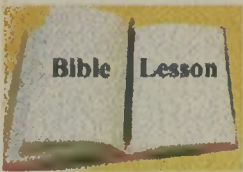


8B

RELIGION



Ascent of praise

(v.10)  
**10. And they cried out in a loud voice:**  
*"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."*

When Christians see what their relationship with God and the Lamb really means, the natural reaction is praise and worship. The Lamb has provided our salvation, which includes forgiveness, righteousness and assurance with the presence of the Holy Spirit. He provides all we need. What do we have to worry about?

**Identity and Service (Revelation 7:13-17)**

*Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"*

*I answered, "Sir, you know."*

Now John finds himself personally involved in the vision. As one of the elders ask him to identify those dressed in white robes, John has not forgotten the previous scenes. In those scenes he saw Christ dressed in white, the overcomers promised robes of white and the 24 elders on 24 thrones with their robes of white and their crowns of gold. As John now ponders the great multitude dressed in white robes, he undoubtedly also remembers the slain saints under the altar, satisfied with their white robes and their rest for a little time.

The question that the elder asks of John means that John is being challenged to draw the bottom line and comprehended the meaning when John replies to the elder "sir you know," the implication is something like you know that I understand.

**The elder replies (vv. 14b-17)**

*14b. And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation: they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*

The reply of the elder, who serves as spokesman in the scene, then reinforces the meaning for the reader. The ones clothed in white robes are overcomers. The great tribulation is a trial they have experienced or are experiencing as their faith is tested. They are clothed in righteousness in God's presence because of their faith in the salvation provided by Christ. In casting their allegiance with him, they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. What availing faith!

Daniel 12:1 speaks of a great "time of distress," and Mathew 24:21 also warns of "great distress." These passages may refer to specific periods in history. But before we get carried away with too much speculation of "when" and "where," let us remember that all Christians are tested. Each of us goes through some kind of great tribulation. Each of us has personal struggles in a sin-sick world, as John had great tribulation. But those struggles will come to an end.

Evidence of Jesus outside the Bible



ILLUSTRATION/TRINA MONTGOMERY-ARDREY

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Did Jesus even exist?  
 The question may seem absurd, but years ago some radicals treated him as an imaginary figure. Today's experts don't take the canard seriously.

But surprisingly, the issue is revived in Skeptical Inquirer magazine, which claims to examine evidence rationally as it seeks to debunk religions and hoaxes, ancient and modern. It's published by the secularist Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

Reviewing Mel Gibson's "Passion" film, committee senior researcher Joe Nickell asserts: "Historically, apart from later Christian sources, there is virtually no evidence for Jesus' crucifixion-or even his very existence."

Perhaps Skeptical Inquirer needs to be more skeptical about its skepticism.

Consider: Could a non-person whose crucifixion was a non-event be seen as real, not in "later" sources but within 20 years (see Paul's early letters)? The four Gospels appeared in succeeding decades, the equivalent of 2004 books looking back at the Depression, World War II, school desegregation or the Kennedy assassination.

But Nickell indicates we must reject all New Testament evidence. He doesn't explain why, but such writers typically complain that the Gospels were written by partisans and insiders. True

enough, but under that standard, scholars must erase much of secular history as well.

But even if all New Testament records are thrown out, nonbelievers also provided early evidence of Jesus' existence.

Such references are scarce, but that doesn't surprise E.P. Sanders of Duke University, author of "The Historical Figure of Jesus" and no fundamentalist. He says "it is sometimes hard to believe how unimportant Jesus was during his lifetime, especially outside Palestine."

The most important non-Christian source is "Jewish Antiquities," completed in A.D. 93 by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.

One passage cites the execution in A.D. 62 of "the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, James by name."

A longer reference to Jesus poses a famous problem. Christian and non-Christian scholars agree that it was retouched by later believers, who added pious phrases that no Jew employed by pagans would have written.

But scholars say the additions are obvious. If they are deleted, Josephus provided at least these bare facts: Jesus was thought to be a "wise man" and "doer of wonderful works," attracted followers, was crucified by Pilate and started a movement that remained in existence decades later.

Any records the Roman occupiers kept about

Please see EVIDENCE/5B



7 Sons of Soul  
 7 Sons of Soul  
 Davey Boy, Supe, Cliff Jones,  
 and Big Bob, producers  
 Verity Records  
 ★★☆☆☆

The 7 Sons of Soul are a bit confusing. There's only six of them on the album cover. They also look like of school gangsters on the cover.

Their sound is a bit confusing as well. One moment they sound like Willie Neal Johnson and the Gospel Keynotes, the next, more like R. Kelly.

Go figure. It's not a bad combination because these guys are fairly young, so it comes across as paying tribute to the past and doing what comes naturally, rather than trying to sound young when you are not. The first two songs are certainly of school. "Amazing Grace" is as traditional as you can get. "He's Coming Back" is straight quartet.

The rest of the recording finds the group straddling the R&B/gospel fence. "He's So Real" is Quiet Storm R&B with Christian lyrics. "Need You" is neo soul while "One More Chance" would sound good in a Jeep cruising. None of these songs is offensive. They all fit the group's tight harmonies and growling gospel delivery.

Traditional buyers will like "Prayer Changes Things." It's got the traditional quartet sound. The lyrics are basically the story of Paul in prison with a lot of shouting and hollering going on. "Show Me The Way" is dedicated to Johnson and the Keynotes. Johnson would be proud. The harmony is wonderful and the lead Cliff Jones has captured Johnson's essence.

A surprising highlight is "What Is This," featuring Fred Hammond and Pamkenyon Donald. It's one of my favorite songs but it's surprisingly good because it's been a while since Hammond's voice has sounded this musical.

"Run On" sounds like a sample from some song I can't remember the name, but no matter. It's the best example of how to combine new school and of school. Not bad.

Ratings

- Classic; ★★☆☆☆
- Excellent; ★★☆☆☆
- Good ★★☆☆☆
- Fair ★★☆☆☆
- Why? ★★☆☆☆
- No stars - A mess ★☆☆☆☆

Funerals at the home make a comeback as simpler ritual

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONOLULU, HAWAII - Some want to be remembered with lavish services, others want their remains launched into space. Bob Prater envisioned his passing in simpler terms: A funeral at home.

Few people opt for funerals in their homes-there's no firm number of how many, exactly- but interest is growing as consumers yearn for a more personal way to bid their loved ones adieu, and are frustrated by

sometimes high-priced, cookie-cutter services.

"The primary focus is bringing the family into the whole thing," said Jerri Lyons, who is considered one of the pioneers of the home funeral movement. "It's making death intimate again."

Lyons' business, Home and Family Funerals, helps families coordinate services for their deceased. Her nonprofit organization, Final Passages, uses workshops and

other methods-including a recent workshop in Honolulu-to spread the word about what she calls "one of the best-kept secrets in our country."

On a near-perfect Saturday when people crowd Waikiki's beaches, a handful of middle-age women cluster in a small room on a suburban block to talk about death and quiet home services.

Reasons for choosing to have a service at home are varied: from envi-

ronmentalists who oppose embalming to Muslims whose faith dictates a simple service. Whatever the motivation, Lyons said there are benefits.

"It's a time when people should be allowed to let the whole process unfold in a natural way," she said. "It's a very healing experience."

Some families may just want a few extra hours at home with their deceased. Others may do everything from getting dry ice to preserve the

Please see HOME/6E

CHURCH NEWS

White Dove Chapel provides a free lunch to anyone in need every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 993 Summers Road between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Doors open at 9 a.m. for coffee and fellowship.

**May 13**  
 Kenny Curry & Nu Spirit have released their sophomore album, titled "I Can't Let Go."

They will be featured for the young adult missionaries of the sounds of praise, Pen-

tecostal fellowship ministries worldwide as they celebrate the Women in Praise Spring Conference at New Hope Baptist Church on Hawthorne Lane.

• The Division of Music at Friendship Baptist Church will present the Florida A&M University Concert Choir in concert with Charlie Tumor and Johnny Williams.

The concert will be held at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church on 3301 Beatties

Ford Road beginning at 7 p.m.

**May 15**  
 Friendship Missionary Baptist Church will host a public forum on federal labor laws at 10 a.m. The forum will be held at Friendship's Enrichment Center, 3239 Beatties Ford Road, directly across from the church.

The forum is free and open to the public. For more information, call (704) 392-0392.

• Grier Heights Presbyterian Church, located at 325

Skyland Ave, will host a Health and Wellness Screening Day from 9:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. The screening will offer tests for diabetes, cholesterol, blood pressure checks, cancer education and nutrition and fitness tips.

**May 21**  
 Faith Community Church will celebrate its 32nd Anniversary Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., at 701 Howie Mine Road in Waxhaw.

**May 22**

District III ushers will hold their quarterly meeting on Sat. May 22 at 10 a.m. in the Macedonia Baptist Church at 1300 Hateras Ave., all youth ushers and youth supervisors are asked to attend.

**May 23**  
 Temple of Total Deliverance Ministries at 5521 Cannon Drive in Monroe is hosting a pre pastor's anniversary celebration at 6 p.m.

The guest minister will be Carl Turner of Faith Soldiers  
 Please see TREASURE/7B

