Would the Seventh-day Adventist Church exist without the Book of Revelation? The Adventist Church is founded on the concept that the last-day remnant movement is God-planned and prophetically introduced in Revelation. The church's eschatological understanding, which is given “fundamental belief” status, is strongly Revelation based. The concept of the “Great Controversy” as the foundational worldview to which all other doctrines are only secondary is largely based on the Adventist understanding of the book of Revelation. It is no wonder that Adventists are known for teaching and preaching from the Apocalypse. It is the very center of its evangelistic content.

There is a strong tendency, however, to interpret the book’s content only in a future-events manner. In Adventist infatuation with the time-lines and beasts of the Apocalypse, their enthusiasm in knowing what the future holds, and their intent to understand the prophecies correctly, have many Adventists overlooked the fact that a central theme in the book is God’s mission? Pictured here is a God who provides salvation to “whosoever will” accept it, a God who calls people out of the symbolic “Babylon” so they will not be under its curse. The prophecies of the book are not only revealing what God is going to do to end this age of sin; but they show God’s mission
to vindicate himself and his people while saving sinners. It is a mission that God’s people are to join for his glory.

Although it might be possible to show that God’s mission is the central point of the Apocalypse, this article's intent is only to survey three of the biblical concepts of mission that are highlighted in this book. The “Great Controversy vision” (Maxwell 1985:61) of Rev 11:19-14:20 will be the key passage for this study of mission implications in the Book of Revelation. This passage has been chosen for the following reasons: (1) it is a section with traditional Adventist interest because of the Church’s application of its message as specifically relevant to the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (2) it includes the one section of Revelation that the Church has seen as its mission statement, the “three angels’ messages” of Rev 14; and (3) this section seems to look at the cosmic battle that underlies the symbolically represented events in the rest of the book, thereby making it an ideal place from which to survey the mission themes of the book as a whole.

The Source of the Mission: God
(Missio Dei in Revelation)
God Is In Charge

The Father is the source of all that happens in Revelation. The book does emphasize that it is a revelation of Jesus Christ; but the book is clear that it is the Father that is actively revealing the Son, and it is through the Son that the Father is revealed to the inhabitants of the earth. The mission to destroy sin and save the redeemed comes from God, himself. Mission is a divine initiative.

All that happens in the Great Controversy vision is shown coming from the presence of God in the temple in heaven (Rev 11:19). As the temple is opened for John and his readers to see, God’s presence is no longer hidden from us. The ark is “symbolic of the very presence of God,” and the “flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, earthquake, and heavy hail are conventional ways of expressing majesty and power attending the manifestation of the divine presence” (Ladd 1972:164). Although the temple is seen in heaven, God’s presence is shown through his activity which is seen in the vision to follow.

In the vision the beast does nothing except that which is “given” to it by God. It is true, of course, that the dragon is directly responsible for the beast’s power and activity (Rev 13:2), but Revelation is reminding us that the Devil can only do as he is allowed from the temple in heaven (see Rev 17:7).
The saints also are what they are because of the power available from the throne of God. They are saints because they have the “Father’s” name written on their foreheads. This is God’s seal indicating his choice. They “belong” to him (Johnson 1994:1195).

God is the one who saves the Child and the Woman of Revelation 12 from the dragon. Events on this earth may seem to be happening mechanically or even demonically, but the message of Revelation is that God is pulling the strings—at least in those things that are connected to the salvation of the earth. “God always effects his purpose” (Morris 1987:155).

Right from the beginning of the book we notice that all that happens is under God’s direction. The introduction of the book, the introduction of the Jesus theme of the book, is clear that the revelations in this book come from God. The first verse of the first chapter says, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him” (Rev 1:1). In Revelation 4 and 5 John specifically states that “there before me was a throne in heaven” (Rev 4:2) and it was from that throne room that John receives the subsequent visions.

The Mission Is God’s

The book emphasizes that this work of God is for his mission to save. God is the one who elevates his Son to a position on his throne (Rev 12:5). The overcoming of the dragon and the beast is seen as the victory of God’s plan, that is, “the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God” (Rev 12:10). Those who are saved are the fruit of the labor of “God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).

Even in chapter 5 where the sacrifice of the lamb and his central position in the salvation story is dramatized, the book portrays this salvation as coming from the throne of God. The introduction to this vision in chapter 4 is the beautiful symbolic picture of the throne room and its glory that drives all creatures to their knees in worship and praise. Then the scroll that no one but Jesus could open was held in the right hand of God on the throne (Rev 5:1). As the heavenly beings praise Jesus and sing of his worthiness to open the scroll, they emphatically declare that he saved people for “our God” (Rev 5:9, 10).

The message of the whole book is that God is saving for himself a people. The 144,000 and the “great multitude” know that “salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne” (Rev 7:10). They sang, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God (Rev 19:1).

Yes, salvation is from God and for God. The book of Revelation declares
that the outcome and very purpose of salvation is to take people from the kingdoms of this world and make them part of God's kingdom. The opening verse of the Great Controversy passage states that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15). This world has become God's kingdom through his plan of salvation pictured in the visions of the book.

The kingdom of God upon this earth has been launched with the overthrow of the Devil's position (Rev 12:10). Although God's people will be still be bothered by the Devil in his fury, his authority is gone. God's Son has accomplished it; the kingdom has come. This was God's plan all along. “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen” (Rev 1:6).

The Message of God’s Mission: Jesus
(Uniqueness of Jesus)
Jesus Is the Only Source of Salvation

Jesus is central in the visions of the Apocalypse. As we have seen, all that he does for the salvation of the world is divinely appointed. Salvation is the mission of both the Father and the Son. But Revelation underscores the biblical truth that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10). The message of God's mission is that Jesus provides the salvation that God offers.

The Great Controversy vision illustrates that Jesus Christ is provided for the purpose of bringing salvation to God's people and providing for them his kingdom. Jesus comes to be the ruler of that kingdom, for the glory of God and the benefit of his saints (Rev 12:5, 10). This explains why the dragon tries to thwart God's plans by having the offspring killed. He “regarded the nations as his legitimate prey” (Beasley-Murray 1994:1441-1442), and fights to keep it that way. God takes the child back to his throne room and protects the church (the woman) that carries on the message of salvation as it is in Jesus. The dragon is portrayed as fighting Jesus (Michael), but it loses the war and his hold on God’s world.

Continuing on in the vision, it is significant that salvation comes only to those who are connected with Jesus (the Lamb). In Revelation 13, the whole world, it seems, worships the beast; that is, “all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the
creation of the world” (Rev 13:8). In Revelation 14, those that are on God’s side in the Great Controversy are those who have been redeemed by the Lamb, “These are those who . . . follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).

The centrality of Jesus to the mission message is dramatically illustrated in the vision of chapter 5. The scroll cannot be opened by anyone except the sacrificed lamb. Although commentators have differed on the exact explanation of the scroll, it is clear that the scroll must be opened if God’s salvation plan is to be accomplished. It is even more obvious in this vision that it would not happen without Jesus. We are told that because he is the victorious ruler of “Israel,” he is the messiah of prophecy that would set his people free forever:

No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev 5:3-5).

Just as God had been wholeheartedly worshiped by the heavenly creatures for who he is, so the Lamb, Jesus, brings forth the devotion of heaven because of the salvation that comes only from him. They sing,

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9, 10).

The Alternative without Jesus

The book of Revelation not only shows Jesus to be the source of Salvation, and thus the main message of God’s mission, but it also reveals the fate of those who are without Jesus. Salvation in Jesus is the offer of God in Revelation; the alternative is clearly outlined.

The Great Controversy vision emphasizes that the consequences of being outside the kingdom of Jesus is to share in the demise of the beast. Those
who are not in the “book of life” worship the beast (Rev 13:8). They have chosen the God of this world. They, along with the beast “will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.” They “will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name” (Rev 14:9-11).

The letters to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3) make it clear that to be without the salvation in Jesus is to be outside the kingdom and to receive the “wrath” of God. Some in Ephesus have lost their “first love” and their place among the “lampstands” in God’s sanctuary will be removed (Rev 2:4). This is symbolic of losing a place in God’s kingdom. Those who do not repent in Pergamum will come under the sword of Christ (Rev 2:16). In the other churches, those who are not following Jesus suffer similar fates.

The book of Revelation ends with the same conclusion, a person is either with Christ and saved; or he is outside of Christ and lost. There are just two groups of people, those whose names are found in the “lamb’s book of life” and those whose names are not written there. “John does not leave us with an irresponsible dream: to be outside of Christ is to be left outside of eternal life—and some are outside of Christ. This fact should impel God’s people to mission” (Hedlund 1991:265). God’s kingdom will only be for those who belong to Jesus. “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27). Those not saved in Christ will be “outside” his kingdom (Rev 22:15). In fact, those not in Christ will be destroyed. “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15).

The prophecies are not pronouncing a curse but shouting a warning. “If a minister of Christ thinks that he may gather from this . . . a commission to go to sinners rather than to sin with ‘tidings of damnation,’ he mistakes alike the Master whom he serves and the commission with which he has been entrusted” (Milligan 1903:251). The book of Revelation is urgent with its call to be separated from the beast and Babylon. The call is to “come out of her my people” (Rev 18:4) and be counted among those who are “faithful to Jesus” (Rev 14:12). This is God’s mission. If Jesus is the only source of salvation and those outside of Christ suffer the judgments pronounced in the Apocalypse, then the gospel must be heard.
The Scope of the Mission: All Peoples
(The Inclusive Kingdom of God)

Revelation portrays salvation as the need of the nations. Without salvation in Christ, the nations are headed for eternal punishment. We have already seen that those not in the “book of life” are worshipping the beast and will join in his judgment (Rev 13:8; 14:9-11). The nations who are involved with the prostitute of Babylon will be overcome by the Lamb (Rev 17:13, 14). The nations will be involved in the final battle between the Devil and Christ which will end with a consuming fire from heaven (Rev 20:8, 9).

Without Christ, the nations are under the bondage of the Devil. Revelation 13 says this is because of their allegiance to the beast. No one can oppose the powers through which the dragon works (Rev 13:4), because he is allowed authority over all of the nations (Rev 13:7). The second creature, that creates an “image of the first beast” (Rev 13:14), is said to “make” (Rev 13:12) the nations worship the beast and he deceives (Rev 13:14) them by miracles. “People follow and worship the beast because he is apparently invincible: ‘Who can make war against him?’” (Johnson 1984:190).

The Great Controversy vision reveals that God’s desire is to save people from all the nations, from every people group. His mission is not limited to a select few. The first angel in Revelation 14 reveals that God desires all people to be called to “worship him” so they will be found to be among his people at the time of the judgment. “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people” (Rev 14:6).

The second angel announces the “fall” of Babylon. If we understand that message to be to all peoples, like the first message, and if it is meant to be given for the purpose stated in a later vision, “come out of her, my people” (Rev 18:4), then it is another example of God’s desire to save all who will let him.

The Lamb’s sacrifice is said to be for all people. In their worship of the Savior, the heavenly hosts declare that Jesus “purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). The book ends with a very inclusive call to enter God’s Kingdom: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Rev 22:17). The rest of the book has made it clear that “whoever” includes all peoples.

Since the book is a book of prophecy, “what is and what is to come,” it is fitting that the book not only tells us that God’s mission is to tell everyone
about the salvation he offers in Jesus, but to also reveal that the mission will be successful. The Great Controversy passages only hints at this fact. All nations receive the invitation (Rev 14:6) to serve God. Some from the nations do not receive the “mark of the best” and the consequences because they are “written in the book of life” (Rev 13:8; cf. 14:6-12).

John saw in other visions, however, that the saved, the people of God’s kingdom will definitely include people from everywhere.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Rev 7:9, 10)

As Roger Hedlund wrote: “How fitting, then that the Bible ends with a warning (22:18-19) and an invitation: ‘Come!’ The word is repeated (22:17) in language reminiscent of the great invitation in Isaiah (55:1). And who is to come: The invitation is open to all” (1991:265).

**Conclusion**

The Apocalypse is a foundational book for Seventh-day Adventist understanding of God’s plan. It is in this book that Adventists have discovered their prophetic role in God’s salvation plan. It is this book that outlines the eschatological beliefs of the church. Looking to the book for an understanding of God’s mission does not abrogate those important contributions of this last book of the Bible, but rather enhances them. The book is a beautiful revelation of God’s character and purpose and his mission is based on those attributes. The book informs the church about God’s plans for the last days. His mission is to prepare a people for that time—a people who will be on the right side of the great conflict and a part of his kingdom. The book explains the role of his last-day church. His mission is the purpose of that remnant movement—a people who will reflect his character and bring glory to his name so people of all nations and tribes will be drawn to worship their Creator.

A study of the book of Revelation with the theme of mission in mind will also enhance the reader’s understanding of all the other themes that are contained in this book. After all, God’s whole purpose in all his revelations throughout the entire Bible and all other contacts with human beings is to fulfill his mission of saving all those who will trust in him.
Works Cited


