctions should not be drawn too sharply. The prophets reassure their people that restoration will come. The apocalypticists challenge the people to behave.

What significance does the distinction between the prophetic and the apocalyptic have for the Advent Christians? Here is a thought for someone to develop. The Advent Christian Denomination is an apocalyptic movement in a prophetic era. The western world's slide into moral decadence calls for an Amos and a Jeremiah. It may not take long before we are "taken captive" by our own degeneracy. An apocalyptic scenario could develop quickly. Iran, for example, has nuclear power and probably intends to produce nuclear weapons. Long range missiles would likely target Israel. Israel would make a preemptive or retaliatory response. In the resultant apocalyptic atmosphere, might the Advent Christian Church come into its own with a mature grasp of the significance of the second advent and the rest of biblical prophecy?

What do you think of the idea?

* * * * *

THE NEXT PARADISE

Jefferson Vann

Recently my pastor and his family went on vacation, and he asked me and my family to house-sit. It was an interesting experience. His house is much larger, and in a much nicer neighborhood, than any I have lived in. When I went on my daily walks, I found myself contemplating the beauty, orderliness and spaciousness of the neighborhood. I was not exactly envious — God has taken care of me and mine; I have never had a reason to complain. But I could not help but be struck by the extravagance of it all.

As I was musing over this one morning on one of my walks, I found myself praying to God. He asked me to take a good look at all this wealth, blessing and provision. Then he asked me to imagine myself (as he often does) a million years into the future. Looking back on those few days in the pastor's neighborhood helps me to keep things in perspective. It helps me to realize that my entire life is simply a short temporary stay in (as it were) a borrowed house. What my Father has in store for me, when I get where he wants me, will be so magnificent that those few days among the well-off will seem like slumming.

God Planted a Garden

According to Genesis 2, God had taken the elements of the ground (Hebrew: 'adamah) and created a man (Hebrew: 'adam; 2:7). He picked a spot of ground on the same planet and planted a rich and beautiful garden (2:8). The garden was given to Adam for three expressed reasons:

1. Enjoyment. The trees and other contents of the garden of Eden were designed to be “pleasant to the sight” (2:9). Long

before scientists would invent the word ecosystem, God had created one, and Adam had the pleasure of watching it work. The interplay between flora and fauna was — no doubt — amazing. Even now, after thousands of years of corruption and dysfunction caused by sin, the planet is a marvel to behold. This planet's ecosystem combines a varied geography with the peculiarities of myriads of species of plant and animal life, and produces an unsurpassed beauty. But it is more than just beauty. Our planet is a delight to behold because it all fits together in such an orderly system.

The ancients looked at creation and saw evidence for the existence of God because the world is a design that functions well. They reasoned from the design to a designer. Later philosophers argued that if one found a watch in the sand, he would never imagine that the watch just emerged out of nothingness. Its design was too complicated for that. Just looking at the planet leads people back to its creator.

Eden was like that. Every blade of grass, every tree, every marvelous species of animal life — caused Adam to reflect upon the one who created it all. It was all “pleasant to the sight” and reminded Adam of the one who gave him eyes to see. Rather than distracting Adam, it enhanced his relationship with God. That is what the next paradise will be for.

2. Life. The trees of the garden were designed to be “good for food” (Genesis 2:9). God had created Adam — not immortal like himself but mortal. To continue living, he was dependent upon the ground from which he was made. The ground would produce plants, which would sustain the life of his soul. God had created him from the ground, and then breathed into his body the breath of life. The resulting combination was a living soul (Genesis 2:7). If Adam had not eaten, his body would have starved to death, and returned to the ground from which it had been fashioned. God wanted to preserve the man he created. He gave Adam what he needed to sustain his life.

Paradise was more than just a nice place to look at. It was designed to sustain life. That is also what the new heavens and

new earth will do. Death and all associated with it will pass away (Revelation 21:4). Look at our future home and you will see a river of life flowing through it, and a tree of life in the midst of it (Revelation 22:1–2). Paradise will be eternal life for redeemed humanity.

3. Meaning. Adam was placed in Eden “to work it and keep it.” That marvelous ecosystem will require the human touch to ensure that it continues to be all that God intended it to be. Adam enjoyed his work. Each day brought new discoveries. He “gave names to all the livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field” (Genesis 2:20). Every new discovery brought Adam even more appreciation of his God, as he categorized and celebrated the magnificent provision.

That is what the next paradise will be like. We will have an eternity to continue seeing what we have never seen before, and marveling at the elaborate richness of our inheritance.

Adam was a servant of God, and a ruler for God. He had been created so that he could have dominion over the “fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that was moving on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). God had placed all of his domains under man’s dominion. Does not the Scripture say that we, the bride of Christ, will reign with him in his eternal kingdom (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 20:6, 22:5)? The next paradise, the new heavens and new earth, will be populated only by kings and queens. We learn to serve under Christ so that we can someday rule with him.

Genesis 2 concludes with the record that “the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). This would be the last time something like that could be said, for shame and sorrow followed on the heels of sin — which was introduced into humanity’s story in the very next chapter. But the picture of paradise in Genesis 2 rightly ends with both bride and bridegroom enjoying the garden and each other’s company without shame. Humanity’s shame will be replaced with God’s glory. John describes the holy city as shining with the glory

of God, the glory of kings, and the glory and the honor of the nations (Revelation 21:22–26).

I enjoyed my recent stay in the neighborhood where “the other half lives.” It has got me to thinking about my destiny. Do you share that destiny? Are you in Christ? Are you his bride? There will be a paradise tomorrow, but it only awaits those who are in Christ today.

* * * * *

Will reading Edward Fudge’s *The Fire that Consumes* make you sick?

Concerning Covenant Theological Seminary students in his *Systematic Theology* 658, Robert Peterson says, “... As they began to read his book and consider his case for annihilationism, they came to class complaining of physical symptoms including headaches and churning stomachs” (83).

Claude Mariottini, professor at Northern Baptist Seminary notes: “... Fudge’s conclusion is based on extensive research and solid scholarship. Any serious student of the Bible will be challenged by his solid exegesis of the text. It is this exegesis that provides the biblical support for his conclusion” (see further below).

Church of Christ pastor Al Maxey says, “That book has probably done more than any other except the Bible to change my focus in ministry” (see further below).

Baptism in the Book of Acts

Oral Collins

The Book of Acts has twenty-seven occurrences of words deriving from the root *baptis-*. The root, *baptis-* is the intensive form of *bapt-*. Whereas *bapt-* means “dip in” or “under,” *baptis-* means “immerse,” “sink,” “drown,” “perish” (by drowning), etc. (*Bapt* [stem of the verb *bapto*] occurs with reference to dipping in Luke 16:24 and John 13:26 and to dyeing in Revelation 19:13). The masculine noun, *baptismos*, is used in the New Testament only for Jewish ablutions (Mark 7:4; Hebrews 6:2; 9:10), whereas the neuter noun, *baptisma*, is reserved in the New Testament as elsewhere for the baptism of John or Christian baptism.

The twenty-seven occurrences in Acts may be related to twelve different occasions as follows:

1. Jesus’ promise of the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit. 1:5 (2)
2. The baptism of John as terminus a quo for the ministry of Jesus. 1:22; 10:37; 13:24 (3)
3. Baptisms of converts at Pentecost. 2:38, 41 (2)
4. Baptisms of Samaritans under the ministry of Philip. 8:12, 13, 16 (3)
5. Philip’s baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. 8:36, 38 (2)
6. Saul’s baptism at Damascus. 9:18; 22:16 (2)
7. Baptism of Cornelius and his household. 10:47, 48; 11:16 (4)
8. Baptism of Lydia. 16:15
9. Baptism of the Philippian jailor. 16:33
10. Baptism of Crispus and other Corinthians. 18:8 (cp. 1 Corinthians 1:14–17)
11. Apollos acquainted only with John’s baptism. 18:25
12. Rebaptism of the disciples of John at Ephesus. 19:3, 4, 5 (5)

Of twenty-one occurrences of the verb *baptizein*, ten are intransitive, and two take the direct object only. The other nine are linked to indirect objects. This class is divided into two groups — those which allude (with or without the preposition *en*) to the instrument of baptism: “with water” (1:5, 11:16) or “with the Holy Spirit” (1:5, 11:16); and those in which the name formula is used to identify the nature of the baptism: “in the name of Jesus Christ” (2:38), “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (8:16, 19:5), “in the name of Jesus Christ” (10:48). For the last construction, both *εν* with the instrumental dative (2:38, 10:48) and *εις* with the accusative (8:16, 19:5) are used, apparently interchangeably.

On the appeal to the name, the following excerpt from Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* is instructive,

The formula *εις το όνομα* [eis to onoma] seems rather to have been a tech. term in Hellenistic commerce (“to the account of”). ... The use of the phrase is understandable, since the account bears the name of the one who owns it, and in baptism the name of Christ is pronounced, invoked and confessed by the one who baptises the one baptised [sic] (Acts 22:16) or both. (Kittel 1, 539–40)

In 19:3 the question is raised of John’s disciples at Ephesus, “Into what [name] then were you baptized?” Their reply indicates that they failed to understand that John’s baptism was done in the name of Jesus, that is, John told the people “to believe in Him who was coming after him” (vs. 4). The expression, “baptize into,” denotes mainly the legal and spiritual identity of the rite rather than mystical union, per se. The use of *εις* reflects [not] only the conventional formula, but in a theological context it points beyond instrumentality, to the authority and object in whom faith rests. It is comparable in this respect to the use of *εις* with *pisteuein* (Cp. Galatians 3:27, “baptized into Christ”).

From the above texts we may draw several deductions:

1. John’s baptism in Acts is seen in harmony with Christian baptism. This is evident from Paul’s instruction to the disciples of

John at Ephesus, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus” (19:4). The latter participial clause defines John’s baptism of repentance as an act of faith in the coming Messiah. This is implicit, of course, in the fact that it was a “baptism ... for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). This understanding of John helps to explain the fact that the ministry of Jesus is seen as “beginning with the baptism of John” (1:22, 10:37, 13:24).

2. Baptism in Acts is given a place at the very heart of the Christian message. Jesus’ final instruction on Mount Olivet expressed the crucial issue of Christian faith and experience in terms of baptism: “John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (1:5). The Spirit who was in his new role to succeed Jesus in his physical presence (John 14:16-18) was to bring to its full potential the baptism of John. Subsequently, baptism and the believer’s saving experience of the Holy Spirit would be seen together (2:38, 41; 8:16; 10:47, 48). Sometimes baptism occurred first (8:16, 17), sometimes the outpouring of the Spirit (10:47, 48), but in each case the one is seen to give sanction to the other.

3. Baptism is in Acts as elsewhere an entrance or initiation rite administered at the outset of Christian experience.

Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (2:38; cp. Matthew 28:19)

What is symbolized in baptism is that work of the Holy Spirit which effects regeneration and entrance upon the new life: “John baptized with water, but ye shall all be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (1:5). Similarly 1 Corinthians 12:13: “By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (also 1 Peter 3:21; Ephesians 4:5). The Spirit is the agent both of this new birth and of the ongoing experience of life in Christ. Baptism should be identified with new birth whereas the ongoing experience is of course, subsequent to baptism. The

Jews believed that only Gentiles needed to be “born again,” and therefore the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected John’s baptism (Luke 7:29, 30). In Judaism only proselytes were baptized. For the apostles, John’s baptismal rite was enough (1:5). Only in the case of John’s disciples at Ephesus, whose baptism was not an act of faith in Christ, was baptism repeated (19:2–5). Apollos, who “knew only the baptism of John,” nevertheless, from his excellent knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures understood its Messianic significance, so that he was not called upon to be rebaptized (Acts 18:24–28).

The repetition of baptism implies that the saving work of the Spirit whereby the sinful nature of the unregenerate man has died has not previously been accomplished (cf. Romans 6:3–4). This results both from the fact that baptism is to be administered at the beginning of Christian experience and from the connotation of the word itself, which in other literatures often means “to perish” (by drowning, etc.; Kittel, I, 530; cf. Mark 12:38; Luke 12:50). It is the overtone of death implicit in the word that gives meaning to Jesus’ enigmatic statement regarding his own baptism (Matthew 3:16), which he apparently understood as a symbol of his own death.

4. Baptism in Acts is closely wedded with the ministry of the Word. Such is always the case. Baptism is administered in conjunction with Spirit-filled preaching and Apostolic instruction: “Those who have received his word were baptized” (2:41; cp. 8:12; 8:35–38; 19:4–5). As with the Ethiopian eunuch and the Ephesian disciples of John, widely disparate instances of rebaptism, the efficacy of the ordinance is dependent upon the adequacy of the spiritual instruction and response of the candidate.

5. In view of the foregoing, it is surprising that only with John the Baptist and the case of Philip and the eunuch are the persons administering the ordinance named. From the rest of the New Testament we are able to add only those named by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:14–16. Not only so, but in the majority of instances the verb appears in the passive, avoiding any reference to the persons who are baptizing. Jesus’ disciples administered

all of his baptisms on his behalf (John 4:1–2), and Paul made it a policy not to become involved with baptizing lest any should say the converts were baptized in his name (1 Corinthians 1:13–15; cp. Colossians 1:17). In most of the baptisms mentioned we are left in the dark with regard to the persons who did the baptizing. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that the church followed the precedent of Judaism at least to the extent that it required supervision by qualified leaders who served as custodians of doctrine and polity (1 Timothy 5:17–22; Hebrews 13:17). We do know that the Jews required that three rabbis witness the proper execution of each baptism.

In conclusion we must observe that most of the above deductions are inferential, being drawn from allusions to baptism in historical narratives rather than from doctrinal statements. Whether they are necessary inferences must be determined from a consideration of the whole of New Testament doctrine relating to baptism. Little will be uncovered, however, to which allusion at least is not made above.

We have observed (1) that Jesus' and John's baptism are essentially one, the difference being that John's baptism is anticipatory of both the historical unfolding of Christ's saving work, and of the revelation of the Spirit in the application of that work. (2) Baptism is central in the Christian Faith. After Pentecost, it is associated with the believer's gift of the Holy Spirit. (3) Baptism is an initiation rite, a symbolic expression of regeneration or "new birth," the inner baptism by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Peter 3:21). (4) The administration of baptism is closely wedded with the ministry of the Word, on account of which it acquires particular sanctity. (5) No explicit guidelines are laid down to govern the administration of the rite, but the supervision of ordained elders (overseers) is implicit in the structure of the New Testament church.

A HUMBLE BUT FIRM APPROACH TO PROPHETIC CONSIDERATIONS

Earl Waterman

Humorous Self-deprecation

In the more professional and authoritative publications, when an article of value appears, down at the bottom of page one in small italics, the reader is given a short resume of the author's credentials.

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I have been tempted to write a 40,000 word thesis for one of these Diploma Mills. I'd like to write some impressive letters behind my name. But in my heart I would know that I hadn't earned a valid degree. I had as good an opportunity in my younger days to study as anyone else, and I just didn't do it. And since P.S. (poor slob) is a rare degree not generally recognized in the highest scholastic circles, I have decided modestly to remain a bit lower than the first rung on the ladder of knowledge.

This light hearted banter is but a thin facade to hide my anguish for not knowing more than I do. To write reliable and accurate material on prophetic matters, one needs to have a background to draw on: a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek,

access to the writings of the Learned, training in the logic of interpretation. These tools I do not have. I have tried to believe that the Lord would supply my lack, but I now believe there is no substitute for years of solid study and research. God forgive me; I am not stupid and I could have done better.

Since, however, it will serve no useful purpose to downgrade or belittle whatever talent or gift I may have, I will do the best that I can do; and under God I can do something.

Literal Interpretation

I believe I had a good background. It was dinged into our heads that if the Bible said something — and there were no qualifying additions — we were to believe it. Conditional immortality is based upon such an approach to the Scriptures. Death, so it is avowed by men of influence, means separation from God. Chapter and verse, please! Death is described as the antithesis of life in the Scriptures. And I can give chapter and verse. I do not say much about it in these days, as God's people are coming together, drawn, I believe by the Holy Spirit. In my view there are more important teachings, but if pressed, I will declare my position in the language of the Bible.

In applying myself to prophetic study, I have followed the same principle. Unless there is a valid reason for not doing so, I have taken the inspired writers at their word. And this, I find, will get you into hot water. The laws that apply so well, and are cherished so highly in doctrinal matters, are not looked upon with favor when applied to prophetic themes.

Millennium

In Florida, a sweet and gentle Brother once said to me in a burst of confidence, “Why, Brother Waterman, I even know some ministers who believe in the millennium.” Since I had barely arrived in that parish, I maintained a discreet silence, hoping that my expression of astonishment and wonder would

comfort and reassure him. And many times I have heard such expressions as, “How anyone can believe in a future thousand years is beyond me.” What would be wrong with reminding them that the Bible plainly, emphatically, and in language that can be understood, states that a thousand-year period is coming when the saints will reign with Christ?

On the supposition that the Lord just might have intended to prophesy such a period of time, could he have used language any plainer? Despite the admitted difficulties that surround this point of view, I am not quite ready to deny the teaching of the Word.

Let me qualify that last statement a little bit. To me the Word of God clearly teaches a millennium. To many godly students of Scripture, it does not. To such there are good and sufficient reasons for not taking Revelation twenty literally. I do not suggest that they are denying the Word. I will say that the principle of interpretation applied elsewhere is not used here.

Antichrist

The Scriptures give us a short and succinct axiom by which to identify Antichrist, dealing both with the spirit of antichrist and with the person of Antichrist.

... every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already (1 John 4:3 ESV).

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22 ESV).

If you were not a theologian, you would use this Scripture fearlessly and literally under the assumption that you had a clear understandable means of identification. Many students of

prophecy, however, have a means of reasoning by which they identify Ecclesiastical Rome to be antichrist. In their view, by following a doctrine of substitution, Rome does qualify. These are men of God who do not deny the Word. But again, I will say that the principles of interpretation applied to other teachings are not used here.

Israel

Of greater importance to me than these subjects are matters having to do with Israel. If God does actually have a future destiny for Israel, then the developments of these present times are CRUCIAL to our applications for prophetic interpretation. If not, however, it is just so much window dressing. The developments in and around Israel are no more significant than what's happening with Solidarity in Poland. Central America is also in an upheaval of some consequence. So what is so important with the events of the Middle East?

It is difficult to ignore that both the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul, when speaking or writing of the last days of time, introduce the subject of Israel, or the city of Jerusalem, or both. This is like digging up a corpse and flaunting it around because Israel, as a chosen nation, is a dead issue. Or is it? All the Old Testament Covenants aside — those documents straight from the voice of God, unconditional, unchangeable, irrevocable — but leaving them out of the picture — both Jesus and Paul talk or write as if there were something further for Israel in the mind of God.

Jesus, weeping over Jerusalem, said,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." (Matthew 23:37–39).

Jesus is not one to sling meaningless words around. He certainly envisioned — he strongly implied a future time when Israel would say “Blessed Is He That Cometh In The Name of The Lord.”

Paul is even more emphatic. In Romans 11 the loyal opposition [to Israel’s prophetic significance] likes that qualifying verse.

And even they, **if they do not continue in their unbelief**, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again (Romans 11:23 ESV).

In verse 25 the blindness of Israel is partial and temporary. The time limit is clear: “when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” And verse 27 is far more weighty. It does something in confirming under grace the covenants made under the law and, as a matter of fact, before the law.

The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob;
and this will be my covenant with them,
when I take away their sins.

The IF of this chapter could stand a little scrutiny. Jesus said, you will remember, as he spoke to the multitudes, “And IF ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come” (Matthew 11:14). If they had received it, the Gospel of John would not have said, “He came to His own and His own received Him not” (John 1:11). They did not receive Jesus as the Son of God, or John as Elijah, the concomitant sign. The ifs of the Bible do not cancel out such covenants which God made with the fleshly seed of Abraham when he swore by himself since there was none greater by which he might swear.

I am aware of the possibilities of error in this position. And as to practical matters of every day Christian living, I can see where the subject of the millennium, the identification of antichrist, and the future of Israel (if any) are quite academic when stacked

up against the grim fact that “the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (Revelation 12:12 ESV). We’re fighting the good fight of faith, whatever the issues of prophecy may be. So let me give you one more point that meets you where you live.

Spirit Baptism

Without being technical — the Bible promises that the last days, though they will compare in wickedness to the days of Noah, also will bring into being a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Millions and millions of Christians the world over have experienced the fulfillment of this prophecy. The sleeping Church has come alive. Even those groups that oppose what we understand to be the Baptism in the Holy Spirit are benefiting from its power. It is not confined. It is not confine-able if there is any such word. You cannot escape its presence. And any church, any individual, any denomination, that takes its stand against it, must inevitably suffer loss.

It would make all the difference in the world if, instead of trying to sweep it under a rug, curse it as being divisive, or loftily condescend to bear with it in discreet silence, the Advent Christian Church would recognize it as our forerunners recognized the pertinence of the second coming of Christ. It would say plainly and squarely, we need the baptism of the Holy Spirit for harvest now — for our united budget — for our ministry and for our laity. Because we do.

(Slightly edited from the *Harbinger*, January 1983)

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HOW MANY TRIBULATIONS IN MATTHEW 24?

David E. Dean

Two Questions and Two Answers

Listening to a Christian radio call-in program one day, I heard something that sparked my interest. “What is the meaning of the verse,” a caller asked, “that talks about one being taken and the other left”? “You must be thinking of Matthew 24,” came the reply, “Since that whole chapter refers to the Great Tribulation; since it takes place after the rapture of the Church, it only applies to the Jews, so you and I will not have to worry about it.”

Besides questioning in my mind the validity of a “secret rapture” of the church, I began to wonder how many tribulations are in Matthew 24? If only one, then it probably has not happened yet, because Matthew 24:29–31 has a description of the second coming of our Lord. If the chapter has more than one tribulation, then the whole chapter need not be placed beyond the vale of the church.

Look at the first forty-four verses. Observe the context in which the passage is located. In the first three verses, Jesus’ disciples praise the beauty of the temple. Jesus responds that it will be completely destroyed, and the disciples ask when this will happen and what will be the signs of the end of the age. Crucial issue involves the disciples’ questions and the way in which Jesus answers them. Does Jesus answer both of these questions? The *Scofield Bible* makes this comment on the passage:

Matthew 24 with Luke 21:20–24 answers the threefold question. The order is as follows: “When will these things be?” — i.e., the destruction of the temple and the city. Answer, Luke 21:20–24. Second and third questions:

“What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?” Answer, Matthew 24:3. (1032–3)

Charles C. Ryrie of Dallas Theological Seminary, in his *Study Bible*, states concerning Matthew 24, “He [Jesus] does not answer, ‘When will these things be?’ He answers, ‘What will be the sign of your coming?’” Yet it would seem strange that Jesus did not answer the most pressing of the questions. The disciples, overawed by the significance of the temple, were shocked by the thought of it ever being destroyed. Is there any evidence that would indicate that Jesus actually did answer the question?

The parallel passage in Luke mentioned by Scofield deserves some examination. Luke 21:20–24 is an obvious reference to the destruction of the temple, as even Scofield agrees. Compare the Luke passage to Matthew 24:15–19.

Matthew 24:15–19 (NASB)

Luke 21:20–23 (NASB)

15. Therefore when you see the Abomination of Desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing IN THE HOLY PLACE (let the reader understand),

20. But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.

16. then let those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains;

21. Then let those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains,

17. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.

22. and let those who are in the midst of the city must leave,

18. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.

and those who are in the country must not enter the city,

22. because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled.

19. But, woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

23. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who nurse babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people.

The similarities between these two passages are both verbal (exact wording) and conceptual (basic meaning of phrases). This fact contraindicates blanket statements like those by Scofield and Ryrie. The similarities along with the highly improbability that Jesus would have answered such an urgent question of his disciples with a reference to something that would have absolutely no meaning to them (or to the church nearly two thousand years later) shows that in Matthew 24, Jesus answers both questions.

In Matthew 24 the word tribulation is found three times — in verses 9, 21 and 29. The most that could be claimed is that there are three tribulations. Yet a look at verse 29 shows that this is highly unlikely. By stating that something happens after “the tribulation of those days,” he refers back to one of the two previous references. So we will examine the first two occurrences.

The First Answer to the Second Question

As we have seen, Jesus answers both questions addressed to him by the disciples. His answers can be broken into three segments: verses 4–14, 15–28 and 29–48. The first is full of broad statements: “wars and rumors of wars,” “famines and earthquakes,” “many will fall away,” and “false prophets.” Jesus here answers the second part of the question first: “What will be the sign of your coming?” Jesus calls these historical developments the beginnings of the “birth pangs.” Then he talks of a great tribulation, a falling away, and the importance of

endurance. But **the** sign of the end of the age is the world wide spread of Christianity. “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations and then the end shall come” (v. 14). The tribulation of verse 9 is one of those events that precedes the end of the age,

The Second Answer to the First Question

Then Jesus changes the subject slightly and answers the first part of the question by referring to the Abomination of Desolation. This had some specific meaning for Matthew who adds a personal parenthesis.

The disaster that Jesus was predicting was not some far distant event of the future when the church was gone. The church, the body of believers, is on the scene as indicated by the warnings to flee. Urgency is stressed. Why? Because a horrible tribulation was coming (v. 21).

Jesus is letting his disciples know when the temple was to be destroyed. He says, “Look out! Do not be deceived, many will claim to have the answer. They will claim to be the Messiah. But don’t you believe it. When I come back everyone will know it!” (vv. 23–28). Jesus is stressing the horrible circumstances of the destruction of the temple in very emphatic terms. The impression given is that the event will take place in the hearers’ lifetime. The only event that could fulfill these verses is the destruction of the temple and the sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In fact, it appears that before the rebellion started in AD 66, many of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem fled to the city of Pella. Apparently, they took seriously the advice to flee (see further F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 375–6).

So, in verses 4–14 Jesus answers the question about the time of the end of the age, and he discusses a tribulation. In verses 15–28 he describes the destruction of Jerusalem as a tribulation. Verse 29 starts, “But immediately after the tribulation of those days. ...” The immediate reference is the tribulation of verse 21. But since this is the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and

since Jesus did not collect his elect from one end of the sky to the other immediately after A.D. 70, this reference must go all the way back to verse 9.

Therefore, from this examination of Matthew 24, we must conclude that Jesus answers both of the questions asked him, that his answers did have an immediate meaning for the disciples, and that **there are two tribulations, one at the destruction of Jerusalem and one just preceding the end of the age** before we are all “caught up together with them [the resurrected dead] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

* * * * *

**“What Is An Advent Christian?”
Adventist Heritage Sunday, June 19, 2011**

Floyd McIntyre

Introduction

I have some friends, a married couple who don't live near here, who have been going through a difficult time. They were experiencing what many people who live in our country dread — they are going through an IRS audit! Among the questions they were asked, the wife's “favorite question” was, “What is an Advent Christian?” I don't know how the question was answered. I am anxious to find out!

It is not the first time the question has been asked. It has popped up hundreds of times in a variety of situations. I recall my discussion with my Baptist son-in-law about it. He apparently asked the question of Bethany when they first met, only to realize later that one of his aunts, married for years to a now retired Baptist pastor, was brought up in an Advent Christian family and church in New Hampshire.

Since today is Adventist Heritage Sunday I thought it might be acceptable to consider the question once again. There are many ways to approach the subject. The answer to the question can be made very simple or very complex. If someone were to ask the question of you, how would you answer? Before we take a look at some relevant biblical texts, permit me to give a brief auto-biographical sketch.

Definition by autobiography

First, I was not brought up in the Advent Christian denomination, although I lived in Northern Maine and was surrounded by Advent Christian churches and people. I drove by several AC church buildings on a regular basis and paid little or no attention to them. I doubt if you had asked me back then what denomination those churches belonged to that I could have told you. Also, I literally rubbed shoulders with some Advent Christian people unawares.

For instance, my high school physical education teacher was an Advent Christian. He was an outstanding basketball coach, leading our team to several championships over the years, and, just last summer, he was honored for doing so. Little did I realize then that in nine short years after graduating from high school, he would telephone me at Berkshire Christian College and invite me to become a candidate for the pastorate of his church, the Advent Christian Church in Crouseville, Maine. He is one of the finest Christian gentlemen I have ever known. Two of his daughters are now AC pastor's wives.

My maternal grandparents were not Christians. Church attendance and participation was not a part of their life. My mother and one brother were the only members of the family who had any interest in spiritual things at all. I have reason to believe that my great-grandmother attended an Advent Christian Church and took my mother along with her on occasion. I fondly recall my mother telling me that she was baptized in the Aroostook River at the Aroostook Valley Park (now Camp Nomacca) by two Advent Christian pastors.

On the other hand, my paternal grandparents were Christians. They were members of a Baptist church in Caribou, Maine, where my father and several other siblings were baptized sometime in the early 1950s. I can only recall hearing about it.

Often, on Sunday evenings only, my parents would take my grandparents (who did not own a car) to the evening services at the United Baptist Church in Caribou. I am sure it was in those early days as a child I learned some of the great hymns of the faith that we still sing today.

Since we lived in Presque Isle, a small city twelve miles to the south, my parents attended another United Baptist Church there, now known as State Street Baptist. It was in that church that I attended Sunday school, DVBS at least once, and most morning worship services. My folks were members as far as I know.

Things changed for me when I entered junior high. For many reasons that I won't go into, I went through a stage of "rebellion" for lack of a better term and refused to attend either Sunday school or worship. Why my parents did not insist that I do so remains debatable.

My dad worked at many jobs. On the farm, at a Ford dealership, and finally as a gas and oil delivery truck driver for a large farming cooperative. Sometimes I would ride around with him during school vacations. One of his accounts was the State Road Advent Christian Church and parsonage in Mapleton, Maine. During those years, in the early 60s, he became well acquainted with two AC pastors. One was the Rev. Ralph Jordan. Since Pastor Jordan served here [North Springfield, Vermont] at one time, his name will be familiar to some of you. According to our church history, Rev. Jordan came here directly from northern Maine in 1963, my junior year in high school. The other pastor was his successor at State Road, the Rev. Clark Cole.

When I reached my senior year, the Baptist church held a "banquet" for all graduating seniors to which I was invited, although I had not attended any function in the church for six years. Churches do that kind of thing because they genuinely care about people. Unfortunately, the feeling was not mutual at the time. I expect I was "encouraged" to attend! The special speaker for the evening turned

out to be a local pastor from the area, none other than Pastor Cole from the State Road ACC. Evidently, the two churches had a good relationship. I remember that event very well.

Again, little did I know that in just five short years I would enter Berkshire Christian College as a 24-year-old Freshman. Although I have lost touch with Pastor Jordan, I still see Rev. Cole from time to time. Until my dad died, whenever I saw Pastor Cole, he always asked me about him.

But before that amazing college matriculation could occur, a geographical relocation for my parents, sister, and me had to take place. At the encouragement of an uncle who was living in Bristol, Conn., we, as a family of four, relocated from Northern Maine to Bristol, Connecticut, in August of 1966 for purely economic reasons. In retrospect, that move was ordered by a Sovereign God and changed my life.

Leaving out many other stories, four months later I walked into the AC Church in Bristol on Christmas Sunday 1966 and came out a different person, although I did not realize it at the time. I was stunned when Pastor Garth Story greeted me at the door and, in his most “pastoral manner,” shook my hand and said; “You must be Floyd; we have been praying for you!” I vowed to never go back there, but I was back the next Sunday. I was baptized the following summer.

In just short of three years, in the fall of 1969, I entered Berkshire Christian College. I soon met Margaret, who was a senior and getting ready to graduate. Her early life differed greatly from mine in that she had been involved with the Advent Christian people since infancy. Her mother’s family roots reach back into the earliest days of Adventism, and her maternal great-grandparents were charter members of a southern Maine AC church that still exists today in Bridgton.

I have taken some time to share this story with you for a specific reason. It could be much, much longer. I have tried to touch only the main points. But what I want you to understand is this: I consider myself to be an Advent Christian today by God’s sovereign will and not by family heritage.

As I look back over my life, I can see clearly now the evidence of the sovereign hand of God in my life. I have no idea what he has in store for me for the rest of my life. But I must believe that if he had so carefully ordered all the events of the last 66 years, then he must also have a plan and purpose for whatever time remains. I have been comforted much in the last year by the words of Psalm 139:16 (ESV).

Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

So I would have to say for the last 45 years I have been an Advent Christian. This was God's perfect plan for me. I do not question it. As I near the finish line, I want to finish the race well. And that brings us back to where we began. Just exactly what is an Advent Christian?

Definition by Theological Conviction

Occasionally people refer to us as Christian Advents. Sometimes I think it might have been a better choice! The reason? Because we are Christians first and Adventists second! Although personally, I find it hard to understand how you can separate the two. More on that in a little bit.

It cannot be over emphasized that Advent Christians are followers of Jesus — they are Christians. Our statement of faith clearly sets forth our beliefs. It is in complete agreement with the clear teaching of the Bible and in harmony with the great creeds of the Church. So first of all, let there be no doubt: We are Christian. This must not be forgotten. We can number ourselves with those who followed Jesus since the birth of the Church. By our confession of belief in him, in all his fullness, we belong to him.

We believe in his life, from his virgin birth to his death on the cross. We believe in his bodily resurrection from the grave. We

believe he is alive today, seated at the right hand of his Father in Heaven, where he intercedes for us as our High Priest.

We believe that both his death AND his life are substitutionary for us. Not only did he take upon himself our sin and pay the debt we owe, but his life, sinless and perfect, was lived for us as well. Although we could, and sadly some will, pay the wages of their own sin, which is death, no one can ever live the sinless life! Therefore, as our sin was credited to him, his righteous life is credited to us! Theologians call this the doctrine of imputation. And therein lies the gospel.

While we were yet sinners Christ died FOR us (Romans 5:8).

HE who knew NO sin, BECAME sin for us, that we might become the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Further, we believe in salvation through Faith Alone, by Grace Alone, by Christ Alone, to the glory of God Alone! Therefore there is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved. No one can be reconciled to God the Father apart from faith in Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

We also believe in the person and work of God the Holy Spirit who gives us faith in order to believe in Christ, who thereby regenerates people to new life, baptizing us into the body of Christ, the church, having brought us from death to life, and then seals us forever in relationship with God the Father, and then who empowers us with giftedness whereby we can minister to one another in the body of Christ, to the glory of God.

Thus we believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, three in person, yet one in essence as the Bible clearly teaches.

Volumes more could be and should be written about our identity as orthodox believers.

ADVENT Christians

Thus, Advent Christians are first of all CHRISTIANS. But they are ADVENT Christians. Historically, the word Advent in our name points back to the time when there was a renewed conviction that the SECOND ADVENT of Jesus to this earth would occur soon. Many Christians in the early days of our nation did believe that Jesus would return at some point in time, after a thousand years (millennium) of peace. But the preaching of William Miller changed all that. He preached a pre-millennial coming of Jesus and believed that it would occur within his lifetime. So, the most simple understanding is that the word **advent** means “coming” and thus theologically puts a major emphasis on the SECOND coming of Jesus as promised in Scripture.

His first coming, advent, we recognize as now a fact of history. Each year we have an “Advent Season” ending with the celebration of Christmastide. Advent Christians believe that someday, at the time appointed by and known only by his Father, Jesus will return to this earth visibly, bodily, gloriously, powerfully, in just the same way he ascended into heaven (Acts 1:10–11). This will be his SECOND advent. His purpose will be to complete the work of redemption of all creation (Romans 8:19–25). He will resurrect the dead, carry out the judgment, and bring about new heavens and a new earth.

These ideas seem farfetched to some, but this is clearly what the Bible teaches. Those who have a problem with this idea, have a problem not so much with the idea itself as they do with its source, the authority and reliability of the Scriptures. Today most Christians believe in the second coming of Christ albeit with different understandings of the particulars, because it is an important and undeniable teaching of the Bible, and Christians believe the Bible! Granted there are some who claim to be Christians who don't believe the Bible, another issue altogether.

But of course there is more. Adventists have developed a particular understanding of eschatological matters, both what happens at the end of the world when Jesus comes back and what

happens at the end of life when people die. The latter is considered “individual” eschatology, whereas the former is called “cosmic” eschatology. It is in these areas where we see most clearly the differences between ourselves and other groups. Although we believe our theology to be biblically based and accurate, we do not elevate them to a level of being a necessary confession for salvation.

Since many people have already died, and Jesus has not yet returned to earth, and most likely many more will die before he does, this leads me to say something about the Adventist understanding of death. This subject can be very technical and complicated; I will try to make it simple.

Advent Christians believe the future resurrection, which will occur at the second advent, is the real hope of the Christian. We believe that the dead are unconscious until Christ comes and restores them to life. Death then is commonly referred to as a state of sleep, a metaphor frequently used in the Bible, both Old and New Testament alike.

There are additional points that need to be discussed for a full understanding. To begin with, it requires some attention to the subject of biblical anthropology, that is, of the nature of humans. This subject raises the whole issue of natural versus conferred immortality, as well as of the nature of the soul. The subject can be complicated.

In simple terms, Advent Christians do not believe that people (or disembodied souls) go to heaven when they die. All people, Christians and non-Christians alike, remain in an unconscious state, in what the Bible calls “hades” or the grave waiting for the resurrection at the coming of the Lord. At that time everyone will be judged, and believers will be clothed with immortality, and they will be granted life forever on the earth made new. The unrepentant will be duly punished and ultimately destroyed in the fires of gehenna, commonly understood as hell or as one bible passage puts it, “the second death.” (Revelation 20:11–15).

Although these understandings of Scripture have been a minority view in the church, the tide is changing. More and more

theologians are rethinking these things and are coming to see the biblical validity of what Advent Christians have believed for a long time. I say this not intending to boast but rather to simply report that this is a fact now occurring amongst contemporary evangelical theologians although not without debate. The Southern Baptist Convention just met last week in Phoenix and passed a resolution that affirmed the traditional view, the “belief in the biblical teaching on eternal, conscious punishment of the unregenerate in Hell.” Why would a resolution such as this be necessary? This action is clearly due to the change of thinking currently taking place and which is challenging their traditional understandings.

A magazine, *Christian History*, has recently published a “handbook” on the positions that have been held on hell through the centuries. This could be a “golden opportunity” for Advent Christians to make clear their understanding of these issues. I wonder if we will have the courage and determination to do so?

So you see, like lots of other denominations, the title or name gives a clue to what has become a doctrinal distinction. Baptists believe in “Believers Baptism.” Presbyterians emphasize certain doctrines and a particular form of church government. Pentecostals place a heavy emphasis on the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit, (i.e., taking their emphasis from the Day of Pentecost detailed in Acts 1). These are just a few examples of denominational titles that point out what is important to each group.

Advent Christians are no different. We agree with the evangelical churches on most points, but we put emphasis is on the ADVENT because the second coming of Christ will bring God’s eternal plan to final fruition, and it compels us to get the gospel out while there is still time.

CONCLUSION

So what is an Advent Christian? To my knowledge, no one has ever spelled out a specific answer to the question. There are people everywhere who fellowship regularly in Advent Christian

churches, some are even members, who do not embrace the doctrinal distinctives of the denomination as set forth in our church constitutions and statements of faith. But, when we report our membership figures and they are tallied up by denominational statisticians and the number of Advent Christians is reported, you are included! So, by some reckoning, you are an Advent Christian anyway! This apparent contradiction is possible because, as our denominational church covenant reads,

1. We agree together reverently to regard the Bible as our rule of faith and order, and Christian character as our only test of church fellowship.

So, I guess each person has to decide for himself whether or not he wants to fly the Advent Christian flag over his life. In a day when denominationalism is being challenged and denominational loyalty is clearly on the decline, one might ask whether or not it really matters. Some of course will hold different opinions on that as well. Loyalists will shout YES! While others will say, Who cares?

You have heard my story, and I'm sure each of you has a story of your own. For me, anyone who confesses Christ as Savior and Lord and believes in his promised return to this earth is an "Advent" Christian. Yet there remains a bond that is precious to many. For some, that bond is realized only in the fellowship of a local church like ours. For others, the fellowship reaches far beyond the local church family. It is true that this bond may be a result of commonly held beliefs, shared experiences, or ancestral heritage, but surely, whatever their nature, these are "ties that bind."

In all likelihood I have not sufficiently answered "the question of the day" to everyone's satisfaction. But if I have informed you even a little bit, perhaps you can answer the question for yourself and be able to give a reasonable answer whenever you are asked; "What is an Advent Christian?"

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ADVENT CHRISTIAN HERITAGE REVIEW

Pledge of Allegiance to One's Mother Church

January 30, 2011

Dear Pastor McIntyre:

Thank you for reaching out to me with the survey mailing from Cindy Hall. As requested, attached is my completed survey.

My father, Wendell Fransen, made a lifelong commitment to the Advent Christian church in North Springfield, Vermont, when he moved to the community in the 1940s. A deacon of the church, who took his commitment to this church very seriously, he raised all five of his children (I'm the youngest) to regard this church as our home church. Sadly, my father died of cancer at 50 years of age (when I was 12 years old). A pew with a plaque in his name is an important remembrance in the church sanctuary.

The Advent Christian church community has had a profound impact on my life. As a quintessential Daddy's girl, I, along with my father, attended every worship service and activity possible during my childhood. My love for Jesus was nurtured in so many ways through this church. Every single Sunday school teacher and Bible School program made an impact on my life. The first dollar I ever earned (scrubbing a neighbor's outdoor patio when I was a little girl) was dropped in the church offering plate to help "missionaries in the foreign field." Receiving my first Bible, reciting my first Christmas piece, receiving my full immersion baptism, singing in the choir and playing the piano, attending campmeeting services in Bethel (I was named "Camper of the Year" in 1972) and White River Junction — these are just a few of the life-changing events because of this church. Pastor Taber, Pastor Jordan and Pastor Monroe provided tons of hours ministering to our family

needs. I could write a book about all the individuals in this church who touched my life and the lives of my family over the years!

Although I now live in New Jersey (after graduating from Gordon College and working with Youth For Christ in Oregon), I value my history with my home church. I understand the need to update your records and your classification of me as inactive; I certainly don't want to cause any hardship for church statistics. But I would be heartbroken if your church Clerk terminated my membership. I believe our God is bigger than geographical barriers to fellowship.

Please accept the enclosed check for \$100 as an unrestricted donation to the work of the church.

I do try to keep somewhat informed about the church, through my brother and online postings (e.g., http://aceasternregion.org/2010_Supt._rept._presentation.pdf).

Also, I appreciate the friendly welcome you extend to my brother, Edwin, when he shows up at church events. My father would be so grateful for your caring.

With love in Christ,

Vivian Fransen

* * * * *

“Revelation, with all its strange symbols, is a reassuring, encouraging book. In the cosmic battles between Christ and Satan, Christ always wins” (see above, p. 6).

THE NAGGING QUESTION

DO ADVENT CHRISTIANS SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY?

Robert Warren

Gary [Havener] wrote: “So I say, teach our distinctives proudly in membership class and never be ashamed of who we are.”

Amen! Again, this is interesting because the VERY same debate is going on in a forum I am on for the Christian Church. Some wonder if we should strive to be more like the evangelical church in general by relaxing our distinctive, which says that the Bible teaches that baptism is the point at which you receive forgiveness for your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and is thus more than just “an outward sign” (though few would go so far as to advocate baptismal regenerationism).

Some think that becoming more like the larger evangelical world is the best thing (unity) while others think that sticking to our distinctives is the most important (truth). But, the truth is that every denomination has a distinctive that they must stick with. That is why they are called distinctives. Methodists add to the conversation on sanctification, Episcopalians on liturgy, Pentecostals on the Spirit, Advent Christians on conditionalism, Christians on baptism, etc. To get rid of every distinctive would make for a very weak Christianity at best, pablum at worst. Each group should make sure that their distinctives are out there and taught well. I doubt that anyone is saying that Advent Christians should just give up the fight on conditionalism.

Something I came across on another forum was really good. With regard to the sticky issue of recognizing unity in the practical sense, one workshop at the North American Christian Convention was especially helpful. It was called “Handling the Tension between Unity and Truth.” Dr. James B. North during

the Q&A indicated three basic levels of fellowship. I am not sure that I have this right in every detail, but my recollection is that the levels are:

1. The **Praise the Lord level**. This is the level at which we can gather to provide mutual praise to our God. It may even include areas of common participation toward common goals.

2. The **Church Membership level**. This is a more highly functional level that requires greater consistency because a congregation will function together in multiple ways across large spans of time. A consensus on requirements for church membership and basic organization are among items that would be critical in this level.

3. The **Church Leadership level**. This requires a great sense of togetherness of belief from which to operate and lead in a consistent and coherent manner. He indicated that even Scripture indicates the uniqueness of this level when it says, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers” (James 3:1)

Those levels are not without their ragged edges as well, but they are helpful in bringing some sense to the real world in which we operate where the Lamb’s Book of Life is not available online for our review.

North commented that our slogan, “In essentials unity,” needs to be related to these levels. He frequently asks the question, “Essential to what?” The essentials for level #1 are obviously far fewer than the essentials for level #2. The question is: Can there be common ground without having all common ground? I believe there can be, and we should celebrate and build on that common ground for his glory.

Thus, for the Advent Christian Church, I would like this:

1: Praise the Lord Level: would include all who hold to the “essentials,” basically that which would make you a bona fide evangelical: belief in Jesus as the only savior, God, the Bible, etc. This would include other evangelical denominations (and maybe mainline and even Catholics in some cases, but let’s not press the point).

2: Membership level: would be anyone who was a Christian. They could be a member of an AC church even if they did not hold to AC doctrine — conditionalism, the nature of death, eschatology. To be honest, most of your members are probably already in this camp, and I doubt that too many folks would advocate purging the membership rolls of all those who do not toe the line on AC doctrine.

3: Leadership level: This would be for pastors, teachers, deacons and elders in the church. If they are going to be leaders in the church, they should hold sincerely to AC doctrine. I do not think I would encourage a congregation to hire a preacher who did not hold AC doctrine or allow teachers or elders who could not teach AC doctrine with good conscience. It does not mean they are not Christians or members, but if they want to teach or preach Baptist doctrine (for example), they should do so in a Baptist church and not cause trouble.

Good way to break things down, no?

* * * * *

TWO CENTS WORTH ON DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES

Keith Wheaton

Gentlemen:

Here is my two cents worth on this discussion regarding doctrinal distinctives and essential elements of faith and practice. Today I led chapel at Advent Christian General Conference headquarters, and I shared many of your comments with my friends there to illustrate how even pastors struggle with these issues. Then I read the following excerpts from Francis Nichol's book, *The Midnight Cry*:

There comes a time in the history of almost every religious movement when the distinctive teachings or convictions that

set it in motion, result in friction and opposition in the church or churches from which it sprang. The founders may have started the movement with no idea of a separate organization, but they generally end up as a distinct body. Wesley, for example, did not start his revivals with the thought of creating a new denomination, but the movement finally became a separate religious body.

The Millerites in their formal pronouncement at the time of the first session of the general conference in October, 1840, very explicitly stated that the movement had no sectarian designs. And that position they restated in obvious sincerity from time to time (157).

A number of clergymen, however, soon began to display a real hostility to the distinctive preaching of the “advent near.” In many instances the believers in Miller’s teachings were not permitted to express themselves on the subject in any way in their own churches. They felt repressed and spiritually suffocated (157).

The Millerite papers at this time were filled with accounts of ministers and laymen either being expelled from the churches or withdrawing voluntarily. One minister wrote an extended report of his trial for heresy before the presiding elder in the Portland district of the Maine Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The charge against him was “disseminating doctrines contrary to our articles of religion, as explained by our standard authors.” This charge was brought against him in harmony with a series of resolutions that had been passed some time before by the Maine Conference. These resolutions discussed Millerism very specifically and described the teachings of the movement as “contrary to the standards of our church” and “as among the erroneous and strange doctrines which we are pledged to banish and drive away.” (175–176.)

The fact is, we (Advent Christians) did not decide to take our ball and go home and start our own church. We were kicked out of every other church. Adventist ministers were told to shut up or get out. Today, most churches will not

excommunicate a member for proclaiming Christ's imminent return. But I am not so sure that would be true if the member proclaimed conditionalist teaching. I know for a fact that, while I am often asked to preach at my in-laws non-denominational church, I would never be called to be their pastor because of my theology. Their statement of faith forbids it.

One poster commented: "If you hold the essentials dear, the non-essentials will come through as well. In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." According to Dr. Nichol's writings, that does not seem to be the experience of our forefathers. The only "liberty" they were given was the freedom to "get out of our church and don't come back!" And, I am pretty sure that would be our experience if we tried to "infiltrate" a Baptist church today!

This has been a good discussion on the listserve, and I can sympathize with Rex's struggle to establish godly priorities of ministry. However, I do not think we as a group are guilty of emphasizing our distinctive theology at the expense of the gospel. In fact, my opinion is that we have distanced ourselves from our distinctives in order to be accepted by the "orthodox" crowd to our own detriment. We have a great and noble heritage, and what is distinctive about our theology is that it is biblical! That is not something to be ashamed of! We were right to proclaim Jesus' imminent return; we are right about conditionalism; and we were right about Saddam's WMDs — Oops, wrong argument!

From: acpastors-bounces@aurora.edu on behalf of Keith Wheaton

To: 'Advent Christian Pastors Hotline'

Subject: RE: [acpastors] Nagging question

* * * * *

CONDITIONALIST REVIEW

Kudos to Three Prominent Conditionalists: Pinnock, Stott and Fudge.

~gracEmail~

CLARK PINNOCK: REST IN JESUS

Edward Fudge

Grandson of missionaries, young supporter of Wycliffe Bible Translators, veteran of Francis Schaeffer's L'Abri in Switzerland, doctorate under F.F. Bruce, theology professor at New Orleans Baptist Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Regent College, McMaster University, controversial thinker, author and teacher, Clark Pinnock, 73, was all this and so much more last Sunday [August 15, 2010], when he suddenly fell asleep in Jesus as the result of a massive heart attack at his home in Hamilton, Ontario.

To me, he was an encourager by mail who took time for me when I was wrestling with Reformed theology at Covenant Seminary around 1970 ... a generous man who gave an endorsement for my first Hebrews commentary in 1974 ... a friend with whom I visited at Evangelical Theological Society meetings through the years . . . with his wife, Dorothy, my hospitable hosts overnight once when I was in Canada ... a later endorser of *The Fire That Consumes* and an early prominent evangelical spokesperson for the view of hell it presents.

He was a patient man who endured much from a few theological adversaries who were not worthy to tie his shoes ... a jovial brother who was so tall that Sara Faye had to choose between cutting off his head or my legs when taking our picture in his yard the last time I was privileged to visit with him in person. In short, Clark was one of the most gracious, humble, productive, courageous, open-minded and trying-to-be-like-Jesus men (and theologians) I was ever privileged to know.

Clark Pinnock began teaching theology as a conservative fundamentalist, Calvinist, cessationist (anti-supernatural gifts). Over the years, he left Calvinism, adopted moderate charismatic views (after his nearly-blind eye was miraculously healed in answer to prayer — “one personal experience like that is more persuasive than a whole shelf of books,” he said — or words to that effect), and became a leading voice on the evangelical Left. He wrote books on the Bible, the Holy Spirit, “openness theology” (does God choose not to know the future?), God’s mercy (will he judge people who never hear the gospel by their response to what they did know of God?) and other subjects.

I agreed with many of his controversial views, am not sure of a few others. Whether his opinions were right or wrong, he knew, loved and served the Lord Jesus. His heart was right and that is what counts. Rest in peace, brother Clark. With thousands of others, I appreciate you, grieve your passing, and will miss you for the time I have left here. We look forward to seeing you again in the great Resurrection reunion.

° gracEmail 19 August 2010 [The ellipses are in the original.]

[P.S.: Clark Pinnock was a “pilgrim theologian” (his self-designation) whose views, as indicated by Edward Fudge above, evolved over time. At the annual conference of the Evangelical Theological Society in November 2003, he and John Sanders were brought to trial on the grounds that their “open theism” denied the inerrancy of Scripture. Both were exonerated, but by relatively narrow margins. Pinnock was an outspoken advocate of conditional immortality. His sometimes problematic approach to the subject is covered in the last issue of *Henceforth ...* .]

* * * * *

REMEMBERING John Stott
A Summary of the Eulogy by
James Emery White

James Emery White is the pastor of one of America's largest churches and a seminary teacher. Shortly after John Stott's death in mid 2011, White paid tribute to him as one of the two most significant evangelical leaders in the last century: Stott and Billy Graham. White recalls two meetings with Stott. The first was during Stott's visit to the seminary where White was a student. He told the students two things: cheer up, you are too serious; the seminary does not seem to promote much spiritual formation. Later at Amsterdam 2000, White was the leader of a roundtable discussion, which included John Stott – a bit intimidating. He says,

Stott was, at least for me, a model and mentor in relation to authentic spirituality and genuine humility. Yes, he was a giant intellect; he could exposit the Scriptures like no one I have ever heard. He was a statesman. ... It strikes me that the two great evangelical leaders of my lifetime – Stott and Billy Graham – both affected me in the same way after spending time with them. I walked away thinking here was someone who walked with Jesus, and challenged me to be more faithful and authentic in my own way, and that humility is something beautiful and to be pursued.

(Church and Culture 7, no. 65 [August 1, 2011])

[P.S.: Stott is particularly important for ACs because his cautious advocacy of conditional immortality (which he insisted on calling annihilationism) started an intra-evangelical firestorm about the destiny of unbelievers, of which you have read in the last two issues of *Henceforth*.... White does not mention Stott's view of eternal destiny, but it is significant that an outstanding evangelical leader continues to express great respect for someone considered a heretic by Robert Peterson and the Traditionalist crew. (Editor)]

Hell and Mr. Fudge

Claude F. Mariottini

Claude F. Mariottini is professor of Old Testament at Northern Baptist Seminary. He recently attended a lecture by Edward Fudge on *The Fire That Consumes*. He gives a positive report of the person and the message. “Edward is a committed Christian, a humble man who loves the Lord, and a man who is on a crusade to present the real teachings of the Bible concerning hell.” Mariottini presents a paragraph biography and calls attention to a biographical film in the making, *Hell and Mr. Fudge*.

He notes “that Fudge’s conclusion is based on extensive research and solid scholarship. Any serious student of the Bible will be challenged by his solid exegesis of the text. It is this exegesis that provides the biblical support for his conclusion.”

Mariottini concludes his longish blog this way:

I was fortunate to have been invited to participate in the lecture. I can honestly say that I was deeply impressed by Edward Fudge. I wish I had an opportunity to have spent more time with him to learn more about his life as a pastor, a teacher, a lawyer and as a writer.

Posted on September 26, 2011 by Claude Mariottini
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Thinking outside the Box

Al Maxey

Al Maxey is veteran pastor in the Churches of Christ. In a recent article in *Reflections*, he expresses his appreciation for the impact on his life of Edward Fudge and his book, *The Fire that Consumes*. After Robert Peterson's contention that his students at Covenant Seminary became physically sick from reading Fudge's book (*Two Views* 83), it is nice to get positive affirmations from Maxey and Claude.

That book has probably done more than any other except the Bible to change my focus in ministry. I read the book twice, and then I read the entire Bible verse by verse again to "see if these things be so." I examined this topic of the nature of man and the final punishment of the wicked more intensely than I have ever examined any other subject.

At some point during this journey of several years "the light came on." This epiphany has impacted almost every area of my theology and ministry, and has opened my eyes to a whole new world. For those who would like to hear more of my thoughts on this, I would urge them to go to my Topical Index and read the 20 Reflections articles listed under the heading "The Nature of Man and Final Punishment."

Al Maxey, quoted from his article titled "Thinking Outside the Box," *Reflections* #494, July 20, 2011).

BOOK REVIEWS

Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived, by Rob Bell. New York: HarperOne, 2011. 213 p. Reviewed by Jefferson Vann.

Rob Bell does a masterful job of shaking the foundations of the theology of destiny. He exposes the fact that much of what

people say about salvation and human destiny is not based on the Bible and therefore does not hold up to scrutiny. He dares to ask direct questions — many of them.

His tactic is similar to that of knocking down base cards in someone's house of cards. A house of cards can be an enormous thing, but it is only as strong as the first few cards that one lays out. Those base cards serve as the foundation. If they are stable, one can build fortresses upon them. But topple those base cards and the entire thing falls apart. Bell has identified some flimsy base cards in modern theology: the idea that only professing believers will go to heaven and its corollary that all others will suffer in hell forever.

He attacked those familiar base cards by appealing to Scripture after Scripture to show that the Bible addresses very different issues. He wanted to show that the whole of modern theology about human destiny was built upon assumptions that do not come from the Bible. He accomplished that mission. Each chapter in the book identifies a presupposition and then proceeds to topple it by going to the text of Scripture. In short, Bell does theology and he does it well.

Nevertheless, Bell's book is destined to be much maligned. He has taken on subjects that are practically taboo for evangelical Christians. "Heaven when you die" and "conscious eternal suffering for the lost" are concepts that are too holy for most good church people to investigate. Expect Bell to be branded a hopeless universalist. Expect retaliation. And rightfully so. Any good theologian worth his or her salt makes a difference. Bell has swung a pendulum, and one should expect the thing to swing back in the other direction. Paul told the Corinthians that "there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized" (1 Corinthians 11:19). Bad theology can mobilize good theology.

With that in mind, let me tell you where I think Bell has it wrong. He spends numerous pages showing that the gospel message is not about going to heaven when you die — then he puts the saved in heaven when they die. He can do no other,

because for Bell (and most of his opponents) the human soul has to live eternally somewhere. Bell sweeps away all of the scriptural evidence that he has amassed against the concept that heaven is a destination. In the end, he says what he has been arguing against.

He agrees with his opponents that all human beings are immortal, except that, unlike them, he argues that their immortality gives human beings hope for restoration to God even after their bodies die. He argues from Scripture that God is love and therefore never gives up on his own. So, as long as there is life, there is hope. He argues for the concept of future probation on the basis of two premises: God never stops loving, and human beings never stop living.

Herein is the problem: none of Bell's opponents want to deny either of those premises. They believe that God is both loving and just. They want to agree with what the Bible says about his love, but not forget that it gives equal time to his wrath. When they talk about Judgment Day, they envision that it will be just that — a day in which God will judge humanity and determine the eternal fate of everyone. They cannot envision a Judgment Day that extends to however many years and centuries needed to purge humanity of all sin and rescue all. Hence, they must believe that death seals the fate of all.

The all important doctrine that Bell and most of his opponents agree upon is the concept of innate immortality: that all humans are born immortal. That doctrine will lead Bell's opponents to insist on eternal conscious suffering in hell for the lost. It leads Bell to insist that a loving God would never condemn people to such a fate for a limited life of sin; therefore he must give opportunity for restoration.

Allow me then in Rob Bell fashion to suggest that it is the presupposition of natural immortality that keeps both Bell and his opponents from seeing what the Bible says about the destiny of the lost. The Bible says that only God is immortal (Romans 1:23; 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:16). Immortality is a promise from God that Christ will give to the saved; it is not an innate characteristic

of every human (Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:53–54; 1 Timothy 1:10). For anybody to live anywhere forever, they must have eternal life. Eternal life is promised to the saved only (Matthew 25:46; John 3:15–16; 36; 4:14; 6:27, 4, 47, 54, 68, 10:28; 12:25; Acts 13:46, 48; Romans 2:7; 5:21, 6:22; 1 Timothy 6:12; 1 John 5:11; Jude 21).

What, then, is the destiny of the lost? The God of justice who gave us his truth in his word has decreed that the lost will be destroyed. (Matthew 10:28; 22:7; Luke 17:27, 29; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 6:13; 15:24, 26; Hebrews 10:39; 2 Peter 2:12; Revelation 11:18.). Since the wages of sin is death, they will die (Matthew 21:41; John 5:24; 8:51; Romans 6:16, 23; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54; James 5:20; 1 John 3:14; Revelation 21:8). They will be punished appropriately, and then they will be no more (Psalm 104:35; Ezekiel 26:21; 27:36; 28:19).

* * * * *

On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei, by St. Athanasius. Translated and edited by A Religious of C.S.M.V. With an Introduction by C.S. Lewis. New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Reviewed by Melodie Dean

Athanasius wrote *De Incarnation* in 318, when he was 20 or 21, to explain the Christian faith to Marcarius, a new convert. C. S. Lewis’ introduction abates our fear of reading something so old. He explains that the old books have survived the test of time whereas a new book is yet on trial (4). Lewis lifts high Athanasius for his stand “against the world and for this book.” Athanasius was an Egyptian from Alexandria, born about 298 to wealthy parents and given a Greek education. He survived the severe persecution from 303–311, which ended with the Edict of Milan in 313.

Six years later the Alexandrine presbyter Arius began to teach concerning the Word of God that “once He was not.” Athanasius opposed him. He was present at the Council of Nicaea, which

condemned Arianism in 325. He was the Patriarch of Alexandria from 328 until he died in 373. His story is one of the ugliest in church history as he was slandered, persecuted and exiled five times. Through it all he remained calm and confident. He is remembered as the one who stood against the world to preserve the Trinitarian doctrine.

Athanasius begins with the creation and the Fall: of God making everything out of nothing, making man in his own image, and how man went astray, became vile, came under the law of death, and was removed from paradise.

It was our sorry case that caused the Word to come down, our transgression that called out His love for us, so that He made haste to help us and to appear among us. It is we who were the cause of His taking human form, and for our salvation that in His great love He was both born and manifested in a human body. For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption to non-existence again. (29 & 30).

Sin activated the power of corruption and spread like wildfire. Men invented wickedness and had an insatiable appetite for new sins. Adultery, theft, murder, lawlessness and perversion reigned. The Divine dilemma:

What then was God, being good to do? Was He to let corruption and death have her way with them? In that case, what was the use of having made them in the beginning? Surely it would have been better never to have been created at all than having been created, to be neglected and perish; and, besides that, such indifference to the ruin of His own work before His eyes would argue limitation on his part! (32)

Yet it was unthinkable that God would go back on his word regarding death. No amount of repentance could maintain Divine consistency or change man's nature. Only the Word of God Himself could bring again the corruptible to incorruption and to maintain for the Father His consistency of character. ... He alone was both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all (33).

Athanasius then says, "through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection," (34) "those that believe" (43, 50, & 57). He shares with Macarius that the Savior's become man so that men would have knowledge of their Artificer. "The Word of God came and dwelled among man that He might teach them of Himself and the Father" (43). He was an object lesson for their senses. If they were awestruck by creation — He was the creator. Did their minds tend to regard men as gods? His unique works marked him as Son of God. Were they drawn to evil spirits? He could drive evil spirits out. Were they inclined to hero-worship and the cult of the dead? He rose from the dead.

Pay attention to His death Macarius, for it is the very center of our faith. "Two marvels took place at once: the death of all was consummated in the Lord's body; yet, because the Word was in it, death and corruption were in the same act utterly abolished" (49). A very strong proof of this destruction of death and its conquest is seen to this day. Disciples of Christ take the offensive toward death, and instead of fearing it, by the sign of the cross and by faith in Christ, they prefer to die rather than deny their faith in Christ (57). Further proof Macarius is this: men once they are dead lose their power of influence over others. "Deeds and actions that energize others belong only to the living" (60 & 61). Athanasius provides further proofs that Christ is alive, including his influence and deeds.

Well Macarius this is a brief statement on Faith in Christ and of the manifestation of His Godhead to us. This is

but the beginning and by faith you must go on to prove its truth by the study of scripture. (95).

Further, study of scripture needs the unincumbrance of a good life and pure soul. So, cleanse your life and copy the saints as they have copied Christ. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard of the reward yet to come for them who love God.

To God is honor and might and glory for ages to come (96). Amen.

This treatise of St. Athanasius on the incarnation is excellent! Although the stated purpose was to inform Macarius of the Christian faith, the book transcends his time and speaks to us. The pernicious way of sin and corruption is growing stronger and stronger in our nation and world. And Christianity grows more complacent and non-efficacious. We are distracted with collecting toys and/or pursuing the American dream or bust, and bust it does. His message is the same for the church today: “cleanse your life and copy the saints as they copied Christ, for Eye hath not seen the reward yet to come!”

* * * * *

The Tree of Life: A Biblical Study of Immortality & New Creation, by Paul Sellman. Denver: Outskirts Press, 2010. Reviewed by Jefferson Vann.

Advent Christian pastor Paul Sellman has produced a significant study on eternal destiny. Much like John Stott and Edward Fudge, Sellman came to his study convinced that people go to their rewards at death. His study of the Scriptures has revealed a different outlook. He now sees that death is not the answer to humanity’s problem, it is part of that problem. The solution to humanity’s problem is Jesus Christ, whose return will

mean the end of evil, and an eternal new beginning for the saved.

The genius of Sellman's approach to this controversial subject is his way of simplifying these very complex issues. He asks his readers to put aside their preconceived notions and to imagine all history as being represented by two ages: this age, and the age to come. This age is the age of mortality because humanity rebelled against God. In Eden they lost the opportunity to take of the tree of life and live forever. The age to come is an age of restoration where God renews heaven and earth with life eternal as it was meant to be. The crucial event that will put an end to this age of mortality and usher in the age of eternal life is what the Bible calls the Day of the Lord. Sellman shows from Scripture that this Day of the Lord is an event taught in both Testaments. It is the Day of Jesus Christ and the Day of his return, and Resurrection Day, and Judgment Day. It is the essential event in all history, since it divides the two ages. It corrects the problems of this age, and explains the destiny of those who will by God's grace make it into the next.

Sellman attacks some of the theological traditions within popular Christianity that tend to obscure this way of looking at things. Chief among these traditions is the concept borrowed from Greek philosophy that all human souls are already immortal. Sellman argues that this is "an unbiblical presupposition," (152) which has led Christians who read the Bible to "see something that isn't there" (172). He calls this view "the great heresy of all existence" (195). Immortality was lost in Eden, and will not be gained back "until the rebellion that lost it is ended" (197).

To Sellman, "good theology is based upon what is clearly taught, and then filled in by the less certain elements" (91). What is clearly taught in Scripture is humanity's need for eternal life in this age; God's plan to fill that need in the age to come; and the Day of the Lord that will make God's plan reality. So, until that great event of the Day of the Lord arrives, those who die wait unconscious in their graves for resurrection — either to eternal life or to the second death. That is why the Bible calls Christians who have died "asleep."

It is impossible for a reviewer to like everything about a book — so here are a few changes that might improve this work. The frequent use of the first person is a style matter, but it seems to detract from the scholarly nature of the study. Quotations from the Bible are everywhere in this work, but the font, italics, and justification combined in quotations tend to make some of the text run together. Sellman steers away from a number of technical and complicated issues and avoids getting carried away in discussing particularly problematic texts. This is a good thing, but it might be seen by opponents of his position as “chickening out.” A few well-placed reference notes to popular works (like that of Stott and Edwards), which do get into those texts, might help.

The Tree of Life is not yet available in electronic book format. If it were, this review would have been written sooner! *The Tree of Life* is a skillful and contemporary approach to questions that God’s people have been asking since the time of the patriarchs. It is the kind of book that pastors can pass on to new church members, who are just getting to know about the issues of life, death and destiny. It helps to explain the way things are, and whet our appetites for the way things will be.

* * * * *

Exegetical Fallacies, by D. A. Carson. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996. 148 p. Reviewed by Gary Stevens.

Carson says,

To focus on fallacies, exegetical or otherwise, sounds a bit like focusing on sin ... but when sins are common and frequently unrecognized ... detailed description may have the salutary effect of not only encouraging thoughtful self-examination but also providing an incentive to follow a better way.

This book brings into focus many common errors that preachers make when delivering sermons. Carson deals with word-study fallacies, grammatical fallacies, logical fallacies, presuppositional and historical fallacies. He reminds us that it takes work and time to develop and test our exegetical skills against others. But as iron sharpens iron it is in the serious give and take of theological wrestling that we learn to respect and listen to our opponents. They may be afraid of us for unnecessary reasons, but until they get to know us better, neither of us will grow in grace.

He states on page 17, "It is all too easy to read the traditional interpretations we have received from others into the text of Scripture." It is only as we carefully examine our own exegetical reasons for the positions we hold that we are then able to intelligently share them in the marketplace of ideas and be ready to modify or change them in order to be more under the authority of God and Scripture. For we are not here to be right all the time, but to follow the Holy Spirit and become like Christ himself.

The mistakes he brings up are easier to see in others than in ourselves. So we need to look that much more closely at our own exegesis and be willing to be that much more open with others in a kind, patient, and respectful way in order to have our ideas receive a hearing.

We as Advent Christians historically challenged the greater church to follow the Bible and live by the truth that the second coming of Christ was imminent. Now we need to challenge the church to get rid of the vine-of-Greek thinking that has negated the importance, and necessity of the general resurrection and of a final destruction of the wicked. We can only do that by being better students of the Word than our opponents, and knowing their positions better than they know them.

Many of the errors relate to not being students of context: taking a meaning from another time or from another context. He talks about the taking of meanings from inappropriate passages. He talks about not knowing our Greek grammar well enough to know how the context shapes and shades the denotative meaning into the immediate context. He talks about the selective use of

scriptural evidence: If there are twelve Scriptures to support a certain position, then are there a hundred to support another? If that is the case then that should be the position everyone would want to follow, if there were no emotional arguments involved. This is the key to arguing for conditionalism. The weight of the arguments is there, but it is only through loving and open discourse that these arguments will be heard.

Every pastor who wants to be better ought to take to heart the challenges of this book.

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Untamed: the Bible, God, and Natural Disasters, by Terence E. Fretheim. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. 176 p. pb.
Reviewed by Freeman Barton.

This author proposes a view of creation quite different from that to which we are accustomed. The title of the first chapter is the theme of the book: “God Created the World Good, not Perfect.” He created the world with tectonic plates that shift causing earthquakes and tsunamis. He released viruses that cause great suffering. “And so God creates a dynamic world in which the future is open to a number of possibilities and in which creaturely activity is crucial to creational developments” (17). God sets humans and the rest of creation, animate and otherwise, free with some restraints. “The future is genuinely open here. It depends on what the human being does with what God presents” (36).

The second essay is “The God of the Flood Story and Natural Disasters.” The point is that the judgment is not imposed by God. It is the natural consequence of sinful acts. The flood story emphasizes not God’s punishment of mankind but his rescue of Noah and his family. God tells Noah that the flood will come, but he does not start the flood. “The fountains of the great deep burst forth” on their own (Genesis 11:6) (55).

Fretheim summarizes the book again in this paragraph:

Such natural events as earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, destructive weather patterns, cell mutations, and even potentially deadly viruses were certainly an integral part of the creation before human beings showed up. So in some sense, such potentially destructive natural events are God-designed in the very creation of things. Then, when human beings did show up, they were told to “subdue the earth” (Genesis 1:28), which must mean that, for all its goodness, the world was not tranquil and perfect (41).

Granted, “sin intensifies the negative dimensions” (42).

The same theme appears in chapter 3: “Natural Disasters, the Will of the Creator, and the Suffering of Job.” The divine relationship to this kind of world is such that God no longer acts with complete freedom but from within a committed relationship to the structures of creation to which God will be faithful ... instances of suffering are not a matter of divine arbitrariness but of God’s bringing into being the kind of creation of which we have spoken. (88).

More in Four: “Suffering and the God of the Old Testament.” As seen in an earlier chapter, God’s world is not a suffering-free or pain-free world, and God created it that way” (106). Concerning “God, Faith, and the Practice of Prayer,” “prayer is a God-given way for God’s people to make a situation more open for God, to give God more room to work, knowing that God has to be close to people desires to be close to people” (147).

This book, from an evangelical publisher, may be a sign of the times. Fretheim takes evolution and errors in Scripture for granted. His theology proper is to the left of the open theism of Clark Pinnock and John Sanders, for which the two scholars were nearly excommunicated from the Evangelical Theological Society. God has the same or more limitations for Fretheim. The new element is the imperfection of the pre-fall creation.

Several biblical passages paint a different picture. “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good”

(Genesis 1:31 ESV). One would expect that what God makes would be perfect. The Fall had a significant impact on the created order, as Genesis 3 indicates. The work that had been enjoyable became difficult. The birth process, which would have been pleasant, became painful. The potentially immortal couple lost access to the Tree of Life. The husband and wife who had been working harmoniously as partners sometimes quarreled. The husband through his superior physical strength began to impose his will on his mate.

Paul maintains that creation was put in bondage by the Fall.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:19–22 ESV).

Paul looks forward to the redemption of the earth just as he does of people. Peter uses the words of Isaiah to assure his readers that “according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 66:22). John in Revelation 21 movingly describes the restoration of creation to its original perfection (21:1–4).

Originally a series of five lectures, the book is interesting and provocative, but it is ultimately unpersuasive. Terence E. Fretheim is not a young fellow trying to make a name for himself by coming up with a radical thesis. He has taught at Luther Seminary “for over fifty years.” It is a mature thesis by a respected teacher published by a highly reputable evangelical seminary. It will be widely read. May the readers evaluate carefully.

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Earth's Final Dawn, by Clinton E. Taber. Xulon Press, 2011. ix, 309 p. pb. Reviewed by Jefferson Vann.

The subtitle of Clinton Taber's new book, *Earth's Final Dawn*, is *Understanding this Age in View of the Coming New Age*. It is a systematic eschatology with numerous practical insights. Taber believes that "life has no meaning without destiny" (43). The destiny he envisions is the restoration of Edenic Paradise for eternity, cleansed of all things temporary — like sickness, pain, sin and death. The Bible is the story of how those temporary things came to be, and what God is doing to bring them to an end. It reveals how God has worked through history to replace the temporary kingdoms of Satan and men with his permanent kingdom, ruled by Christ. That kingdom is now in its formation phase — where God is preparing "a people who would live in fellowship with Him in His Kingdom Paradise for His glory forever" (xxii).

Humanity is on the verge of witnessing earth's final dawn — the dawn of the age to come. In this present age, Christ dealt with our sin problem by becoming our sacrifice of atonement. In the new age, after Christ returns, he will destroy death by raising his own from their graves, and he will destroy all his enemies by consuming them with the fires of hell. All of this is imminent — it could happen at any moment. All of this is necessary because God's plan for a restored Edenic Paradise cannot happen without it.

In Taber's explanation of these things, you will find exegetical overviews of significant eschatological books of the Bible (like Daniel and Revelation) and extensive treatments of relevant doctrines (like the resurrection, the timing of the second coming and conditional immortality).[2] His treatments are thorough, biblically sound and up-to-date. He avoids following the party-line of popular end-times teachings, but points out that their popularity is due to the relevance that eschatology has for everyone.

Taber is not an extremist. He encourages balanced, biblical thinking on these important issues. He discourages the kind of date-setting fanaticism that has brought shame to the Church historically, and recently. He presents a powerful case that Christ could come in this generation, but stops short of saying that

he definitely will. His evidence is compelling to anyone, but especially to those of us who long for our coming king.

Taber goes beyond simply proving that Christ is coming again. He gives his readers an appetite for the event. His descriptions of “main street” and “paradise park” (chapter 7) paint emotionally charged portraits of why Christ must come back. He captures the angst of this age with his descriptions of the pain, anxiety, trouble and sorrow that this world is now facing. He offers glimpses of a new age where the old limitations and sorrows are erased — the old bondages destroyed. He speaks as a man, and as a man of God who has seen much suffering, but who still believes that “God will not leave man forever in a world that falls short of his glory and purpose” (247).

Conditionalists will find particular interest in chapter 2, where Taber shows that Christ was sent to fight the battle of the ages in his own grave (63). Taber points out that “Death is the antithesis of life. Contrary to popular opinion, it is not the same as life. Death prevents man (even a believer) from experiencing the glories of God’s Kingdom Paradise. Without resurrection, there isn’t any future for man” (64). In chapter 5, Taber argues against the notion of innate immortality and for the notion of humanity’s complete dependence upon God. He investigates three views of what happens at death (reincarnation, relocation and resurrection) and concludes that “our problem with death stems from the fact that we were created for something better” (157). In chapter 6, Taber explains why the adjective eternal describes both destinies: “Eternal death is death forever. Eternal life is life forever” (193).

Taber neither expects nor demands complete agreement with everything he has presented. He encourages investigation. I took exception to Taber’s treatment of Revelation 20 and of some of his exegesis of Matthew 24. But these minor differences of exegesis did not deter me from my enjoyment of the work, or my benefit from it. Taber’s work is a well-written reminder that the second coming of Christ is the believer’s blessed hope. Come, Lord Jesus.

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