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Adventist Journey

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My Journey

Everything, when it comes to understanding what the Bible has taught me, when it comes to discipline, when it comes to a charitable work, when it comes to just my drive, has come from being a Pathfinder. So when you break down everything that you see in front of you, deep down I'm a kid who loves LEGOs—and I'm a kid who loves Pathfinders.

Visit nadadventist.org/ajcoreysamuels for more of Samuels' story.

COREY D. SAMUELS,
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Corey D. Samuels



Cover photo by Art Brondo

Dear Reader: The publication in your hands represents the collaborative efforts of the North American Division and *Adventist World* magazine, which follows *Adventist Journey* (after page 16). Please enjoy both magazines!

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The Church Parking Lot

World Harvest Outreach church in Houston, Texas, fills up their parking lot on a Thursday with employers, job seekers, and community leaders.

Photos provided by Adventist Community Services

Serving as an example for other churches, two Adventist churches in Texas utilize their parking lots for community service.

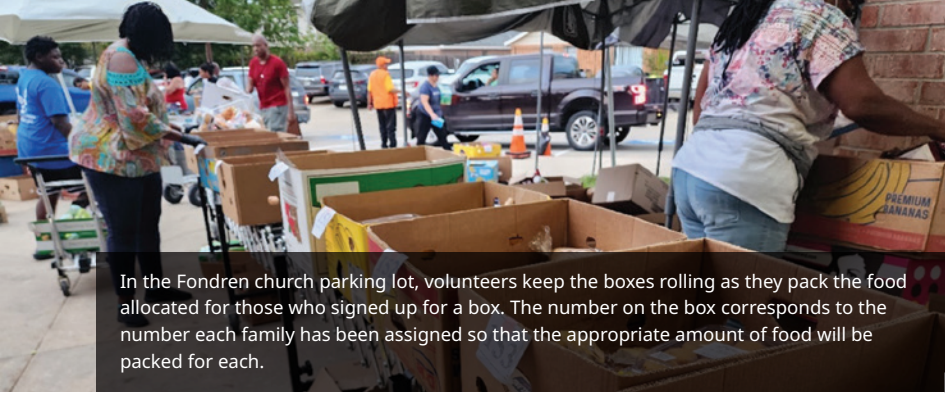
BY COLETTE NEWER

What does your church parking lot look like during the week? For many the answer is “empty,” but for two Adventist Community Services (ACS) ministries in the Houston, Texas, area, the answer is “full of cars.”

The Fondren Seventh-day Adventist Church ACS moved their food distribution into the parking lot in 2020 to abide by COVID-19 recommendations, and they haven’t moved back inside. Rain or shine, Fondren ACS volunteers distribute boxes of food to their community every Wednesday. Despite the distribution not beginning until 4:00 p.m., cars begin coming to the church by 4:00 a.m., lining up to receive a number. Volunteers pack boxes of food, including fresh produce, dry goods, proteins, and baked goods.

At a recent distribution volunteers filled car trunks and pickup beds with food for more than 180 families. After receiving their food, visitors are welcome to park their cars and walk around to look over the tables of clothing, personal care items, and household goods. Fondren ACS keeps the parking lot buzzing with activity and conversation.

Down the road, another church parking lot is packed with cars as well. World Harvest Outreach Seventh-day Adventist Church (WHO) recently hosted their fourth job fair. In partnership with Workforce Solutions, the church parking lot is filled with vehicles belonging to employers, job seekers and local leaders from



In the Fondren church parking lot, volunteers keep the boxes rolling as they pack the food allocated for those who signed up for a box. The number on the box corresponds to the number each family has been assigned so that the appropriate amount of food will be packed for each.

“We want to be the church in the community that feels the heartbeat of the community.”

ACS ministries fill the parking lot, because they reflect the love of Jesus—a love that so many are desperately seeking. These programs demonstrate His concern for their well-being. They extend His grace and mercy. Thank you to each of you who are the face of Jesus in your community.

Colette Newer is associate director for Adventist Community Services for the North American Division.



Texas Department of Criminal Justice welcomes attendees to sign up for information and interviews at the WHO church's ACS job fair.

government, and nonprofit agencies, all hoping to enrich the neighborhood through livable wages.

WHO pastor Neylon Samuels shares, “We want to be the church in the community, that feels the heartbeat of the community. The way to do that is to get beyond the four walls. By the grace of God, we have been able to find some great partnerships and been able to serve our communities together. We want to make our community a great place to work, go to school, and to worship.”

What difference has it made? At one job fair more than 200 individuals gained employment. One of those was Gloria Skeete, who found not only a job but also a church home. Skeete works for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and serves as the head deaconess for the WHO church. Now when she attends the church’s job fairs, it is with her work colleagues to recruit more employees. “God is good, and He continues to bless me, and I know today we will bless other persons and get them a job,” shares Skeete.

Parking Lot Ministry Tips

How can you get involved in your community and fill up the church parking lot? Here are three tips from the leaders of these two ACS ministries:

Collaborate with other organizations. This lessens the load of planning and organizing, and connects you to additional resources. You don’t have to do

everything yourself to share God’s love to the community.

Keep track of what happened, so that you know how effective it was. This might include counting how many people helped, and how many people were served. Remember to also track the effect of the ministry. Depending on the program, this may include: “How many job placements were made?” Or: “How many students earned their GED?” These add insight, not only into the amount of activities you are doing, but into the difference you are making.

Know the next steps you want to take to grow the ministry. Too often our lack of vision blinds us to the opportunities God brings our way. We don’t recognize that the resources are within our grasp, because we don’t know what we’re looking for and cannot communicate it to others.

Getting Noticed

Will people notice if you do this? Absolutely! Not only will they notice, but they will share the good news with others. Councilmember Carolyn Evans-Shabazz (Houston District D representative) was on hand at the job fair to encourage job seekers. Says Evans-Shabazz: “World Harvest is one of our destination churches. The Holy Spirit is in the house. We have willing workers at this church who are helping people to change the quality of their lives.”

She continues: “And they are not just here today. They have done many activities, food drives . . . you name it. Anything that has touched this community, this church has been a part of it.”

NURTURING THE ROOTS

NAD President G. Alexander Bryant Conducts Three-Week Series in Springfield, Missouri, to Help Revitalize First Church He Pastored.

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA

It's not every day that the leader of the North American headquarters of an international religious organization returns to the city where his ministry began years ago to conduct a three-week evangelistic series. But from August 27 to September 16, 2023, in Springfield, Missouri, G. Alexander Bryant, president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD), did just that. Between 60 and 75 people attended the series each night—at least 25 percent of them community guests. At the end, 21 members joined the Providence Seventh-day Adventist Church, 18 by baptism and three by profession of faith—the same church Bryant helped revive 41 years ago in the early 1980s.


Set in a Holiday Inn, the “Hope for Today” series offered what attendees described as simple yet profound teachings, stirring music, and a sense of belonging. Kim Coder, from Springfield Seventh-day Adventist Church, stated, “[The series] has been inspiring. It's renewed my faith.”

Hope for Today was full of surprises, including the night a dog led his owner to the meeting. Still, community guests were amazed when Roger Bernard, president of the hosting Central States Conference, revealed the identity of the series' humble preacher as he welcomed new members to the global church. “Can anyone guess who our North American Division president is?” he asked. The room erupted in laughter and applause as Bryant's picture appeared.

Bryant later shared that he makes time for an annual series because “Matthew 28:18-20 calls everyone who takes on the name of Jesus to make disciples. Evangelism is the heartbeat of who we are and what we're about.”

Sharing Hope and Wholeness in Springfield

Throughout Hope for Today, Bryant's messages emphasized God's love as an anchor amid chaos. In the first two weeks he



THE CROSS

her attend alone so that “the Holy Spirit could do its work.” Carrie continued attending faithfully, bringing friends with her each night. That Sabbath a radiant Carrie and two friends were baptized, with James unexpectedly joining the church by profession of faith.

In another poignant moment, Bryant baptized eight relatives, including his oldest sister, Brenda, one of her daughters, two of her granddaughters, one great-granddaughter, two nieces and one nephew. Brenda, a member for 35 years, got rebaptized as an example for her family. A thrilled Bryant stated, “There's always joy when you see a soul getting baptized, but there's a special joy when you see your family come to the Lord.”

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

Several individuals contributed to the series' success, including Seminars Unlimited, which mailed Bible study cards to local homes, yielding more than 100 interests. “God has blessed this outreach. This is a lot of Bible study interests for this church family,” noted Ella Johnson, who runs Seminars Unlimited with her husband, Carl.

Pastor and Bible worker Roosevelt Williams, who assisted at Bryant's 2022 “Impact Columbus—Sharing Hope Revival,” initiated



G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president, conducts a three-week evangelistic series in late summer 2023, in Springfield, Missouri, intended to benefit the first church where he pastored 41 years ago.

Throughout Hope for Today, Bryant's messages emphasized God's love as an anchor amid chaos.

follow-up with interests for three weeks before the 2023 series. He was then joined by six Bible workers, who answered Bible questions, prayed with interests, and befriended them. The relational aspect was critical, as Williams emphasized, "Friends follow friends."

The tight-knit group included Janet Barnhill, who also worked with Bryant in Columbus. "It's amazing that since COVID-19 the doors [have been] open for us to be invited in. It's an open-door community," she said.

New team member Jordan McCoy, 16, said, "I've always liked working for Jesus; going door to door has been my favorite thing to do here."

On the final day, Bryant thanked the Bible workers, the NAD audiovisual production team (headed by Nick Wolfer), Central States Conference leaders, and Providence and Springfield church members.* His most heartfelt thanks went to his wife, Desiree, an NAD Ministerial Association associate director, who served as a Bible worker and wore several other hats on a smaller-than-usual team. "Des became everything I needed in this meeting. I thank the Lord for her," said Bryant.

All Photography by Christelle Agboka

covered Seventh-day Adventist fundamentals, including salvation through faith, Jesus as Savior and Lord, the state of the dead, and baptism. In week three Bryant introduced the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In a message titled "Why Are There So Many Denominations?" he unpacked church history from the book of Acts to the present.

Bryant noted that Seventh-day Adventists integrated teachings from Lutherans (justification by faith), Methodists (holy living), and other Protestant denominations while embracing the Second Coming and the seventh-day Sabbath as "new light." He concluded that, while not perfect, the Seventh-day Adventist Church "imitates most closely the church Jesus established through His apostles in the book of Acts."

(Re)Commitment

The baptism held later at the hotel's swimming pool represented a fresh start for Providence. Among the new members was Carrie Wolf, whose husband, James, introduced her to the series after hearing about it from his employer, a Springfield church member. He'd long embraced the Sabbath truth and had been trying to share it with his wife of five years. After the first night, he had



"There's always joy when you see a soul getting baptized, but there's a special joy when you see your family come to the Lord," said NAD president G. Alexander Bryant, as he baptized several family members, including sister Brenda (pictured beside him) at the end of his Hope for Today evangelistic series.

Diverse Groups Unite in Ministry and Mission

Notably, while Providence church was founded as an African American congregation, attendees, including Springfield church members and interests from the predominantly Caucasian community, were diverse. This multicultural aspect was evident in everything from the music and messages to the volunteers and new members. "This is the most multicultural meeting I've ever conducted," said Bryant, observing that attendees appreciated the diverse worship setting.

Hope for Today also set a precedent for the regional and state conference churches to serve Springfield together. Before breaking his collarbone in a biking accident, Springfield church's Pastor Abel Hagan was Bryant's "right-hand man." Members followed suit, enthusiastically assisting with greeting, music, ushering, registration, pre-baptism preparations, and more.

Hagan stated, "I pray yearly on behalf of our local church and community for God to open the right doors, that we'd follow His plans and work together to accomplish His goals. [This series] was an answer to prayer."

His wife, Tammie, added, "We want to do whatever we can to work together."

Reigniting the Fire at Providence Church

In 1982 Bryant, a recent Oakwood College (now university) graduate, arrived at the Providence Seventh-day Adventist Church to revive the small, one-room church built in the 1960s and closed a few years later as membership faltered. He grew the congregation from zero to 50 in



Several attendees, including James Wolf (standing), responded to altar calls throughout G. Alexander Bryant's three-week Hope for Today evangelistic series in Springfield, Missouri.

10 months by holding public evangelistic series and training members in personal outreach.

Before the meeting, Providence had 10 members on the books, with four attending regularly. There were no deacons, no elders, and, until recently, no pastor; they had not had a pastor for several years. Thus, they would gather weekly to study the Sabbath School lesson, sing, share testimonies, and pray, with Brenda Bryant leading. Despite their limited numbers, said Brenda, "The Lord has sustained us."

Four years ago Bernard invited Bryant to come back to help Providence. Bryant accepted, remembering the "very active and vibrant" church he'd left in 1983. "I was disheartened that it had gone down, [so] having an opportunity to try to put some fire and life into it was appealing to me," he stated.

Of the many series Bryant has conducted since leaving congregational ministry, Providence is the smallest host church. Thus, he kept the music and audiovisuals focused on what Providence could provide—the hospitality and warmth of its members and the undiluted gospel.

To keep the momentum from Hope for Today going, Bryant engaged Williams to remain in Springfield for a few months. Starting on September 17, Williams began an evangelistic series every Sunday and Wednesday at Providence church, helping teach and nurture new members.

The Best Is Yet to Come

During the concluding Saturday night concert at Providence church, new members received their baptismal and profession of faith certificates, signifying their transition into church life. Bernard then installed Quentin Everett, a 2012 Oakwood graduate from inner city St. Louis, Missouri, as the church's new pastor. In his commitment Everett vowed to prepare the congregation to meet Jesus, and they promised to follow him as he followed Christ.

Bryant, Bernard, and the other Central States Conference officers, Cryston Josiah, vice president of administration, and Kelley J. Paris, vice president of finance, then laid hands on Everett. Bryant prayed for divine wisdom and strength for the young pastor and for the congregation to embrace him, that "together they might be a mighty, mighty force in the community."

In response, Everett affirmed the genuine warmth he'd already observed among the small congregation, and promised to "love [them] authentically." Then, smiling broadly, he concluded, "Providence, the best is yet to come!"

Christelle Agboka is news writer/news producer for the North American Division Office of Communication.

*Springfield church is part of the Iowa-Missouri Conference.

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NAD NEWS BRIEFS



From August 28 to 31, 2023, more than 100 Hispanic coordinators and leaders gathered at the NAD headquarters in Columbia, Maryland, for the annual NAD Hispanic advisory meeting. *Glendon Hines, NAD*

Inspiring Ministry and Strengthening Faith at the NAD's 2023 Hispanic Advisory

At the North American Division's (NAD) 2023 Hispanic Advisory Meeting, from August 28 to 31, the NAD headquarters came alive with singing, devotionals, prayer sessions, ministry reports, and presentations from Spanish media ministries Esperanza TV and *El Centinela*. The event concluded with a day trip to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, as a team-building activity.

The annual gathering aimed to unite more than 100 Hispanic coordinators and leaders across the NAD, affirm them as they shared regional ministry efforts, and help them strategize new ways to reach their Hispanic communities.

The advisory's theme was "Multiply Hope," emphasizing evangelism and outreach. Multiply Hope is a seven-phase program focusing on every stage of a person's discipleship journey, including preparation, sowing, growth, harvesting, equipping, planting, and revitalizing.

In his opening devotional, Minervino Labrador, Jr., the event organizer and NAD vice president for multilingual ministries, encouraged participants to strengthen their connection with God. Labrador distinguished between "rhema," a spoken message from God, and "logos," the Bible — noting that both are necessary for the Christian walk. He asserted, "When we come to the Lord, reading the book is one thing. It's quite another to sit personally with the book's author."

Later, Ricardo Betancur, *El Centinela* editor, shared insights from his book *The Word Became Flesh*, which focuses on seven revelations about Incarnation and the promise of John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Jesus is the light enabling us to transcend life's challenges as we traverse an

upward path to heaven. Betancur concluded that to receive Christ's presence in our lives, we must clean "the basement of our house," i.e., the darkness within, and worship God in spirit and truth.

Betancur spoke with an unmistakable passion, later reflecting, "I felt the Holy Spirit in a special way in this advisory because God is calling us. He's calling right now because Jesus is coming soon."

Each day union-level vice presidents for multilingual or Hispanic ministries and conference Hispanic Ministries coordinators shared ministry initiatives, tithing gains, and church growth among the Hispanic congregations within the NAD's nine unions. They represented the roughly 260,000 Hispanic church members who form nearly a quarter of the NAD's total membership.

—Christelle Agboka, NAD Office of Communication

North American Division Works With Educators, Professional Programmers, and Designers to Create New Student Information System

The North American Division (NAD) has been working with a dedicated group of Adventist educators, professional programmers, and designers to create a cutting-edge student information system that will specifically meet the needs of Adventist educators.

The system, called AE-Connect, includes an enrollment/registration module, a standards-based assessment module, scheduling and messaging capabilities, and options to connect with NAD financial management systems, such as the Student Treasury system and Adventist Accounting Software International.

“AE-Connect is truly a product developed with input from us. It will allow us to input student information on a product that is ours and fits our needs,” says Rachel Jameson, a teacher and the principal of a one-room school, Edenville Seventh-day Elementary School, in Michigan.

With the development of this product, teachers will no longer need to rely on systems designed for public schools. This platform will integrate with other platforms such as eAdventist, eCertification, Accreditrac, Encounter, Cobblestones, and others to streamline the data entry process, said Martha Ban, director of technology for education at the NAD.

After a number of years of research and development, AE-Connect was introduced at the North American Division 2023 Educators’ Convention in August in Phoenix, Arizona. During the convention, educators from small and larger Adventist schools met with the Guildhouse Group, led by Matthew McVane. McVane’s company has been managing Adventist Education Dashboard and Data Rollup, and will now be the administrators of AE-Connect.

For this 2023-2024 school year, around 110 small schools started using the system, representing eight unions, 29 conferences, and one mission. For the upcoming 2024-2025 school year, larger schools and academies in the NAD will begin to use it as well.

“We are excited about being able to offer this software, knowing that it was built utilizing expertise from our practitioners and that we are honoring our core values,” said Arne Nielsen, NAD vice president for education.

“AE-Connect is an investment in Adventist education,” added Judy Glass, NAD treasurer. “It provides our students, parents, and educators with technology that is intuitive and meets the unique needs of our schools.”

—Lisa M. Krueger, freelance writer

Christian Record Services Expands Offices With Opening of Braille Production Suite

Christian Record Services, Inc. (CRS), is pleased to announce the opening of its new office space dedicated to the production of braille resources. This expansion marks a significant commitment to serving the worldwide visually impaired community and enhancing access to braille literature for all.

CRS celebrated a soft opening during a ribbon-cutting ceremony, held after a recent board of directors meeting. Board members had the opportunity to tour the new expansion and G. Alexander Bryant, board chair and president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, had the honor of cutting the ribbon.

“We are so grateful to God for the new expansion project at Christian Record Services and for the exponential impact it would make for spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ,” said Bryant.

Earlier this year CRS received \$597,000 from the General Conference to increase its braille production capacity. While the ministry already had capacity to fulfill member requests from within the United States and its territories, more requests are coming to expand production capacity worldwide.

“We were incredibly grateful to be the recipient of these funds and are excited about the opportunity to expand our production,” said Diane Thurber, president of CRS. “With this expansion we will contribute to braille literacy and address the book famine that currently exists, with less than 10 percent



of published works available in accessible formats in developed countries and less than 1 percent in undeveloped countries.”

The new office space is equipped with technology designed to streamline the braille production process. With the new production space open and operating, CRS is poised to embark on a new chapter of service and impact. The organization hopes this expansion not only will meet many of the immediate needs of the visually impaired community but also inspire other institutions to prioritize accessibility in their outreach efforts.

—Christian Record Services

↑ During the ribbon cutting, Christian Record Services president Diane Thurber (center) celebrates with other special guests from CRS and the North American Division the opening of its new office space dedicated to the production of braille resources.



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BY WASHINGTON JOHNSON II

The Blessings of a Delay

James Edson White, the son of Adventist pioneers James and Ellen White, is credited with taking the gospel to African Americans in the southern United States—after having departed from the Adventist faith for approximately 30 years. Thankfully, the fervent prayers and countless letters from his mother resulted in his return to the Lord. He later read a life-altering pamphlet written by his mother entitled “Our Duty to the Colored People,” an appeal “made to denominational leaders in a meeting in the Battle Creek Tabernacle on March 21, 1891” to share the good news of the gospel with African Americans in the Southern region of the U.S.¹

What may have seemed like a delayed answer to Ellen White’s prayers over the years that Edson was absent from the faith turned out to be God’s perfect timing for the gospel to be shared with former slaves and their children. White, along with longtime friend William O. Palmer, designed a paddlewheel steamboat named the *Morning Star*, which headed down the Mississippi River to function as an education center for teaching former slaves and their children basic skills, i.e., reading and writing, of which they had been previously deprived. Knowing how to read and write would also prove to be an inroad to having the ability to bring hope and wholeness to the lives of persons who had been deprived of knowing the liberating power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

En route to Vicksburg, Mississippi, White was unexpectedly but divinely delayed in Memphis, Tennessee. The *Morning Star* had failed a federal government steamship inspection and was subsequently fined. The delay lasted several months, and initially the *Morning Star* crew was discouraged, but God had a purpose! While in Memphis, the crew sold present truth literature that inspired many locals. Edson also formed a friendship with an African American minister, A. H. Freeman, and began studying the Bible with him. Freeman subsequently decided to become an Adventist.²

The blessings did not stop there. In the fall of 1894 the first African American Seventh-day Adventist church was established in Memphis as the Mississippi Boulevard Seventh-day Adventist Church, which later became the Alcy Road and Longview Heights Seventh-day Adventist churches, respectively. After Edson’s work was completed, the initial fine was dismissed, and the *Morning Star* was once again under way.

Almost 75 years later, in the summer of 1969, Calvin B. Rock, who then served as associate ministerial director for the Southern Union Conference, held a successful tent evangelistic meeting in South Memphis under the leadership of the late pastor Jackson Doggette, Sr. Rock would later go on to become the president of Oakwood College, now Oakwood University, and a vice president of the General Conference. According to Rock, the meeting took place during a time when “there was peak tension in the city of Memphis” because of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., approximately one year prior. The Holy Spirit was undeniably guiding their efforts, with more than 200 converts being baptized in the meeting.

Remarkably, 100 of those baptized came from the efforts of my late mother, Bible worker extraordinaire Mildred P. Johnson. A college student at the time, Barry C. Black, the sixty-second chaplain of the U.S. Senate and former chief of chaplains of the United States Navy Chaplain Corps, also worked diligently in this meeting.

Satan’s plot had completely failed, and God’s plan had prevailed! The blessings of Edson White’s work continue almost 130 years later, with every African American Seventh-day Adventist Church in western Tennessee being able to trace its roots back to the Mississippi Boulevard church, including the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jackson, Tennessee, where it was my distinct honor to serve as pastor.

The delays experienced by Edson White proved to be part of God’s providential plan for the spreading of the gospel message.

¹ Historical reference from Ronald D. Graybill, *Mission to Black America* (2013), <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Books/MTBA1971.pdf>.

² *Ibid.*

What seemed like a delayed answer to prayer turned out to be God’s perfect timing.

Washington Johnson II is director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries for the North American Division.



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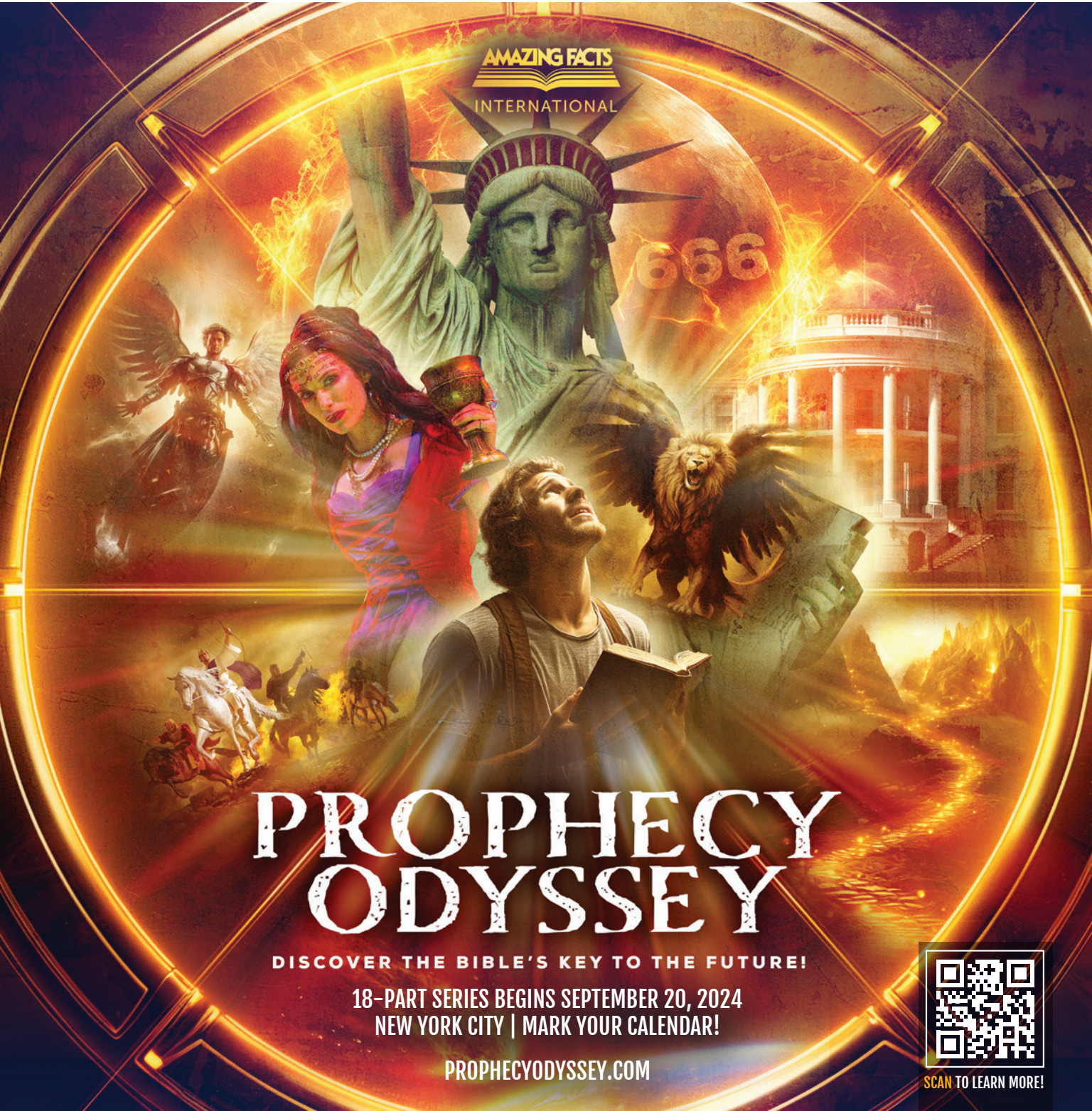
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