

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 140**

**“NATURAL DISASTERS: ACTS OF GOD OR ACTS OF SATAN?”**

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**He has served as AUC College President, Associate Editor of Adventist Review, Vice President of Pacific Press**

**He has authored 16 books, including the recent Messenger of the Lord, and God at Risk.**

**“BACCHIOCCHI’S RESPONSE TO DR. DOUGLASS’ ESSAY”**

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**“HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NEWLY RELEASED CD-ROM ON ‘THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST’”**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.**

If two for the price of one is a good bargain, what about three for no price at all? Well, this is the bargain I am offering you in this newsletter. Let me tell you what happened!

For the past three months I have devoted 15-17 hours a day investigating and illustrating the newly released CD-ROM album on *The Mark and the Number of the Beast*. When Jon Paulien, Ph. D., Chairman of the NT Department at Andrews University theological Seminary, invited me to research and share with his *Revelation* classes my findings on *The Mark and Number of the Beast*, I never thought that I would embark on a journey that would offer me exciting new vistas of an intriguing and pivotal Bible prophecy.

The first phase of this project was completed on December 6, 2005, with the release of the CD-ROM album, containing 162 power-point slides. We have been mailing the new album to hundreds of pastors, teachers, evangelists, and lay members in many parts of the world.

To make it possible for many to benefit from all my research, we are offering the package of all my recordings consisting of five albums,

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**for the one-time Holiday offer of \$100.00, instead of the regular price of \$450.00.** See details at the end of this newsletter. If you already have my previous recordings, you can order only the newly released CD-ROM on *The Mark and the Number of the Beast* for only \$35.00, instead of \$50.00. The price includes the airmail expenses to any overseas destinations.

The second phase of this project will take place on Wednesday evening, January 25, 2006, when a TV crew will record my lecture on "*The Mark and the Number of the Beast*" before a live audience at the Fil-Am SDA Church, in Berrien Springs, Michigan. The recording will be offered on a DVD album soon afterwards.

The third and final phase of this project will be the publication of a book on *The Mark and the Number of the Beast*. The book will include all the color slides used for the powerpoint presentation. People who do not use computers will be especially grateful for the opportunity to enjoy in a book format the powerpoint lecture with all the colorful slides.

Having invested so much of my time and energy on this project, I feel that I ought to share with you some of the highlights of this learning experience. There is great satisfaction in sharing the joy of discovery. This is true in every field of endeavor.

In the last newsletter I posted a preview of the partially completed powerpoint lecture. Since then I have examined several new aspects of this intriguing prophecies on the mark and number of the beast. Thus, I thought it would be nice to share with you what I consider some of the highlights of this research. For the sake of brevity, I will only mention some of the significant discoveries that captivated me during the course of the investigation.

## **SECOND PART OF THE NEWSLETTER: DR. HERBERT DOUGLASS' ESSAY ON "NATURAL DISASTERS: ACTS OF GOD OR ACTS OF SATAN?"**

The second part of this newsletter consists of Dr. Herbert Douglass's essay on "Natural Disasters: Acts of God or Acts of Satan?"

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Dr. Douglas has served our Adventist church with distinction as Bible teacher, AUC College President, Associate Editor of *Adventist Review*, Vice President of Pacific Press, author of 16 books, including the recent *Messenger of the Lord*, and *God At Risk*.

Dr. Douglass wrote his essay largely as a corrective to my newsletter No. 138, “A Rush of Natural Disasters: What is the Lord Telling Us?” You may recall that my Bible study suggested that the increase of natural disasters are divine endtime judgements designed to warn mankind of the impending final judgement.

In his essay, Dr. Douglass takes a somewhat different approach. He argues that natural disasters are acts of Satan, not of God. He draws his conclusion primarily from three biblical episodes: the holding of the winds of strife in Revelation 7:1, the experience of Job, and the experience of the old Jerusalem.

In each of these three instances, according to Dr. Douglass, God allowed Satan to carry out his destructive acts by withdrawing His restraining influence. His conclusion is that “God takes responsibility for that which He allows or does not prevent,” but Satan is the malignant destroyer, able to carry out his destructive plans when unrestrained by God. Simply stated, natural disasters are acts of Satan, permitted by God.

### **THIRD PART OF THE NEWSLETTER: BACCHIOCCHI’S RESPONSE TO DR. DOUGLASS’ ESSAY**

Personally, I find Dr. Douglass explanation very appealing, because it makes Satan, not God, responsible for both natural and man-made disasters. This explanation has the merit of resolving the apparent contradiction between the omnipotence and the benevolence of God in the case of disasters, since God is not directly responsible for the destruction caused by disasters like Tsunami or Katrina.

But this explanation poses some problems which remain unresolved in my mind. In the third and last part of this newsletter, I will express some of my concerns over Dr. Douglass’ explanation, which reflects the prevailing Adventist view points. The intent of this dialogue is

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not to contradict one another, but to help one another to better understand what the Bible really teaches about disasters and calamities: Are they acts of God or of Satan?

Perhaps it is providential that this lengthy newsletter comes out at this holiday season, when most people enjoy more free time. May these studies, fruit of dedicated research and reflection, enrich your thinking and living at this holiday season.

### **HOW TO SUBSCRIBE OR UNSUBSCRIBE!**

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### **ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY ON *THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST***

The last newsletter No. 139 on “The Mark and the Number of the Beast” generated an unusual number of responses. The vast majority of comments were very positive, expressing appreciation for the new insights on this subject. In fact, many ordered copies of the CD-ROM album that was released last December 6, 2005.

A few responses were somewhat critical of the proposed symbolic interpretation of the number 666. Some concerned Adventists seem to be determined to defend at any cost the traditional interpretation of 666, which identifies that number with the numeric value of the letters of the pope’s title: *Vicarius Filii Dei—Vicar of the Son of God*, allegedly inscribed in some papal tiaras. For these fellow believers, abandoning this traditional interpretation is tantamount to rejecting a fundamental Adventist belief.

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The few negative comments received, made me forcefully aware of the blinding effects of tradition. This is a problem common to all denominations, namely, the refusal to take a fresh look at crucial Bible texts for fear of weakening traditional denominational teachings.

Let me reassure everyone that I am not an iconoclastic individual who delights in dismantling traditional Adventist interpretations. I believe in being a *builder*—dedicated to strengthen and expand our teachings—not a *bulldozer*, determined to destroy the beauty of our Adventist Message. Indeed our message has given me reasons for living, loving, and serving the Lord.

### Commitment to Biblical Truth

My goal has always been to be a biblically committed Adventist. But, to be a committed Adventist does not mean to be an apologist, determined to defend traditional teachings, even if they lack exegetical and historical support. Rather, it means to be a diligent Bible student, eager to deepen the understanding and experience of biblical truths. It means have to the courage to reexamine and reject those interpretations that cannot legitimately be supported by Scripture.

Uriah Smith, who pioneered the *Vicarius Filii Dei* interpretation was a good man, with good intentions, but with limited resources. He based his interpretation on stories of people who claimed to have seen that inscription on the pope's tiara, while watching the pope in Rome, in procession or in the celebrations the Mass. The stories are discredited by the fact that the tiara is placed upon the head of the new pope *only* at the coronation ceremony. For special religious ceremonies the pope wears the miter—a cloth hat—not the golden tiara.

It is unfortunate that Uriah Smith's interpretation of the number of the beast, has been widely accepted until recent times. Our Adventist church is to be commended for the courage it has shown in re-examining and rejecting the traditional numeric interpretation of 666, pioneered by Uriah Smith. The Sabbath School Lesson of June 6-7, 2002, offers a concise but compelling explanation of the reasons for rejecting the traditional numeric interpretation and accepting the symbolic one. I view this development as a step in the right direction.

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Frankly, it was this development that encouraged me to accept Prof. Jon Paulien's invitation to undertake this research and share some of the findings with the three seminary *Revelation* classes on November 8, 2005. Had not our Adventist church rejected the traditional numeric interpretation and accepted a symbolic interpretation of 666, I would have hesitated to prepare this study.

I learned this lesson a few years ago, when I dared to expand our prophetic interpretation of the 1260 days prophecy. The negative reaction of some influential church leaders, caused me to shelf immediately that research project. The fear of departing from traditional interpretations, is present in all denominations. Thus, the courage shown by our Adventist church in proposing a new symbolic interpretation of the number of the beast, augurs well for the future of the church.

### **The Unfinished Task**

The unfinished task is to examine the underlying unity that exists among the MARK, the NAME, and the NUMBER of the Beast. Traditionally, our Adventist church has interpreted the mark and number of the beast as two distinct entities. The mark of the beast has been identified with the enforcement of Sunday observance, while the number of the beast with numeric value of the letters found in the pope's title Vicarius Filii Dei—Vicar of the Son of God.

But Revelation 13:17 clearly suggests that the three are essentially the same. "The mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name" (Rev 13:17; NIV). In the light of the essential unity that exists among these three, can our church still legitimately differentiate between the *Mark* and the *Number* of the beast? Should we not look at them as a symbolic representation of the same attempt to enforce false worship by the unholy trinity, consisting of the dragon, sea beast, and land beast? These questions are examined at some length in the newly released CD-ROM powerpoint presentation.

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## A Few Highlights of the Symbolic Interpretation of the Mark and Number of the Beast

When I accepted the invitation to investigate the question of the mark and number of the beast and to share my findings on November 8, 2005 with three seminary classes, I never imagined that I would be embarking on an intriguing study that would captivate me for 15-17 hours a day for over three months. My wife can testify that for several weeks I missed our evening devotion together at about 10:30 p.m., in order to continue uninterruptedly my study into the wee hours of the night.

What proved to be time consuming, was not only the investigation into the past and present interpretations of the mark and number of the beast, but also the search for pictures of the items mentioned: documents, inscribed tiaras, books, popes, Reformers, Adventist pioneers, and recent scholars who have examined this subject. I wanted to make this powerpoint presentation as visual as possible, because “seeing is believing.” The 162 powerpoint slides should prove to be a valuable resource for evangelists, pastors, and anyone engaged in sharing the prophetic message of *Revelation*.

As I look back to the time spent studying this intriguing prophecy about the rise of an end-time Antichrist determined to enforce false worship and to control the economic, political, and social life of mankind, several highlights stand out in my mind. Let me briefly mention what I consider a few outstanding aspects of this prophecy.

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

In many ways Revelation 13 is central to the whole book and to the theme of the Great Controversy. It shows how the conflict between Christ and Satan that began in heaven and continued on this earth (Revelation 12), will reach its climax when the unholy trinity will attempt to enforce false worship (Revelation 13). The following chapters describe

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God's final warnings and judgements upon unbelievers before Christ's coming.

**The Key Issue is the Proper Worship of God.** In reading and rereading Revelation 13 and 14, I was made forcefully aware of the fact that the key issue in the final conflict is the proper worship of God. Seven times the word "worship" is applied to the false trinity, and once, in Revelation 14:7, is related to the worship of the true God. In this context of conflict over worship, the reference to the mark and number of the beast, calls for believers to recognize, not external markings or papal titles, but the deceptive worship promoted by the false trinity through a variety of agencies, including the papacy.

**666 Was the Number of Babylon.** It was enlightening for me to learn that a possible reason the number of the beast is 666, is the fact that such number stand for false worship, both in Scripture and in the ancient Babylonian religion. In the Babylonian religion great significance was attached to the number 666. For examples, Babylonian priests wore a popular amulet that contained a mysterious configuration of numbers in a square. When counted horizontally or vertically the numbers added up to 666. In fact, as shown in the picture, the number 666 is found at the very bottom of the amulet itself.

The importance of the number 6 in the Babylonian religion explains why Nebuchadnezzar's gold statue was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide (Dan 3:1). In view of the fact that the idolatrous worship of the golden image commanded by the king of Babylon, serves as a type of the false worship enforced by the beast in Revelation 13, there is a realistic possibility that the number 666 serves to represent the false worship of both ancient Babylon and modern spiritual Babylon.

**The Mark and Number of the Beast Are Essentially the Same.** Another significant highlight of the study is the discovery of the essential unity that exists between the *mark* and the *number* of the beast. Contrary to some popular interpretations, Revelation 13:17 clearly equates the mark with the name and number of the beast. This means that the three are essentially the same. They represent the various manifestations of the evil nature of the beast, determined to enforce false worship. This

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means that any interpretation true to Scripture must respect the essential unity among the three found in the text.

**The Central Issue is True Worship Versus False Worship.** What impressed me greatly in this study is that the issue in the final conflict is not merely WHICH DAY do people observe, but WHO do they worship! The observance of the Sabbath or of Sunday or of NO-DAY at all (as true for most Western European Christians), must be seen in the context of true worship versus false worship. In the final conflict the central issue is allegiance to God, reflected in the observance of His commandments, or allegiance to Satan, reflected in adherence to the false worship promoted by the sea and land Beasts.

**The Mark of the Beast in the Final Crisis.** In the context of the final conflict over worship, the mark of the beast will be, not an external marking on the forehead or hand, but an internal, mental and practical allegiance by those who choose to worship the satanic trinity.

The false worshippers who receive the mark of the beast, stand in sharp contrast with the true worshippers who receive the seal of God because they obey His commandments. The end-time believers who have the divine seal are characterized as keepers of “the commandments of God” (Rev 12:17; 14:12). By contrast, the followers of the beast obey a counterfeit moral law and follow a pseudo-messiah.

**First Four Commandments are Central to the Final Conflict.** Another important lesson that I learned, is that Revelation 13 and 14 indicate that the first four commandments will become the central issue of the final conflict, because they define our relationship with God. The false trinity described in Revelation 13, not only counterfeits the God-head, but also violates especially the first four commandments.

For example. “The first commandment says, ‘You shall have no other gods before me,’ but the sea beast takes the place of God by receiving worship of itself (Rev 13:4,8). The second commandment warns against the worship of images, yet the land beast raises up an image to be worshipped (Rev 13:14,15).

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“The third commandment says, ‘You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God,’ but the sea beast has the names of blasphemy written all over it (Rev 13:1,5,6)” (Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*, pp. 122-123). The fourth commandment has the seal of God’s authority (He is the Creator), but the false trinity counterfeits the seal of God with the mark of the beast.

The best protection against the end-time deception of the mark and number of the beast, is the seal of God, manifested in living by the enabling power of the Spirit in obedience to God’s commandments.

### **A Few Highlights of the Numeric Interpretation of the Mark and Number of the Beast**

The study of the numeric interpretation of the 666, proved to be also very informative. This study brought out several points previously unknown to me. I will briefly refer to a few of the most significant discoveries

**Unlimited Possibilities to Identify Names with 666.** It is amazing to see how many names can be manipulated so that the numeric value of the letters adds up to 666. Historically attempts have been made to identify the number 666 with the names of such important personages as Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Mohammed, Napoleon, Hitler, Ronald Reagan, and the late Pope John Paul II.

Adventist critics take pleasure in showing that even the name of Ellen Gould White adds up to the number 666. It is evident that interpreting 666 on the basis of the numerical values of the letters of a name can give absurd results.

**The Number 666 in Barcodes and Biochips.** With the advent of laser scanning and the universal barcode, popular evangelical writers have largely abandoned their attempts to identify the Mark and Number 666 of the Antichrist by calculating the numerical value of the names of possible candidates. Instead, they are looking for the number 666 in barcodes and biochips. They believe that John describes the latest electronic developments in the commercial world: global banking, laser scanning, and the universal bar code.

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The problem with such sensational electronic interpretations of the March of the Beast is the failure to recognize that barcodes, scanning, and biochips did not exist in John's time. He could hardly have urged his contemporary readers to be wise in seeking to understand the human number 666, when electronic barcodes and biochips did not exist.

In interpreting the symbolism of Revelation, it is *imperative* first to understand the meaning of the symbolism to the original recipient of the book, and then to look for an endtime application. This important principle applies to the study of all Bible prophecies.

For example, Christ's prophetic discourse about the signs of the End, begins with this warning about the appearance of "false Christs and false prophets" for obvious reasons. At that time there was an intense messianic expectation and Christians as well as Jews were susceptible of being deceived by the self-styled messiahs who frequently appeared, especially until the Barkochba revolt (A.D. 132-135).

The warning of Christ, however, goes beyond the contemporary deception of messianic pretenders, since He speaks of them not only in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:15-22) but also in connection with the Second Advent (Matt 24:27). In Matthew the description of "the coming of the Son of man" as a shining lightning (24:27) is preceded immediately by the warning about "false Christs and false prophets" (24:24-26). This suggests that the endtime appearance of pseudo-prophets, found an initial fulfilment in NT times and will find an increased and ultimate manifestation before the End (2 Thess 2:3; Rev 13).

**The Origin and Historical Usage of Vicarius Filii Dei.** It came as a surprise for me to learn that the particular pope's title Vicarius Filii Dei appears for the first time relatively late in Christian history. It first appears in the fraudulent document called "THE DONATION OF CONSTANTINE" that was fabricated in the eighth century by unscrupulous Catholic clergymen.

The aim of this forgery was to prove that the Italian territories given to the Pope in 756 by the Frankish King Pepin, and later reconfirmed

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by Charlemagne, belonged to the Pope in the first place, since he had received them five centuries earlier from Emperor Constantine. This is the most famous forgery in European history that played an inestimable role in boosting the temporal power of the papacy during the Middle Ages.

According to the forged document, the Emperor Constantine affirms that when he was baptized by Pope Sylvester in A.D. 324 (in reality he was not baptized until A.D. 337), he presented the Pope with the Lateran palace, all the imperial insignia, and the territories of the western Roman Empire.

The reason given for the generous gifts is because the pope is *VICARIUS FILII DEI—THE VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD*. The truth is that Constantine never had leprosy and never donated to Pope Sylvester the Western territories of the Empire. The only thing he donated to the pope was the Lateran Palace, which had been the residence of emperors and lately of his wife, Fausta.

Much of the pomp and power achieved by the papacy during the Middle Ages were based on the forged DONATION OF CONSTANTINE that attributes to the pope the right to rule the church and the Western Roman Empire, because he was constituted the VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD. Scholars admit that no other document has boosted the power of the papacy like the fraudulent DONATION OF CONSTANTINE. It is hard to believe that Medieval Popes used this fraudulent document to defend their temporal and ecclesiastical supremacy.

**Denial of the Use of *Vicarius Filii Dei*.** Some Catholic writers, critical of the Adventist Church, deny that *Vicarius Filii Dei*, first mentioned in the forged Donation of Constantine, has been used historically as one title of the Pope. For example, in the cover article of *ENVOY MAGAZINE*, entitled “Pope Fiction,” —an article especially aimed against Adventists— Patrick Madrid, the editor of the magazine, writes: “*Vicarius Filii Dei*, or ‘Vicar of the Son of God,’ is not now, nor has it ever been, a title of the bishop of Rome” (March/April 1998). Madrid’s picture, as well as that of the magazine, are shown in the CD-ROM.

On a similar vein, the National Catholic magazine, *Our Sunday Visitor*, twice admitted and twice recanted that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is a

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pope's title inscribed in the tiara. The second denial went as far as claiming that papal tiaras "bear no inscription whatsoever."

In response to these denials, I submit in my study seven major Catholic literary sources where the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* occurs. Furthermore, I show two magnificent inscribed papal tiaras, namely, the 1871 Belgian Tiara and the 1903 Gold tiara, with inscriptions exalting the divine right of the pope to rule the earth.

**The Origin of Papal Tiaras.** It was interesting to learn that the three-tiered jewelled papal crown is of Byzantine and Persian origin. It was originally used for the crowning of kings. It was adopted with one crown in the ninth century, when the popes became the temporal rulers of the Papal States. A second and a third crown were added in the thirteenth and fourteenth century to symbolize the spiritual and ecclesiastical dominion of the papacy.

At the moment of the coronation, the new pope used to be crowned with the words: "Receive the tiara adorned with three crowns and know that thou art Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the World, Vicar of Our Savior Jesus Christ on earth, to him be the honor and glory forever and ever."

The outrageous and preposterous claim of the pope, to be not only Vicar of Christ on earth but also Ruler of the World, reflects the apostate nature of the papacy—a power that historically has sought to control and subdue people, including the most powerful rulers, rather than calling upon humankind to follow Jesus in His humility, simplicity, and righteous living.

The last three popes, John Paul I, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, declined a coronation ceremony with the tiara. They chose instead a papal inauguration Mass with the mitre. The apparent reason is the past association of the tiara with the temporal power of the papacy.

As the latest popes have shown good judgment in doing away with the coronation ceremony and with the use of the tiara—both sad reminders of past popes' attempts to act as temporal rulers—so it has been wise

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for the Adventist church to abandon the traditional numeric interpretation of *Vicarius Filii Dei*, which lacks both exegetical and historical support.

**The Mark and the Number Are NOT on the Beast.** Those Adventists who feel betrayed by their church for abandoning the traditional interpretation ought to note that Revelation 13 does NOT say the beast has the mark and number etched or branded on himself. Rather, it says that the Beast wants to brand all the inhabitants of the earth with his mark, name, and number. This fundamental information has been ignored by those who have spent time and money prowling around the Vatican and peering at tiaras with binoculars, looking for the inscription *Vicarius Filii Dei*.

**Protestant Reformers and the Number 666.** All the giants of the Reformation agreed in identifying the Antichrist beast of Daniel and Revelation with the Papacy. But they differed in their interpretation of 666.

It was interesting to learn that Luther and a few other reformers, believed that the number 666 represented the years of papal domination beginning from the time of Gregory I (590-604), who asserted primacy over all bishops.

Unfortunately, these Reformers failed to show how their identification of the number 666 with the years of the temporal and worldly domination of the papacy could be legitimately placed between the seventh and the fourteenth century.

**Application of the Number 666 to *Vicarius Filii Dei*.** The first attempt to compute the numerical value of the letters *Vicarius Filii Dei* seems to have been made by Master Andreas Helwig or Helwich (c. 1572-1643). Helwig was a professor of classic Greek literature and wrote an Etymological Greek Dictionary. In 1612, at the close of his rectorship in Berlin, he wrote his *Antichristus Romanus—The Roman Antichrist*.

In his book Helwig explains how he tried to solve the riddle of the number 666 by computing fifteen different names in three differ-

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ent languages. He finally decided on *Vicarius Filii Dei* because he felt it was a legitimate expansion of the actual historical title of the Pope, *Vicarius Christi*. He felt that this modification was justified because the pope fulfilled the characteristics of the Beast of Revelation 13. This interpretation remained largely unnoticed until the French Revolution, when computation on this and other titles of the pope became increasingly common.

**Adventist Pioneers and the Mark/Number of the Beast.** Adventist pioneers early identified the Mark of the Beast with the enforcement of Sunday observance, but they were uncertain regarding the meaning of the Number of the Beast (666). It came as a surprise for me to learn that until the late 1860s, the popular view, espoused even by J. N. Andrews, was that the number 666 was made up by the many Protestant sects influenced by Roman Catholicism. Apparently Ellen White herself supported this interpretation in her vision of 1847.

Uriah Smith appears to have been the first Adventist leader to mention *Vicarius Filii Dei* as a possible interpretation of the number 666. In his book *The United States in the Light of Prophecy* (published in 1884), Uriah Smith affirms unequivocally that “The number over which the saints are also to get the victory, is the number of the papal beast, called also the number of his name, and the number of a man, and said to be six hundred three scores and six. The pope wears upon his pontifical crown in jeweled letters, this title, *Vicarius Filii Dei*, Vicegerent of the Son of God. The most plausible supposition we have seen on this point is that here we find the number in question. It is the number of the beast, the papacy; it is the number of a man, for he adopts it as his distinctive title; it is the number of a man, for he who bears it is the ‘man of sin’” (4th edition, 1884, p. 224).

Uriah Smith’s interpretation of the Number 666 became widely accepted in the Adventist church largely because it was ably defended by J. N. Andrews, who was highly respected as the leading scholar of the Adventist church. He agreed with Uriah Smith in the identification of the Mark of the Beast with the enforcement of Sunday observance and of the Number of the Beast with *Vicarius Filii Dei*.

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**Adventist Tiaras.** The wide acceptance of the numeric interpretation of *Vicarius Filii Dei* as the fulfillment of the number (666) of the beast, led some zealous Adventists to design fraudulent tiaras with the famous inscription. Contrary to the golden tiaras donated to the pope by different countries, the Adventist paper-drawn tiaras were never given to the pope as a gift from our church. The story of how this happened is reported by LeRoy Froom in a short but straightforward article entitled “Dubious Pictures of the Tiaras,” published in *The Ministry* (November, 1948).

Froom strongly protested against the use of fraudulent tiaras: “In the name of truth and honesty this journal [*Ministry*] protests any such use by any member. . . . Truth does not need fabrication to aid or suppress it. Its very nature precludes any manipulation or duplicity. We cannot afford to be party to any fraud. The reflex action upon our souls should be a sufficient deterrent. We must never use a quotation or a picture merely because it sounds or looks impressive. We must honor the truth and meticulously observe the principle of honesty in the handling of evidence under all circumstances” (*The Ministry*, November 1948, p. 35).

Froom’s stern warnings may have discouraged the use of fraudulent tiaras in evangelistic meetings, but not the identification of the number 666 with the papal title *Vicarius Filii Dei*. This identification has remained largely unchallenged until recent years, when responsible Adventist studies have shown that the traditional numerical interpretation cannot be legitimately supported exegetically or historically.

Exegetically, the key phrase is “it is a human number—*arithmos anthropou*” (Rev 13:18), suggests that it is not the number of a name, but a number reflecting the human condition of rebellion against God. The triple six suggests a determined effort of the beast to promote the worship of himself, rather than of God. Yet such efforts will ultimately fail because the remnant will triumph “over the beast and his image and the number of his name” (Rev 15:2).

Historically, the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* has been used occasionally as a papal title, but it is not the only official title and there are no clear proofs that it has ever been inscribed on papal tiaras.

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**Conclusion.** Our study suggests that the Mark and Number of the Beast are essentially the same. They both represent the evil nature and character of the Beast determined to enforce idolatrous worship. What is at stake in the final conflict, is not external markings, but the internal control of the mind and behavior of people.

The key issue in the final conflict is the proper worship of God. John's reference to the mark and number of the beast, calls for believers to recognize, not external markings or papal titles, but the deceptive worship promoted by a variety of agencies, including the papacy.

The best protection against the end-time deception is the seal of God, manifested in living by the enabling power of the Spirit in obedience to God's commandments.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES AT THE END**

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

This is the list of the announcements described in detail at the end of this newsletter.

- 1. PACKAGE OF ALL MY RECORDINGS:** Special 70% discount on the package of all my recordings. Special offer also on the newly released CD-ROM on the The Mark and the Number of the Beast.
- 2. A WEEKEND SEMINAR AT YOUR CHURCH:** Information on how to invite me for a weekend seminar in 2006.
- 3. HITACHI PROJECTORS:** I received a special overstock discount given from HITACHI on the volume purchase of four models.
- 4. TOSHIBA LAPTOPS:** Special 30 to 40% discount on Toshiba laptops computers for Adventists.

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**5. DA-LITE SCREENS** for your church at 30% discount.

**6. REMOTE PRESENTER:** The smallest and most powerful REMOTE powerpoint presenter by Honeywell.

### **“NATURAL DISASTERS: ACTS OF GOD OR ACTS OF SATAN?”**

**Herbert E. Douglass, Th. D.**

**He has served as AUC College President, Associate Editor of Adventist Review, Vice President of Pacific Press**

**He has authored 16 books, including the recent *Messenger of the Lord*, and *God at Risk*.**

In trying to understand the role of God in natural disasters, we must avoid the trap that Satan has encouraged, namely, that last-day disasters are from an angry, insulted God (some call Him, Allah). That is exactly how Satan has been painting God since Eden and before. Millions, yea billions, on this planet believe this today. We are in the midst of the last hours of the Cosmic Conflict, the Great Controversy that has plagued heaven and earth since “war broke out in heaven” (Revelation 12:7).

### **God’s Role in the End-time Events is Forecast in Revelation 7**

In Revelation 7 God is holding the “four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.” This sounds most ominous. Before the end times, this earth will have seen all kinds of distress affecting the “earth, sea, and tree.” But we have never seen anything yet like what will happen when the winds are fully released by the holding power of the four angels who get their orders from the Lord Himself!

Why are the winds still being held? God’s people have not all been “sealed” with the approval of God “written on their foreheads” (14:1). God’s seal of approval will be placed on those who can rightly represent Him and can be trusted with “latter rain” power. Here are people who tell the truth about God and witness to His power—again, exactly what Satan has been resisting for a long, long time. Here are people who are

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now ready to stand firm through the troubles of the last days as depicted in the closing verses of Revelation 6.

What about those angels? Even now, “angels are belting the world, refusing Satan his claims to supremacy, made because of the vast multitude of his adherents. We hear not the voices, we see not with the natural sight the work of these angels, but their hands are linked about the world, and with sleepless vigilance *they are keeping the armies of Satan at bay* till the sealing of God’s people shall be accomplished”—(Letter 79, 1900, EGW Comments, *SDA Commentary*, vol. 7, 967 (emphasis added)).

And what about those winds? They are the works of Satan about to be released from the restraining hand of God. All this can best be understood in light of the Great Controversy. It is the replay of the book of Job (but on a colossal scale)—fire from the sky burning up sheep and Job’s servants, roaming bandits killing at will, a great wind destroying a house and killing his children. Satan is unbelievably evil! And he is still the same today as in Job’s day. Satan’s studied strategy has always been to confuse, bewilder, deceive, and destroy the peace of this world. Why? In order to drain all hope and trust from earth’s billions that a more powerful Person, faithful and true, runs the universe!

### **Satan Was Behind Job’s Distress**

Where is God? God, within the purposes of the Great Controversy, permits this final barrage of deceit and distress, not only on one man called Job but now on the whole planet. All that Job finally knew about what was behind the colossal catastrophes he was enduring, God told Him later. But until then, it was a very dark time. He only knew later that God had been challenged by Satan. Satan was furious that Job had been so blessed with a great family and a great financial statement. He accused God of playing favorites—that the reason Job was so dutiful in his worshipful obedience was because God had build a “hedge” around him to bribe Him in obedience (Job 1).

And then we listen to the theologians who came to explain to Job why he had experienced these horrible disasters. What we read in those

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following thirty-six chapters are the various reasons that people today still use to explain awful calamities. Either Job is hiding deep secrets of evil habits and God is punishing Him, or God responds only to the upright and ignores those who suffer calamities because He is a just God, or God is so righteous and just that He can only vent wrath against the wicked, or that Job is receiving less punishment than he deserves.

So many echoes of Job's three friends today—on the Internet, media articles, and from many pulpits.

### **God Held the Winds that Satan Wanted to Blow on Old Jerusalem**

The Jews had played out their stubborn rejection of the mercies of God—they finally murdered Him! God had nothing greater to give His chosen people as He was telling His side of the great controversy. And so “God withdrew His protection from them, and removed his restraining power from Satan and his angels, and the nation was left to the control of the leader she [Hebrew nation] had chosen. . . . These sufferings are often represented as a punishment visited upon them by the direct decree of God. It is thus that the great deceiver seeks to conceal his own work. By stubborn rejection of divine love and mercy, the Jews had caused the protection of God to be withdrawn from them, and Satan was permitted to rule them according to his will. The horrible cruelties enacted in the destruction of Jerusalem are a demonstration of Satan's vindictive power over those who yield to his control” (*The Great Controversy*, pp. 28, 35).

Thus, we have two examples—Job and Jerusalem—from the past of what happens when God's restraining hand is released and the “winds” blow.

### **But Lets Look at Our World Today**

Obviously, this planet has always had earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, typhoons, famines and volcanoes. Some of the worst of these on record happened long years ago—with far greater damage than we have experienced in the last few years even though we have greater populations in these same areas today. I will pick only a few (See World Almanacs):

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**Earthquakes:** Syria in 526 A.D., 250,000 deaths; India in 1737, 300,000; Japan, 1923, 200,000; China, 1927, 200,000; China, 1976, 242,000; Armenia, 1988, 56,000; Iran, 1990, 40,000.

**Major Floods, Tidal Waves:** Holland in 1228, 100,000; China, 1642, 300,000; 1887, 900,000; 1931, 3,700,000; 1939, 200,000; India, 1979, 15,000.

**Major Hurricanes, Typhoons:** Galveston, 1900, 6,000; Hong Kong, 1906; India, 40,000; Bangladesh, 1963, 22,000; May 1965, 17,000; June, 30,000; December, 10,000; 1970, 300,000; Honduras, 1974, 2,000; Bangladesh, 1985, 10,000; 1991, 139,000.

**U.S.A. Tornadoes:** Illinois, 1925, 689; Alabama, 1932, 268; Georgia, 1936, 455; 1938, 203; 1952, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, 208; 1965, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, 271; 1974, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, 315.

As Jesus said: “All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8). In other words, these are not specific signs of the end of the world. The world will always have wars, earthquakes, pestilences, etc. But there are specific signs that He outlined Matthew 24 and 25, such as the gospel going to the entire world and then He would return (verse 14). He specified other signs that would be perceived as something very special such a darkened sun at midday, and a moon that would not give its usual light, and a night when there would be an astonishing star display (verse 29). He compared the last days of Planet Earth to the last days before Noah entered the ark (verses 37-39). He compared His delayed return to the delay in the Bridegroom’s appearance at his wedding 25:5).

### **But Something is Indeed Different in the Last Few Years**

It seems to me that disasters of all kinds are indeed different in comparison with the past. But we have been told to expect all this “difference” but before now, we have only romanticized these words that Ellen White wrote: “Famines will increase. Pestilences will sweep away thousands. Dangers are all around us from the powers without and satanic workings within, but the *restraining power of God is now being exercised*” (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, 382 (emphasis added)).

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“These wonderful manifestations will be *more and more frequent and terrible* just before the second coming Christ and the end of the world, as signs of its speedy destruction” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 108, emphasis added).

### The Exponential Curve

I call it the exponential curve that registers a slope that constantly increases in contrast to a predicted increase that follows a predicted straight line up. We use this curve in so many areas in the scientific world as well as the financial world. For example, think of interest on your savings in your bank account. If you get 8% interest on \$100,000, you can draw a straight line up beginning with \$8000 the first year, \$8000 the second year, etc. In ten years you would have \$80,000 earned interest and still have your \$100,000 (that is, you own \$180,000). In 30 years, you would own \$215,892.

But if you were earning compound interest at 8%, you would not have a predicted straight line of \$8000 per year but a line that would slope up continually. At the end of the second year, you would own \$116,640 (not \$116,000); end of third year, \$125,971 (not \$124,000); end of fourth year, \$136,048, (not \$132,000). At 30 years, you would own \$1,006,266. Compare!

Now how does this apply to last-day events? All the awful catastrophes of the past will be repeated but in exponential rapidity. Very much like the mother's labor in childbirth! Can anyone deny that hurricanes, floods, famines, pestilences, national debt, personal debt, bankruptcies, moral degradation, depletion of water aquifers, energy consumption, etc., are increasing with astonishing speed? Most people live with the sense that everything is out of control compared to life we lived even 25 years ago. There seems to be no way to turn back the clock. The escalator, either down or up, seems to go faster every day with every news broadcast. And everyone has the lurking feeling that they can't get off that escalator.

The sense of escalation is heightened when the latest disaster is wired into our living rooms through CNN or FOX News in living color.

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Instantly, we are fed the reporter's hype and this constant feed gives us the feeling that it is happening more rapidly, that we are surrounded with distress, and that has never happened like this before.

### **Just What Satan Has Planned!**

Paul nailed it: Satan is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). He is more than a myth! He is God's great antagonist, doing all he can to distract, demoralize, and destroy men and women.

One of the prime ways he does his work is through "natural" disasters (certainly not, "acts of God"). "Satan is working in the atmosphere; he is poisoning the atmosphere, and here we are dependent upon God for our lives—our present and eternal lives. And being in the position that we are, we need to be wide-awake, wholly devoted, wholly converted, wholly consecrated to God. But we seem to sit as though we were paralyzed. God of heaven, wake us up!" (*Selected Messages*, book. 2, p. 52).

"Satan works through the elements also to garner his harvest of unprepared souls. He has studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature, and he uses all his power to control the elements as far as God allows. . . . Satan has control of all whom God does not especially guard. He will favor and prosper some in order to further his own designs, and he will bring trouble upon others and lead men to believe that it is God who is afflicting them. While appearing to the children of men as a great physician who can heal all their maladies, he will bring disease and disaster, until populous cities are reduced to ruin and desolation. Even now he is at work. In *accidents and calamities* by sea and by land, in great *conflagrations*, in fierce *tornadoes and terrific hailstorms*, in *tempests, floods, cyclones, tidal waves, and earthquakes*, in every place and in a thousand forms, Satan is exercising his power. He sweeps away the *ripening harvest, and famine and distress follow*. He imparts to the air a *deadly taint*, and thousands perish by the pestilence. *These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous*. Destruction will be upon both man and beast" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 589).

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Note that these awful disasters are “to become more and more frequent and disastrous on both man and beast—the exponential curve. Read those quoted paragraphs again.

### **Adventists Have a Unique View of End-time Events**

No, we don’t echo the millions of Evangelicals who proclaim the soon coming of our Lord much louder than Seventh-day Adventists. Just look at the dozens of Internet web sites devoted to last-day events. Nothing like it ten years ago! The “Left Behind” best-selling book series plus their three “Left Behind” movies more than amplifies the sense of something awful about to happen. And many people know nothing better!

Adventists don’t believe in the Rapture, or in Israel as a key figure in last-day events. Nor do we look for an Armageddon where modern armies fight it on the Plains of Esdraelon.

Optimists are right—the world will not end in either a whimper or a bang. World nuclear powers will not incinerate the earth; we will not drown or be suffocated in our own garbage, nor shrivel up in mass starvation.

And pessimists are right—this world may soon have all the vaccines needed for all the physical challenges we face today but there will be no vaccine for the rising tsunamis of moral garbage that permeates modern life, especially in the “enlightened” western world. All the GPS devices and gasless cars will not drown out the increasing incivilities and plain hatred that plague communities as well as between nations.

How right Ellen was when she wrote: “I have been shown that the Spirit of the Lord is being withdrawn from the earth. God’s keeping power will soon be refused to all who continue to disregard His commandments . . . Iniquity is becoming so common a thing that it no longer shocks the senses as it once did” (*Last Day Events*, p. 27).

We live in the waning days of earth’s history. The sun is setting. Ellen is more relevant today than in her day: “When God’s restraining hand is removed, the destroyer begins his work” (*Manuscript Releases*, book. 3, p. 314).

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## Conclusion

The main principle we must always embrace when we read the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White: *God takes responsibility for that which He allows or does not prevent. Satan is the malignant destroyer and when finally unrestrained . . . we haven't seen anything yet!* Compare 1 Chronicles 10:4, 13, 14.

### **“BACCHIOCHI’S RESPONSE TO DR. DOUGLASS’ ESSAY” Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.**

Much of what Dr. Douglass wrote resonates with my convictions. I like especially the use of the “exponential curve” to illustrate the predicted intensification of natural disasters. On this point we are in full agreement.

#### **An Area of Limited Disagreement**

The area of disagreement is limited to the role of Satan in natural disasters. Dr. Douglass quotes several statements from the Bible and Ellen White to support two things: First, Satan is responsible for the destruction caused by natural disasters: “He [Satan] will bring disease and disaster, until populous cities are reduced to ruin and desolation. In accidents and calamities by sea and by land, in great *conflagrations*, in fierce *tornadoes and terrific hailstorms, in tempests, floods, cyclones, tidal waves, and earthquakes*, in every place and in a thousand forms, Satan is exercising his power. He sweeps away *the ripening harvest, and famine and distress* follow. He imparts to the air a deadly taint, and thousands perish by the pestilence. *These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous.* Destruction will be upon both man and beast” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 589).

Second, Dr. Douglass maintains that Satan is able to accomplish his destructive purposes, only to the extent that God allows him by withdraws His restraining influence. He draws this conclusion primarily from three biblical episodes: the holding of the winds of strife in Revelation 7:1, the experience of Job, and the experience of the old Jerusalem. In each of these three instances, according to Douglass, God allowed Satan to carry out his destructive acts by withdrawing His restraining influence.

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Personally, I find Dr. Douglass' explanation very appealing, because it makes Satan, not God, responsible for both natural and man-made disasters. This explanation has the merit of resolving the apparent contradiction between the omnipotence and the benevolence of God in the case of disasters, since God is not directly responsible for the destruction caused by disasters like Tsunami or Katrina.

### **The Bible Does not Blame Satan for Disasters**

But this explanation poses problems which remain unresolved in my mind. The first problem is biblical. I have looked in vain for Bible texts which blame Satan for destructive disasters or attribute to him partial or total controls the forces of nature. So far I have not found a single text.

The texts cited by Dr. Douglass under closer scrutiny do not support his view that natural disasters are caused by Satan. For example, Dr. Douglas views the holding back of "the four winds of the earth" (Rev 7:1), as representing God restraining the Satanic winds of destruction ready to be unleashed upon the earth. He writes: "And what about those winds? They are the works of Satan about to be released from the restraining hand of God."

The notion that the winds of destruction are sent by Satan, is difficult to support from *Revelation*, where angels are often sent from the throne of God to punish mankind with all sorts of disasters. In Revelation 8, "the seven angels who stand before God" (8:2), are instructed to blow their trumpets and pour out upon the earth all sorts of calamities.

The same is true in Revelation 16 where seven angels are thus instructed by God: "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God" (v. 1). The outcome is the destruction of much of the human and subhuman creation by the last seven plagues. It is hard to escape the conclusion that God both holds and deploys the "winds of destruction."

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### Uriah Smith's Interpretation of Revelation 7:1

In his book, *Daniel and the Revelation*, Uriah Smith acknowledges that God uses angels for both “holding” the winds and “hurting” through the winds. He writes: “Angels are ever-present agents in the affairs of the earth; and why may not these be four of those heavenly beings into whose hands God has committed the work here described; namely, holding the winds while it is God’s purpose that they should not blow, and hurting the earth with them when the time comes that they should be loosed? For it will be noticed [verse 3] that the ‘hurting’ is a work committed to their hands equally with the ‘holding;’ so that they do not merely let the winds go when they are to blow, but they cause them to blow; they impel forward the work of destruction with their own supernatural energy. But the hurting process here brought to view does not include the seven last plagues. That work is given into the hands of seven special angels; this, into the hands of four” ( p. 437).

It is evident that Uriah Smith clearly understood that God causes His angels both to hold the winds of strife and to blow them in order to do “the work of destruction with their own supernatural energy.”

### The Example of Job

The second example given by Dr. Douglass to support his view that disasters are acts of Satan, is the experience of Job. The Lord says to Satan: “Behold, all that he [Job] has is in your power; only upon himself do not put forth your hand.” The story continues outlining the outcome of God’s permission, namely, the destruction of thousands of asses, sheep, camels, and servants by the Sabeans, Chaldeans, and fire from heaven. Eventually a great wind destroyed even the house where all Job’s 10 children were eating, and killed them all (Job 1:13-19).

According to Dr. Douglass, the story of Job reveals the final out-working of Satan on a global scale. God allowed Satan to accomplish his destructive ends by using not only people like the Sabeans and the Chaldeans, but also natural forces like the fire and the wind.

This conclusion ignores that what at first appears to be the power of Satan to destroy Job’s family through disasters, under closer scrutiny

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it is shown to be the work of God. For example, after the loss of his ten children Job said: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). It is clear that Job understood the calamities he was experiencing as being the work of God, not an act of Satan.

This conclusion becomes clearer when we read God’s subsequent words to Satan: “Have you considered my servant Job . . . He still holds fast his integrity, although YOU MOVED ME AGAINST HIM, TO DESTROY HIM WITHOUT A CAUSE” (Job 2:3). The text clearly indicates that it was God, not Satan, who brought calamities upon Job’s family. The purpose was to prove to Satan Job’s integrity in the midst of trials.

There is no question that Satan had a hand in Job’s misery, but ultimately God takes the responsibility for it all. When Satan afflicts Job with sores, Job says to his wife: “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil” (Job 2:10). Job accepted his calamities and suffering as God’s sent, not as Satan’s caused. And the Book of Job closes by calling the satanic sores experienced by Job as “the evil that the Lord had brought upon him” (Job 42:11). It is evident that Satan brings misery, but he goes no further than God allows him. The message of the Book of Job is clear: God was ultimately responsible for the tragedies that Job experienced. The purpose was to prove to Satan Job’s integrity.

Like on the case Job, Satan undoubtedly has a part in the rush of recent disasters, but ultimately the power over Tsunami and Katrina rests with God. In Job 38:8, 11, Job asks rhetorically: “Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb . . . and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?” In Job’s mind, there is no doubt that God controls the forces of nature manifested in tidal waves.

The same thought is expressed in Psalms 89:8-9 where the Psalmist says: “O Lord God of host . . . Thou dost rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, thou stillest them.” Jesus Himself exercised control over the deadly threatening waves: “He rebuked the wind and the raging waves; and they ceased, and there was a calm” (Luke 8:24). Applying

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Christ's miracle to Tsunami or Katrina, God could have stopped the destructive tidal waves, even if Satan caused the earthquake in the first place.

### **Satan Has no Direct Control Over the Forces of Nature**

The assumption that natural disasters are acts of Satan, raises two questions. First, as mentioned earlier, nowhere the Bible attributes to Satan power to cause such natural disasters as earthquakes, floods, draught, hurricanes. I read the 16 references to "earthquakes" in the Bible, but none of them blame Satan for earthquakes. Sometimes Satan is called the prince of this world (2 Cor 4:4, John 12:31, 14:30, Eph 6:12), but his power appears to be limited to tempt and deceive, not to cause natural upheavals.

A second consideration is that if Satan had control over the forces of nature, he would have destroyed our planet long time ago. After all, Jesus tells us that Satan has been "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). Like the terrorists today, Satan would have used every opportunity to destroy the creative and redemptive work of God in this world. The very fact that our planet has lasted so long, is an indication that Satan has no direct control over the forces of nature.

To assume that God holds Satan, as if it were, on a leash, allowing him to cause natural disasters, only at certain times and to a limited extent, presupposes some kind of a working relationship between God and Satan. I find such an idea to be absurd, because in the Bible there is no partnership between God and Satan.

Moreover, if God allowed Satan to cause disasters, ultimately God Himself would be blamed for the horrific destruction of human lives and property, because He could have prevented it or to stopped it. God cannot seat on His throne in heaven, oblivious to the destruction caused on earth by Satan. Such an indifference would discredit God's benevolence and omnipotence.

In the light of the foregoing considerations, the belief that natural disasters are acts of Satan allowed by God, poses problems that need to

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be resolved. To allow disasters to happen means to be partly responsible for the resulting destruction. But God can hardly be held responsible for the destructive activities of Satan.

### **God Controls the Forces of Nature**

Christians who believe in a Creator-God who upholds “the universe by his word of power” (Heb 1:3), seek to understand the mysterious outworking of divine wisdom and power in disasters.

There are numerous biblical passages that suggests that God does micromanage the forces of nature such as earthquakes, storms, floods, draughts to accomplish His purpose. Scripture tells us that God controls the rain (Deut 11:14-17, 28:12, Job 5:10, Matt 5:45, James 5:17-18), lightning (Ps 97:4), thunder, snow, whirlwind, flood, clouds “to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world, whether for correction, or for his land, or for love, he causes it to happen” (Job 37:12-13; also Job 28:10-11, Ps 107:25, 29, Nahum 1:3-4).

God causes earthquakes (Job 9:5, 28:9, Ps 18:7, 77:16-18, 97:3-5, Isa 2:19, 24:20, 29:6, Jer 10:10, Nahum 1:5, Heb 12:26), and the mountains to be thrown down and the valleys to fill (Ezek 38:20). The forces of nature never spiral out of God’s control. They are controlled by God who “shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble” (Job 9:6). God “looks on the earth and it trembles, touches the mountains and they smoke!” (Ps 104:32). “I form the light and create darkness, I create peace and make calamity; I, the Lord do all these things” (Is 45:7).

The prophet Ezekiel writes: “Thus says the Lord God: I will make a stormy wind break out in my wrath; and there shall be a deluge of rain in my anger” (Ex 13:13). Likewise the Psalmist catalogues those elements of the natural world that follow God’s commands: “fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command!” (Ps 148:8). Amos asks the rhetorical question: “Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?” (Amos 3:6).

On a similar vein Haggai writes: “Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I

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will shake the nations . . .” (Hag 2:6-7). Contrary to pagan beliefs that gods controlled the earthquake, the rain, or the lightning, biblical prophets affirm God’s control over the forces of nature.

### **A Call to Repentance**

Disasters serve as a wake up call to repentance for mankind. Disasters can have a sobering effect upon the human mind. When a war breaks out, or an earthquake destroys countless lives and property, or a drought burns the crops and dries up the water supply, or an epidemic disease victimizes millions of persons, many people will call out to God either in curse or prayer. C. S. Lewis wrote that “pain is God’s megaphone to a deaf world.”

It was an earthquake that caused the jailer at Philippi to exclaim: “Men, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). It was a famine that sent King Ahab searching everywhere for the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:10). It was a plague that brought Pharaoh to his knees, confessing before Moses: “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me” (Ex 10:16-17).

In His Olivet Discourse Jesus predicted that certain calamities will occur before His Return. Because of their nature and function, we can call these calamities “signs of divine judgment.” Specifically Jesus said: “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:6-8; cf. Mark 13:7-8). Luke adds “the roaring of the sea and the waves” (Luke 21:25) among the signs of the End. The latter reminds us of the South Asia Tsunami.

Disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruption, tornados, and hurricanes can have a sobering effect upon the human mind. They can challenge complacent, self-centered, and self-sufficient people to acknowledge their finiteness and helplessness and thus to seek God. It was the earthquake which marked the death of Christ that led the centu-

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tion and his soldiers to confess, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt 27:54).

John Wesley wrote in 1777 to a friend: “There is no divine visitation which is likely to have so general an influence upon sinners as an earthquake.” (Cited in “Forecast: Earthquake,” *Time*, September 1, 1975, p. 37). It is reported that in a high school in Palm Springs (California) there was a sign which read: “In the event of an earthquake, the Supreme Court ruling against prayers in school will be temporarily suspended.”

### **Harbingers of the Final Judgment**

Disasters such as earthquakes figure prominently among the End-time signs, because they are signs of divine judgment and of concern for evildoers to repent before the final judgment. They represent a solemn divine warning and appeal to repent and be saved before the final judgment.

What is the Lord telling us through natural disaster? The answer is found in Christ’s words uttered in the face of the tragedy that killed 18 persons when the tower in Siloam fell upon them: “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5). Christ did not spend His time arguing about who was to be blamed for the tragedy. Instead, He reminded His listeners that tragedies are a wake up call to repent.

The present intensification of natural and man-made disasters must be seen as clear signs of God’s final warning to mankind of the impending divine judgment. These disasters tell us that, as in the experience of ancient nations, God will not allow human rebellion and wickedness to continue much longer (Gen 15:16). Soon Christ will come to bring an End to the colossal crises that are engulfing our fragile planet (Rom 8:19-22). Since these things are about to happen, “What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God”? (2 Pet 3:11:13).

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

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**5) The DVD PASSION ALBUM** contains 1 DVD disk with the 2 hours interview on 3ABN on my book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*.

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**TWO CD-ROMS ALBUM WITH ALL MY PUBLICATIONS AND POWERPOINT LECTURES**  
Regular \$100.00 — Special \$50.00

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**ONE DVD PASSION ALBUM WITH 3ABN INTERVIEW**  
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### **Four Ways to Order**

You can order the five albums, individually or as a package at the special prices listed above, in four different ways:

- 1) **ONLINE:** click: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/holidayoffer.htm>
- 2) **BY PHONE:** call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915
- 3) **BY EMAIL:** email us your order with your credit card number at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> or <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> For security reasons, you can email your credit card number in two separate messages. In the first message you email me the first 8 digits and in the second message the last 8 digits, plus the expiration date. Be sure to include your postal address.

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**4) BY MAIL:** Send your personal check to the following address: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

### **HOW TO INVITE ME FOR A WEEKEND SEMINAR IN 2006?**

If your church is interested to invite me next year to present one of my PowerPoint seminars on the **SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, or CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE**, feel free to contact me at this time. You can call me at (269) 471-2915 or email me your request at sbacchiocchi@qtm.net I will email you the open dates and the outline of the three PowerPoint seminars.

At this time I am setting up my 2006 calendar of speaking engagements and I would be glad to include your church. If your church is small, there is the possibility of rallying together the district churches. Every weekend capacity crowds attend these timely seminars in the USA and overseas.

### **INCREDIBLE NEW OFFERS ON HITACHI PROJECTORS**

In order to reduce their inventory, HITACHI has offered me the possibility of buying in large quantity four of their projector models at a substantially discounted price. If your church is looking for an outstanding projector at a bargain price, this is the golden opportunity. To be brief I will only list the model, the lumens, and the special price.

CP-X250 HIGH RESOLUTION 2000 LUMENS – Only \$1195.00  
Previous SDA price for the 2000 lumens was \$1900.00.

CP-X440 HIGH RESOLUTION 2500 LUMENS – Only \$1795.00  
Previous SDA price for the 2500 lumens was \$2900.00.

CP-X444 HIGH RESOLUTION 3200 LUMENS – Only \$2195.00  
Previous SDA price for the 3200 lumens was \$3295.00.

CP-X1250 HIGH RESOLUTION 4500 LUMENS – Only \$4195.00  
Previous SDA price for the 4500 lumens was \$4900.00.

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These special offers are not listed at my website, because the prices change all the time, depending on the deal that HITACHI gives us. Feel free to call to call us at 269-471-2915 or email us a message at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> and I will email you all the details of each projector. Keep in mind that HITACHI offers us a 3 years 24/7 warranty package that is worth about \$285.00.

### **TOSHIBA LAPTOPS COMPUTERS FOR ADVENTISTS**

TOSHIBA has agreed to offer to Adventists two of their business laptop models, called TECRA. I shared the information in the last newsletter and the response has been overwhelming. If you are looking for an outstanding TOSHIBA laptop at a bargain price, visit my website at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Toshiba/Notebooks.html>

If you cannot surf the web, feel free to call us at 269-471-2915 or email us a message at <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>. We will email you immediately all the information about the TECRA A5 and TECRA S2, I AM IN THE PROCESS OF NEGOTIATING A VOLUME PURCHASE AT A LOWER PRICE. Call me for details at 269-471-2915.

### **DOES YOUR CHURCH OR SCHOOL NEED A SCREEN?**

If your church/school is looking for a screen, the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY, the largest manufacture of screens in the world, has agreed to offer their line of screens to our Adventist churches and schools at a about 30% discount.

The procedure is very simple. Visit the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY website at <http://www.da-lite.com>. You will see hundreds of models of screens with their respective prices. Once you find the screen that you need, give us the model number by phone (269) 471-2915 or email your request <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com> We will forward your order immediately to DA-LITE that will ship the screen directly to your address. You will receive the screen at about 30% discount.

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**THE SMALLEST AND MOST POWERFUL REMOTE PRESENTER**

If you are looking for an outstanding REMOTE for your Power-Point presentations, you will be pleased to know HONEYWELL has just come out with the smallest and most powerful remote in the market. You can view it at <http://www.powerremote.com/>

The size of the transmitter is smaller than a credit card. You can stick it inside the palm of your hand and nobody can see it. I tested the remote in an open environment, and the radio signal can go up to 400 feet of distance. IT IS INCREDIBLE! The transmitter has three buttons: forward, backward, and laser.

I can offer you this incredible remote for only \$120.00, postage paid. To order a remote, call us at (269) 978-6878 or (269) 471-2915 or email us your order at <[sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com)>

Christian regards

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