Uncovering the Veil: The Apocalypse

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Statement of Beliefs:

1. The Bible to be the inspired Word of God, God the Father is the supreme Deity, Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, and the Holy Spirit is the promised Comforter.

2. In the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ; His virgin birth; His sinless life; His miracles; His vicarious and atoning death; His bodily resurrection late on the Sabbath day; His ascension to the right hand of God in heaven; and His personal return to establish His kingdom and rule this earth in great power and glory.

3. The only means of being cleansed from sin is through repentance and faith in the precious blood of Jesus and obedience to our Lord’s command to be baptized (immersed) in the Name of Christ for the remission of sins.

4. That by faith we may receive healing for our bodies.

5. The Scriptures enjoin the observance of the Ten Commandments, including the observance of the Seventh Day Sabbath (commonly called Saturday) to be observed from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday.

6. The Lord’s Supper and foot washing should be observed once a year at the proper and appointed time.

7. In the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust, the just to eternal life and the unjust to eternal death.

8. The dead are in a state of no consciousness.

9. The true church organization taught in the Bible is local autonomy and that the Bible name for the church is THE CHURCH OF GOD.

10. That the tests of Christian fellowship are the Commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

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From the Editor

“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.” Revelation 22:7, NIV

We’ve now reached the Bible’s final book. Throughout the year, ACTS has explored the major genres in the Old and New Testaments and identified major themes and people. Revelation, also called the Apocalypse, tends to be one of the least understood books in the Bible. In fact, believers tend to fall into two camps: either they thoroughly study it and attempt to link its teaching with current world events or prefer not even to read it. It is our hope to “uncover the veil.”

From the Greek word eschatos meaning “last,” eschatology is the study of “the last things.” Along with other eschatological writings in the Bible, namely Isaiah 26; 66, Daniel 7-12, Mark 13, and Matthew 25, the book of Revelation constructs a doctrine of the future. Though Christians generally agree on the necessity of the Parousia, or return of Jesus, there is much disagreement concerning the order of events. However, the heart of Revelation’s message is that the hope of believers lays both in the reality of Christ’s presence today and His imminent return in the future. In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Walter Elwell has listed five points to help Christians understand Revelation.

1. Visions. God gave John over sixty visions. Similar to our dreams, visions are elusive by nature. However, the visions that John received were from God and served as a guide to the last days.
2. Images. Because Revelation was written nearly 2000 years ago, some images might appear unfamiliar. Yet these images have a biblical precedent. In fact, Revelation alludes to the Old Testament nearly 350 times.
3. Apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is a style of literature, or genre, which is symbolic, visionary, organized, and pictoral. The purpose of apocalyptic literature, which flourished during the intertestamental period until New Testament times, is to strengthen and comfort believers through encouragement. Therefore, the central message in Revelation is that God will completely triumph against evil.
4. Symbolism. The Old Testament will serve as the best guide to interpret Revelation’s beasts, horsemen, blood, hail, locusts, etc. Another facet is John’s use of numbers. The numbers three, seven, and twelve are significant not only in Revelation but also the entire Bible. Appearing over 50 times, the number seven represents completeness. The number seven’s significance rests in the fact that God chose to rest on the seventh day upon creating the heavens and the earth (see Genesis 2:2-4).
5. John wrote to believers in his day. The believers of John’s time would have been well versed in the Old Testament to understand the rich symbolism and imagery employed. Due to Roman persecution against Christians, John of Patmos identified with his original intended audience as a fellow member in the body of Christ who suffered for his faith. Therefore, John’s call to overcome the present evil age is really a call to remain faithful to God and to Jesus through tough times (see Revelation 12:17). For believers, the promise of security, peace, and glory awaits a new existence that centers on worship to God. As for unbelievers, the devil, and the Antichrist, the second death awaits.

By gaining a firm grasp of these points, a greater understanding of Revelation can be gained and faith can be strengthened in knowing that God is in total control of all things.

On a personal note, this issue marks the end of my tenure as editor of ACTS Magazine. I would like to thank the General Council Board, the publishing staff, all of our dedicated writers, and especially our readers for enriching my life with this blessed opportunity.

For the Glory of God,

John R. Kennedy,
Editor ACTS

Advocating Christ The Savior
When I was given the opportunity to write this article, one resource that I found helpful was Revelation—Four views—A Parallel Commentary by Steve Gregg. A review of that book was also noteworthy, “Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary” by Ron Maness. I recommend both the article and the book to anyone interested in studying the book of Revelation.

Gregg offers a valuable comparative study for those interested. In the Forward to this book, Robert Clouse states that “Regardless of the perspective on Revelation each holds, many students of prophecy are intolerant of those who cannot in good conscience agree with them.” Gregg states, “I once believed that there were two types of prophecy enthusiasts—those who shared my views on Revelation and those who had not yet heard them convincingly presented.” Perhaps you can identify with that statement. I know I can.

Gregg states his goal “has not been to advocate any position above another, so I hope that my own opinion will not be evident . . . and that rather he has “attempted to present the very best arguments and evidences for each view . . . to encourage Bible students to wrestle with the inspired text of Revelation and with the earnest efforts of godly interpreters to unfold its meaning for the people of God.” Each group includes fine scholars and devout Christian believers. While maintaining a certain amount of reservation and respect for the opinions of others (scholars—not novelists), it is wise to first emphasize that our methods of study and research are vitally important and that we must begin our study by gaining some familiarity with the genre, language, historical background, nuances of meaning, symbolism, etc. when studying apocalyptic literature.

Many Christians are surprised to discover that others view the book of Revelation differently from them. The book invites a wide spectrum of approaches, but the common denominator of all is the ultimate triumph of Anointed Savior, who culminates history with His final coming and reigns with and through His bride forever. The four major views as listed by Gregg are the Historicist, the Preterist, the Futurist, and the Spiritual approach.

The Historicist position sees Revelation as a symbolic prophecy of the whole of church history forming a picture of the events and movements that have shaped the conflict and progress of the Christian church. Much conjecture is associated with this view as history progresses and references are made to barbarian invasions, the Reformation, the French Revolution, World War I and II, the European Common Market, etc. These historical interpretations obviously have to be revised periodically when the popular interpretations prove to be unreliable. The historicist view was professed by Wycliffe, Knox, Tyndale, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, and other famous Christians. It developed in the 12th century and is the view of most premillennialists prior to the 19th century when it was replaced by the development of dispensationalism, which became popular through the Scofield Reference Bible published in 1909.

The Preterist position views Revelation as a message of hope and comfort to first century believers, offering them an expectation of their deliverance from Roman persecution and oppression. This is also called the Contemporary Historical view and regards the visions as referring primarily, if not exclusively, to events and persons within the first century. The preterist view became strong in the 19th century. Some preterists advocate that everything refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 and that all of Revelation has been fulfilled but others believe the final chapters of Revelation still look forward to a future second coming of Christ.
Some believe that “the first half of Revelation describes the fall of Jerusalem, the second half predicts the fall of the Roman empire, and the final chapters describe the second coming of Christ.” Gregg notes in regard to Revelation 8:8-9, “the words of Josephus, the Jewish/Roman historian who witnessed and documented the events of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and who had never read Revelation, seem almost as if they were calculated to present the fulfillment of this trumpet judgment.”

The Futurist view developed in the 17th century and proposes that the prophecies are of events which are yet future from our perspective. Everything after Revelation 3 is future and is usually held to refer to things that will occur in a short period (i.e., a seven-year period known as the Great Tribulation) before the return of Christ. The view portrayed in the futurist approach “is held by the majority of the most popular contemporary evangelical writers and Bible teachers . . . (and) has so dominated the Christian media, in fact, many Christians and virtually all non-Christians are unaware even of the existence of other approaches.”

Belief in the futurist approach leads the reader to take a more literal view of the visions, reducing or eliminating the difficulty of interpreting the symbols but, in my opinion, this leads to faulty interpretation because it often ignores the genre of the book. Even strict dispensationalists often recognize some symbolism in Revelation. In my opinion it is absolutely impossible to truly interpret the book properly without understanding its symbolism.

The most popular and widely promoted approach is called the Dispensationalist interpretation. It is also the most recent and was unknown to the early churches. This view emphasizes a (secret) rapture of the church at which time the redeemed in Christ are translated into heaven at His coming “in the air” and the Great Tribulation or the wrath of God from which believers are spared. This approach sees national Israel as God’s people on Earth at this time (the church having been raptured), restored to Jerusalem, protected by divine seal, worshiping in a rebuilt temple, and suffering at the hand of the Antichrist. Dispensationalism was founded by John Nelson Darby and promoted by W. E. Blackstone, G. Campbell Morgan, H. A. Ironside, A. C. Gaebelein, and C. I. Scofield. It was popularized further by D. L. Moody and Billy Graham. Popular books and novels like Left Behind and The Late Great Planet Earth take this view and sensationalize it. The doctrine of a secret rapture was first conceived by Darby in 1827 who claimed that there were not one, but two “second comings.” Although his teaching was immediately challenged as unbiblical and he had lingering doubts about it as late as 1843 or 1845, it has become a very popular view to this day.

The Moderate Futurist view proposes the book of Revelation as summarizing the conclusion of the church’s historical procession through tribulation and triumph, warfare, and victory, and consummating in the climactic return of Jesus Christ for His church. The tribulation is generally viewed as over a long course of time, but increasing in intensity, so that the church is understood as present through much of earth’s turmoil until just prior to the outpouring of the “bowls full of the wrath of God.” This occurs during Revelation 16 and culminates in the collapse of the present world order. This is the view that concludes with a redeemed society dwelling in a new earth that has been cleansed of all evil and with God dwelling in the midst of His people. This is a more literal view and again this is a relatively modern view that developed from the more ancient Augustinian view.

The Idealist, Spiritual, or Symbolic view (which developed in Germany, England, and the United States in the 19th century) sees spiritual principles within the book of Revelation but little or no references to specific literal events or persons. This view formulates no particular historical focus or effort at interpreting specifics of the book, rather seeing it as a broad, poetic portrayal of the conflict between the Kingdom of God and the powers of Satan. Rather than seeking to find individual fulfillments of the visions, the spiritual view is an extension of the ancient allegorical approach. It takes Revelation as a drama, depicting spiritual truths which may be happening over and over throughout history, such as the
conflicts “between Christ and Satan, between the saints and the antichristian world powers, and depicting the final victory of Christ and His saints.” xi Fulfillment of the prophecies may be seen as “entirely spiritual or as recurrent, finding representative expression throughout the age, rather than in one-time, specific fulfillments.” xii An important factor, which I believe many Bible students miss, is the relatively recent development of the major views as well as their source. Most of the more popular views today are relatively recent in origin and many can be traced no further back than to the 19th century.

Let’s see how these four views might look at a well known text differently. Revelation 13:16 gives us the number 666. To the Historicist this may represent the Roman Catholic Church, to the Preterist it represents Nero Caesar (the number of his name in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), to the Futurist it represents body markings, and to the Spiritualist it is symbolic of worshipping the beast, e.g., human dictators. A blend of all 4 may include Nero, false religious and political systems, and any identification with these false “gods.”

Many students of the Bible settle for a particular dogmatic view. When this occurs, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to see beyond that view. If the view is incorrect or distorted the problem is obvious. The benefit of using varied viewpoints is illustrated by the four Gospels. One is simple and literal (Mark), another is hinting at truths (at times with allegories and parables) about how God cares for His people (Luke), still another has many practical and moral illustrations and parables (Matthew), and finally one has a deep meaning not contained in the others (John). Revelation will embrace the full spectrum of literal and allegorical. And, in the book of Revelation we are also dealing with a genre (apocalyptic writing) that uses many dramatic symbols.xiii

An open mind that is disciplined by serious study of Holy Scripture is vital when we look at this book which has had many controversial interpretations. Various perspectives have obvious merit.

Notes
12iii Gregg, p. 1.
12iv Ibid, p. 4.
12vi Ibid, p. 156.
12viii Gregg, p. 40.
12xi Ibid, p. 3.
12xii Ibid, p. 3.
12xiii For a list of symbols, see http://www.ccel.org/ccel/johnson_bw/pnt.pnt2700_sec7.html
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The Publishing House staff
Students of prophecy know that the Bible contains curious information about a group of ten kings who are prophesied to arise at a critical time in man’s experience. These ten kings are compared to ten horns. We read the following:

...The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and shall give their power and authority unto the beast… Revelation 17:12-13 NKJV.

It could not be more explicit, when it says: “…the ten horns…are ten kings.” So, where would anyone go for information to discern the fulfillment of this text about these 10 kings? That question puzzles many. This is because several different responses can emerge.

Ten Toes & Ten Horns

One consideration is whether the 10 horns of Revelation correspond to the “ten toes” in Daniel 2:42-44, and the “ten horns” in Daniel 7:7. That is a legitimate question, because scholars recognize that certain typology in the book of Revelation is based on the book of Daniel. Hence, any study must give careful consideration to this fact.

In theological circles, it is no secret that the identity of the 10 kings in Revelation has gained widespread attention down through the ages. Their unknown character has inspired a variety of interpretations to suggest solutions to the mystery. When considering speculative constructs in an attempt to resolve this mystery, it is best to begin with known history.

The Historical Approach

Some theologians interpret these kings historically. William Barclay considered the 10 kings in his book, Great Themes of the New Testament (Westminster Press, 1979). He gave one indication for a literal fulfillment. In his provocative Chapter 5 “Revelation 13: The Mystery of the Beast,” we find Barclay’s comment about “the ten horns” as:

…they have to do with the ten main provinces of the Roman Empire—Italy, Achaea, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Germany. The horns would then be the governors of these provinces… (p.84).

But there is another, more logical explanation. It concerns the proper placement of contents from the prior book of Daniel in relation to this topic. This is because much of the symbolism of Revelation is based upon the earlier book of Daniel.

When discussing the symbolism of the 4th kingdom of Daniel, factors suggest that we are dealing with two separate sets of 10 kings. This is because we have the “ten toes” in Daniel 2 and the “ten horns” in Daniel 7.

Simultaneous or Sequential?

One set of 10 kings (Daniel 7:7-8) appears to be sequential with the 10 Caesars from Julius to Vespasian (incl. Galba, Otho, and Vitellius [“three plucked up”]). Another set of 10 kings (Daniel 2:42, 44) appears to be simultaneous. They would be compared to “the ten toes,” and all appear at the same time (see: Revelation 17:14).
On a strictly historical basis, it appears that the seven heads of the beast in Rev 13 compare with the seven Caesars: (1) Julius, (2) Augustus, (3) Tiberius, (4) Caligula, (5) Claudius, (6) Nero [then 3 are uprooted]. Then finally we have (7) Vespasian. For details, see the history chart placed at the end of this exposition.

**How To Understand?**

To understand the correct interpretation of these 10 kings, we should take into consideration the historical precedent already set. A clear historical fulfillment must preempt any attempted futuristic explanation. This applies even if the historical fulfillment is a typological basis for a futuristic fulfillment.

While some think the answer to the riddle is found in history, others think that we must look to the future alone. Others believe it is something in the future that is based on historical occurrences (i.e., a type or foreshadowing). This view would be formed from a combination of both history and a proposed futuristic fulfillment.

**The Futuristic Approach**

Now we can take a brief look at reasonable possibilities to consider for identifying “the ten kings” in the “last days.” This is something that many do not expect. Yet it will occur, because we are told by the prophetic texts that

> ...God hath put it in their [10 kings] hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled... Revelation 17:17.

Based on the futuristic approach, these events will occur at some time—from now into the future. Various scenarios have been posed by different researchers, which would include examples like:

(1) a group of 10 nations in Western Europe,
(2) a combination of 10 nations from Eastern & Western Europe,
(3) 10 nations in the Middle-East per Psalm 83:6-8,
(4) 10 of the 15 former Soviet Republics which are not Muslim,
(5) 10 geographical regions of the globe,
(6) 10 bodies of the UN, and/or
(7) anything else?
Speculated conclusions are tenuous at best.

**Chart: Harmony of 7 Heads & 10 Horns**

Below is a harmony of the 10 Horns (kings) of Daniel with the 7 Heads (Caesars) of Revelation. This clarifies the mystery of “…the little horn…” [11th] as it contrasts with the puzzle in the words: “…even he is the eighth, and is of the seven…” (Revelation 17:11). The implications supplied by identifying the “missing king” Mark Antony are enormous!

The chart below reveals several important features which space permits only the briefest review. The first is that if the three (3) Caesars, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius are removed (as they should be), then the numerical pattern of 11 (i.e., with the “…little horn…” [10 + 1 = 11]) becomes readily apparent as it is contrasted with the mystery of “the eighth, and is of the seven” in Revelation 17:11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 KINGS</th>
<th>2 HEADS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before</strong></td>
<td><strong>After</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Galba</td>
<td>3 plucked up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Otho</td>
<td>3 plucked up</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Secondly, we must realize that Vespasian is the 11th king until we retroactively reconstruct (from instructions in Daniel 7:7, 8, 20, 24) that three (3) must be removed after they had been established (i.e., “plucked up by the roots...” [they ‘were’: but they ‘are not’]). Because the “little horn” is the 11th, with the three (3) uprooted, he becomes the 8th.

Also, Vespasian is the 10th HEAD (not just king) until three (3) are plucked up making him the 7th. Since it can be shown elsewhere in the text that there is a direct connection here between Daniel and Revelation, this restoration of ANTONY to his rightful position of KING (not head) reconciles the entire matter—and clarifies the identity of Rome as the 4th beast.

This was fully known by God, the inspirer of Daniel, well in advance of the most liberal date assigned to the composition of Daniel (160s BCE). Study these facts carefully because they prove that Daniel is a relevant and timely prophecy of God.

Gary Arvidson is currently active in a writing ministry, focusing primarily on theology, history, and archaeology. * Copyright Chart 1989 – Clyde Brown & Gary Arvidson

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Purification

During this time of year, purity is something we all need to reflect upon. Purity is usually thought of as a matter of the mind or of lust; but purity reaches much deeper than that, into our intentions toward our brothers in Christ, our actions and the things we do, say, or even in what we eat. It is a matter that encompasses everything about us. After all, our body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Actions and Speech

This is more obvious to most, yet is one of the least followed. Our actions need to glorify God, showing others that we are Christians. They will know we are Christians by our love (John 13:35), does everyone see that in you? If not, then something needs to change. We are called to be different, separated from the world and its pleasures and desires. We need to be shining beacons for others to follow to God. How can we do that if our actions and words contradict what we stand for?

One person, after spending just a few minutes with you, should be able to tell that you are a Christian. One of the main ways that they first see God in us is by our words. By refusing to use foul language, by giving praises to God for the abilities he has given us, and by never telling rude jokes, we show that we are not like everyone else, even before they see what we do.

Our words mean nothing if we do not back them up. Our actions have to shine just as much as our words. What would someone think if you speak of God and His love, and then you cut someone down for no apparent reason? Even if there was a reason, show respect to that person and talk with them one on one, firmly if you have to but not by cutting them down. This will show that God is in you and that you care for your fellow man and his honor.

Eating with purity

Our bodies are the temple of God, so we need to treat them that way. We need to eat things that are good for us. We need to only eat sugary or fatty foods on occasion, not as part of our steady diet. Overeating is also a problem; it damages our ability to do God’s work. Maintaining a healthy balance of food gives us strength so that we can help our fellow brother if he would need it.

Heart

The heart is hard to control because there is no one to hold us accountable, we can act friendly toward someone we despise and they may never know how we feel. It was the hardness of the hearts of the Jews that kept them from God’s will and from receiving Christ (Matthew 23:37). It is the hardness of our hearts that keeps God from giving us His blessings as well.

The prayers of the righteous availeth much (James 5:16), but we are told that if things are not right with our brother, we need to go to that person and make things right before bringing our requests to God (Matthew 5:22-24).

This one is extremely important; during this time of year as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper service, we need to examine ourselves in preparation for taking part. Many people read the passage in 1 Corinthians 11 about the Lord’s Supper, but neglect verses 26-32.

These verses state that “whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” and even “drinketh damnation to himself.” It doesn’t stop there; it also says that we should examine ourselves (28) so that we can partake, and that “if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.” So take these thoughts with you as you prepare for the Lord’s Supper, that you will be worthy. Purify yourself in all ways, striving every day to be a better temple.
One belief of note that has garnered a lot of debate throughout history is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Most of the Christian world holds fast to the belief of a Friday death and Sunday resurrection, some to a Thursday death and Sunday resurrection, and a numbered few believe in the Wednesday death and Saturday evening resurrection. For many Christians, it is a hot debate when two ideas collide, but which one is right?

Looking purely from an educational standpoint, let’s examine each one through the groups own eyes. The less common Thursday believers hold that if you count the days exclusively following their view of Christ’s death, then you come to three days on Sunday. This does not take into account the “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” Matthew 12:40. It also doesn’t account for the fact that it was the day before Sabbath. By Jewish tradition, they did not have two Sabbath’s consecutively. They moved a high Sabbath to the day prior for Friday, and the day after for Sunday high Sabbaths. Therefore, Thursday would have been the day of the Passover, not Friday.

Studying the viewpoint of the Friday death, we find that it does satisfy the day before a Sabbath, but is lacking in other points of prophecy. It was foretold by Christ Himself that the sign of Jonah would be given, that the Son of Man would be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. (Matt 12:40) Even if Christ was put in the tomb before the sun set on Friday and rose from the dead after the sun rose, there would still only be two nights and three days before Sunday (Friday day, Sabbath night, Sabbath day, Sunday night, Sunday day). This view also does not take into account the verse in Matthew 28:1 where it says, “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week...” This verse clearly breaks the idea that he could have been in the tomb on Sunday night.

The last viewpoint is the Wednesday crucifixion and a Saturday night resurrection. This view satisfies the requirement of being in the tomb three days and three nights, in addition to taking into account a high day Sabbath. Though the three other Gospels, Mark, Luke and John, appear at first glance to disagree with Matthew’s account of Christ rising from the dead prior to Sunday, a deeper look into the events gives a better understanding of what they are saying. In Mark, it says “And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun” Mark 16:2. Clearly, this account shows that Christ had already risen from the dead, which is correlated in all of the other accounts. Luke states in chapter 24, starting in verse 1 “Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning...” Christ was already gone (See verse 3). John 20:1 begins “The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.” Here, it states again that it was still dark and Christ was gone, therefore refuting that Christ was still in the tomb on Sunday day.

This fact alone repudiates the Friday and Thursday crucifixions and verifies the Wednesday crucifixion and Saturday resurrection, but when joined with the other holes in the theories it leaves no shadow of a doubt that Christ was indeed crucified on Wednesday and arose on the Sabbath.

This is a photo of an ancient tomb with a rolling rock disk shaped door stone.
Dawn Shimmers Darkness Away
By Dwight James

Too many times we take for granted God’s endless love,
And we live a lie, claiming God’s satisfaction;
But when the strings that keep us attached gets cut,
We’re left clinging unto our own hallucinations.

Woe unto the affluent man without Godly consolation;
He’s susceptible to heartbreak and sorrow’s employ,
And is under-verge of losing his mind and soul
Along with all the riches that he adores.

But unto the man who invest all his praise
Into the bank of never-ending joy,
Peace follows him in misfortune and triumph;
For God adds to his life many days and eternity’s raise.

Living in worldly pleasure justifies no man
On the day that death pays life a visit;
And many of the affluent who are fully aware of that day
Are worried about losing their treasure to strangers.

But a man whose wealth is joy and peace
Will be applauded with life more abundantly,
On the day that his Lord returns to reward man
According to the works that he has done.

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" Psalm 90:12..
The Spin Zone: Remember “Baghdad Bob,” the Iraqi Minister of Information, standing daily before the world’s TV cameras during the 2003 Iraq War? Even as other cameras showed western coalition forces taking control of Baghdad, the minister denied their presence, claiming they had been utterly destroyed and driven from the city. He was guilty of selective reporting, picking and choosing his version of reality, while denying the bigger picture around him.

In our electronic age, spin-doctors abound, from politicians who debate what the meaning of is is to news organizations that show selected parts of a scene while framing out other parts of the shot. This was particularly noticeable during the Iraq War, as the western world received broadcasts showing the coalition forces as liberators, while the Muslim world were shown scenes of civilian casualties—the innocent victims of the coalition invaders.

Whether in the electronic media, in print, or in everyday conversation, the simplest lie is omission—focusing on a part to the exclusion of the whole. Unfortunately, this is nothing new. The Bible has been manipulated by selective treatment for centuries. We’ve all seen it done, and if we are honest with ourselves, we’ve all done it—taken verses out of context.

Without a doubt, it’s the number one mistake people make when interpreting the Bible, perhaps because it’s so easy to do. Just read a verse in isolation from neighboring verses or surrounding chapters and, voilà, the verse can mean anything we want it to mean. After all, who has time to read and study a whole chapter, much less an entire book? It’s much more convenient to support our views and silence our critics by firing off a proof-text.

However, when we ignore the context of a verse, we run the risk of substituting our own preconceived ideas, limited knowledge, and cultural baggage for the original meaning of the text. We mishandle the Writ. We muddy the waters of scriptural understanding and mislead others and ourselves. We end up treating the Bible like the drunk treated the lamppost—for support, not illumination.

How could we, as otherwise intelligent and sincere people, have developed such a bad habit? There are at least three factors that have led us to approach the Bible in piecemeal fashion.

One Liners: Chapter and verse divisions have subconsciously “trained” us to ignore the context. Instead of seeing the entire flow of thought, we see only a series of one-liners—each with its own independent meaning.

But contrary to popular opinion, that is not the way the Bible was intended to be read. We would do well to remember that the Bible in its original form had no chapter and verse divisions. In fact, the first English Bible to contain the verse divisions we use today was the Geneva Bible, published in 1560. Translators and printers added chapter and verse numberings as an aid in locating Bible sections, phrases, and words. However, over the years, they have become like blinders on our eyes, artificially narrowing our field of vision. Verse numbers continue to serve a worthwhile purpose as a location aid, but other than that, they have nothing to do with interpretation. For the most part, we should disregard chapter and verse divisions, concentrating instead on reading the Bible by units of thought.

Jigsaw Puzzle: A faulty assumption about chapter and verse divisions has led to a second assumption: if each verse is an independent unit, then the entire Bible must be like a jigsaw puzzle.
It's our duty as interpreters—so we think—to take various puzzle pieces (verses) out of the Bible's box and arrange them into a picture.

If the pieces "fit" together in some sort of quasi-logical fashion, then our interpretations must be right. And, if everything "fits," then surely we could not have taken anything out of context. As silly as this sounds, too many of us have presumed that this is the proper and intended method of interpretation.

Such a view, however, fails to recognize that the biblical writers completed their pictures long ago with every piece already in its rightful place. Our job is not to create our own pictures—to cut and paste and pound verses into place—but to see the finished portraits as arranged and intended by the original authors.

**Line Upon Line:** A third reason for taking verses out of context comes from the assumption that the Bible itself supports the idea of piecing together verses from here and there. One verse in particular, Isaiah 28:10, is offered as proof that this is so. In the King James Version the verse reads: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little."

Is this verse a divinely given formula for interpreting the Bible? Or, is it an ironic example of a verse wrenched from its context? Let's take a look at the context of Isaiah 28 and find out. (You may want to read the entire chapter for yourself before continuing.)

In verse 1, we see to whom the chapter is addressed: "Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim . . ." (Ephraim is another name for the northern kingdom of Israel).

Verses 2 through 6 contain Isaiah's message to Ephraim: "Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one . . ." (a reference to the nation of Assyria which stood poised to invade the northern kingdom). When the Assyrians attack, "the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet" (verse 3). But a remnant of those in Ephraim who are faithful to God will be spared (verses 5, 6).

Verses 7 and 8 offer a transition. Isaiah now addresses the priests and prophets of the southern kingdom of Judah: "But they also have erred through wine . . . the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, . . . they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean" (emphasis added). The priests and prophets of Judah were no less overcome with wine than their cousins to the north in Ephraim. The declining northern kingdom should have served as a warning to the priests and prophets in Judah, but they also resisted Isaiah's message.

In verses 9 and 10, the drunken priests and prophets of Judah speak. Notice the change in pronouns. In verses 1-8, Isaiah uses the third person plural (them, they) to address the drunken leaders. Now in verses 9 and 10, the drunkards respond to Isaiah with the third person singular (he).

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.

The priests and prophets are ridiculing Isaiah in verses 9 and 10. In essence, they are saying, "We are of age. Isaiah doesn't need to teach us anything. Are we like children who must be tutored again in the basics—line upon line; here a little, there a little?"

The English translation for "precept . . . upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line" is actually a series of monosyllables in the Hebrew: sav lasav sav lasav, kav lakav kav lakav. There is no exact translation for these words. They are almost equivalent to "blah, blah, blah," and represent either the drunken babblings of the priests and prophets, or the repetitive sounds Hebrew children might make when learning to talk. Either way, verse 10 is the jeering reply of the priests and prophets as they mock Isaiah's words.
Verses 11 through 13 offer the LORD’s reply to the scoffers. Since they are making nonsense out of his sense, as delivered via his prophet Isaiah, the LORD will truly speak to them “with stammering lips and another tongue” (verse 11). In other words, if the priests and prophets of Judah want to hear babbling, they will hear plenty of it when the Assyrians invade. Then the word of the LORD will become to their ears sav lasav sav lasav, kav lakav kav lakav (verse 13a). The result will not be positive. Rather than a formula for making the drunken leaders better Bible interpreters, the speech of the invading Assyrians will sound like babbling to them, so that “they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (verse 13b).

The chapter then concludes in verses 14-29 with further warnings to the rulers of Jerusalem, while also offering a word of hope.

After viewing Isaiah 28:10 in its context, can we properly use the words of drunken priests as a formula for interpreting the Bible? The answer should be obvious.

However, lest some misunderstand, we are not suggesting that it is wrong to compare one scripture with another. That is a valid principle, as long as we first understand each verse in its own context before we start comparing. It is the “Old McDonald” method of interpretation—which pays no attention to context—that we should avoid: “Here a verse, there a verse, everywhere a verse, verse.” Such an approach leads to distortion (Isaiah 28:10 being a case in point), because those who use this method rarely consider the contexts of the verses they are piecing together. In their hands, a text without a context becomes a pretext for anything they want it to mean.

Jerry Griffin writes from Colorado. ã 2007 by Jerry Griffin. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

**Circles of Context:**

The following diagram illustrates the various levels of context surrounding a Bible verse. To understand a writer’s point of view and to avoid taking his words out of context, always read every verse with this progression in mind.

1. The immediate context of the chapter.
2. The context of the entire book.
3. The context of that author’s other writings, if any.
4. The context of the rest of the Bible, starting first with the overall context of the Testament (Old or New) in which the verse appears. Also, note the original context of any allusions or quotations that the author draws from other Old or New Testament books.
Hang Out the Red Cord. These Walls are Coming Down!

Monico Muffley

Way back in Bible times, right after Moses had died and his right-hand man Joshua took over the leadership of Israel, God told the Israelites that they were to destroy Jericho; they had to do this before entering the Promised Land.

The city of Jericho was a formidable place. Archaeological findings say the outer defense walls were around 15 feet high at the base of a hill. A massive rampart was at the top of the wall. The inner city wall was higher up on the hill. It stood about 8 feet high. So, you can see that it was not easy to enter the city. One could only enter it through the city gates and these were closed at night (Joshua 2:5).

Joshua sent some spies into the city to check it out. They ended up at the home of a woman named Rahab. But, as in most good spy stories, the presence of these Israelite men was discovered, and they had to hide.

"Hide beneath the flax," Rahab told them. Did you know that the fact of her covering the spies with bundles of flax, which lay on her house-roof (Joshua 2:6), was not just a coincidence? It so happened that this time was "the barley harvest, and flax and barley are ripe at the same time in the Jordan valley [where Jericho was], so that the bundles of flax stalks might have been expected to be drying just then."i

The invasion occurred just following the fourteenth day of Abib (March/April) (Joshua 5:10), thus in the springtime, or in the harvest season (3:15). Rahab was drying flax upon her roof. During their respective archaeological digs, two famous archaeologists, John Garstang and Kathleen Kenyon found large quantities of grain stored in the ruins of Jericho’s houses. In a very limited excavation area, Kenyon found six bushels of grain in one digging season.ii And so we see that Rahab really was able to keep the spies from being caught by hiding them under the flax; something that God had planned out ahead of time.

So by doing this, Rahab was able to help the spies. And the two returned to help Joshua prepare for battle. But, in reality, God was the One who was going to take down Jericho. In fact, the commander of the Lord’s army came to tell Joshua, “I [the Lord] have given you Jericho, its king, and all its mighty warriors” (Joshua 6:2). Joshua just had to follow God’s orders in how he could help accomplish his part of the job.

It didn’t seem humanly possible to get past Jericho. But if it were going to be done, it had to be done! Jericho and its walls stood between Israel and the Promised Land. The Promised Land had been everything the Israelites had dreamed about since they had first arrived into Egypt. Four hundred years of slavery left them really wanting to go back home to their own land. Now God was going to use Joshua to lead them there. According to more archaeological finds, an earthquake did God’s part. What a great event!
Like the Israelites, we have to step out on faith in our dependence on God. We each have our own impregnable city. Our particular cities have high walls that hold us back from all that God has promised us. But like Rahab, we have to switch our focus on the things that surround us to God. He’s the One who’s going to get us through our crisis. Beyond those walls of our cities lies our own Promised Land. Rahab’s kind of faith is what it is going to take for us to get each of us to them—a faith demonstrated in action. James, the half brother of Jesus, in his letter recorded in the New Testament says, “Rahab the prostitute is another example of our being made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone. She was made right with God by her actions—when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road” (James 2:25, New Living Translation).

And you’ve probably guessed by now, if you didn’t know already: Rahab was a prostitute. Rahab identified her house with a scarlet cord. Some Bible experts think this is where prostitutes from modern days got the idea for a red light that is placed at their windows to indicate what kind of business they were offering to potential customers. That’s what Rahab did. And all kinds of princes and rulers were known to hook up with her, and that’s why she knew so much about the people from Israel and what was going on outside Jericho. And it is interesting to see that Rahab lived in the side of the city wall (Joshua 2:15). This proved to be part of God’s divine plan for her and her loved one’s rescue. [Archaeological] evidence indicates that [the area where Rahab lived] was the “poor quarter” of the city—just the type of residence that one might expect a harlot to have.

Pretty surprising information about Rahab! Not the kind of woman you would think the Bible would like to brag about, is it? But I bet you didn’t know that Rahab’s life was turned upside-down after those days in Jericho, that she became the mother of Boaz, the husband of Ruth who was the great-grandmother of—you betta believe it—the same young David of David and Goliath, who later became king! And what’s more—Rahab would later have Jesus born as one of her descendants (see Matthew 1:5, 6, 16). That’s just proof of how a person’s life can change once God removes the walls from that person’s life.

So, what’s blocking your way to having your life all put together—especially in a spiritual way? Have you got walls you can’t get around or go over? Are there problems at home with your mom and dad that no one outside your family sees? Do you want to just chill with your friends and hang out, but it seems that every time you do you get pressured to do things you know are not right, but after all, they are your friends? Or do you feel like you don’t have a friend in the world? Too much pressure to do a good job with your grades or at school activities? Too much pressure to be popular? Struggling with why you were even brought into this world? Not sure what you believe anymore? Yeah . . . there’re walls of all kinds around you, that’s for sure.

But there is Someone who hears your cries for help. He sees the red cord you are hanging out the window. He offers rescue and safety for you and those closest to you who dare to run and take refuge in Him. He’s sending out a rescue team to knock those walls down and pull you out. Don’t give up. Hang in there. He’s the One who promised you the Land. He says it’s yours to take. You’ve just got to trust that He’ll get you there.

And this One says, “Go ahead. Hang out the red cord. These walls are coming down!”

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Note:
i From wikipedia.com.
iii Jewishencyclopedia.com, “Rahab.”
v There is a tradition in Orthodox Judaism that states that Rahab became Joshua’s wife, so some Bible scholars believe that Rahab could not have been the Rachab (KJV spelling) of Matthew 1:5a.
Maranatha College is now accepting applicants for its inaugural Summer Session being held at Marceline, MO!

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