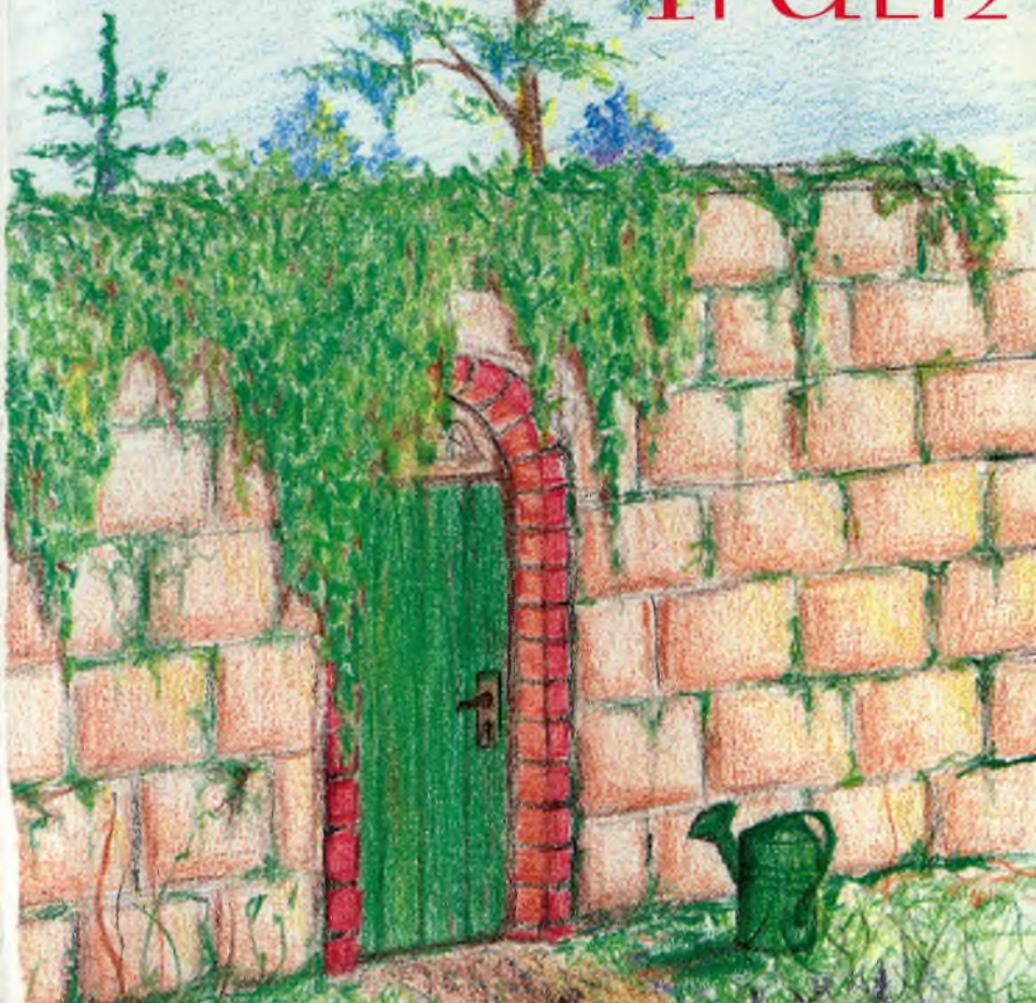


JANUARY-MARCH 1999

CQ

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

God's
Breath
of
Truth





Julie Z. Lee: Senior English & psychology major and a writing intern for a public relations office

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JANUARY - MARCH 1999

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Welcome to *CQ*'s World!

The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ*'s writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School lesson quarterly, more than three hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about fifty-nine thousand. It is published in the English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Finnish languages.

Ever think about writing a Sabbath School Quarterly?

Why not! Each year 300 young adults from around the world participate in the *Collegiate Quarterly* writing program. CQ gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our CQ formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed, contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson—and get paid for it—write us today:

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CQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

This Quarter's Illustrator



The illustrator for this quarter is Sarah Johansen, who was born in Denmark, the eldest of four children. Sarah grew up in Sweden and then moved to Lillehammer, Norway. Presently a student at Tyrifjord Videregående Skole in Røyse, Norway, she enjoys painting, singing, and basketball.

Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

Facts You Should Know

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult quarterly find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics as the adult quarterly, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist young-adult groups work together in producing this quarterly. More than three hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about fifty-nine thousand.

Pointers for Study

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" (Monday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.
3. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.
4. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:
 - "Introduction" (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "Logos" (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.
 - "Testimony" (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "Evidence" (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "How-To" (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "Opinion" (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

CQ and the Church

CQ is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.*

THE GOODNESS FACTOR



“The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’” (Exod. 34:6, RSV).

Is God Good?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Exod. 34:6

The room was dark. I heard a tiny electronic beep. I could hear my father breathing. He was about to die. He was unconscious, and I did not know what to say. I kissed his cheek and walked out of the room.

I stood watching as they lowered the pine box into the ground. My throat was so tight it ached, but I would not cry. I was trying to be brave.

Of course God has a plan. There had to be a reason that my father died. I tried to console myself with these thoughts, as many Christians do.

Though I comforted myself with these thoughts as long as I could, however, my shock turned to anger and confusion. This was the beginning of my resentment against God, but I repressed it. I felt guilty for being angry. I could not face God with all my anger and hurt, so I walked away.

When I walked away from God, I walked away from my only source of happiness, and I withdrew my trust from Him. I did not believe anymore that God was good.

My self-directed quest for peace lasted 10 years. As I lay in the dark of my room filled with smoke from my cigarette, depression swallowed me up. My

There is a misconception that when you have God in your life everything is roses.

roommates were worried about me. I was worried too, because I was contemplating suicide. For the first time in years, I prayed. God heard me as He always does. He sent Christians to witness to me and to show me the way to the happiness I was searching for. I needed Jesus.

When I met Jesus, I realized just how good God is. He proved His selflessness at Calvary by dying on the cross to save me.

There is a misconception that when you have God in your life everything is roses. This idealistic thinking has led many people to falter at times when their faith was being tested. Christianity is not a lifestyle. Christianity is a relationship.

Don't mistake the empathy of the Creator of the universe as a cliché. He has proven Himself to be merciful, gracious, longsuffering, and full of goodness and truth. He can be trusted with your heart. He will never forsake you.

Have you ever been afraid to come to God with your anger? Ever been afraid it would turn Him away? Trust Him with all your heart. He has proven His love for this brave daughter. He has not left me orphaned. Who knows? Maybe I will see my dad again, but no matter what, God is good—all the time.

By Patricia J. McCue, a theology and English major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Remember—God's Everlasting Love!

LOGOS

Ps. 77:1-13; 107:1-8; Jer. 31:3; 1 Chron. 16:8-12

God is good—not necessarily self-evident in these days full of hate, mistrust, mayhem, and both manmade and act-of-God holocausts. So, how are we to relate to God's self-revelation that He "is good, his love is eternal"?

God's goodness is at the heart of His Written Word and the Living Word—Jesus Christ. In this week's lesson we will focus on our Old Testament passages that trumpet this ancient theme.

Hymn for Sleepless Nights (Ps. 77:1-13)

As ancient as other psalms of Asaph and as contemporary as our last sleepless night, that's Psalm 77. Verses 7-9 imply that God's goodness is questioned, no longer backed up by deeds. Ever felt that way? Welcome to the Old Testament's reality check on God's goodness. Verse 11 turns about by breaking into a hymn to God's mighty deeds—a hymn of meditation meant to overcome our nighttime of doubt and despair.

"Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary" (Ps. 17:13). This is clearly a possible translation and is favored by some Adventist scholars for obvious reasons: It once

Welcome to the Old Testament's reality check on God's goodness.

again points to our heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ. Only this perspective enables the psalmist to make sense of his world. Only as we maintain this heavenly-sanctuary perspective can we make sense of life in these last days. God in the sanctuary recalls for the psalmist much less of God's goodness than the same thought for us with our New Testament gospel perspective.

When in Doubt, Give Praise (Ps. 107:1-8)

This assertion is not merely proclaimed but demonstrated by tangible, memorable acts. This poem is a rehearsal of thanksgiving, probably used as an antiphonal praise song. References to the desert always evoked memories of 40 years of wilderness wanderings and miracles of God's sustaining power.

"This psalm is not an exercise in speculative theology, and therefore we cannot censure the author on the ground that he shows no awareness of all the facets of the age-long problem of evil. We may assume that the psalmist was sufficiently familiar with life to realize that circumstances do not always work out, even for the saints, in a happy way. On the other hand, he also knew that many could testify to the Lord's goodness. Their testimony had to do with the facts of their own experience, and it is these facts that are celebrated in the psalm."

The psalmist confronts this problem of evil by praising God's eternal goodness—God's acts of rescuing Israel. There is lots of good news here: Do you need to be rescued from your enemies (verse 2)? Are you in captivity in some foreign country (verse 3)? Are you lost in a trackless desert (verse 4)? Are you hungry,

thirsty, and without hope (verse 5)? The example of early believers is ours: Call on God, and He will save, He will lead—His constant love will help us survive.

Walk the Walk—Not Just Talk the Talk (Jer. 31:3)

Again God proclaims through His prophet that just as He has always loved Israel, “so I continued to show . . . my constant love” (TEV). Proclaiming love and *showing* it is part and parcel of God’s love. Alone, *words* of love would be an imperfect, incomplete, counterfeit love.

Similarly, love is not godly unless it is constant, everlasting. Once God begins to love, His love is everlasting; i.e., not fickle, temporary, transitory, unpredictable.

The context here is Jeremiah’s rising questions as to whether Israel’s return from exile is literal. God’s first answering word is this reference to His everlasting love. Similarly, the questions occur to every believer in the Second Advent: “Is there some word about Christ’s literal return to take His people home?” “Is there any word about the end of our exile and captivity?” Jeremiah refers us to God’s constant, faithful love.

Moving Day Praise (1 Chron. 16:8-12)

Context check: This praise psalm was sung as part of King David’s celebration of moving the ark of the covenant to its newly prepared tent home in Jerusalem. This was a time of movement and transition, a time to apply old principles to new situations in new ways.

An earlier attempt to move the ark was aborted when Uzzah died trying to steady the ark. David later learned by studying scriptural documents that only the Levites were to move the ark. So here we have a song of praise and celebration, sung following God’s Written Word that led to great success for King David and all of Israel. The message was this: Following God’s Word leads us to know God as great, helpful, and faithful to His Word. He does wonderful things as He honors His love for us.

REACT

1. How can I use the sleepless perspective of Psalm 77:1-13?
2. In what ways does Psalm 107:1-8 touch my life? In what ways does the problem of evil sidetrack me?
3. How can we reflect the literal aspect of God’s faithful loving actions—to our friends, neighbors, work associates, families?
4. In what ways do we need to apply old principles to new situations—in new ways?

**The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4, p. 572.

Goodness in God's Character

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 107:8

The Cross is the ultimate manifestation of God's goodness. Through it He has redeemed a world that has hated and derided Him. "Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. The greater the sinner's guilt, the more he needs the Saviour. His heart of divine love and sympathy is drawn out most of all for the one who is the most hopelessly entangled in the snares of the enemy. With His own blood He has signed the emancipation papers of the race."¹

Christ's goodness was revealed in His character, and it is to be a living example to all. "He is our example, not only in His spotless purity, but in His patience, gentleness, and winsomeness of disposition. . . . He had ever a kind look and a word of comfort for the needy and the oppressed. His presence brought a purer atmosphere into the home. His life was as leaven working amid the elements of society. Pure and undefiled, He walked among the thoughtless, the rude, the uncourteous; among unjust publicans, unrighteous Samaritans, heathen soldiers, rough peasants, and the mixed multitude."²

"Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may

“Jesus . . . exercised no powers that men may not have through faith in Him.”

possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was."³ This gives us hope in knowing that the goodness and example demonstrated by Jesus while here on earth are not something out of our reach.

"All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us."⁴

If we conform to the will of God and lead a life as He did, we will in turn learn to hate sin. Our words, thoughts, and actions will reflect the goodness of Christ, which is essentially His character.

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 89, 90.

2. *Gospel Workers*, p. 121.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 664.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 668.

By Daina Horner, an elementary education major and literature evangelist, Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

God Is Good!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Jer. 31:3

The greatest evidence of God's goodness is His Son, Jesus. His goodness is manifest through Christ, revealed to humankind at its lowest point. However, what is being good? Is being good helping an old lady across the street or opening the door for someone else? The type of goodness we are discussing surpasses all human understanding. It is a goodness that has captivated the minds of many, been exposed to countless millions, but sadly enough, reached the hearts of very few.

Once I was interested in inviting someone to a school banquet. She seemed to be beautiful inside and out. Word got around that I was interested in escorting her to the banquet. She broke out in hysterical laughter at the thought that I was even thinking of attempting such a feat. You can imagine how terrible I felt. We often do the same thing to Christ. He comes pleading for us to tap into His goodness. Unfortunately, most of the time we reject Him, breaking His heart repeatedly.

One of the reasons that we refuse His goodness is that we have never experienced it before. To appreciate goodness, one must be able to receive it.

Jesus never saw Himself as good but rather set the example for us by stating, "None is good, save one, that is God" (Luke 18:18, 19). God continually gives us

Is being good helping an old lady across the street?

the opportunity to realize how much He loves us. When we have sunk to the depths of despair, it is then—and only then—that we realize we have rejected Him. Yet God never gives up on us, even though we may give up on Him. Like sweet music to the ear, He continually bids us saying, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness will I draw thee" (Jer. 31:3).

Even when we are at our lowest, God's lovingkindness reaches out and draws us from the depths of iniquity. The songwriter elucidated it accurately when he penned:

I was sinking deep in sin,
 Far from the peaceful shore,
 Very deeply stained within,
 Sinking to rise no more;
 But the Master of the sea
 Heard my despairing cry,
 From the water lifted me,
 Now safe am I.
 Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
 When nothing else could help,
 Love lifted me.

By Fred Nichols, a junior theology student at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

A Trite Expression?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 77:1-13

“God is good!” How many times have you heard someone say that? How many times have you said it yourself? Of the times you have said this, how many times have you actually meant it? Are the numbers a little different?

Now don't get me wrong. I *know* God is good. (If He weren't good, He wouldn't have provided the time for me to write this just before the deadline.) But, even though I *know* He is good and I *know* that His goodness never falters, sometimes it still feels like a cliché when I shake hands in church and say, “Yes, brother, *God is good!*” When you're running late to church, your hair is a mess, and you still have spaghetti sauce from last week's potluck on your tie, it is hard to put a lot of enthusiasm into that handshake. I am talking about *knowing* that God is good but somehow feeling as though you missed the goodness boat for the day. I am talking about *knowing* God is good but wondering why you don't *feel* that God is good. I am talking about the human Goodness Factor.

We humans can be very logical. (The Bible says God is good. The sun is shining. I am alive. Therefore God is good.) But, we can also be very emotional. (I have spaghetti sauce on my tie.) I like to call this intrusion of emotion on our logic

When your hair is a mess, it is hard to put a lot of enthusiasm into that handshake.

the Goodness Factor. Imagine a scale from one to ten, with ten being the highest. Where on the scale is your interpretation of God's goodness *today*? Remember that this scale is just to rate human feelings and interpretation. We know that God's goodness is always a ten. But back to the scale. Where is your goodness factor today?

Really high? Great! Have a nice day!

Kind of low? Here are some suggestions on how to improve your goodness factor.

1. Sing. Singing songs is a great way to praise and glorify God. If your goodness factor is a little low, pick songs that talk about His goodness and sing them as loud as you can. You'd be surprised how quickly you can convince yourself.

2. Think. Take some time in the day to pause and think on God's goodness. Consider the flower growing outside your window, the colleague who recently had her baby, the part in the school play that your best friend just got, the special music you have just heard in church. God's goodness is everywhere. Take some time to dwell on it.

3. Pray. This is my favorite. Simply say to God, “Lord, thank You for being good.” After all, He is.

By Adam M. Lombard, a freshman at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Can Man Be Good?

OPINION

Key Text: Jer. 31:3

Since I was a child, I was taught to control my actions to become a good person. Once I became a Christian, I applied these lessons to my life in order to do good like Jesus. However, I was ignorant that “there is no one good, not even one” (Rom. 3:12) and “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one” (Job 14:4). In trying what was against my (sinful) nature, I became frustrated to the point of leaving the church because I couldn’t be good like Jesus.

God, in His love, took time out to help me understand that I couldn’t be good, for there “is only One that is good” (Matt. 19:17), and there is no way for one who is sinful in nature to do good works. It is like a bad tree producing good fruit—impossible! For the bad tree to produce good fruit, it needs to be recreated or “reborn.” And for it to be reborn, it would need an outside source. For humanity, this source is Jesus. John 15:5 says, “I am the Vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” We Christians have a false conception that once we accept the gift of salvation we must do good works to be perfect, like our Father. Are we like the Galatians? “After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Gal. 3:3, NIV).

As Christians “we are God’s workmanship.”

What does fruit symbolize in Scripture? “But the fruit of the Spirit is love . . . goodness” (Gal. 5:22). Fruit symbolizes works, so if someone remains in Christ and Christ in him, the person will bear much good works. Yet how do we remain in Christ and Christ in us? “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13). When we accept Christ into our lives by faith, then He abides in us and we in Him. Then automatically we’ll produce good works. “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing” (John 14:12).

As Christians “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). Let us not worry about doing good works. When Christ is in our hearts, we are moved to do good works. God is good and let us praise Him for it!

By Emmanuel Ortiz, a junior English student at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

MYSTERY AND MAJESTY



“This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3, NIV).

Why Mystery?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Job 40:1, 2

In Dostoevsky's *The Adolescent*,* a renegade youth named Arkady tells of the time he asked his 70-year-old stepfather the meaning of "fulfilling one's mysterious destiny."

"What's mystery? Everything is mystery, my boy, everything is God's mystery. There's mystery in every tree, in every blade of grass. When a little bird sings or all those many, many stars shine in the sky at night—it's all mystery, the same one. But the greatest mystery is what awaits man's soul in the world beyond, and that's the truth, my boy."

"I don't quite see what you mean. Believe me, I'm not trying to tease you and I assure you, I do believe in God. But all these mysteries you're talking about have been solved by human intelligence long ago, and whatever hasn't yet been completely solved will be, and perhaps very soon. Take for instance a microscope and look at a drop of water through it. You'll see a whole new world full of living creatures. That was a mystery once, but science has now explained it."

"I know a man of great wisdom who is now living in the Genadieva Desert, a man of noble birth who was rich and was also a lieutenant colonel in the cavalry."

"I'll show you something very strange, something that you've never seen before."

Last summer I found myself in that desert—God just willed it that way—and I saw it standing there, that thing, the microscope. He had ordered it from abroad and paid a lot of money for it. 'Wait, old man,' he said to me, 'I'll show you something very strange, something that you've never seen before. Here, see this drop of water that looks as pure as a tear? All right then, look at it now and you'll see that scientists will soon explain all the mysteries of God without leaving a single one to you and me.' I didn't tell this man that I'd already glimpsed into this wonder 35 years before, because I saw how much he was enjoying showing it to me and, indeed, I started marveling out loud and pretending to be horrified. He gave me time to recover and then asked: 'Well, what do you say to that, old man?' And I bowed down and answered him: 'The Lord said let there be light and there was light.' To that he answered: 'And shouldn't there be darkness too?' . . .

"It's so good to be alive, my dear boy! If there is mystery in the world, it only makes it even better; it fills the heart with awe and wonder, and it gladdens the heart. Do not repine, boy, mystery makes it even more beautiful," he added with tender fervor.

*Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971) [Adapted from a translation by Andrew R. MacAndrew].

By Tom Gammon, a magabook district leader in the Washington Conference, Bothell.

To Find God

LOGOS

2 Kings 22; Ps. 107:31-43; John 14:8-11; 16:8-14; 17:1-5; Rom. 1:17-23; Col. 1:12-20

Many belief systems have a place for an omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent god, with ceremonies and doctrines that reflect the characteristics assigned to that god. Sometimes worship rites involve appeasing an angry god. In other belief systems, gods are less centralized, and worship rites involve communal searching for the divine. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we have chosen to believe in a literal, personal God who is interested in our individual actions. However, in order to claim our faith personally, we each need to find a picture of God that relates to our uniquely individual spiritual needs. Consequently, we each must compose an image of God that will help us construct our belief system. Yet, we are not left without direction in constructing a picture of God for our lives. There are clues all around us that lead us to a fuller understanding of what God is like.

Salvation Reveals God's Character (Rom. 1:17, 18; Col. 1:12, 13; John 17:1-3)

My closest friends are the ones with whom I have created the kind of intimacy that comes from sharing experiences. We share our experiences by spending time together and by telling one another stories of significant events in our lives. These shared experiences become touchstones for helping me understand my friends

We are not left without direction in constructing a picture of God for our lives.

better. The story of salvation is a similar touchstone for understanding God better. This story is important because its occurrence made it possible for us to be friends in the first place and because it reveals God's character to us.

Paul tells us that God's character is most clearly seen in the plan to save the lost world from eternal death (Rom. 1:16).¹ We see infinite love and unblemished righteousness in the sacrifice at Calvary. God's righteousness is revealed through the plan to save us: The Creator was the only Being who could pay the price to free us from eternal death. The gift of eternal life is a manifestation of God's power, love, and compassion. While pondering the mysteries of salvation and the ultimate sacrifice at Calvary, we can gain a clearer picture of the kind of God who would offer the gift of eternal life.

This gift of eternal life would not be possible without Jesus Christ. He reconciled us to God and was the visible expression of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). God chose to send Jesus Christ to this earth so that the entire universe could scrutinize God's character.² Jesus repeatedly told listeners that one of the purposes for His coming to earth was to show people what God was like (John 14:8-11; 17:1-3). As a result, we can learn what God is like both by studying Jesus' life as revealed in the Gospels and by studying about the gift of eternal life as revealed in inspiration. In Jesus' life we see ultimate generosity, unselfishness, kindness, fortitude, and love. Love pours out of His parables, His acts of healing, and His death on the cross.

The Holy Spirit Reveals God's Character (John 16:8-14)

Jesus told the disciples that a Comforter would come to lead them to truth. This Comforter would help explain questions when Jesus was no longer with the disciples. The Comforter became visible to the disciples at Pentecost and has been referred to as the Holy Spirit ever since.

The Holy Spirit helps us understand Jesus' sacrifice and the gift of eternal life.³ The Holy Spirit can enlighten us as we read the Bible and help us see examples of God's character in the world around us.

Nature Reveals God's Character (Ps. 107:43)

We can see demonstrations of God's character in natural wonders and in the miracle of life.⁴ Jesus illustrated God's dependability in the parable of the lilies. Jonah learned from a vine and a worm about God's compassion for people. David described God as a mother hen protecting her chicks under her wings.

In my backyard pea patch, I saw an example of the importance of depending on God for my spiritual support. My pea plants were clinging to each other, and their tendrils were choking one another in their effort to grow. When I finally gave them strings to climb, they wrapped themselves around the strings instead of around one another; now they can grow without choking each other. Likewise in my spiritual growth, I need to climb by grasping the gospel, salvation, and inspiration. When I study to know God independently, I no longer need to rely on other's visions of God. My belief system flourishes.

Some of my pea plants grow on the string better than others, and they offer support to the pea plants that have yet to reach the string. As I study to know God for myself, I can help support others in their search for a God that is meaningful for them.

REACT

1. What has been the most effective way for you to learn about God?
2. How will your belief system benefit from finding your own personal picture of God?
3. What is the difference, if any, between one's personal picture of God and creating God to fit man's image?
4. Isn't the purpose of each of the Bible's 66 books to demystify God? If so, why is God often depicted as a mysterious Being?
5. Is demystifying God healthful or unhealthful for our relationship with Him?

1. William E. Richardson, *Paul Among Friends and Enemies* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1992), pp. 110, 111.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 68, 69.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 91.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

It's Me, God

TESTIMONY

Key Text: John 14:8

“Many are the ways in which God is seeking to make Himself known to us and bring us into communion with Him. Nature speaks to our senses without ceasing.”¹ “God’s object lessons are not obliterated; . . . nature speaks of her Creator.”² Even in the cities God speaks through the sun, the clouds, the average houseplant, and even the dandelions. Christ tied His lessons to nature. “So through the creation we are to become acquainted with the Creator.”³

Nature is not God’s only voice. “God speaks to us through His providential workings and through the influence of His Spirit upon the heart.”⁴ “In every line of . . . life, He desires us to find a lesson of divine truth. Then our daily toil . . . will continually remind us of our Creator and Redeemer.”⁵

“God speaks to us in His Word. . . . If you would become acquainted with the Saviour, study the Holy Scriptures. . . . Before opening its pages we should ask for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and it will be given.” He “exalts and glorifies the Saviour.”⁶ “To minds that were open to the Holy Spirit, the significance of the Saviour’s teaching unfolded more and more. Mysteries grew clear, and that which had been hard to grasp became evident.”⁷

If you would become acquainted with the Saviour, study the Holy Scriptures.

Most important, “That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us.”⁸ As the disciples “learned of Christ, they put their knowledge to use by co-operating with Him in His work.”⁹

“How must God esteem the human race, since He gave His Son to die for them and appoints His Spirit to be man’s teacher and continual guide!”¹⁰

REACT

1. What do dandelions say about God?
2. Christ referred to everyday activities in His parables to describe God and His kingdom. In your everyday life, what parables illustrate God to you?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 85.
2. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 18.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 87.
5. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 26, 27.
6. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 87, 88, 91.
7. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 21.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
10. *Steps to Christ*, p. 91.

By Melanie I. Felton, a graduate physics student at the University of Washington at Kent.

God's Love Is Seen in Creation

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 1:20

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20, NIV).

We can see God's love revealed in creation. The true, good, beautiful creation reveals the true, good, beautiful love our Creator has for us.

You walk up to an apricot tree and select a fruit to eat. These seemingly simple actions are carried out by the most stupendous spaceship in existence—your own body. Your wiring system enables you to sense your environment and to act. Rod and cone cells in the retina of your eye absorb light reflected from the tree and the fruit, allowing you to see. Once you choose a fruit, nerve cells carry that message to muscles in your arm, where actions are coordinated to allow you to raise your arm and pick the fruit. Each of the billions and billions of cells in your body has a purpose and carries out that purpose reliably. We humans can discover the wonders of creation and of our Creator's love because creation can be seen and understood, and it makes sense.

As you raise your arm to pick the fruit, kinesin motor protein molecules trudge

Your body works because each cell performs its duties.

along microtubule highways throughout your neurons and other cells. Kinesin carries packets of other molecules from place to place within the cell. The work of kinesin and other protein molecules is possible because the cell is always burning sugar in controlled reactions. The sugar to burn comes from the digestion of foods such as the fruit just picked. The fruit (and ultimately all human food) is produced by photosynthesis in plants, made possible by light energy from the sun. Therefore, your kinesin, your nerve cells, and your entire body are solar powered! Our Creator's love is evident in a well-designed creation.

Our Creator's beautiful love is evident in a creation that is beautiful at every scale. The nerve cell functions only because each kinesin and ATP molecule functions on its scale. Your body works because each cell performs its duties. You have sugar to burn because the apricot tree and the sun function. The beauty of creation declares God's love to us.

REACT

1. We live in a sin-stained world. Think of one thing about creation, here and now, that is not beautiful. How will this thing be different on the new earth?

2. A study of our Creator's love will take an eternity. What facets of God's love beyond those outlined above do you look forward to studying and praising?

By Richard G. Fattic, II, a software engineer for Edmark in Redmond, Washington.

Getting to Know God

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 3:21

I never had one of those great conversion experiences: you know, the type where the Lord comes down and touches your life or saves you from some precipice. But looking back I have noticed ways in my understanding that have grown and matured into something more.

I don't remember when I first learned about God. He was just there. In the home, God was thanked for the food even though Mommy cooked it. Bedtime was when I prayed that the Lord might forgive my transgressions against my sister. Somewhere along the line, I learned that He is preparing a place for me. As a child, I was all for someone wanting to clean my room.

In grade school, my knowledge of God increased. Through the Creation story, I learned of God's power. I also heard stories about what God does to the wicked. Were stories like Sodom and Gomorrah designed to place fear in the heart? According to some renditions I heard, you would think so, but I never did. I always pictured a God who warns and protects those who serve Him. There was no reason to fear Him, because this God became my miracle-maker.

High school Bible classes showed how Christ is the scriptural basis for revelations about God. "The Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so

My first job after college was an eye-opener.

that we may know him who is true" (1 John 5:20, NIV). From the Bible, our class learned that Christ alone does not provide full understanding of all truth. In order to gain full understanding, we learned that Christ provided the Holy Spirit as a guide into all truth (John 16:12-16). College provided an atmosphere in which I could question the foundations and beliefs that have supported my faith through the years; this also resulted in a rebellion against standing during altar calls just because everyone else did. Why should I stand when my knowledge of God fails to develop on a more personal level?

My first job after college was an eye-opener. For the first time in my life, I lived in a secular world. Sabbaths were my only refuge to meet with like-minded individuals, and for that reason they have become important to me. I have even started to want more out of my relationship with God. Maybe next time I'll stand in full support of an altar call.

REACT

1. One of my non-Christian friends asked me this question: "John 17:3 mentions that eternal life is nothing more than a form of knowledge. Assuming this is true, would you still be a Christian?" How would you answer this question?

2. How does knowing God change the way you relate to others?

By Richard G. Fattic, II, a software engineer for Edmark in Redmond, Washington.

Here and Now

OPINION

Key Text: Gal. 4:9

I've often thought, as many people have, that I was born in the wrong era. I used to tell my parents that when I grew up I wanted to be a native American. Of course, as a child I saw such a life as one big adventure after another: exploring new terrain every day, riding a horse, living off the land. The dangers never crossed my mind. The work involved and the stress of that lifestyle was too obscured by my romantic dream. I'd read a lot about native Americans—even presented a series of talks in the third grade about their lifestyles—but never experienced anything remotely close to tribal life.

Of course, my parents assumed that this would pass, and I have moved on to new dreams. I haven't accomplished all of them though, and still every once in a while I think, "Why couldn't I just be an Indian?" But such a life today is far different from my childhood image. Many native Americans of the twenty-first century are struggling to maintain a link to their past as they cope with the present. A seeming minority are trying to build toward the future.

Trying to find God and establish His presence in our lives sometimes seems similar to "wishing to be an Indian." As Adventists trying to maintain a link to our heritage, we often have trouble relating Bible principles to our modern world.

I saw such a life as one big adventure after another.

Occasionally we find ourselves wishing for the more romantic world of biblical or early church history. But the Bible focuses on forward thinking. Paul is always encouraging us to "press on," Jesus is always encouraging us to be ready for the future, and Revelation endeavors to take us into the future with some knowledge before the fact.

It seems that God wants to lead us ahead but gives us enough evidence in the past to trust Him for our future. Can we? Is evidence from the past enough on which to build a saving faith?

REACT

1. Where can we look in the modern world to see evidence that God is still at work?
2. What kind of personal experiences with God do you require to trust His inspired Word?
3. How frequently do you require a personal experience with God to maintain your faith?
4. How do you know your personal experience is a legitimate experience with God and not a counterfeit?

By Kimberly Boggess, a pediatric nurse case manager in Seattle, Washington.

BREATH OF GOD



“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV).

Fisherman or Preacher?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Acts 2:14-42

Because the world of medicine is extensive, we have many specialties and subspecialties. To be a specialist, it is necessary to be up to date; and to do this, one must attend conferences and read the latest medical journals, among other things. There are many things to keep up on—new products in the marketplace and new drugs, more selective for each disease.

With all this knowledge, there are circumstances in which doctors are limited. Each patient can react differently, and there are cases in which nothing can be done. As in the following real case history:

Male patient, 32 years old, admitted to emergency services for observation one hour after he aspirated a piece of food in his home. On admission, physical examination shows him to be asymptomatic, normal vital signs and without pathological antecedents. Four hours later, he presented with an AMI (acute myocardial infarction). CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) was performed. He was pronounced dead 30 minutes later.

Each patient can react differently.

Making a comparison between the world of medicine and the subject of inspiration, we note that inspiration is also extensive. It can also be simple and complicated at the same time.

If you are unsure about this subject, you should ask for divine direction. Ask for the ability to understand how a fisherman could convert three thousand people in a single sermon! (Acts 2:14-42).

By Andrés Sáenz-González, a medical intern in Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

What Is Inspiration?

LOGOS

2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:10-14; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; Rev. 1:1-3; Eph. 3:3-6; John 14:26; 16:12, 13

Emmanuel Kant said: "The existence of the Bible as a book for the people is the greatest blessing that the human race has experienced." Isaac Newton expressed this thought: "We have the sacred scripture as the most sublime writing." Francisco I. Madero, ex-president of Mexico said: "Appreciate the value of the Bible."

Here we have three great personages of different social and cultural backgrounds who have something in common: the Bible. What is extraordinary about this book? Let's discover it together.

"All scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). This is the extraordinary characteristic of the Bible: It's inspired. The great geniuses of music and the theater were also inspired. They were humanly inspired to leave us important creations; that is to say, human productions. God has inspired the most marvelous book of all and placed it in the hands of humanity.

The Greek word *theopneustos*, translated "inspiration," literally means "breath of God." God "breathed" the word into the minds of humanity. They then expressed the concept in the words that are found in the Scriptures. In this way,

Inspiration is the process through which God communicates His eternal truths.

inspiration is the process through which God communicates His eternal truths.

Many theories exist about the inspiration of the Bible. Naturalists teach that the Bible is only a human product in which there is no intervening supernatural element. Others claim that only certain parts of the Scriptures are inspired. But let's not forget what the apostle Paul says: "All scripture." The Bible is a whole formed by the Old and the New Testaments, so both should be considered as inspired by God.

The apostle Paul said that Scripture has "the power to make you wise and lead you to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15, NEB). Did you note that the Bible makes us wise for our salvation, because it is God's thoughts communicated to humanity in whom God has breathed life. We continue to discover other important aspects of inspiration. No one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself (2 Pet. 1:20, 21, NEB).

At times we hear murmurings that the Bible was written by the humans themselves, that it is like any other book, but Peter says that not even the interpretation is personal or by one person alone. That is to say we should not introduce our own ideas when we interpret the Bible, much less when we are writing under divine direction. "For it was not through any human whim that men prophesied of old; men they were, but, . . . they spoke the words of God" (2 Pet. 1:21, NEB). These writers spoke for God, and He inspired them by the Holy Spirit. It was the third person of the Trinity who gave the messages to the prophets, examples of which

are shown in the following Bible passages concerning David and Paul: 2 Samuel 23:2; Acts 28:25.

The Lord Jesus has many things to teach us (John 16:12) and has sent us His Spirit so that He can impart to us understanding of the truth (1 Cor. 2:10).

REACT

1. How do you explain to someone the inspiration of the Bible?
2. Why don't we understand some texts in Scripture?
3. What do you say to a person who believes that only the New Testament is valid?

**Creencias de los Adventistas del Séptimo Día*, p. 14. (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...* [Spanish edition]).

Humans Wrote God's Word

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Jer. 1:4-10

“The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all ‘given by inspiration of God’ (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language.”¹

“The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man.”²

“God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God

“After the close of the canon of the Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work.”

beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.”³

“Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the word.”⁴

“The Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon. The Bible itself relates how, through the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction, in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of the Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work, to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God.”⁵

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. v.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. v, vi.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. vi, vii.

4. *Ibid.*, p. vii.

5. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

By Bonnie Head, a medical student in Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

Motivation or Inspiration?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Pet. 1:21

It is good to define these terms: *motivation* is the positive attitude, the enthusiasm to do things; *inspiration* has much to do with creativity, intellect, ability to do things.

In considering beautiful works of art, we can't help noting that their creators were inspired. The dictionary defines the word *inspiration* as: the effect of feeling of the writer, speaker, or artist; that singular and effective stimulus that one is made to feel spontaneously.

The Bible talks about human conduct and says that there is no one who does good, not one, but we can't negate God's participation with humankind. The result of this is that divine inspiration is a special influence of the Holy Spirit in guiding certain persons to speak and write that which God wants to communicate with others, without annulling their individual personalities.

The SDA Bible Commentary speaks of our text and says that the term *inspired* implies that the prophets were carried, impelled, by the Spirit as a boat is moved by the wind. They were completely under the direction of the Spirit.

The text 2 Timothy 3:16 includes the word *inspired*, and *The SDA Bible Com-*

Divine inspiration is a special influence of the Holy Spirit.

mentary defines it as "exhaled or breathed of God."

The major test of the existence of inspiration is the Bible itself. The inspiration of the Scriptures is proven through the consideration of its beauty, its enduring wisdom, its prophetic forevision, and all the characteristics of the divinity that are contained in these.

At the least, we can say that inspiration is that which the prophets of God experienced in their will or in their understanding when they were occupied in composing the pages of the Sacred Book. If we are to ask ourselves how this divine inspiration was accomplished in the prophets of God, we answer that we don't know. With the same ignorance—yet with a faith of the same kind—we receive the doctrine of the new birth and the sanctification of a soul by the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Spirit illuminates, cleanses, elevates, consoles, and sweetens the soul. We see all these effects. We admire them and worship the cause. In the same way, we believe in the existence of divine inspiration.

REACT

If you had the opportunity to defend the existence of divine inspiration, what arguments would you present?

By Daniel Eduardo Contreras-Cordero, director of the Adventist Services of First Aid and Rescue in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.

God's Diary

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Cor. 2:10

A personal diary is always secret. Have you ever asked yourself why God's diary, the Bible, has been preserved faithfully for so long?

Without a doubt, God Himself has safeguarded the Bible through the complete history of this earth. He has entrusted this great source of divine truth to us.

It is awe-inspiring to think that God in His infinite wisdom instituted this divine-human process (inspiration) so that you and I could know His character in our language. We can know what He wants of us, as well as all that He has done, is doing, and will do for us.

"The inspiration of the scriptures guarantees their truth."* We can test this by analyzing the written prophecies and their fulfillment. We have been selected to live in this final time so we can recover the role that God predestined for us to fulfill the prophecies that remain to be fulfilled. As we face the final great crisis, we should:

1. Trust completely that the content of the Bible is that which God wants for us personally.
2. Interpret the Bible in the light of the Holy Spirit and not based on our own

Our job is to make use of the Scripture that God gave us.

creativity or intellect.

3. Ask God for inspiration so that we speak and act as He would if He were in our place.

Our job, then, is to make use of the Scriptures that God gave us. In this way we can be guided in this turbulent world, we can live abundantly, we can live a righteous life, and we can know part of the deepest secrets of God.

**La Educación Cristiana*, Elena G. de White (*Christian Education*, Ellen G. White).

How Much Does This Gift Cost?

OPINION

Key Text: Acts 8:15-22

Has it ever occurred to you that someone might offer money to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit or of inspiration? Although this question may sound strange, a man named Simon the Magician did this very thing. The story is found in the eighth chapter of Acts. Simon wanted to possess this gift but not to transmit God's messages; he wanted to use it for his own purposes. But something blocked him from receiving it. He had deceived many people with his miracles. After observing Philip, however, he believed, but he had not been transformed. He offered money for the gift of prophecy, but Peter reprimanded him because his heart was not right with God.

What we need to understand from this lesson is that the Holy Spirit calls all equally but that He cannot pour out his gift to those who are proud and unrepentant. There are many Simons in our church who want the gifts of inspiration or revelation. Some have received these gifts from God, but others have received counterfeits by the work of the enemy. If someone reveals something to us from the Scriptures, we have a standard by which to measure the revelation: "To the law and to the testimony. If they do not speak according to this Word, they have no light

There are many Simons in our church who want the gifts of inspiration or revelation.

of dawn" (Isa. 8:20, NIV).

God is going to pour out His Spirit over His people, but we all have to make an effort so we can receive it. In this way we continue being inspired by the Holy Spirit, and we can discover some of the mysteries of omnipotence.

Joel 2:28 says clearly that this is what God will do in the last days so we can understand the revelations of God and interpret them correctly. It is important that we have an intimate communion with our Creator. Only in this way are we Christians inspired by the Holy Spirit.

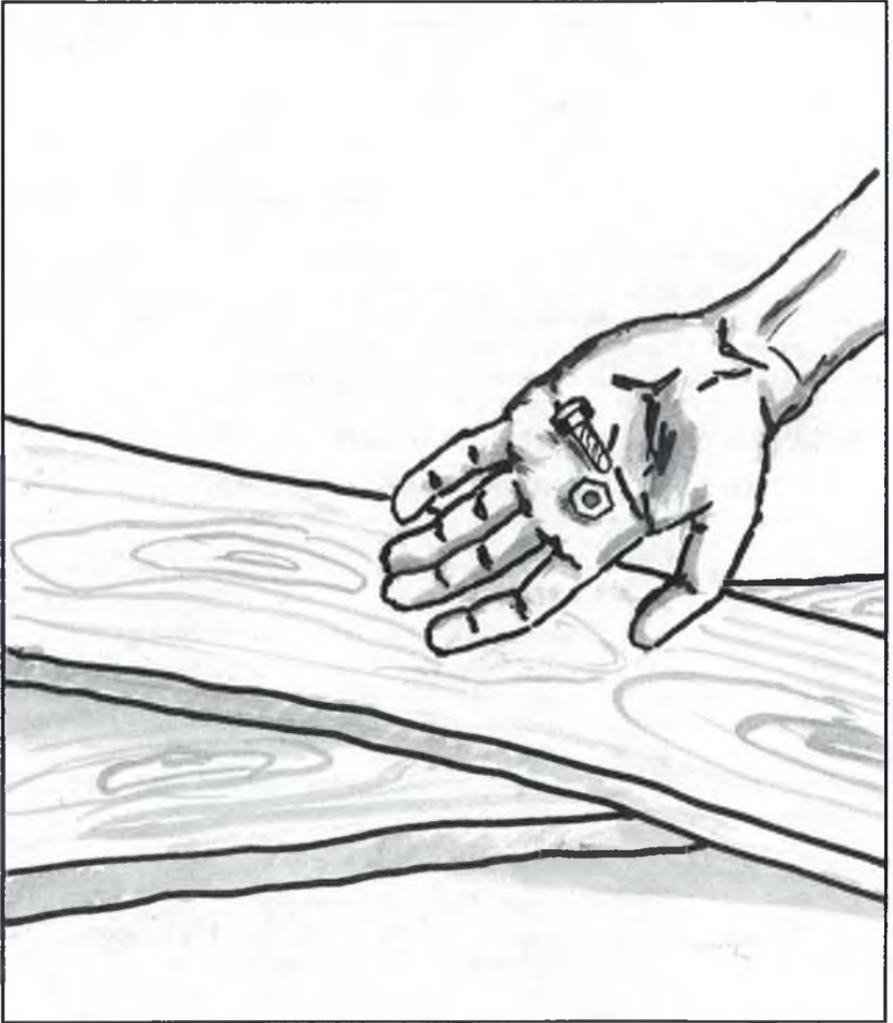
How much does this gift cost? It doesn't cost anything—for those who use it correctly, to the honor and glory of God.

REACT

1. How can I know that the Bible writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit?
2. How can I know that Ellen White's writings are inspired by the Holy Spirit?
3. How can I help others believe in the inspiration of the Bible?

By Febiola Hernández Lara, a secretary in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS



“Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you” (Deut. 4:2, NIV).

Inspired to Understand

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Tim. 3:16

Jonathan is a 22-year-old computer systems specialist who grew up in a Roman Catholic country and is familiar with biblical stories. Though he believes in God, he also believes that Jesus is nothing more than an example for others to follow. His surprisingly common view of Jesus no doubt stems from a lack of understanding of the inspired words of the Bible and its amazing prophecies that could only have been inspired. The Bible says about itself that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Although it is true that Jesus is our example of how to live the godly life, the Bible is very clear concerning His true identity and His purpose for being born. God calls him “my beloved son” (2 Pet. 1:17, NKJV), and the Spirit of God instructs us that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, NKJV). We learn from the Bible that “God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (3:16, NKJV).

Unfortunately, countless intelligent, educated people all over the world read

He believes that Jesus is nothing more than an example for others to follow.

the Bible and see it as only a compilation of books that are partly historical, partly poetic, and partly fantastic. Without the Holy Spirit to guide them, they can neither understand the prophecies concerning Jesus and the end time nor be moved by God’s plan of salvation. They see the biblical account of Jesus only as stories of a good man whom they should imitate; they see Him as a type of Buddha, as only an enlightened man.

As we go through the week, are we trying to follow in Jesus’ footsteps, faltering as we fail to fill His sandals and growing increasingly frustrated? Or are we seeing Him as He is, as God come to show us His love for us and to bring us back into a relationship with Him and with each other? How have you been inspired in your understanding of Jesus? Have you been moved to action in any way by the Holy Spirit, i.e., to sing, to write, or to care?

By Dana Axibal, a chemist in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Truth and Reason

LOGOS

**Deut. 4:1-9, 27-29; Jonah 1; Luke 24:25-27; Heb. 11:8-10;
2 Pet. 1:19-21.**

Some things in the Bible are hard to understand, but when we compare Scripture with Scripture, the pieces of the puzzle begin to come together. The book of Revelation is a sample of Scripture that is hard to understand, probably one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted books of the Bible. Some people are even afraid to read it. Maybe this is because it is so enigmatic or because it is so symbolic (i.e., the seven trumpets, the seven seals, and the seven bowls). There is a saying that goes something like this: "The New Testament is in the Old concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New revealed."

Consider Joseph of Egyptian fame. "Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?'" (Gen. 37:9, 10, NIV). According to Genesis the sun, moon, and stars are Jacob, Rachel, and Joseph's 11 brothers. Why is this important? In Revelation we read, "Now a great sign appeared in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars."

There are even allusions to New Testament writings in Revelation.

This woman gives birth to "a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron" and was caught up to God and to His throne (Rev. 12:5, NKJV). Genesis 7, 9, 10 are keys to understanding Revelation 12:1. When we put these verses together, we see that the sun, moon, and stars represent the Jewish people. And we know from previous Bible study that the male child who was caught up to the throne of God is Jesus.

The book of Revelation alludes to Daniel, Zechariah, the Psalms, Isaiah, Genesis, Ezekiel, Exodus, and just about every other Old Testament book. There are even allusions to New Testament writings in Revelation. It is a truly amazing book. Perfectly complete. Consider Revelation 22:18, 19. "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (NKJV).

Yet people do add to it and do take away from it. No, they don't go to the publishing house and alter the words; that is too obvious. What they do is much more subtle. They take things out of context. Consider all the different teachings that are around today in Christendom (i.e., the secret rapture and seven-year-past-rapture tribulation period, baptizing people for the dead, New Age Christianity).

There are so many. The only safeguard against being misled is to know the Scriptures and have a love of the truth (see Jer. 9:3; 2 Thess. 2:10). Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). About the Holy Spirit Jesus said, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Is it really so important to know the truth and to follow it? Of course it is. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt. 7:21-23).

Many today profess Christianity, yet their teachings are contrary to basic and vital Bible truths. If they read their Bibles in search for the truth and not convenient doctrines or texts to support preconceived notions, they wouldn't be misled. It is very important that we have a "love of the truth" and not "itching" ears.

"And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:24, 25, KJV [The NKJV reads "truth and reason.]).

REACT

1. To what extent do the inspired writings of the Old Testament apply to us today as spiritual Israel?
2. If it was God's intention to reveal Himself through Scripture, why do you think the Bible contains so much symbolic language?

Written for Our Admonition

TESTIMONY

Key Texts: Deut. 4:5-8; 1 Cor. 10:11

“[The Israelites’] obedience to the law of God would make them marvels of prosperity before the nations of the world. He who could give them wisdom and skill in all cunning work would continue to be their teacher, and would ennoble and elevate them through obedience to His laws. If obedient, they would be preserved from the diseases that afflicted other nations, and would be blessed with vigor of intellect. The glory of God, His majesty and power, were to be revealed in all their prosperity. They were to be a kingdom of priests and princes. God furnished them with every facility for becoming the greatest nation on the earth.”¹

“The purpose which God seeks to accomplish through His people today is the same that He desired to accomplish through Israel when He brought them forth out of Egypt. By beholding the goodness, the mercy, the justice, and the love of God revealed in the church, the world is to have a representation of His character. And when the law of God is thus exemplified in the life, even the world will recognize the superiority of those who love and fear and serve God above every other people on the earth. The Lord has His eye upon every one of His people; He has His plans concerning each. It is His purpose that those who practice His

“They were to be a kingdom of priests and princes.”

holy precepts shall be a distinguished people. To the people of God today as well as to ancient Israel belong the words written by Moses through the Spirit of Inspiration: ‘Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.’ Deuteronomy 7:6. ‘Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?’ Deuteronomy 4:5-8.”²

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 288.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 12, 13.

By Edwin Cook, a Bible worker for the Jackson Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church, Greater New York Conference, Manhasset.

“If It’s in the Bible, We Want It . . .”

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Deut. 4:2; John 14:15; 15:12, 17; Rev. 22:18, 19

Have you ever read a tract and said to yourself, “That verse is taken out of context” or “Something is being read into that verse that isn’t there.” Those are eisegetical approaches to Bible study. The most sound approach to Bible study is the *exegetical* one.

According to Kenneth A. Strand, “The confusions so rampant in most commentaries . . . find their root cause in *eisegesis*—that is, reading into the text something that is *not there* rather than proceeding on the basis of sound *exegetis*—drawing out of the text what *is there*.”¹

For example, after reading John 20:19, a well-known Baptist preacher in the U.S. commented, “Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week. . . . Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of the first day of the week (John 20:19). Was this a coincidence, or was it a pattern being set even then? . . . I believe that we can accept the example of the early church. It is fitting for us to worship on the first day of the week in celebration of Christ’s resurrection.”²

This is an example of an eisegetical approach to Bible study (taking something out of the text that isn’t there). If we read the Gospels, we will find that most of

Many people today are allowing others to interpret the Bible for them.

the disciples did not understand or believe that Jesus would be resurrected (Luke 24:25, 36-41). Second, the disciples were not gathered for worship; they were meeting together for “fear of the Jews.”

It is crucial in this day and age of false teachings to stick with what the Bible says and not add to or take away from it. Many people today are allowing others to interpret the Bible for them. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:3).

REACT

How would you answer the assertion above that “It is fitting for us to worship on the first day of the week in celebration of Christ’s resurrection”? Refer specifically to biblical evidence.

1. Kenneth A. Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” *Symposium on Revelation*, book 1, p. 7.

2. Charles Stanley, *The Glorious Journey*, pp. 30, 31.

By Gina Cordova, a college student at LaGuardia Community College, New York City.

Truth or Myth?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Heb. 11:6

As I breezed through the library's mythology section, I came across a book that caught my attention. Flipping through the pages, I noticed a section entitled "Jewish Mythology." As I read this section, I was shocked and amazed that the Bible was being described as a myth, a made-up story to explain human existence.

From God's second coming as a rapture to eternal torment in hell, human opinions, theories, and interpretations of the Bible are found all over the world. We can easily be deceived if we are not well grounded in the truth. But what is the truth? One night, as Jesus prayed to God for His disciples, He said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The Bible is the truth. We need to be grounded in the principles and values that God's Word teaches us.

1. Believe in the Bible as God's Word to His people. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of him that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6). We must demand daily the spiritual blessings and promises that God has for us, so that our faith can grow and give many fruits.

2. Take time alone every day to study the Bible and meditate on God's

We can easily be deceived if we are not well grounded in the truth.

loving character. When we study, we should ask God to send the Holy Spirit to teach us His will through His Word and to reveal His character to us. When we daily meditate on Christ's character, we become like Him.

3. Pray fervently. We need to talk to God with enthusiasm and eagerness, as though we were talking to a best friend. We should also bring Him our concerns and sorrows, for He is always willing to help us and forgive our sins. "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord" (Isa. 1:18).

Satan sees our everyday struggle with sin. He designs traps to fit our weaknesses and tries as hard as possible to discourage us and to make us doubt God's Word. But if we spend time with God, just like Enoch, we will grow closer and closer to Him, and we will not fall for Satan's temptations.

REACT

1. How would you prove to a nonbeliever that biblical events actually happened?

2. What would you do if someone accused you of teaching false doctrines?

3. How would you share the gospel with a friend or relative who does not want to hear about God because of a negative religious experience?

By Mairim Pina, a graduate student in elementary education at Columbia University, New York.

God's Guidance

OPINION

Key Text: Isa. 63:13, 14

Inspiration—"God's method of influencing and directing the minds of men in the process of making them channels of divine revelation."

Divine inspiration is like a vaccine containing doses of love, nurture, and guidance (Isa. 63:13, 14). Every time we are excited to move forward into another day, with vision, direction, and motivation—in this less than perfect world—we are experiencing inspiration. When Christians who have close working relationships with God experience the same, it is safe to say that it is divine inspiration. We all can use divine inspiration as it helps guide us through life's dense moments to victory. It can also help to jump-start stagnant periods in our lives. Life, then, becomes much easier because God makes it so. In such a moment, we have God's full support behind us. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). If we as Christians were to delve into the Bible daily; pray to God daily; and practice Christlikeness daily—there is no doubt that divine inspiration would be experienced more often.

Divine inspiration is like a vaccine containing doses of love, nurture, and guidance.

There are times, however, when we lack motivation, purpose, conviction, love, and direction in our lives—as though we were dead. We live life in a perpetual limbo and tend to focus on the negativity that the world so readily offers. God's Word is alien to us, and we have no sense of His master plan. We lack Christian refinement, so we feel as though we belong neither in church nor in the world.

This is a good time to renew our vows with the Lord, allowing Him to give meaning and purpose to our stagnant lives. We should make a routine of praying and reading the Bible. Changes will begin to take place within us that will be noticeable to others. The routine, then, ceases to be simply a routine and instead becomes a joyful necessity. As God begins to use us, His master plan becomes more clear to us. Our works begin to have meaning and purpose and are rendered with a touch of love. Thus, we've experienced divine inspiration, and death becomes life, stagnation becomes movement.

REACT

Why do we too often wait till we reach rock bottom before we allow the Lord to work in our lives?

**SDA Bible Commentary Series CD-ROM Edition and Logos Bible Software 2.0—Bible Dictionary.*

By Francisco Reyes, a computer professional in Union City, New Jersey.

INSPIRATION OR COMPILATION?



“The word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you” (1 Pet. 1:25, NIV).

By Any Means Necessary

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 55:11

They said he was habitually drunk, that he had numerous illicit relationships with men and women, that he flaunted and exhausted his wealth on an extravagant lifestyle. He was foul in speech, raucous in behavior, manipulative of his children, sometimes stubborn and sometimes weak. He offended many by his abuse of power in favor of his friends. The pattern of his life revealed one who had not been touched by the Spirit of God. Very few had a good word to say about him, yet his name appears on the first page of millions of Bibles. King James I of Great Britain was the prime mover in producing the King James Version.

The Bible, in scroll form, was written by shepherds, monarchs, priests, legislators, and others. The wide variety of abilities and life experiences of the Bible writers is phenomenal. When we think of the broad and colorful spectrum of these 66 books, we must ask one question: How did this collection of writings, the Holy Bible, come to be known as canon?

The word *canon* is derived from the Greek word *kanon*, which means “measuring rod.” In modern usage, *canon* has come to mean the authoritative list of books accepted as holy Scripture. These are writings that are inspired of God and

How did this collection of writings come to be known as canon?

invested with divine authority. The Old Testament canon, which was in place before the time of Christ, was often referred to as the Scripture. The early church fathers, in committee, agreed on the New Testament canon.

Selecting the canon was not, however, just a case of picking and choosing. They came as a result of the Holy Spirit impressing on the hearts of many people of different backgrounds that these writings were God-inspired, that they were authoritative. Nothing was left to chance! The Bible had and still has the protection of Almighty God. It is nonsectarian, with universal appeal.

The message of the Scriptures was so crucial, so powerful, so valuable that by any means necessary, God would have it rest in the hands of humanity. God was willing to use less than perfect means (even sinful kings) to secure the preparation and the preservation of His Word. The objective of God was not thwarted by the oppression of emperors or the fire of revolutions. So when I read about the tortuous journey of the Scriptures, I am reminded of Isaiah 55:11. It is here that God assures us that “my word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please.” God used all means necessary to form and safeguard the revelation of His plan for the rescue of the human family.

By Steve Murphy, a graduate student in the department of theological studies, Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.

God's Everlasting Word

LOGOS

Deut. 31:24-26; 2 Kings 22; Jeremiah 36; 2 Pet. 3:15, 16; Acts 20:29, 30; 1 Cor. 10:11

The Divine Standard of Conscience (Deut. 31:24-26)

The Holy Spirit led Moses in the writing of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). When he had finished writing, he handed it over to the Levites. The Scriptures were so holy that God protected and preserved them in the sacred ark. The Pentateuch was essentially the first installment of the canon.

God gave the Levites strict instructions to teach the people (men, women, children, and the aliens living with them) all that God had commanded Moses to write. These writings constituted:

- The beginning of a trustworthy history of God's leading of His people
- God's revelation of His plan of salvation for the fallen world
- The highest, purest, and noblest set of moral codes the world has ever received
- The wonderful self-disclosure of God and of His unflinching love for the human family
 - Instructions on how to develop mind, body, and soul, and to attain holiness and righteousness
 - The power of God to save sinners
 - The covenant, or agreement, between God and His people

Moses delivered the Scriptures to the people with a prophecy of the apostasy of Israel, which was to follow them throughout history (Deut. 31:16-18). The Scriptures were not only to communicate God's offer of salvation, but they were to protect His people from apostasy. They were the standard or canon for judging both life and conscience. They were to provide life, comfort, and instruction for Israel. The Scriptures were to keep God's people free and, if necessary, liberate them from the slavery of sin.

Neglect of God's Word (2 Kings 22)

During the restoration of the temple, Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered the scroll containing the main part of Deuteronomy and showed it to the scribe Shaphan, who in turn showed it to King Josiah. Josiah tore his clothes in horror and remorse when he learned of the awful judgments to fall upon Judah for its idolatry. He sent a delegation to Huldah, the prophetess, to receive counsel from the Lord. Through Huldah, God confirmed that fearful judgments were to fall upon Judah, but because of Josiah's faithfulness, they would not occur during his reign.

Negligence in the study of God's Word resulted in spiritual apostasy and extreme danger, but the sincere study of the Scriptures brings blessing, life, and prosperity. However, "the people had so long followed a course of iniquity that they had become hardened in their sins. Their senses were so deadened that wrong appeared right and evil was preferred before good. Under such conditions the ruin of the nation could not be averted by a temporary reform."

The Invincibility of God's Word (Jeremiah 36)

During the reign of Josiah's sons, the people were encouraged in their rebellion by kings, apostate priests, and false prophets. The godly life and dynamic preaching of Jeremiah, however, was a thorn in the conscience of Israel's leaders. When the divinely inspired revelations of Jeremiah were read to King Jehoiakim, he contemptuously cut each scroll to pieces and burned them. The king took exception to the threat of the complete desolation of Judah.

It was God who commanded the writing of the scroll (verse 2) to preserve its content. Jehoiakim's futile attempt to destroy God's Word, therefore, was tantamount to rejecting God. God's Word speaks not only against Israel but "against all the nations." People like to forget disagreeable ideas and cherish only those that please them, yet God's chastenings are given in love and are designed to lead us back from sin to Him (verse 3). Had God's people accepted His messages to guide their conduct, how different would have been the history of the world.

Distortion of the Word of God (Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Pet. 3:15, 16)

The apostles warned the believers that after their departure, some would come in among them and distort the pure teaching of Scripture to win over converts. These deceivers would twist and strain the meaning of Scripture to suit themselves.

The Bible is a divine human book; it requires, therefore, a combination of the divine and the human to understand it. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are in danger of forming distorted pictures of God and the plan of salvation. Scripture must be allowed to interpret itself, otherwise we will inevitably impose upon it our own views and interpretations. A perversion of Scripture deprived it of its power and leads the deluded on a path of destruction.

Their senses were so deadened that wrong appeared right.

Scripture's Warnings and Admonishments (1 Cor. 10:11)

Israel's experience as recorded in Scripture serves as a warning to God's people to the end of time. The children of Israel failed to enter the Promised Land because they departed from God's expressed will. By neglecting God's Word, Israel's kings failed to prepare their people for the coming of the true King. God's remnant people, standing on the borders of the heavenly Canaan, can find safety and success only in a "thus saith the Lord."

REACT

1. Make a list of specific benefits you derive from the study of God's Word.
2. How is it possible to have the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy writings and still distort the Word of God?
3. What should we do when we read the Word of God and find things that are difficult to accept?
4. What steps can I take to encourage a friend to believe in the Word of God?
5. How would you demonstrate that God preserved the sacredness of His Word?

**The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 974.*

By Elliott A. Williams, a pastor of two churches in London, England.

You Can Trust It!

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Pet. 1:25

I knew an important question was on her mind. As I reached the end of the Bible study, she revealed her burden. “How can I believe that God preserved the purity of His words? Are you trying to tell me that what I have here, the books of the Bible, are in perfect agreement with each other?”

My mind went back to a statement I had read some years ago: “But the Lord has preserved this Holy Book by His own miraculous power in its present shape—a chart or guidebook to the human family to show them the way to heaven.”¹ Immediately the Holy Spirit inspired me to say: “If we believe there is a God who formed this world by the word of His mouth and created humankind from the dust of the ground; and that it is the same powerful God who keeps this world turning and the stars and heavenly bodies on course; then if that God is so powerful and so precise, why is it so difficult to believe, through faith, that He could preserve the purity of His words?”

She looked at me with astonishment. “I never thought of it like that before. The faith factor is important.” A peaceful smile came to her face.

The Bible’s consistency is amazing, given the numerous authors and the dura-

The books of the Bible are consistent with each other in principle and thought.

tion of time in which it was written. The books of the Bible are consistent with each other in principle and thought. Perhaps it was with reference to the grammatical questions that Ellen White says: “All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.”²

“The word of God is the only steadfast thing our world knows. It is the sure foundation.”³ The heavenly hosts “for ages have communicated to men light and knowledge, telling them what to do, . . . unfolding before them scenes of thrilling interest, waymark by waymark in symbols and signs and illustration.”⁴ “This Word arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world, bequeathed to them that, by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven.”⁵

The Bible is the inspired, revealed, and preserved Word of God—you can trust it!

1. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 15.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

3. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 148.

4. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 17.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

By Eglan Brooks, pastor of the Battersea and Bethel Seventh-day Adventist churches, London, England.

Preserved for Your Salvation

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Jer. 36:28

Do you like apples, bananas, pineapples, and oranges? Yes? If you grow your own, you will most likely eat them when they are in season because you cannot keep fresh fruit for long—they will spoil. If you obtain your fruits from the supermarket, you will get a fresh supply each week. That bag of smooth-skinned apples will shrivel up after a week; if a bad one is among them, the lot will spoil within a month.

I like apple and pineapple juices. If I were to make my own, I would find it laborious, inconvenient, and I could not keep it for very long—not even if it were refrigerated. It is easier to buy a few cartons of my favorite juices and store them in the fridge ready for instant use. The last carton of Sainsbury's orange juice I bought had a shelf life of 12 months. The secrets of a long shelf life are: quality fruit, careful preparation, and added preservatives.

Careful preparation and selected fruit are not enough: safe chemical additives are essential to preserve the juice for future use. More than 2,500 food additives are in use, but the Food and Drug Administration regards only about 600 of these to be safe to preserve food from oxidation, microbes, and rusting metal.

More than 2,500 food additives are in use.

The Scriptures have been carefully preserved (Deut. 31:24), even in ink (Jer. 36:2, 17, 18), but that was not enough. Sometimes they were destroyed (verse 23). God took drastic measures, however, to preserve His Word (verses 26, 28) to afford it a long shelf life for its future use (2 Kings 22:8, 13).

Many sacred writings are in circulation, but God preserved the 66 books in the form of the Bible as a safe record on which you and I can totally rely. Without the preservation and canonization of Scripture, there would be no authority for my Christian faith.

Preservation, therefore, ensures that God's Word endures forever (1 Pet. 1:25). The preserved Word brings awareness and solace to the believer (1 Cor. 10:11-13). It engenders hope, peace, and confidence (John 14:27); sustains joy and jubilation (Prov. 11:10); eradicates ignorance (Acts 17:30); solves poverty (Prov. 28:19); teaches wisdom and understanding (Prov. 5:1, 2) and points the way to Jesus, our only Source of salvation (Acts 4:12).

REACT

1. Why does the Bible, as a holy book, hold more significance for you than any other sacred writings?

2. Why do you think God used human sources to prepare and preserve the Scriptures?

By Albert A. C. Waite, a freelance writer from Bracknell, Berkshire, England.

Flashlight in the Dark

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 119:104, 105

The Bible has retained its relevance throughout many historical events: Wars, famine, natural disasters, and personal tragedies have not diminished the light cast by the writings of ancient prophets of God. Something of such enduring quality is rather astounding when examined alongside other literary works.

How often do we sink into the recliner and read the newspaper to keep up to date, and in so doing, forget that what has been written in the past will affect our future? I have found myself pondering how exactly to apply all the biblical principles to my life. Which ones are dated or have necessarily evolved to accommodate a lifestyle different from the days of shepherding and flowing robes?

These are valid questions, though perhaps when hunting for answers we ultimately distort the truth to fit our comforts and desires. If we pray for wisdom in our search for truth, the enduring message of Scripture will serve as a beacon in the dark. “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13, NIV). It may not happen suddenly or dramatically, but even if it is in the whisper of God’s still, small, emphatic voice, we will walk away from study enlightened.

How often do we sink into the recliner and read the newspaper to keep up to date?

In Acts 20:30, Paul warns the Ephesians that some will distort the truth to draw them away from Christ and the church. In today’s world, we use the actions of others to justify our own behavior to the standard set by Scripture. Just as photocopies made of other photocopies fade and blur the further down the line they are from the original, so our moral code disintegrates as we cease to look at the source and turn instead to other imperfect copies to guide our actions. God has provided us with an original for a reason—to be *used*.

We spend a lot of time debating issues among ourselves, yet argument will bring us no closer to resolution. When we examine the Bible with open minds, answers emerge, which in contrast to those we glean from others are based on our faith in the biblical canon. As David writes in Psalm 119, God’s Word is a light for our Christian journey. Through our study we are drawn closer to the Word, Christ, which is what I believe to be the ultimate aim of Christianity.

REACT

1. How can I prevent myself from looking to those around me for a standard instead of consistently turning to Scripture?
2. What are some sins in my life that I justify by the behavior of others?

By Jamie Zimchek, a senior history major at Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.

Burning Candles Are More Beautiful

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Tim. 3:16, 17

I am really interested in candles. I love to go to craft shops and explore their various shapes and colors. Even better, it's exciting to see how they are actually made. In 1996 I saw some very intricate candles being made. The craftswoman repeatedly dipped the wick in different tubs of melted wax of various colors. She then carved it with a small knife and finally hung it up to dry. The results were amazing.

The candles in my room, on the other hand, are rather different. Most of them are burned at least halfway down, leaving rough edges, beads of melted wax, and traces of black soot. I suppose to an outsider they might look rather worn out compared to the ones in the craft shops. But to me, my candles are the most beautiful, because they have been lighted. They have given a beautiful flame to light my room for hours at a time, bringing me to appreciate the wonderful shapes that spring out as the glow of their flames casts shadows from behind my plants.

In a sense, my candles are similar to my Bibles. The NIV that I received recently is lovely and new. My old, tattered Good News Bible, however, which I have had since I was 11 years old, is far more beautiful to me because it has served its

My old, tattered Good News Bible is far more beautiful to me.

purpose. It has been used so much that the images of God that spring out of its pages, through the helpful notes and underlined verses, as well as the meaningful scribbles at the back, help me to appreciate God more as I become closer to Him.

It is exciting to realize that the Bible is a miracle book: first, it is the dynamic Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17); and second, these words have been preserved perfectly to this very day. The Bible's miraculous features will serve no purpose, however, till we open it. Unless we read it earnestly and open-mindedly, its most beautiful, transforming message will have no effect on our lives.

Like the candles, the different versions of the Bible may look good on display, but they will not shine until you use them. Candles are more beautiful when they are burning; the Bible communicates only when it is used.

REACT

Do you think the use of the Bible among young Christians today has declined? Give a reason for your answer.

By Maria Bećejac, a second-year English and history major at Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.

LOST IN THE TRANSLATIONS?



“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6).

Accepting the Gift of Salvation

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Tim. 3:16

The day I turned 13, I knew I was a woman. I wore a single-letter-sized bra, waged war on my zits, devoured *Seventeen* magazine, and developed a serious relationship with Elvis. All this was faithfully recorded in my journal, which did double duty as trusted listener and keeper of all my dreams. My journal had become my best friend. The human who once occupied this place had waged war with me over Elvis' affections and could no longer be trusted. As a consequence, I spent more time with my journal till the day my mother suggested a pen pal. Often I rejected her ideas, but the pen pal was the Romanian nephew of my sister's art teacher. The request came with a picture, and he was actually cute. After conferring with my journal, I decided to write him.

The answer came in two short weeks. The paper was pink parchment; the name was Valerio. The letter began, "*Gentle Jodi*"; and my heart stopped. Valerio had written his letter without an interpreter. He simply got an English dictionary and translated the words himself. Of course, I knew I could do the same thing. Against my mother's advice, I decided translators and interpreters were unnecessary interference and could decipher Romanian myself.

The request came with a picture, and he was actually cute.

My correspondence with Valerio was glorious till the fateful day when I received the tickets and itinerary for my trip to Romania. Somehow, relying on my own translating ability, I had agreed to marry Valerio and to stay with his mother until the wedding.

My recovery from my panic was resolved with help from my parents, my sister's art instructor, and the Romanian consulate. The pain and embarrassment that followed could have been avoided if only I had used an interpreter and a translation I could really understand—something geared to my level of thinking. It turned out that Valerio was a medical student and on a completely different plane of thinking.

So it is with us. The Bible was written for each of us. "All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV). In His great wisdom, God breathed His Word to prophets from all walks of life—with different understanding and experiences—so that each one would offer something unique. In addition, He allowed us to develop our ability for translating thoughts from one language to another and, just as important, from one mind-set to another.

How typical of God to cover every need we might have in understanding His Word. Shouldn't we rejoice at His wisdom and forethought?

By Jodi Cahill, assistant chaplain at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

Translation—It's a Serious Business

LOGOS

Isa. 19:18; Mark 5:41; 15:34; Acts 21:37, 38; Rev. 14:6; 22:18, 19; 2 Tim. 2:15

Translation has been part of the Jewish and Christian heritage for a long time. Early Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. And the New Testament contains and refers to translation. Since Jesus presumably spoke in Aramaic, most or all the words attributed to Him by the evangelists have already been translated into Greek before they reach us in English (traces of this translation process are preserved in Mark 5:41 and 15:34). And in Acts, Paul's ability to tell his story in Greek helps him to be more effective as a communicator of the gospel (cp. Acts 21:37, 38).

What we can think and feel depends to a significant degree on the language available to us. So the language we use to tell the Christian story matters very much. We have to think hard about the words we use when we translate the Bible into our own or someone else's language. We have to think hard about the process of translation itself.

Translation is a consequence of our commitment to the truth of the Christian gospel

If we affirm the truth and universal relevance of the Christian gospel, then we must believe that it is important to share this gospel (Rev. 14:6). But to touch the

Translation is a never-ending process.

lives of others effectively, we must articulate our convictions in ways they can understand. Thus, if we want them to learn the Christian story by reading the Bible, it will do no good to give them a Bible they cannot read. Either they will fail to understand it entirely, or they will misunderstand and thus misapply it. Translating the Bible is an integral part of sharing the good news of God's love as it is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

Translation is an unavoidable aspect of communication, and thus of building human community

One of the most remarkable claims in the New Testament is found in Ephesians 3:1-6—at least if you think the gospel is about obscure religious trivia or about heavenly transactions not directly related to human life. What is “the mystery of Christ” according to Ephesians 3? That “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (verse 6). The gospel is about building community. There is no way to build community without dialog. There can be no dialog without understanding. And there can be no understanding among people of different cultures without at least some degree of translation.

The biblical text provides a shared focus for our conversation and a common store of images and ideas that bind us together. But these images and ideas can be accessible to everyone only if translated. Once translated, the Bible can serve to unite people from different backgrounds by providing the basis for their partici-

pation in a common, Christian culture. Thus, translation helps to build community, a central element of what the Christian message is all about.

Translation requires serious study of history and society

To convey the messages contained in the biblical text to others requires that these messages be understood themselves. And understanding the Bible requires more than simply a knowledge of grammar, syntax, and linguistic rules. To know what a word or expression means, to know best how to render it idiomatically in another language, requires in-depth study of the social and historical world out of which the biblical materials emerged. Of course, a translator can take refuge in literal translation, attempting to render the Bible word-for-word into another language.

But meaning doesn't reside only in words. Words are part of larger wholes. The meaning of a word depends on the phrase in which it is embedded, the meaning of the phrase on its setting in a sentence or paragraph, and so on. And texts are typically written for readers who already share assumptions and understandings that are not made explicit in the texts themselves. To share the meaning of the biblical documents through translation, not only the literary contexts of biblical words and expressions but the background assumptions that underlie the various biblical texts, must be taken into account. The good translator is not only a linguist but a sociologist and historian. And so the work of translation helps the church itself to learn more about the biblical world.

Translation into our language is required

If we think of, say, the Wycliffe Bible as our model for Bible translation, we may envision the translator as someone who shares the Bible with a culture that has never encountered it before—perhaps a culture with no written language. But the gap between our culture and the cultures from which the Bible emerges is enormous. That's why we still need new Bible translations. Not only is our understanding of the biblical world greater than it was even 50 years ago, but our own culture is changing. If people today are to understand what the Bible meant and what it might mean, new translations are unavoidable.

The King James Version is beautiful—poetic, majestic, powerful. Some people like the more conversational tone of Today's English Version or The New English Bible. Scholars may appreciate the up-to-date quality of the New Revised Standard Version. But whatever translation you like, it isn't perfect. It isn't perfect for us—because there is always more to learn about the biblical world, and there are always the biases of translators to be corrected. And it won't be perfect for our children or grandchildren because their language and culture will be different from ours, and translations must be prepared that will make it easier for them to understand the words of the Bible. Translation is a never-ending process.

By Gary Chartier, managing editor of Adventist Heritage at La Sierra University and adjunct assistant professor of religion, Loma Linda University, California.

The Newest Language of the Bible

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Rev. 14:6

“The Word of God, like the character of its divine Author, presents mysteries which can never be fully comprehended by finite beings. . . . Because they cannot fathom all its mysteries, the skeptic and the infidel reject God’s word; and not all who profess to believe the Bible are secure from temptation on this point. . . . The very grandeur and mystery of the themes presented should inspire faith in it as the Word of God.”¹

At the time of this writing, a book entitled *The Bible Code*² is sending shock waves through the academic community. It is authored by Michael Drosnin, a respected journalist and best-selling author. In 1992 Drosnin learned that Dr. Eliyahu Rips, a world-class mathematician, had discovered a code in the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures that detailed specific significant events of earth’s history for the past 3,200 years—and into the future.

This code has been confirmed by Harvard mathematician David Kazhdan, Yale mathematician Piatetski Shapiro, and other mathematicians and code specialists throughout the world. Several avowed atheists, including the author himself, have come to believe in the reality of God or a Higher Being based on this discovery.

“The very grandeur . . . of the themes presented should inspire faith in it as the Word of God.”

This Bible code, which could be deciphered only in our age of computerization, predicts dates, times, and places of the assassinations of both Kennedys, King, Sadat, and Rabin (found a year before he was killed), the election of Clinton, the Oklahoma City bombing, everything from World War II to Watergate, from the Holocaust to Hiroshima, and from the moon landing in 1969 to the collision of a comet with Jupiter.

Some critics suggest that any large piece of literature could be analyzed similarly to make such predictions. But the codes have already been applied to other great literary works of equal size with no similar results. According to experts, this discovery is unique to the Bible and if true has mind-boggling implications for the doctrine of inspiration and God’s foreknowledge.

The Bible code is vulnerable to abuse concerning future predictions. It should be applied only in a manner that is consistent with revealed biblical principles. Personally, I could not dismiss the validity of the code, but its presence does help me better understand Ellen White’s words, “The mystery of the Bible is a proof of its inspiration.”

1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 698-700.

2. Michael Drosnin, *The Bible Code* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

By Steve Daily, chaplain at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

Earthen Vessels

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 Cor. 4:7

Was it likely, he wanted to know, that it could all simply have *happened*? I had stopped to see if he needed help with his stalled motorcycle. As we talked, he wanted me to know about something he believed was crucially important: The King James Version *must* have been a product of divine inspiration. Wouldn't God assure a divinely authorized, flawless translation of the Bible available in English? Otherwise, think of all the confusion that might result.

There's something attractive about that kind of argument. "We know what God is like," we say, "so we know what God must have done." But there are at least three problems with an *a priori* argument about Bible translations like the one my new-found acquaintance offered me.

First, it doesn't fit well with available data. Evidence doesn't suggest that the King James Version—or any other translation—really *is* perfect.

Second, the argument presupposes the possibility of a perfect translation that would convey to *everyone* whatever God wanted to communicate. Clearly, this view is false. People speak different languages. No one translation could be equally helpful to *all* of them. But what about the possibility of a divinely authorized translation for each language? That wouldn't work either: Languages change,

The history of the world makes clear how often God's purposes are frustrated.

dialects vary from place to place, and cultures develop over time. The same words can't communicate the same meaning to the same people.

Third, this argument implies that God always gets what He wants, but this assumption flies in the face of the whole Christian story. Creation means letting creatures be themselves, and this means that sometimes they may not fulfill God's intentions. God couldn't change this without transforming free creatures into puppets. The history of the world, marked by so much sin, recounts how often God's purposes are frustrated. There's no way for God to respect the freedom of creatures and the integrity of the natural world while at the same time guaranteeing that a Bible writer or a Bible translator communicates exactly what God wants. This means there's sometimes confusion over God's nature and goals, but there's no way to avoid this without turning creation into a puppet show.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, God packages the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels. We human beings are those vessels; our abilities are limited and our characters are flawed. Because no human being is a perfect Bible writer or translator, my motorcycle-riding acquaintance's hope for a flawless King James Version won't be realized, but we can at least be thankful for God's gift of freedom—even if it means we don't always get everything right.

By Gary Chartier, managing editor of Adventist Heritage at La Sierra University and adjunct assistant professor of religion, Loma Linda University, California.

The Sound of the Gospel

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rev. 14:6

Does the everlasting gospel sound the same to a 23-year-old Kentucky coal miner as it does to a young female marketing director of a high-tech company in California's Silicon Valley? Would you get the same definition of the gospel from a young man who grew up on a farm in Maine that produced maple syrup as you would from the son of an immigrant taxicab driver in Chicago? Does the appreciation of the gospel change if you hear it through mariachi music in El Paso or from an alternative band in Seattle or accompanied by a pipe organ in the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.?

Presenting the everlasting gospel in the specific contexts of target audiences, in words that people can understand and appreciate (including various versions of the Bible), is not a divisive argument about worship, not a confusing debate about Bible translations, not a vague educational principle but *a key biblical strategy for evangelism*.

1. Know your community. Take a close look at the people you want to reach with the everlasting gospel. What are their ages? Occupations? Educational levels? Interests? Find a segment of your community with whom you identify.

Explore how Jesus customized illustrations and expressions of His kingdom.

How will the gospel best be understood by that audience? Is there a version of the Bible that will speak more clearly to their needs?

2. Speak to individuals. Explore how Jesus customized illustrations and expressions of His kingdom to fishermen (Matt. 4:19), farmers (13:4), shepherds (18:12), housewives (Luke 15:8), blind people (John 9:5), and people who were suffering loss (11:25). How will the promise of God's abiding grace make a real and practical difference in the lives of the people you meet?

3. Testify from your experience. Make the connection between your personal faith experience and the individuals to whom you are sharing the gospel. Your life, like the life of the apostle Paul, is God's chosen means of "testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24).

4. Unchain the Bible. Put the Bible into the hands of the people. Break the chains that bind God's Word only to pulpits. Refuse the arguments that insist the Bible can be appreciated fully by only an elite few. Trust the Holy Spirit to speak directly.

5. Be confident of success. "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth" (Col. 1:6). We can be confident that God's Word, heard and understood, is powerful and productive.

By Stuart Tyner, director of the John Hancock Center for Youth and Family Ministry, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

The Translations and Me

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Tim. 3:14-17

It wasn't until my ninth-grade Bible teacher, Mr. Jones, introduced me to a new version of the Bible, the Thompson Chain Reference (TCR), that I really felt included in God's plan. As I read the texts written in simpler words, I felt God speaking directly to me.

Since high school, I have grown in my faith and have read many different Bibles. One of my favorite translations is the Jerusalem Bible. This may send chills through the blood of many Adventists because the Jerusalem Bible is a Roman Catholic publication. But, as an English major, I love reading passages in this translation because they are so poetic. They quench my creative thirst.

Everyone should own at least three translations—two for biblical study and one for devotion. I read *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson, for my daily devotions. The interpretation is so practical to daily living. As I read it, I feel as though God understands everything I am experiencing. This version is also a stimulus for further study. I often find myself pulling out my TCR for clarification.

Different translations offer different things to different people. Sometimes words or phrases in one are easier to understand in one Bible than in another. Some versions take cultural traditions and linguistics into consideration for clearer

Everyone should own at least three translations.

understanding. Others structure translations around topics, offering readers healing and comfort as they learn of God's love.

When choosing translations, we need to be very careful to recognize translator's interpretations included in the Word. Many versions I have mentioned are designed specifically as interpretations that clarify meaning and offer the translator's opinions on the text. Yet, they are invaluable in introducing people to the gospel and strengthening our own relationship with Christ.

When questioning the accuracy of Bible translations, we can turn to 2 Timothy 3:14-17 for guidance. Here, Paul shares his insight on the topic: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (RSV).

Our mission as Christians is to teach others about God through God's inspired Word. Whether we use the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, *The Message*, or even *The King James Version* doesn't really matter as long as we focus on the Word of God and not merely the opinions of its translators.

By Jennifer M. Tyner, assistant vice-president for student life and contract instructor for the freshman English program, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

“VEINS OF PRECIOUS ORE”



“From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15, NIV).

The Search

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Tim. 2:15

A beautiful day dawned with a balmy breeze whispering a happy tune as the birds chirped a staccato melody. The day beckoned me to put my cares aside and enjoy its beauty at the beach. As the temptation took root, a troublesome thought emerged: *There is a mountain of papers requesting your attention. But there was a compromise: Take the work to the beach. You always work better and faster there.*

So I packed everything into the car, and off I went. When I arrived, an elderly gentleman was sitting on a stone, looking out to sea. A frisky dog came down the path sniffing here and there and moving on as though it were searching for something. His path meandered here and there, but with a definite forward direction. Suddenly there was a happy yap, a jump of joy, a reaching up to lick the face and hands of the apparent object of his search: his master; the elderly man perched on the stone. The dog's joy was full, complete.

Similarly, a discovery of truth that leads to Christ and salvation necessitates a diligent search that our joys might be full, complete. "Little good will be accomplished by skimming over the surface of the word. Thoughtful investigation and

I packed everything into the car, and off I went.

earnest, taxing study are required in order for this word to be understood. There are truths in the word which, like veins of precious ore, are hidden beneath the surface. The hidden treasure is discovered as it is searched for, as a miner searches for gold and silver. The evidence of the truth of God's word is in the word itself. Scripture is the key that unlocks scripture. The deep meaning of the truths of God's word is unfolded to our minds by His Spirit."

Because of our spiritual heritage (John 8:44), we cannot—of ourselves—correctly interpret the Scriptures, for our limited "eyes have not seen nor ear heard . . . the things which God has for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 9:14). True knowledge comes through searching the Scriptures only under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who undertakes a complete search; then ultimately, like the lost coin, truth is found. In Psalm 119:66-69, David asks God to teach him as he studies the Scriptures. With this approach, God's Word becomes "a lamp unto [our] feet and a light unto [our] path."

As we search the Scriptures for truth, confusion and false doctrine will be eliminated, our minds will be enlightened, and we will experience an increase in wisdom as we drink of the omniscient Springs of Living Water.

**Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 157.

Keys to Understanding the Word

LOGOS

2 Tim. 2:15; 3:15; John 7:17; 8:43, 44; 16:13-15; Isa. 28:9, 10;
1 Cor. 2:9-14

The Bible contains everything we need to know to understand it. However, we must study diligently, systematically, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These are the keys to understanding the Bible.

Diligence in Study

In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul emphasized that diligent study is necessary to ensure proper understanding of the Scriptures. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

If we study the Scriptures as we should, we will be able to give the right interpretation, and the real truth that God intends that we receive will be revealed. Notice this statement: "The truths of the Bible must be rightly interpreted so that no part of the Scriptures will be in opposition to the picture presented by the Bible as a whole."¹

The importance of a careful and diligent study of the Bible is further stressed

"A superficial reading of the Scriptures will yield a superficial understanding of it."

in the following statement: "A superficial reading of the Scriptures will yield a superficial understanding of it. Read in such a way, the Bible may appear to be a jumble of stories, sermons, and history. Yet, those open to the illumination of the Spirit of God, those willing to search for the hidden truths with patience and much prayer, discover that the Bible evidences an underlying unity in what it teaches about the principles of salvation."²

Systematic Study

Though it is important to study the Scriptures diligently, it is also helpful to study systematically. Isaiah puts it this way: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isa. 28:10). In other words, examine the texts that relate to a particular subject to get a true picture.

The following further explains the above text: "Truth must be presented clearly and logically, one point leading naturally on to another. Only then can men become thoroughly acquainted with truth. Instruction must be given as if to children, by repeating the same point again and again, and going on from one point to another by easy and gentle degrees as men whose minds have been darkened by sin are able to follow. Such instruction may appear simple, but it is effective."³

Rely on the Holy Spirit

We may study the Word of God diligently and systematically, but our understanding will be limited without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Notice this text: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit

of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14, NIV). It is clear that one who is not guided by the Spirit of God is interested only in the things pertaining to this life. "Such a man depends on human wisdom for the solution of all his problems. He lives to please himself and to gratify the desires of the unconverted heart, hence is incapable of understanding and appreciating the things of God. To him the plan of salvation, the wonderful revelation of God's love, is folly. He cannot distinguish between worldly philosophy and spiritual truth, because the wisdom of God is understood only by those who permit themselves to be taught by the Holy Spirit."⁴

The Holy Spirit is ready, willing, and able to help the sincere seeker for truth to understand the Word (John 16:13).

REACT

1. How can you determine the correctness of an interpretation of a passage of Scripture?

2. To what extent do you think Timothy's exposure to the Scriptures in his early years influenced his relationship with God? (2 Tim. 3:15).

3. How can a careful student of the Bible transcend the merely intellectual aspects of such study?

4. What can you do personally to gain a clearer understanding of Bible truth?

5. How could apathy in Bible study delay Christ's second coming?

6. Why is misinterpretation of the Word of God directly related to one's Christian experience?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 336.

2. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 14.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 210.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 672.

A Nice Place to Visit, But . . .

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Cor. 2:9-14

Recently on television I saw a story about some tourists who had saved for a year to undertake a trip to the sunny shores of a Caribbean island. The trip lived up to their expectations initially as they landed one morning on the sun-drenched island and proceeded immediately to frolic in the clear water and walk along the white sandy beaches, lost in the admiration of nature's beauty.

By late afternoon, however, the winds suddenly increased, the sea became angry, the sky grew overcast, and ferocious rain descended. A serene morning had given way to a terrible storm. Of course, the visitors expected that the disappointment of the afternoon would be over by the dawn of the new day, but this was not to be. The meteorological department forecasted more rain for the next several days. A vacation was ruined, a year's savings and planning was slowly being wasted before a television screen in a hotel room, on an island where nature had betrayed them.

Often in life we feel betrayed by God. We leave our worldly, sinful lives to be led by His Word to a supposedly better way of life only to discover that the life we left behind seems sunnier than the one we were promised. We begin to look

Many would like to take the “tourist approach” to Christianity.

suspiciously at the Bible—the unerring source of truth for guidance during life's difficult moments; but rather than find illumination, we are often left more confused at its apparent lack of reasonable, practical solutions to our problems.

Many would like to take the “tourist approach” to Christianity, allowing themselves only small excursions into the Word of God at their convenience and expecting clarity and solutions to all of their problems. First Corinthians 2:10 reminds us of our need of the Holy Spirit to guide us in our search for truth. Like the weather forecaster, the Holy Spirit can also explain the spiritual weather with which we are often faced.

When aided by the Holy Spirit, our search for truth becomes an ongoing endeavor in which we are interested not just in the snapshots of the gospel but in seeing the whole picture. Our understanding of the Bible becomes clearer, and we are enriched when we faithfully, reverently, and patiently allow the Holy Spirit to help us unearth the deeper meaning of God's Word. In this way we can view life not in its limited, always sunny context, but we are able to reconcile the occurrences of storms in our everyday lives.

By Lionel Johnson, a biology lecturer and chairperson of the natural science division of the College of the Bahamas, Nassau.

With So Many Voices

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Cor. 2:9-14

In Corinth citizens were noted for their philosophical attributes, and many measured truth by how articulate a person was. Philosophers throughout the city were respected as people with the ability to search out deep truths. They were seen as knowing how best to understand and explain truth. With arising divisions within the church (1 Cor. 1:12), many were now equating those with wisdom to discern truth with those who were most articulate.

The Corinthians' attitude is still in effect today. Deference is given to theologians and Bible commentary writers as those with the best interpretations of Scripture. Others look to pastors and Sabbath School teachers. With so many authorities, do we dare interpret for ourselves?

We live in a pluralistic world in which anyone's interpretation on Scripture is considered equally valid. Relativism is the key word of the day. There are seen to be no absolute truths. The corollary follows that there must be no accurate way of understanding Scripture either.

Does such a view harmonize with Scripture? Speaking to His disciples, Jesus said, "If anyone wills to do His [the Father's] will, he shall know concerning the

With so many authorities, do we dare interpret for ourselves?

doctrine, whether it is from God" or whether he speaks out of his own interpretation (John 7:17). Clearly, Scripture informs us that there is a pattern for finding the right interpretation. But in the midst of so many voices, how do we decipher the way to true biblical interpretation?

In our text Paul provides an answer. He notes that the Spirit has searched thoroughly and deeply into the things of God and has revealed them to us so we might know them (verse 10). This receiving and knowing in order to interpret, however, does not come about naturally. Richard Lenski states it best: "The . . . natural [human] lacks the faculty and the organ for this knowing and this receiving. He has nothing beyond the organ of purely human condition, and this does not reach into the spiritual realm . . . just as a deaf man cannot hear the sweetest music, so this man cannot appreciate the sweet tones of the gospel."

The Spirit has not only revealed to us the things of God, He also guides us in understanding and properly interpreting the Scriptures. Human agendas subvert this process. "Only by the agency of the Spirit can one carry out the kind of research, systematic examination, or questioning that enables one to understand" the truths of the Bible. Then, men will be able to compare spiritual things with spiritual things in order to understand God's Word correctly and not "wrest" the Scriptures from their true meaning.

By Henry R. Moncur, a master of divinity student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

The Quest for Truth

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Tim. 2:15

Three coworkers sat around a small table enjoying lunch at the office cafeteria. Ted looked at Sandy and smiled as she quietly ate a vegetarian burger sandwich. “Hey! Sandy, try one of these juicy barbecue pork chops!”

Brian quickly chimed in, smacking his lips, “Yeah, Sandy, I guarantee these chops have more taste than that veggie . . . whatever sandwich that you’re eating!”

“Haven’t you read in the Bible that all you have to do is pray over the food,” Ted teased, “and ask God to bless it? Besides, the Bible says not to judge others in meat, drink, and the day of worship.”

“And,” Brian added, “God told Peter in vision not to refer to anything He created as unclean . . .”

No doubt you have had similar encounters with friends and associates whose points of view (interpretation of Scripture) are just the opposite of yours. How do you stimulate them to take a closer look at God’s Word and its true meaning?

1. Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Given that the Bible is not an ordinary literary work but a revelation of God’s will for all humanity, we need supernatural assistance to discern His message. Pray earnestly for the guidance of the Holy

“God told Peter in vision not to refer to anything He created as unclean.”

Spirit before you open the Holy Scriptures. “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14, NIV).

2. Discard preconceived ideas of biblical teachings. You will find that this is not an easy task to accomplish on your own. Again, prayer is the key! Ask God to take away anything that might serve as a barrier to your quest for a deeper understanding of His Word. The more you pray, the more misgivings fade, the more you develop a deep trust in God and an appreciation of His will for your life.

3. Employ systematic personal study. Do not depend on the interpretation of others. “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV).

There is little to be gained from whispering hurried prayers and quickly reading a Bible text or two. We are admonished to “search the scriptures” (John 5:39). This search involves a comparison of scripture with scripture. God rewards the diligent searcher with the unearthing and illumination of the hidden treasures of the Bible.

REACT

How can you make your daily Bible study more effective for witnessing and spiritual growth?

By Deborah E. Zonicle, an accounting analyst/supervisor at Esso, Nassau, Bahamas.

Are You Misrepresenting the Facts?

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Pet. 1:20, 21

The notion that the Bible presents an array of self-contradictory facts is unbiblical. Simply put, it is not factual. There seems to be a developing ideology in religion that when one cannot understand something, he or she should leave it to faith. This is the biggest mistake a Christian can make. We are expected to study the Word, which under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will open our minds to enlightening truths.

Though it is true that certain scriptural passages appear to contradict other passages, careful study will erase this perceived conflict. Seventh-day Adventist Christians are called from darkness into God's wonderful light, not to be confounded by His Word but to be invigorated to share it with all the world. God's revelation to humankind is in His Word. The Bible makes clear God's instruction and direction to all. Many would have the church accept their personal interpretations based on their own spiritual revelations. We each, individually, need to study the Word so that we will be able to understand and interpret correctly (2 Tim. 2:15).

God spoke through human prophets so that humanity can understand His will

God spoke through human prophets so that humanity can understand His will for them.

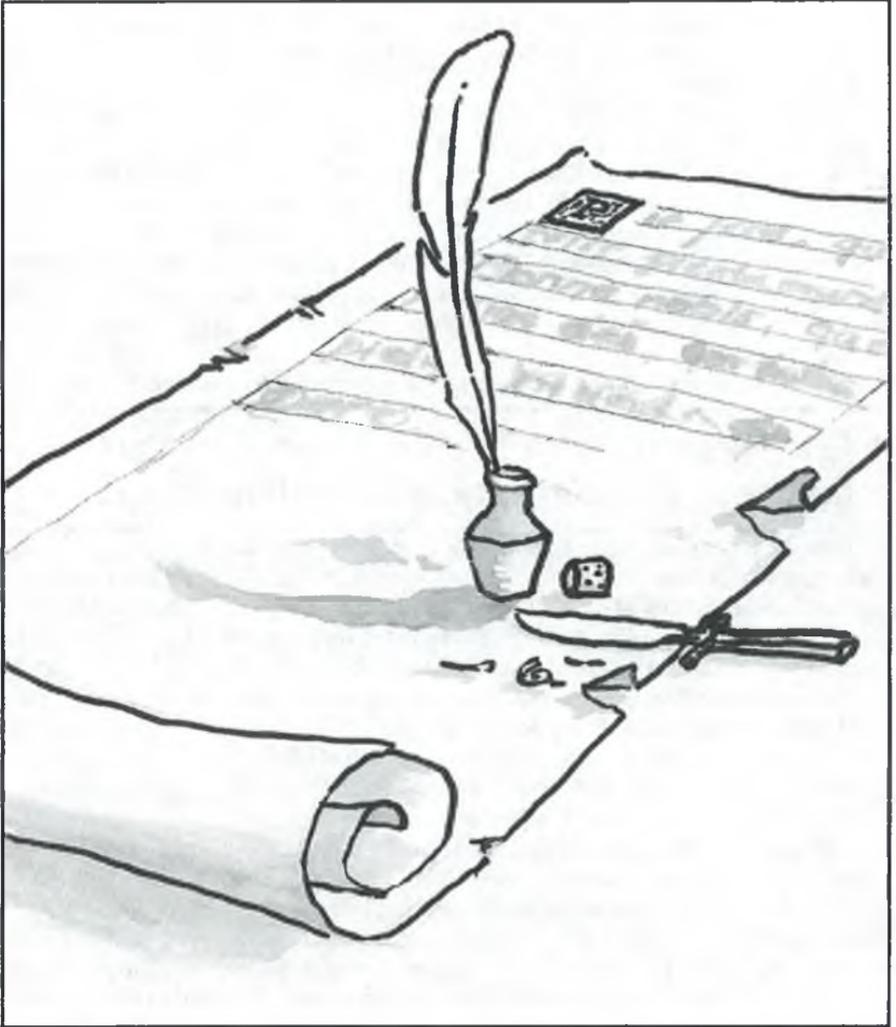
for them and their purpose in life. In an attempt to explain Scripture, many develop messages that were never meant to be delivered and proclaim them as the good news. These apostates of deceit have their just reward. Our willingness to follow God's way and our understanding of His Word form an inseparable union. The more we understand His Word, the more we follow His way.

The absence of hunger for the Bible has led to apathy in the hearts of many Christians and thus a yearning for fulfillment in a false hope. If we as Seventh-day Adventist Christians would yearn for the Word of God as we ought, evangelism and revival would explode. Christ's second coming would be hastened, bringing eternal joy, peace, love, and happiness.

Our constant search for truth and correct interpretation of the Scriptures will occur only when we genuinely seek God's guidance. Through the medium of prayer, fasting, and Bible study, much can be gained. The prophets of old were in touch with God's Word. The New Testament church continued the zeal in understanding the Bible. The early church founders were inspired along the right path. Now, we are charged to keep on the right path as we look forward to Christ's soon return.

By John G. F. Carey, environmental health and safety engineer for Texaco in the Bahamas and Truk and Caicos Islands.

MORE THAN INK ON PAPER



“Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful” (2 Chron. 20:20, NIV).

Keeping Hope Alive

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Acts 2:14-21

Psychic hot lines by phone and credit card. Daily newspaper astrology readings. Tarot cards. Swamis, gurus, and mystics. All are considered to be prophecy for our times. People claiming to know the secrets of life attract devotees by the millions from all walks of life. Every moment of every day, someone, somewhere on our planet, is seeking guidance from a trusted source of apparently higher knowledge.

Christians believe the gift of prophecy to be one of many Holy Spirit-motivated gifts for ministry (1 Corinthians 12). This spiritual gift of ministry, implemented on God's behalf, courageously and, at times, with predictive insight, evidences the continuing success of Jesus' rescue mission 2,000 years ago. The existence of this gift declares God's presence with you and interest in your life. According to the apostle Paul, it is to be desired above all gifts (14:1).

As good as the prophetic gift is, however, it is incomplete as a revelation of God when compared to Jesus' revelation of God (Heb. 1:1-3). Further, it is an equal opportunity gift. According to God's will and a person's willingness to work in partnership with Him, God may provide this gift to young or old, man or woman.

We live in an era of the weird and wonderful.

Though the gifted person is valuable and necessary to the process, the focus is ultimately not on the prophet. The gifted person is the means to an end.

God is result-oriented. The purpose of the gift is to benefit the person or group who are, as it were, on the receiving end. It is, after all, a gift. Gifts are designed to be well-intended, freely given, and for the benefit of another person. Prophecy provides four benefits: to make us more aware of who God is, who we are, what our world is like, and how we should live together according to God's plan.

We live in an era of the weird and wonderful. People are looking to all kinds of beliefs and experiences to give hope for living one day at a time. The quest for spiritual enlightenment, God consciousness, and holistic living is gathering momentum in many parts of the world. A balanced Christian belief in and expression of the spiritual gift of prophecy imparted by God is not strange. Rather, it is yet another positive opportunity for us to know and share our God and ourselves in the world in which we live. Like all spiritual gifts, prophecy will one day end, but the faith, hope, and love that the gift is designed to encourage in every human being will last for an eternity (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

By David Foster, Personal Ministries/Sabbath School director for the South Pacific Division, Wairoonga, New South Wales, Australia.

The Uniqueness of the Gift of Prophecy

LOGOS

Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10

The gift of prophecy is one of the spiritual gifts given to the church (1 Cor. 12:10). The Greek word for “prophecy” means “to speak forth” or “to speak for another.” A person with a gift of prophecy speaks on God’s behalf. As God’s spokesperson, he or she reveals God’s will, provides guidance, exhorts God’s people, and rebukes evils.

Given to the Remnant Church

One of the characteristics of the last days is the emergence of the remnant church spoken of by John in Revelation 12:17. This church keeps the commandments of God and cherishes “the testimony of Jesus.” For these reasons, the church becomes a target of Satan’s attacks.

“The testimony of Jesus” is first mentioned in Revelation 1. “I John . . . was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (verse 9). Jesus gave his witness, or testimony, to John, and the testimony of Jesus is the “spirit of prophecy” (19:10). During the time of John, the New Testament had not yet been written. Christians relied on the Old Testament and on letters from the apostles. During the time of the New Testament, the Holy Spirit continued to give the gift of prophecy to persons like Matthew, Mark, Luke,

The significance of the gift of prophecy at the end of time is explained in the Old Testament.

Paul, Peter, and John himself. The New Testament thus is part of the growing understanding of truth as revealed by the testimony of Jesus.

Sign of the End

The testimony of Jesus did not end with the New Testament. This gift appears again, especially in the last days. In fact, the emergence of the testimony of Jesus, as a spiritual gift to the remnant church, is itself a sign of the kingdoms of the world.

The significance of the gift of prophecy at the end of time is explained in the Old Testament. Joel the prophet foresaw sons and daughters prophesying and old men dreaming dreams in the time of the “dreadful day of the Lord” (2:28, 29, 31). The spirit of prophecy is a special gift to the remnant church during the period prior to the Second Coming of Christ.

Joel further associates the “dreadful day of the Lord” with a darkened sun and a bloody moon (verse 31). John the revelator also mentions these signs in the sun and moon (Rev. 6:12, 13).

Revival of the Gift of Prophecy

Based on what we have studied so far, we should expect to find a revival of the gift of prophecy in the last days among God’s commandment-keeping people before Jesus returns. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the renewal of the spirit

of prophecy has been given through the person of Ellen G. White. They consider her writings, over 100,000 manuscript pages, as divinely inspired.

In 60 years, Ellen White wrote about twenty-five million words. That is equivalent to 1,100 words or 3 to 4 typewritten pages a day! She also preached two to three sermons every week. Her quill pen had to be dipped into the inkwell to write every five words. At the end of her life, her arm would have traveled about two thousand miles, moving between the inkwell and the paper.

True or False

Circle your response to the following statements:*

- T F 1. The quality or degree of inspiration in the writings of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture.
- T F 2. The writings of Ellen White are an addition to the canon of sacred Scripture.
- T F 3. The writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture.
- T F 4. The writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine.
- T F 5. The study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture.
- T F 6. Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White.
- T F 7. The writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.
- T F 8. The writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large.
- T F 9. The inspired writings of Ellen White are the product of mere Christian piety.
- T F 10. Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.

REACT

1. What evidence have you observed personally that the gift of prophecy did not end in New Testament times?

2. In what respects have you observed that Adventists sometimes forget that Ellen White asserted that her writings were intended to support and illuminate the Scriptures?

3. Explain why you agree or disagree that it is possible for the use of Ellen White's writings to be idolatrous.

4. If Ellen White, an Adventist, is one of only a few modern Christian prophets, what does this suggest about the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

5. Is it possible that someone may yet have the gift of prophecy before Jesus comes? Explain your answer.

*According to an article published by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists ("The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings," *Adventist Review*, December 23, 1982), all ten statements above are false.

Making It Plain

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Chron. 20:20

Unfortunately, the Bible wasn't written only for Seventh-day Adventists. That's why the writings of Ellen White, the Adventist church's own inspired, modern prophet, are so important.

A friend once said the Bible was tough to study. I agree. It chops and changes topics a lot of the time, and the sequence is wrong. For example, Revelation, the last book of the Bible, describes things that happen before things that happen in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Confused?

Ellen White breaks down the messages in the Bible and makes them more relevant. Hey, they're also easier to read. There's something for everyone. Her early writings are emotional, almost naive (but that's understandable: She was pretty young at the time). Her later writings are more structured and analytical.

And you can be confident the advice she gives is good. The Bible says believe in God's prophets and you will be successful (2 Chron. 20:20). Studies show that Adventists who follow Ellen White's advice are more likely to show positive Christian attributes and behavior than members who do not. And one of our church's fundamental beliefs is that her writings are a continuing and authoritative

Ellen White's writings are excellent, but she's not the last word.

source of truth, providing comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction.

A warning, though. Ellen White's writings are excellent, but she's not the last word. Studying something spiritual? Start and finish with the Bible. Ellen White even says the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. She, and the early church pioneers, combined Bible study with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to help solve their problems. "We would search the scriptures with much prayer, and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds."¹

Results? "The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error."² "As the points of our faith were thus established, our feet were placed upon a solid foundation. We accepted the truth point by point, under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. I would be taken off in vision, and explanations would be given me."³

Then she'd write and write and write. She's written a lot of books on a lot of topics (from *Messages to Young People* to *The Ministry of Healing* to *The Desire of Ages*). The challenge? Begin reading them!

1. *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 31.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

3. *Gospel Workers*, p. 302.

By Brenton Stacey, an editorial assistant at the Signs Publishing Company, Warburton, Australia.

Still Scratching Our Heads?

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Acts 2:14-21; Rev. 12:17

Referring to a time after the year 1798, John the revelator reported: “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17, NIV). The “testimony of Jesus” spoken of here is identified as the “spirit of prophecy” (19:10). In other words, in the very last days, there is to be a group of God’s people identified by the fact that they obey all the commandments and have the true prophetic gift.

How would you react if your best friend claimed to have a vision from God for you? Skeptical? Some of our great-great-grandparents were scratching their heads over the same issue. After all, Ellen White was only 17 when she received her first vision from God.

Even Ellen balked at the idea of being a special messenger from God. About her first vision, she wrote, “I was exceedingly troubled. . . . I lay upon my face a long time, and all the light I could get was, ‘Make known to others what I have revealed to you.’”^{*} Added to these doubts, the skepticism of others made the first few years of Mrs. White’s ministry difficult indeed.

How would you react if your best friend claimed to have a vision from God for you?

In apostolic times, even Peter had to defend the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). On behalf of the other 11 apostles he said, “These men are not drunk . . . It’s only nine in the morning!” (verse 15).

Could you be used by the Holy Spirit? Is this so difficult to imagine? Consider two of God’s choices: the apostle Peter and Mrs. White. Both would probably not have been your first choices to be God’s message bearers. Peter was loud and abrasive; Ellen, shy and sickly. But God’s Spirit transformed them into powerful servants of God. As you consider the soon outpouring of the Holy Spirit, be encouraged that God is able to transform you too.

Peter claimed Joel’s prophecy for his own day, saying, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people’” (Acts 2:17). The fulfillment of Revelation 12:17 can be found in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But God desires more for us. God desires that we, too, claim, as Peter did, that, “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

^{*}Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 20.

Farther Ahead on the Trail

HOW-TO

Key Text: Joel 2:28, 29

Recently, I was helping to make a hiking trail near Seventh-day Adventism's first church—in Washington, New Hampshire. We were spreading gravel over the winding trail through the woods. Our little tractor dragged the gravel-filled trailer to the end of the trail. We would extend the trail a little farther then return for another load.

As we neared the end of our job, a second crew began surfacing the trail behind us with a second tractor. Because of hills and bends, we could not see the other crew and tractor as we returned for more gravel, so we designated a teenage girl as a “lookout” ahead of us to avoid troublesome tie-ups. This lookout told me when to stop and when to move ahead. She did not diminish my driving, but her advice made me more efficient because she could see ahead. Similarly, God has given us a lookout, someone who could see the trail ahead of us. The closer we get to the end of the trail, the more we need the Spirit of Prophecy.

To make our use of this lookout more effective, perhaps we might look at the two parts of the title, “spirit” and “prophecy.”

1. Spirit in past writings—The Holy Spirit motivated and enlightened the

Our little tractor dragged the gravel-filled trailer to the end of the trail.

prophets of the past. Ellen White was inspired by the same Holy Spirit. We need the Spirit's guidance to understand both the Bible and Ellen White's writings. If we will open our lives to His influence, He will enlighten us through these revelations of the past.

2. Spirit in our own lives—God promises the Holy Spirit's power to *all* His people in the end time (Joel 2:28, 29). The same Spirit who inspired Ellen White is promised to each of us. The effect can come in several ways: conviction of the truth of Ellen White's writings, insights, and inspired understandings, or dreams. These do not invalidate the Spirit of Prophecy. A number of the pioneers experienced God-given dreams and insights. However, God never pushes anyone. If we want to receive the Holy Spirit, we have to get to know Him.

3. Written prophecy—We need to know the Bible. Everything we read in the Spirit of Prophecy should be studied with the question, “How does this relate to my life?” This key opens new insights. We see how Ellen White's work amplifies the scriptural message.

4. Tender advice—Prophecy was never intended to be some glittering magic show. It was always the tender advice of one who saw farther ahead on the trail than we do. Prophecies are connected by the love of the Holy Spirit, for us, the people He guides.

By Doug Hosking, a pastor and Bible worker in Maine and New Brunswick.

What Is Ellen White's Authority?

OPINION

Key Text: Rev. 19:10

I grew up Adventist. As a child, I heard Ellen White quoted; as a teenager, I warmed to a picture of God in *The Great Controversy*; as a church pastor, I despaired at the abuse of her writings in theological battles of the 1980s.

In the 90s, I'm not sure how to use her authority. I want to take her seriously, and if the Seventh-day Adventist Church claims to have a prophet, then we have to take her seriously. I know that her wisdom on a range of issues makes such common sense. I quote her regularly in a sermon, not as a token or even as a source of authority but because young adults and old identify with her thought processes.

But I can't use her merely as a good quote. I also quote from Eugene Peterson, William Barclay, J. B. Phillips, John Stott, and Morris Venden. They have some profound things to say about God that I and my congregation identify with.

Although I'm not sure how to respond to her authority at present, I'm convinced that God *is* using her (and the "is" is important) to guide Seventh-day Adventist Christians on matters of everyday living before Christ comes.

For example, here in England, we've just been through the process of slaughtering cattle in a wholesale cull to eradicate bovine spongiform encephalopathy

I also quote from Peterson, Barclay, Phillips, Stott, and Venden.

(BSE) disease, originating from infected meat and bonemeal in cattle feed concentrates. Some beef eaters have had the disease transmitted to them in the form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and died. McDonald's (UK) banned British beef from their shelves, and it is only now after half a million cattle have been slaughtered that British beef is on the menu at McDonald's again.

The root cause of the cattle disease problem is greed. When farmers feed cattle with dead cattle—and do so to increase the profit margin—BSE is the result. This practice in Britain is now banned.

I am not a vegan, not a 100-percent full vegetarian, not really into the "serious" health blueprint, can't stand tofu, and I love eggs, cheese, and milk. But when Ellen White talks about a corresponding increase of human wickedness and animal disease, in the context of the BSE crisis her words are ringing in my ears.

It makes me wonder whether there is further common sense I need to look out for. Consider the values she shares about music and entertainment, dress code, relationships, casual religion—all those seemingly outdated, authoritarian standards passed through previous generations that we have rejected. Looking at other social, ethical, and political problems of today, her authority takes on new meaning. And as in response to any gift from God, I say Thank You!

By David Neal, youth director of the South England Conference and minister of the Stanborough Park Seventh-day Adventist Church, England.

A RELIABLE ROAD MAP



“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17, NIV).

Coming at a Bad Time?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 24

Steve sat in his fourteenth-story office overlooking Wall Street. It was 6:45 a.m. Looking over the daily schedule his secretary had left on his desk the day before, he let out a long sigh of relief. At the bottom of the schedule in large print she had written "Last Appointment Before Hawaii!" At long last he and his wife would enjoy a few quiet weeks together. As he sat behind his desk imagining the sun, sand, and gently swaying palm trees, he began to relax for the first time in quite a while.

Suddenly Steve's door flew open and his secretary burst into the office. As she ran to his window frantically motioning for him to follow, he noticed that the light now pouring through his window was far greater than anything he had experienced before.

Steve's face lost all color, and panic surged through his brain as he watched thousands of people pointing to the sky at what appeared to be the second coming of Jesus. In disbelief Steve stared at what should have been the most thrilling scene the world has ever witnessed. "This can't be happening now!" he screamed. Steve's defenses kicked into full force now. Systematically he began to review all the events he'd been taught that would occur before Christ's return. He smiled with

"This can't be happening now!" he screamed.

reassurance as he turned to Shelly and said, "This can't really be Jesus coming, I haven't had to run to the hills yet. The world police haven't come to my home asking me to denounce Jesus. They aren't televising the weekly persecution and executions of Christians around the world. It's all right, Shelly, the church has taught me what to look for, and there are still a lot of things that have to happen first. . . ."

It is easy to laugh at Steve and tell ourselves that we could never be as narrow-minded in our attempt to understand the Scriptures, but are we really that different? Only through the illumination of the Word can we prepare for the second coming of Christ. By focusing on those things that we must do to obtain our salvation, we often lose sight of what really matters.

If Christ came today, would you react like Steve? Do you rely on others' interpretations of the Bible, or do you strive to understand for yourself? Should we be trying to figure out exactly what will happen in the last days, or should we focus on being prepared for whenever Christ returns?

By Tim and Cheryl Toscano, an officer in the U.S. Army stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, and cardiopulmonary technician at Metroplex Hospital, respectively.

Illusion or Illumination?

LOGOS

Psalm 119; Isa. 50:4; 60:1-3; Daniel 7-12; Eph. 6:17; Rev. 10:1, 2, 7

At the time of this writing, it is only a few weeks after the suicide of 39 men and women of a group who called itself “Heaven’s Gate.” In the current Zeitgeist, it is all the media are asking, “Why would 38 people surrender their wills to another? How could this New Age guru convince them that they would leave their ‘containers’ (bodies) behind and take the next evolutionary step in joining a UFO trailing behind the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet?” (It sounds like a bad plot for the *X-Files*.) How many more illusions or illusionists will people follow as millennial fever grows?

Illusion or Illumination

The members of “Heaven’s Gate” followed an illusion, and it cost their lives. An illusion is defined as “an erroneous perception of reality, a fantastic, impractical plan or desire,”¹ or “the condition of being deceived by an erroneous belief or perception.”²

Instead of an illusion, God wants us to have *illumination*, which is defined as the condition of being “filled with light, or informed spiritually,”³ or “to enlighten intellectually or spiritually.”⁴ How do we become illuminated?

It sounds like a bad plot for the *X-Files*.

Read and Use God’s Word

The theme of Psalm 119 is the Word of God, which is called by 10 different names: commandments, judgments, law, path, precepts, saying, statutes, testimonies, way, and word. Each of these names tells us what God’s Word is and how we need to respond to it. God’s Word is also pictured as treasure (verses 14, 72, 127, 162), water (verse 9), counselor or companion (verse 24), light (verses 105, 130), honey (verse 103), song (verse 54), and heritage (verse 111).

We’re strangers on the earth (verse 10; 1 Peter 2:11), and we need a road map to guide our journey. If you’ve ever been lost in a strange place, you know the value of a good map. In fact, the psalmist values God’s Word so much that he would rather have it than food (Ps. 119:103), sleep (verse 55), or money (verses 72, 127, 162). Furthermore, Paul calls it our “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17), which means it is our offensive weapon in life. Only the foolish would go into battle unarmed!

Memorize God’s Word

If God’s Word is this vitally important, it needs to be more than facts in our head. We need to put God’s truth in our hearts by memorizing Scripture. This was the whole reason for the structure of Psalm 119. It contains 22 sections of 8 lines each, each section beginning with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This was probably a device to help memorize the psalm.

How important is it to memorize Scripture? Chuck Swindoll writes, “No other single discipline is more useful and rewarding than this. No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your wit-

nessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your counseling will be in demand. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.”⁵

Don't Run Out of Oil

The Bible is not only inspired, it can give us illumination through the Holy Spirit. The truth of the Bible is not of some ancient, irrelevant ideas from thousands of years ago. It can be contemporary and individual in its application and relevance as we humbly study it and allow the Holy Spirit to direct our thoughts. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is lacking in our Bible study.

“Everywhere among conservatives we find persons who are Bible-taught. They conceive truth to be something which they can grasp with the mind. If a man holds to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, he is thought to possess divine truth. But it does not follow. There is no truth apart from the Spirit.”⁶ In fact, Jesus said the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth (John 15:26). As we study the Bible and apply it to our lives, we need to pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten and illuminate our minds and hearts.

In Matthew 25, Jesus taught the disciples about the last days by using three parables. The first story tells of 10 maidens who are waiting for the bridegroom of a wedding party to arrive. After hours go by and no bridegroom comes, they are disappointed. All 10 maidens sleep, including the five wise ones. When the bridegroom arrives, the wise maidens are ready to go because they have oil (a symbol of the Holy Spirit) for their lamps. Prepared Christians need not panic in the last days when Jesus returns if they have the illumination of the Holy Spirit.⁷

Our faith is in Jesus, not in charts or time tables. Through Him, we can be ready for anything. Trusting in Jesus by allowing the oil of the Holy Spirit to lubricate our lives will keep us functioning well. Like the wise maidens, we can sleep at night when we trust in Jesus.

REACT

1. Why is it so difficult for us to memorize Scripture?
2. Why do you think people in Heaven's Gate or the Branch Davidians were deceived into turning their wills over to someone else?

1. *Roget's II The New Thesaurus* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), p. 482.

2. *Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), p. 610.

3. *Roget's II*, p. 481.

4. *Webster's II*, p. 609.

5. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1985), p. 78.

6. Warren W. Wiersbe, *With the Word* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1991), p. 391.

7. Alden Thompson, *Signs of the Times*, June 1984, pp. 8-10.

By Jonathan David Leach, pastor of the Killeen (Texas) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Scriptures Our Safeguard

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Isa. 8:20

“Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves. Then, by controlling the minds of these leaders, he can influence the multitudes according to his will.”¹ This is not to say that we are not to listen to our pastors, elders, or other church leaders. This means that we need to know the truths of the Bible for ourselves so that we may not be deceived. So often I think being deceived is something that can happen to anyone else but me. I mean, I was born an Adventist and went to Adventist schools all my life. . . . Really, of all people I think I should know the Bible enough not to be deceived. . . . NOT!

Several weeks ago I found myself giving a Bible study to a couple of friends. Even though their message was pretty confusing, they stood strong and firm on what they believed and quoted texts left and right. I had to go pull out my “27 beliefs” book so that I could quote some texts. That’s what happens when you think you know the Bible; all of a sudden you realize you don’t.

That is how we can be deceived.

They stood strong and firm on what they believed and quoted texts left and right.

“We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing Scripture with Scripture. With divine help, we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God.”² “When the testing time shall come, those who have made God’s word their rule of life will be revealed.”³ We, God’s people, must maintain the Bible and the Bible only, as our standard of living. After all, “God has given us His word that we may become acquainted with its teachings and know for ourselves what He requires of us.”⁴

Though Satan employs a variety of methods to distract us from that which is pure and true, we must diligently pray so the Holy Spirit may keep our eyes opened to the truth. That is my sincere prayer for you and me.

REACT

If the Bible were taken away from us, how could we defend our beliefs?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 598.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 602.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 598.

By Keren Arisai Aguinaga, an office manager for a surgeon and family practitioner in San Marcos, Texas.

Inspiration vs. Perspiration

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Isa. 50:1-3

When I entered my cousin's house one day, I found a large group of friends sitting around the kitchen table playing with a Ouija board. They were asking it various questions about the future and their lives to come. At the time, I was somewhat amused at the fact that intelligent people were sitting around talking to a piece of cardboard. When they seemed to have run out of questions, I decided to have a little fun. I suggested, "Let's ask it who in this room will die next!" Everyone bolted from the room!

For many, the future is only an uncertainty at best, but for God's people the future is not only certain, it is filled with hope: the promise of a better land in which we will be with God. Yet we overlook the fact that the Word (the Bible) is not just for God's people; it is for everyone who seeks understanding and wisdom. It was intended for all of us who stood around the table that day looking for answers to all our questions. When people seek understanding, they will go to any means necessary to get it. Saul, king of Israel, also sought to know the future outside of the Word of God, and as all who trust in other sources, he met his fate—death.

We have two basic choices. We can work hard at getting to know Jesus, and He

Intelligent people were sitting around talking to a piece of cardboard.

will reveal our future to us, or we can work hard at knowing the future and miss Jesus altogether. God's Word is the only accurate account of what is to take place at the end of time, yet understanding does not come automatically from just reading the Bible for answers. It comes from getting to know Jesus. It comes as the result of a supernatural change in the mind of the reader. As we allow Jesus into our hearts, His Holy Spirit opens our minds to the ancient and future mysteries of the Bible. It is not something that we have to work at; it is simply a gift from God.

As the future comes alive to us through Christ, we will become His light unto the world. Those around us will benefit from our relationship with God and from our knowledge of His Word. Not only will the Christian find himself talking with those around him, but he will soon discover that others will come seeking him out from far away. We must also realize that the darkness that Isaiah talks about is a spiritual darkness and that it covers the entire earth. Therefore, our purpose is obvious: to spread God's Word and give His light to a dark world so that truth will be illuminated and when He comes may we be found in Him.

By Trey Wilson, a freelance writer from Killeen, Texas.

Ripening in the Light

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 24:24

I became a Seventh-day Adventist as a teenager attending public school. As the only Adventist in our small agricultural community, I remember all the allusions to “dare to be a Daniel,” and I remember trying to stand (usually alone) for Jesus Christ. I looked forward to attending an Adventist college where everyone believed as I did. I imagined the giant spiritual leaps I would make being surrounded by fellow believers.

Unfortunately, I never made those leaps at college. The responsibility for my spiritual stagnation was all mine. I was happy with where I was. I had become complacent. I didn’t have to be peculiar or stand in the face of perceived persecution anymore. Therefore, I didn’t feel the need to call on God (except during finals).

Complacency hits us all. It is spiritual stagnation. To avoid this deadly apathy, we are pushed by the Holy Spirit to seek illumination—new knowledge that will get our spiritual juices flowing.

Illumination can be a two-edged sword, though. Though some have sought illumination and grown, others have sought illumination only to be deluded by

When a tomato finishes ripening, it begins to rot.

Satan’s tricks. How are we to be properly illuminated?

1. Study. This is how we get to know God. When those we love call us on the phone, we know who they are. No one could imitate them and fool us. We should know God’s voice so well—through the study of His Word—that even when Satan tries to deceive us, we cannot be fooled. Matthew 24:24 says that Satan could deceive even the very elect if that were possible. Our close relationship with God makes deception impossible.

2. Involve the Holy Spirit. We know how important it is to pray before studying. I challenge you to address this member of the Godhead personally. Invite the Holy Spirit by name to illuminate you. Be prepared for that still, small voice to become louder.

3. Understand the nature of your new light. The term *new light* unfortunately conjures up images of offshoot groups or cults. The Holy Spirit may not necessarily give new light to an individual to pull the Seventh-day Adventist Church out of Babylon. New light may be only for that individual. Once you ask for and receive new light, don’t expect to turn an unsuspecting church on its collective ear but take what the Holy Spirit has shown you and apply it to your own life.

There is no time to stop growing. An old saying says that when a tomato finishes ripening, it begins to rot. If we want to continue to ripen, we need to seek illumination. Ask for it. Jesus guarantees that we will receive it.

By Stan and Kelly Michael, teachers at Killeen (Texas) Adventist Junior Academy.

Getting It All in Order

OPINION

Key Text: Psalm 119

A discussion in Sabbath School opened a new door for me. We discussed the types of people who are attracted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We unanimously agreed that most of these are people of order, people who like things orderly. These people would be happy living their lives from neat, clean, organized checklists. They can invariably follow the checklists and know that all is finished when they have scratched off the last task.

I am a soldier in the U.S. Army. Being in the army, I know all about checklists. We soldiers live by them. We have checklists for typing a memo, fixing a tank, flying a chopper, and, yes, even starting a truck. For just about everything there is a checklist you must follow. Most of these checklists are found in army regulations, which mean they are often left open for interpretation and human error.

Contrary to popular belief, soldiers are human. We can read the regulation and misinterpret some bit of information. When this happens, something goes awry. And as we all know, when something goes wrong in the military, it's no small bag of potatoes.

The Bible is a regulation with many checklists contained therein. These check-

When something goes wrong in the military, it's no small bag of potatoes.

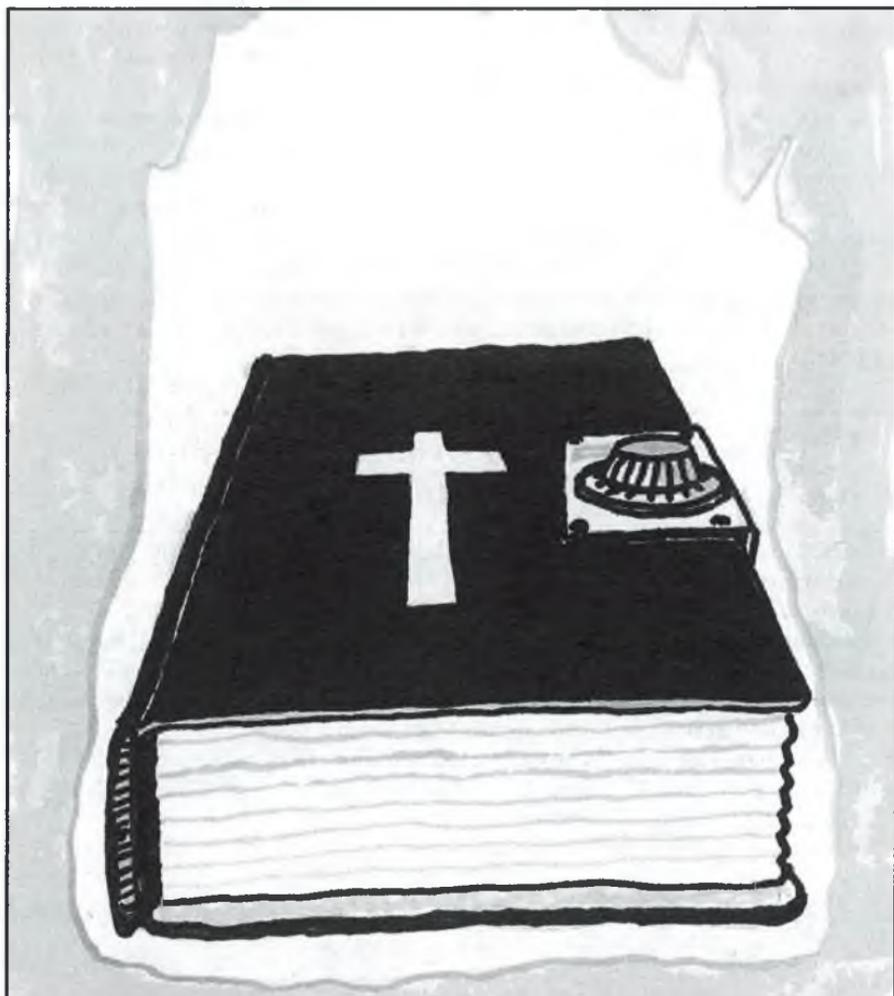
lists provide the means for salvation, with the help of Christ and the Holy Spirit. And if we carefully execute all the tasks at hand, we are promised eternal life (John 12:50).

If, however, you use the Bible for the compilation of a checklist, be careful; seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. And remember, we are all human—we need the Word to give us light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). Pray that your list be right, and I'll pray that nothing inadvertently goes wrong. . . .

A wise man once said, "Who can separate his faith from his actions, or his belief from his occupations?"*

*Kahlil Gibran, *Il Profeta: Engrae nel segreto della vita* (Demetra, Italy: 1993), p. 118.

THE *REAL* “BIBLE CODE”



“We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19, NIV).

Prophets, Prophets Everywhere

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Pet. 1:19-21

Everyone wishes they could know the future! TV commercials blare the pronouncements of psychics who promise they can reveal it. The Internet has web pages where one can talk with those who claim to know all manner of things. Who among us hasn't wished for our very own Urim and Thummim?

Regularly the supermarket tabloids declare the doomsday prophesying of Nostradamus, a 16th-century astrologer and seer. History records his heavy involvement with the occult and astrology. Yet thousands believe him to be a prophet. Kings and queens called upon him to tell them what lay ahead. During World War II both Axis and Allied powers used his predictions as psychological propaganda.

From his humble beginnings Nostradamus was noted for his intellect and ability to grasp difficult subjects. His grandfather instructed him in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, mathematics, and "celestial science," or astrology.

Nostradamus wrote his prophecies during the period of the Inquisition after his family had been forced to convert from Judaism to Catholicism. He chose to record his predictions in a polyglot vocabulary of French, Provencal, Italian, Greek, and Latin. This was to protect him from those who might accuse him of being a magician.

Supermarket tabloids declare the doomsday prophesying of Nostradamus.

How do Christians relate to these revelations? Do we accept them as prophecy or cast them aside? There is no evidence that Nostradamus used the Bible for the basis of his proclamations. Yet some seem to be accurate.

Recently *The Bible Code*, by Michael Drosnin, caught the attention of the reading public. The author, himself an atheist, reported the discovery of a code in the Bible. The code supposedly foretold specific events, including names, dates, and places. It is noteworthy that shortly after the death of Princess Diana, this "startling" revelation was discovered by use of the Bible code. Was this prophetic interpretation?

For Seventh-day Adventist Christians, prophetic interpretation has long played an important role in our church. We have our own prophet. Members conduct seminars on Daniel and Revelation. Since 1844 we have looked to the fulfillment of prophecies. In all of this, however, do we forget the principles of prophetic interpretation?

Eschatology is the study of last things or last-day events as outlined in Bible prophecy. When we wonder about the future, we must remember that prophecy is God's answer to our human questions. God is the One in control. When false prophets arrive on the scene, it is necessary to understand prophecy and apply it correctly.

By Deena Bartel-Wagner, a freelance writer in Windham, New Hampshire.

A Guiding Light

LOGOS

2 Pet. 1:19-21; Rev. 1:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Isa. 61:1-3; Zechariah 3, 4; Matthew 24

Spiritual darkness in our world hangs like an ominous, frightening cloud over humanity. Moral bankruptcy in this world is the result of a lack of spiritual knowledge. It seems that we are fast approaching—or perhaps surpassing—the gross darkness that covered the earth prior to the first advent of Christ. I have never been so grateful for the assuring words in 2 Peter 1:19-21. The light that Jesus brought to the world continues to shine through prophecy. The Greek phrase that is translated “dark place” (verse 19, NIV) can be translated literally as “a squalid place which may be dark as well as dirty.”¹

When Peter tells us that the words of the prophets are as a light shining in a dark place, we can praise God. Never has the light of prophetic truth been needed more desperately than it is right now; never have humanity’s dark and dirty deeds been more apparent.

Prophecy is not a human quest for God; it is rather the work of God in revealing Himself to us. “There is a God in heaven that reveals secrets” (Dan. 2:28, NKJV). The task in interpreting these revelations, however, is ours. And it is possible both to misinterpret prophecy and to receive false prophecy unless we are guided by the same Spirit who inspired the prophets of old.

The light that Jesus brought to the world continues to shine through prophecy.

Several guidelines will help us correctly understand and apply prophecy:

The Principle of Time and Dual Application (Joel 2:28-32; Isa. 61:1)

Bible prophecies span time periods from the immediate to the far-distant future. Some prophecies are fulfilled right away, some at a later time, and some in the future.

When Joel prophesied, “It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (2:28-32), he was spanning a vast time period. Peter suggested that this prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost when he said, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel!” (Acts 2:16). Yet Ellen White adds that this prophecy is to “reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel.”²

Another example of this principle of dual application occurs when Jesus discusses in Matthew 24 the destruction of Jerusalem but applies the message to the end of the world. Yet another example is found in Isaiah 61:1, “The spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners” (NIV). One Sabbath, while reading the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue, Jesus declared, “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21, NIV).

The Day-for-a-Year Principle (Dan. 8:14; Ezek. 4:6)

Some prophecies span centuries. “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed” (Dan. 8:14). This prophecy makes sense only when the year-for-a-day principle is applied (see Ezek. 4:6). Widely applied throughout Scripture, this principle states that one prophetic day is equal to one literal year. The above prophecy then literally spans from 457 B.C. to 1844 A.D. This, of course, is well-established prophecy in Adventism.

The Principle of Literal Interpretation (Rev. 19:20; Dan. 7:17)

This principle asserts that prophecy is to be understood in a literal sense unless the Scriptures indicate clearly that the language is symbolic. For example, are the fires of destruction at the end of time (Rev. 19:20; 20:10) literal? They are, for in other instances in Scripture (2 Pet. 3:10-12), they are spoken of as literal. By contrast, what about the beast of Revelation 13? Daniel also saw beasts and was told, “The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth” (Dan. 7:17, NIV). When prophecies are to be taken symbolically, the Scriptures will make it clear. It is a mistake to attach symbols to elements of prophecies when the Bible does not. So many individuals try to explain away the Scriptures by making all prophecies figurative.

The Principle of Self-Exposition (Rev. 19:10; 12:17)

The key to understanding Bible prophecy is found in the Bible itself because the Bible is its own expositor. The prophecy of Revelation 12:17 illustrates this. It states, “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (NIV). If having the testimony of Jesus is an identifying characteristic of God’s last-day offspring (remnant), then we need to understand what this phrase means. Sure enough, the Bible explains itself: “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). As we apply this particular prophecy to our day, we can know that the gift of prophecy continues to our church.

Isn’t it reassuring to know that the Jesus who came to be the Light of the World 2,000 years ago continues to shine in this world through the Bible prophets and through the modern gift of prophecy as well? As serious students of the Word, let us be careful to interpret and apply these prophecies correctly so that we will be guided by that Light.

REACT

1. How do the prophecies of Matthew 24 relate to you personally? Are they important to you? Explain your answer.
2. Why do you think there is a tendency to explain away the literalness of the Scriptures or to make all prophecy symbolic?
3. How can the principle of dual application help strengthen your view of the inspiration of Scripture?
4. How can our interpretation of second-coming prophecies safeguard or damage our relationship with Christ?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 604.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. ix.

By Matthew L. Lombard, campus chaplain at Greater Boston (Massachusetts) Academy, Stoneham.

Do You See What God Sees?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 3:10

Seventh-day Adventists are a people who have an understanding of prophecy. Traditionally we have been unafraid to study and explain the difficult passages of Daniel and Revelation. Has this confidence, however, caused us to become desensitized to prophetic instructions?

In 1974, a fuel crisis settled on the United States unlike ever before. A generation that had been used to filling up their car anytime they chose now was forced to ration their fuel and cut back on driving. Lines at gas stations were long, and tempers were short. Violence erupted in some cases.

As the crisis escalated, many Adventists began to declare that this had to be the beginning of the time of the end. Surely not being able to buy or sell was just around the corner. Eventually the crisis was settled, and gas was once again plentiful—though at a higher price.

In 1991 Iraq invaded Kuwait. The ensuing Gulf War captured the attention of an expectant world. Again some declared this must be the end. Wasn't Armageddon supposed to be in that area of the world after all?

Now we are in the last year of this century. There are doomsday proclamations

Lines at gas stations were long and tempers were short.

and all manner of speculations. Where do we focus our eyes?

Ellen White states, "Let Daniel speak. Let the Revelation speak, and tell what is truth. But whatever phase of the subject is presented, uplift Jesus as the center of all hope." Too often this is where we get off track. We are so busy looking at the individual event that we fail to recognize the continuing process of which it is only a part. By focusing on events rather than on Jesus, do we fit the profile that Jesus described in Luke 8:10? Do we see but not see? Do we hear but not understand?

REACT

1. Why is it so easy to turn our focus on events rather than to look at the big picture?
2. How can I prevent the sensationalism of last-day events from drawing my eyes off Christ?
3. How would you describe the value of prophecy to a Christian friend? To a non-Christian friend?

**Testimonies to Ministers, p. 118.*

By Deena Bartel-Wagner, a freelance writer in Windham, New Hampshire.

The Safeguard of Second Coming Prophecies

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 29:18

Unless I make a list of things to do at the beginning of the day, I don't get much accomplished. Likewise, I find it difficult to save money unless I have a specific purchase in mind. Solomon went so far as to say that "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). Notice in the following highlights of Christian history how the vision of Christ's literal second coming kept Christians faithful to God.

Origen, a brilliant third-century scholar, concluded that the literal interpretation of second-coming prophecies was only for the simple. Drawing on the philosophies of Plato, he allegorized prophecies that depict the actual second coming of Jesus.

Although Origen was an influential scholar, Christians of that era still believed in the literal second coming of Jesus. The Roman government continued to persecute Christians because of their faith. Hope in the literal Second Coming fueled their faithfulness.

With Constantine's superficial conversion in the fourth century, Christianity became popular and polluted. Many Christians neglected their belief in Christ's

The hope of the Second Coming will carry God's remnant people through.

literal second coming because they no longer needed a hope for the future to keep their present faith alive. Christians could now worship God freely. This, they thought, was the age of peace that the Bible predicted, rather than the time following a literal Second Advent.

Augustine, one of the most influential Christian scholars of the late fourth and early fifth century, believed that the salvation of the soul is the only consideration of the Christian. He considered Jesus' death on the cross a metaphysical phenomenon. The actual event did not matter. With nothing to look back to, only death to look forward to, and church claiming control of the afterlife, it is no wonder that this era is dubbed the Dark Ages.

Before the Reformation could begin, God must restore His prophetic second coming message of hope to the world. In the twelfth century, Anselm, bishop of Havelberg, and Joachim of Flores, an Italian abbot, reintroduced the historical interpretation of prophecy (that is, prophecy speaks of actual events that have taken place or will take place). Rupert, abbot of Duetz, believed that the Bible is the center of all theology, not philosophy.

A vision of the Second Coming kept pre-Reformation martyrs, Jerome and Huss, singing till their fiery death. The hope of the Second Coming will carry God's remnant people through deception and persecution before Christ returns.

By Sandra Covell Dombrowski, a teacher of English, government, and biology at CedarBrook School, Rehoboth, Massachusetts.

Keys to Understanding Prophecy

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rev. 1:3

One of the most intimidating subjects for Christians to study is biblical prophecies. It is common for many to shy away from the Bible's prophecies and let the "experts" tackle Daniel, Revelation, and other prophetic Scriptures. Many believers are taught that the books of Daniel and Revelation are closed and cannot be understood. However, Revelation 1:3 promises, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near" (NIV).

God desires to bless those who *read* and *hear* His prophetic word. Paul's charge to Timothy is ours as well: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). The Bible's prophecies are actually good news for Christians, but we must not remain ignorant concerning them; we must take Paul's advice: Study, study, study!

Christians need to approach the study of prophecy with prayer and faith. Prayer is the key to understanding Scripture. We must be willing to take Christ at His word in order to understand prophecy. Therefore *ask* for understanding, *seek* God's blessing, and *knock* that Scripture may be opened (see Matt. 7:7, 8).

Many shy away from the Bible's prophecies and let the "experts" tackle prophetic Scriptures.

Regardless of where we begin our prophetic study, Daniel 2, Revelation 13, or Matthew 24, it is important for the student of Scripture to understand, that "no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20, 21, NIV). When all else fails us in this world, we always have the confidence that God's Word never fails. God's prophecies are just and true.

We are now ready to seek God's blessing as we open Scripture. Our golden rule will be to let the Bible interpret itself! One of the most intriguing books in the Bible is Revelation. As we begin our verse-by-verse study of Revelation, the first words encourage us: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . ." (1:1). I recommend *The SDA Bible Commentary* as we search Scripture. Other helpful books: *The Message of Revelation*, by C. Mervyn Maxwell, and *Daniel and the Revelation*, by Uriah Smith. Don't forget to look for Christ in the center of each prophecy.

REACT

1. How would you explain to your friend from another faith that the book of Revelation can be understood? Why is it important?
2. You have been asked to explain 1844 and your faith. Where would you begin?

By Daniel I. Sierra, a pastor in the Southern New England Conference, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

A Spiritual Pattern Language

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 7:7, 8

Sleepy-eyed graduate students filed into the classroom for another morning session. Many carried caffeinated beverages as a hopeful antidote to the early hour. In stark contrast, the professor showed no signs of fatigue. Beginning the lecture, he chose a victim to drill on the obscure details of the course material. One by one, the students failed to demonstrate their comprehension, and the focus would shift to a new victim.

My turn came, and like the others I struggled to answer the questions. Then the flash of insight struck: All the questions had the same answer. As I confidently responded to the next few questions, repeating that single answer, the professor moved on to easier prey. The lesson that day lay in the pattern woven through seemingly unrelated ideas.

Prophecy speaks to us in much the same manner. It, too, is understood through the subtle interweaving of details. A maze of references to other prophecies and literature reveal the richness of the message. Symbols and context provide a framework in which to see applications in history and the world around us. Through prophecy we see the strategic outline of the celestial battle. From prophecy we

My turn came, and like the others I struggled to answer the questions.

understand more clearly the character of our Creator.

To benefit from prophecy, we have to be willing to invest some time, since understanding follows relationship. We have to become familiar with the message in order to comprehend it. We need to develop our relationship with the Author to grasp the context more fully. Then, with an intimate familiarity with prophecy, we will be ready to perceive its mysteries.

In the classroom, inspiration depended on familiarity with the subject. Even an imperfect knowledge was better than none at all. The instructor provided the clue to enlightenment, but only those who were prepared were able to apply it. Prophecy is like that morning classroom. There are lessons to be learned, but far too many are still spiritually asleep. Others try to get by with artificial stimulants, like seminars, Sabbath School discussions, and sermons. Although the Instructor provides clues, they focus on getting to class at the appointed time rather than studying the prophets in preparation.

What does it take to see the prophetic pattern? Understand the language and structure of prophecy. Familiarize yourself with its context. Commit yourself to a relationship with the God of that prophecy. Seek the guidance and inspiration of the Spirit. "For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matt. 7:8, NRSV).

Are you prepared to perceive the pattern?

By Steven J. Dovich, a software engineer from Boston, Massachusetts.

“HOW DO YOU READ IT?”



“They that seek the Lord understand all things” (Prov. 28:5).

The Most Common Book in the World

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 28:5

Once upon a time, according to a popular Japanese nursery story, a rabbit and a turtle lived in the same town. One day the rabbit said, "Hey, Mr. Turtle, you are the slowest animal in the world. Why are you so slow?"

The turtle answered, "Well, . . . shall we run a race with each other to the foot of the mountain, Mr. Rabbit?"

They began the race, and soon the rabbit got a long lead over his rival. So he took a rest on his way because he thought a turtle wouldn't reach the finish line until evening. Then he slept there and finally awoke. "Oh, I have overslept!" he cried. "I've made a big mistake."

He made a desperate dash for the finish line, but the turtle had already won the race.

After telling this story, Japanese parents and teachers advise children that they must not look down on others and that they always must do their best.

A rabbit and a turtle lived in the same town.

Children grow up learning these kinds of lessons. Many people use allegories like this because they make lessons easier to remember. Adults as well as children enjoy hearing stories.

Each culture has its own stories, allegories, and parables. We also have a book that transcends cultures—the Bible. God has given us the Bible to reveal Himself to us so we can know Him better.

By Osamu Sanada, a gas station attendant in Iwakuni-shi, Japan.

“How Do You Read It?”

LOGOS

Exodus 25; Psalm 19; 80:7-11; Matt. 13:34, 44-46; Isa. 40:26; 2 Cor. 5:7, 9; 10:1-13; Heb. 9:1-9; Rev. 6:1-8

On one occasion, Jesus asked an expert in the law, “What is written in the Law? . . . How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26, NIV). You know he answered well and was commended by the Lawgiver. The subsequent story (the parable of the good Samaritan), however, revealed that the lawyer did not understand the *spirit* of the law (verses 29-37).

Recently, I made a visit to a nearby international Protestant church. The pastor was preaching on the inspiration of the Bible. Overall, the message was inspiring, pointed, and very practical, except for one statement that troubled me: “The Bible is the Book about God, and it has to be interpreted theologically only. It is not a book of history or science.”

The apostle Paul advised Timothy that he should be “handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15, NASB). His advice is even more valid in these last days. In the field of biblical hermeneutics (the study of the interpretation of the Scriptures), how the Bible interprets itself is of primary importance. The following counsel of Ellen White is noteworthy: “The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed.”¹

“The Bible has to be interpreted theologically only.”

In order to meet the various needs of humanity, God willingly employed different ways of communication (Heb. 1:1). Professor Gillespie points out that “there are history lessons and poetry, laws and psalms, Gospels and epistles, direct teaching and hundreds of illustrations. The Bible comes to us through the various forms (genres) chosen by the inspired writers to frame God’s message to us.”²

Literary Styles

Our texts for today are a collection of typical literary styles.

History (Exodus 25). Instruction regarding the tabernacle. “The Lord said . . .” (verse 1). You can find similar expressions at least 3,800 times in the Old Testament. “Since more than 40 percent of our Bible is historical, we are able to consider the importance of biblical examples in our walk of faith.”³

Prayer, poetry, and hymns (Psalm 19; 80:7-11; Isa. 40:26). In these passages, we are invited to recognize God’s revelation in the world of nature and His law. Here you can find parallelism—the second line in Hebrew poetry parallels the first line, or the thought in the second line contrasts with that of the first.

Parables (Matt. 13:34, 44-46). “Jesus spoke . . . to the crowd in parables” (verse 34, NIV). Teaching in parables was popular in Christ’s day. The Greek word translated parable means “comparison,” “illustration,” “type,” “figure.” Jesus, the One sent from heaven, taught the crowd what heaven is like “by earthly things with which the people were most familiar.”⁴

Allegories (2 Cor. 5:7, 9). "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (verse 7). An allegory is a "description of one thing under the image of another."⁵ Jesus' extended reference to Himself as "the true vine" (John 15:1-8) is a typical example.

Types (Heb. 9:1-9). Type is a means by which something is prefigured or represented by a model or symbol.⁶ It is synonymous with "copy" and "pattern" (cf. Rom. 5:14, "Adam, who was a pattern of one to come," NIV).

Symbols (Rev. 6:1-8). Symbols characterize apocalyptic prophecy, and both Daniel and Revelation employ symbolic language freely in describing the great conflict between Christ and Satan. There are six keys to Bible symbolism: a day (a year), wings (swiftness), horns (heads), beasts (kingdoms, divisions of kingdoms), waters (peoples, multitudes), and winds (war, strife).

"The Bible was not written for the scholar alone; on the contrary, it was designed for the common people. The great truths necessary for salvation are made as clear as noonday; and none will mistake and lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God."⁷

REACT

1. Why does God employ such a variety of literary styles in communicating with us?

2. How can we understand the Bible in perfect harmony with the mind of Jesus?

3. If Jesus tells you, "Do this [the law] and you will live" (Luke 10:28, NIV), how would you react?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 599.

2. *How to Study Your Bible*, Adult Sabbath School Lessons Teacher's Edition, January 1996, p. 29.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

4. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 17 (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14).

5. *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 2nd ed., p. 47.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 1979.

7. *Steps to Christ*, p. 89.

Deep Into the Bible

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Acts 17:11

“Now from the light given men of God, I know that as a people we have not improved our opportunities for educating and training the youth. We should teach them how to read and understand the Scriptures. Wherever there is a biblical institute for ministers and people, we should, in connection with it, organize a class for the youth. Their names should be registered. All should feel the importance of the scheme of educating the youth to understand the Scriptures. Let the work be taken hold of in the very simplicity of the truth itself. Lead the minds of the youth from truth to truth, up higher and higher, showing them how scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages.”¹

This quotation suggests that training our God-given intellectual power to understand the Bible, as we are doing this week on the subject of literary styles, is important and therefore must be given high priority. However, we must not forget this: “Understanding of Bible truth depends not so much on the power of intellect brought to the search as on the singleness of purpose, the earnest longing after righteousness.”² Therefore, even before we attempt to do any biblical research, we need to pray. “The Bible should never be studied without prayer.”³

“But the most valuable teaching of the Bible is not to be gained by . . . disconnected study.”

We should engage in the study of the Bible “with a prayerful dependence upon God, and a sincere desire to learn His will.”⁴

Casual reading of the Bible may sometimes provide insights, but the most benefit is to be gained by serious, in-depth study into various aspects of the Bible. Studying its literary styles is one example. “But the most valuable teaching of the Bible is not to be gained by occasional or disconnected study. Its great system of truth is not so presented as to be discerned by the hasty or careless reader. Many of its treasures lie far beneath the surface, and can be obtained only by diligent research and continuous effort.”⁵ “Observe system in the study of the Scriptures in your families. Neglect anything of a temporal nature, . . . but be sure that the soul is fed with the bread of life. It is impossible to estimate the good results of one hour or even half an hour each day devoted in a cheerful, social manner to the Word of God.”⁶

1. *Evangelism*, p. 58.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 599.

3. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 38.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Education*, p. 123.

6. *Child Guidance*, p. 511.

By Arnold P. Siboro, an information engineering student at Kyushu Institute of Technology, Iizuka-shi, Japan.

I Have a Choice

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Acts 14:15-17

In Japan there are two main religions, Shintoism and Buddhism. In both of these religions there are many gods. Each of these gods controls or cares for a certain aspect of life. In Japan the proportion of people who are Christians is about 1 percent. Many people believe the Bible is only a fairy tale. They think that its claims are simply too outrageous to believe.

But I believe the God of the Bible is who He says He is. When I listen to the sea roar and I watch as the endless waves roll in, never passing beyond a given line, I have to wonder who put that line there. To me nature is the greatest testimony that God exists.

This same God who created us is so full of love that He gives us freedom of choice. You don't have to believe Him if you don't want to. He respects your individuality far greater than that. But every day He gives you proof. Evidence that

I have to wonder who put that line there.

He is real can be seen all around. It's in the air we breathe every day. It's in the gift of that smile from a stranger when your heart is sad. It's in the kind of actions of a person who sees you, not as a foreigner in his or her country but who accepts you as an individual with needs. So why not open and read God's letter to you. It's called the Bible. I choose to believe it's true. I have a choice.

By Rhonda L. Graves, a volunteer missionary to Japan.

Fleshy Styles

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 1:14

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14, NIV). Just as Jesus was fully divine and at the same time fully human, the Scriptures in our hands now are both fully divine and fully human. Although Divinity never changes, humanity does. Writing styles that were taken for granted by people in Bible times are often not so comprehensible in our present age. The untrained reader may misunderstand biblical accounts because of failure to recognize its literary styles. Look at the following story presented in different literary styles:

Historical reporting: “A great fire raged through the Northeast residential area of Centerville today, taking hundreds of lives and destroying millions of dollars’ worth of property. A strong north wind hampered the efforts of the firefighters to bring the flames under control.”*

Personification: “The loud voices of flames bade the winds welcome, while trees mourned and hills grimaced in pain. A remnant of the living tried valiantly to silence the mouths of the flames but fell useless under the belching breath of the conqueror.”*

Poetic form: “O torturous memory of searing flames and the cries of the dying.

Be careful not to force the Scripture to fit into current styles.

Begone and let us rest; What bleakness thou hast cast upon us, And cruel wind, why didst thou visit us in this ill-appointed hour? Why didst thou choose to heap sorrow upon sorrow?”*

Had you seen only the poetic form, would you recognize the real message of the story?

Here are some pointers that may help us deal with the Bible’s literary styles:

1. Many biblical writers presented much of the material as poetry. Therefore, it is helpful to use a version of the Bible that presents poetry in poetic style.

2. Literary styles that we know today may not be the same as the ones known to ancient writers of the Bible. Be careful not to force the Scripture to fit into current styles.

3. Explore the historical and cultural factors. Though archaeology, anthropology, and history do not have greater authority over the Bible, they may contribute to correct understanding of the Bible.

*From Lesson 2 of the Old Testament Bethel Bible Series (<http://www.fopc.org/hrb/4-ot-lit.html>).

By Arnold P. Siboro, an information engineering student at Kyushu Institute of Technology, Izuka-shi, Japan.

Understanding God's Word

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 28:5

One of the greatest promises of the Bible is found in Proverbs 28:5. We all can understand God's Word by choosing to seek the Lord. We shall understand.

John said Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is also the Word. The closer we are to the Word, the easier it is to comprehend fully all the prophecies, history, and stories in the Bible.

In Matthew 13:44 Jesus teaches that the kingdom of heaven is a hidden treasure. Our world does not recognize God's kingdom. Jesus said: My kingdom is not of this world. When we find God's kingdom, something special happens inside us. God's Holy Spirit begins to live within us. Jesus spoke about this in Luke 17:20. He said the kingdom of heaven is in ourselves. First Corinthians 3:16 says God's Spirit lives in us, and thus we are God's temple. This is the treasure spoken of in Matthew 13:44. The field is our body covering God's Spirit within us, and this makes us so happy that we want to give everything back to Jesus, who truly owns us.

In Matthew 13:45, 46, once again Jesus teaches about the kingdom of heaven. He compares God's kingdom to an unusually fine pearl. The way a pearl is formed

Each of us has the opportunity to experience God's kingdom even in current life.

is very interesting. After time passes, the shell transforms part of itself into a pearl. We, too, can be transformed by the renewing, amazing Spirit of God. As we allow God's Spirit to grow within us, something so beautiful, precious, unusual, and priceless happens. God's kingdom dwells within us. There are many normal things in this world, but God's kingdom is unusual. It is so special and wonderful. Each of us has the opportunity to experience God's kingdom even in current life.

REACT

Extra-biblical sources like archaeology or history may shed light on our understanding of the Bible, but unreliable sources may also confuse or even divert us from the truth. Describe how to choose extra-biblical sources.

By Yuki Nishimoto, a student at Kobe Pharmaceutical University, Osaka-fu, Japan.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES



“There was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him” (Rev. 12:7-9).

Whose Side Are You On?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Gen. 3:15

Two months ago a woman who had worked at my college, known and loved by many students, died of cancer long before age could ever be to blame. I've stood on a mountaintop that looked out over a meandering river, that made me feel larger yet smaller than life, that served me a brilliantly pink evening sky and left me in awe of God.

A month ago a friend of mine gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, but her boyfriend had long since left her. I've stood at the edge of a waterfall, hypnotized by the rushing water that one minute flowed quietly by, now falling over the edge, its fine, cool spray dancing on my face.

Three weeks ago a young woman who lived in the adjacent flat to me was killed in a motor accident, leaving behind a three-year-old daughter, who in time will not remember her mother. I've bounced on a fallen log that jutted out of a creek in a rain forest. I've sung in a church that resonated my voice so confidently, so sincerely, that it could not have been me singing.

I heard last week that a friend had run off with an older married man. Today I heard that another friend has separated from her husband. I've read verses in the

A friend of mine gave birth to a baby girl, but her boyfriend had long since left her.

Bible that have lifted my depression, given me hope, guided my decisions, and cleared my hazy vision of God so that my being bursts with extreme joy.

Are all these scenarios part of God's and Satan's war tactics?

It's so easy to get caught up in our own little battles, to become lost in our own bliss. The bad times nearly always seem more prominent than the good, so much so that in heartache we ask God, Why? We need to look up, to look around, to look beyond, and realize that our joys and our pains are not our own. We are caught up in something bigger.

A war? A cosmic battle between God and Satan? Yes, and everything we say and do, the decisions we make, and our reactions to different situations determine whether we're on God's side or Satan's, whether we ultimately declare to the universe God's supremacy, His undying love for us, His righteous character. What a daunting concept! I know one thing's for sure: I want God to win this battle.

Whose side will you be on?

Today is a great day! The sun is shining, the clouds float lazily by, and I feel good. But tomorrow it could rain. I don't have to give up my plans just because it rains, and I won't blame God if it does. I may even thank Him.

By Ledia Lotawa, a trained nurse who is in the third year of an education degree, majoring in home economics at Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

Working From the Battle Plan

LOGOS

Gen. 3:15; Job 1, 2; Isa. 13:12-14; Rom. 5:6-11; Phil. 2:5-11; Revelation 12

The Art of Good Generalship

World War I is infamous for the horrific butchery that occurred on the Western Front. Out-of-date tactics and poor planning led to tens of thousands of needless deaths. Many front-line officers found themselves in the middle of a battle for which they had no map, no clear objective, and no idea where they were at the time. The heavy casualties of such futile attacks left survivors disillusioned not only with the army but also with life. Suicides and nervous breakdowns became common occurrences.

Bernard Law Montgomery was a junior British officer during the conflict. He determined that if he rose to high command he would not repeat these mistakes. As a general in World War II, his leadership was marked by careful planning, training, and communication. He insisted that not only junior officers but also the rank-and-file understood their role in the overall battle. History records him as one of the great generals of this century.

Humanity is locked in an even greater struggle than a world war. The battle is for control of the universe. Isolated on a tiny planet at the edge of the universe, we can feel as helpless and frustrated as a soldier lost in no-man's-land, with barbed

Humanity is locked in an even greater struggle than a world war.

wire in front and shells bursting on every side. Fortunately, we have a Commander who knows our situation firsthand. Wanting us to understand the situation we find ourselves in, He has provided us with a master map of the war, which carefully details a battle-survival plan for each of us.

God's Battle Plan

The six texts above outline God's strategy for the war, which goes farther than any other general has safely been able to go. Not only does He tell us of the plan, but He can assure us of the outcome of the war.

Genesis 3:15 assures us that, while Satan will cause us hurt, Jesus will crush his destructive ways. The following verses explain the pain and hardship that humanity faces, but at least we confront it in the promise of the ultimate removal of the source of evil.

In the story of Job, we see the cosmic picture played out in the life of a single human. Though Job's suffering is incomprehensible to him, and though his friends mistakenly think they understand, the opening and closing chapters reveal the complete picture. In the fight for control of the universe, Satan accuses God of not playing fair, of bribing His followers to be loyal. Despite his pain and doubts, Job unknowingly refutes Satan's lies and shows that love is the real reason for serving God.

Isaiah 14:12-14 reveals to us the true nature of Satan. His thoughts are totally

self-centered, aiming to make himself equal with God. Nothing will stand in his way. To get his own desire, he is prepared to inflict the kind of misery that he sent to Job, that he has inflicted in the countless cruel and vindictive events that have marred human existence, from the murder of Abel to the crimes of twentieth-century dictators.

Romans 5:6-11 explains how God made sure that we could be on His side, the side destined to win. He shows us where we fit in His master plan to restore the universe to peace and stability. He knows we were behind enemy lines, recruits in the devil's cause, and cut off from Him. So He sent a rescue mission before we had asked for it, before we had even wanted it or realized it was possible. At the cost of the life of His own Son, He brought us safely across no-man's-land and gave us citizenship in His kingdom.

Philippians 2:5-11 reminds us that the primary issue at stake in this universal war is not our salvation but rather the character of God, which Satan questioned. Jesus fully reveals His Father's true nature in His humility, voluntarily shedding His rights as God and submitting to the most humiliating treatment meted out to man. What a contrast with the I-centered statements of the devil! Satan aimed to inflict pain on others; Jesus took other people's pain on Himself. The result? Jesus is given the place that Satan craved, the position of honor at the throne of God.

Revelation 12 expresses in metaphors the ideas of the rest of Scripture. Here we see a vicious dragon attacking a defenseless woman—graphic images of the battle we find ourselves in. But we are assured that God has defeated the dragon and provided for our rescue.

The picture the Bible paints is one designed to help us understand how our experience fits in the overall design of the universe. God's aim is that, by understanding, we may live better.

REACT

1. What difference does it make to me that I know the big picture of the war of the universe?

2. How can I make this picture relevant to people around me who feel the bad effects of this war?

3. What kind of answer does the great controversy theme provide to the issue of suffering and injustice?

4. How do our personal experiences of suffering and injustice affect the way we read the Bible?

5. How can a Christian urge someone to accept Christ when he or she can't guarantee that things will become better after conversion?

Chickenpox or Boils?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Job 1, 2

One thought echoed through my mind: *misery is me*. The contagious red sores had spread the length of my body. As I contemplated my pain, I commiserated with Job. Though I had never had a boil in my life, I was sure that chickenpox was a good substitute. As Job showered his head with ashes, I showered my head with Pinetasil. Like Job's comforters, my mother laughed at my attempts to relieve the itching (hey, I looked like a leopard in a state of shock, OK?). Like Job I suffered tremendous losses—I missed out on the friendship pin craze at our school.

Unlike Job, I wasn't into scraping myself with pottery—yet. Unlike Job, I still had my family (who gave me the chickenpox anyway). Yes, Job was in a sorry state. But when he questioned God, no reasons were given for his suffering. God's explanation went something like this: "My ways are so far above your ways that you could never possibly understand." Like Job, often we feel like pawns in a world game. Satan uses any means available to get us to admit that God is unfair. "By the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in heaven, . . . Satan induced man to sin."¹

Often we wonder why God lets bad things happen to good people. But like Job,

One thought echoed through my mind: *misery is me*.

let us hold fast to our faith in God. "God permits trials to assail His people, that by their constancy and obedience they themselves may be spiritually enriched, and that their example may be a source of strength to others. 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil.' Jeremiah 29:11. The very trials that task our faith most severely and make it seem that God has forsaken us, are to lead us closer to Christ, that we may lay all our burdens at His feet and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange."²

Like Job, let us hold fast to our faith in God. "Those who live nearest to Jesus discern most clearly the frailty and sinfulness of humanity, and their only hope is in the merit of a crucified and risen Saviour."³ Like Job, let us say, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5). Are you living near to Jesus yet?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 500.
2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 129.
3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 471.

By Sarah Weedon, a third-year theology major at Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

The Reason

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 12:7

Just living brings good times and bad times. Good times make us feel great, but nobody can avoid the bad times. Everybody dies, for example. This means that each of us has already lost a loved one or will do so in the future. When really bad times come, we would like to know what God is doing to bring an end to them. When are we going to live in a world where babies do not get cancer, where loved ones aren't snatched away from us before we can tell them that we love them, where there are no drive-by shootings, where nobody commits suicide, where ...

In Revelation 12–14 we are given a glimpse into heaven, where we find an explanation for the good and evil on earth. The forces of good are at war with the forces of evil (12:7). The devil has been defeated in heaven but is still active on earth (verse 9), and he is the source of all evil in the world. Death can be traced back to the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:3, 16-19). Revelation 21:1-4 points to a time when sin, death, and tears will be no more. In the meantime, we are participants in a spiritual battle. Evil still has control over much of this world. Love, friendship, and happiness abound, but it is accompanied by the evil that sin has brought.

When are we going to live in a world where babies do not get cancer?

The book of Revelation shows that God is going to remove evil from the earth. Yet this will not be without cost to Him or to humankind. The lamb was slain “from the foundation of the world” (13:8). Not only was the death of God's Son required, it was planned even before the world's Creation. Furthermore, the conflict between good and evil is going to reach a terrible climax before Jesus returns. Revelation 13 paints a dire picture of the persecution of God's people, yet good will ultimately triumph. Eternal life and true happiness will be restored.

In the meantime, we have some understanding of what is happening around us. Death and suffering are still great evils. We have hope that will provide comfort, yet it does not remove the sorrow and anger that we experience in the face of evil. We do know, however, that we are destined for greater things, when all evil will be a thing of the past.

REACT

1. What difference does a belief in the resurrection make to the one who has lost someone they love in death?
2. What was the cost to God of providing salvation for us?

Robert K. McIver, a senior lecturer in biblical studies at Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

Jigsaw Puzzles and Patchwork Quilts

HOW-TO

Key Text: Heb. 12:2, 3

My mother loves putting together jigsaw puzzles. In all the years that I have watched her do so, she has never disregarded the picture on the front of the box. If she didn't look at the "big picture," she would struggle to make the pieces fit. I see the great controversy as the picture for the jigsaw puzzle of life. It helps us make sense of the pieces of life.

As I am not a fan of jigsaw puzzles, I'd prefer to think of the great controversy as the pattern for a patchwork quilt. Quilters will create something of beauty if they constantly refer to the pattern. A dear friend gave me a quilted heart with this verse on it: "When life gives you scraps, make quilts!" Often life seems to us to just be scraps of hurt, loss, betrayal, and disappointment. Yet, when we look at the master pattern, we see that those scraps when stitched together with the threads of love, acceptance, peace, and happiness form a beautiful piece of artistry.

Our lives are like jigsaw puzzles and patchwork quilts. We can make sense of the pieces only as we look to the master plan (the great controversy). But when you're in the midst of life and the pieces are just not fitting, what can you do to remind yourself to look again at the master plan? Please don't think that I'm say-

She has never disregarded the picture on the front of the box.

ing that this is going to be easy—it *ain't*. Satan is a master at directing our focus to just the scraps, but God is *the* Master at directing our focus to the big picture. Here are some ways that I find help me keep the master plan in view.

When I pray, I not only talk to God about the pieces of my life (which too often take up a significant proportion of my prayer time), but I make a deliberate request that He help me see the master plan.

I study the master plan (the great controversy). If you have ever done a jigsaw puzzle or sewn a patchwork quilt, you know that it takes a careful study of the plan and/or the instructions provided to be successful in completing the project.

Each time I see a piece of my life vividly illuminated by the master plan, I write that understanding down. I then read these experiences in times of doubt, when I'm struggling to fit the pieces together, and I am reassured and encouraged that there is a master plan and that God is in control.

REACT

1. How do you relate to the idea of life being like a jigsaw puzzle or patchwork quilt? If you can't relate to these metaphors, what metaphor has personal meaning for you?

2. When life doesn't make sense (the pieces don't fit), what do you do?

By Cheryl Todd, a registered nurse, midwife, and postgraduate theology student at Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

Making Sense

OPINION

Key Text: Job 1, 2

Black and white, dark and light, good and evil, heaven and hell, God and Satan, life and death, guilt and innocence—these themes permeate the Old Testament and the New. As Seventh-day Adventists, we often see them in the light of what we call “the great controversy.” These issues are about our search to make sense of our world. As such, they affect the way in which we read the Bible.

Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of the best-selling book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, discovered this when his infant son was diagnosed with progeria—rapid aging disease. “My son lived his entire life with physical and psychological pain and he died the day after his fourteenth birthday.”¹ The turning point for Kushner came when he sat down to read the book of Job. In the past he had read it as Scripture. “Now,” he recalls, “I was reading it as Job. . . . Now I found things in Job that I had never seen before.”² Interestingly, God never reveals to Job the great controversy theme that we find in Job 1, 2. Instead, God’s answer can be summed up as, “You’re asking the wrong questions. It doesn’t matter why these things happened. It is your response to suffering that is important.”

Habakkuk complains to God, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you

God seems much less preoccupied with answers than we are.

will not listen? Or cry to you violence! and you will not save?” (Hab. 1:2). God’s reply is direct: “But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!” (2:20). When it comes to finding meaning in this world, God seems much less preoccupied with answers than we are.

Rabbi Kushner tells this story: “There was a little boy whose mother sent him on an errand and it took him a long time to come home. When he finally got back, his mother said, ‘Hey, where were you? I was worried about you.’ The boy said, ‘Oh, there was a child down the street who was crying because his tricycle was broken and I felt bad so I stopped to help him.’ Then the mother says, ‘You don’t know anything about fixing tricycles,’ and the boy replies, ‘No, of course not. I stopped and I helped him cry.’”³

Much more important than our theology is our response to one another’s needs. We are not called to have all the answers; rather to be with one another, and by our presence, indicate that we care.

1. Samantha Trenoweth, *The Future of God* (Alexandria, NSW: Millennium Books, 1995), p. 142.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

By Jeff Crocombe, a senior theology major at Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

LETTERS FROM A FRIEND



“The dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17, NIV).

Ebony's Dilemma

INTRODUCTION

Scriptures: Acts 20:27, 28; Mark 16:15

In Ebony's freshman year, school was not what he had expected. As a young Christian man, he was raised in a typical Adventist home. He was taught about the love of God, and he sought after God's Word.

In school Ebony was bombarded with secular teachings. Premarital sex, homosexuality, and antireligious thinking were taught and accepted as the norm. No one ever told him that here, in an academic institution where mature discussions would take place, his beliefs would be challenged to such a great extent.

Ebony's dilemma was either to "go with the flow," be cool and accept what was being taught, or to listen to and obey God's Word. Ebony learned in Acts 20:27, 28, that he was to be an overseer of God's flock and that he was not to be ashamed of what he believed in and shun God, but on the contrary, he should spread His truth and His love. In his very first year at college, Ebony took a firm stand. He decided to go with God, to be an example to his peers and teachers, to feed God's flock.

No one ever told him that his beliefs would be challenged to such a great extent.

As young people, we are confronted by many of the same issues that Ebony faced, and like Ebony, we have to weigh our great responsibility against the influences of the world. The world makes sin appear to be the norm because everybody is doing it. We have to remember that the Holy Ghost has made us overseers to feed His people with the truth. We are commissioned to stand up against false doctrines and false teachings. As young women and young men, we are to go into all the world and spread His love and His truth.

By Carolyn Morgan, a third-year music education student at McGill University, in Montreal; and Mercy Yeboah, a social-work graduate student at the Université de Montreal.

Letters From a Friend

LOGOS

Revelation 10; 12:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:2-4; Acts 20:27, 28; Jer. 31:10; Mark 16:15

As the plane touched down, I felt a nervousness in the pit of my stomach. It had been four years since I'd seen my friend Renee. Would she be the same? Would I? Would we have anything to talk about? Was the money I'd saved up and spent on the overseas flight worth it? These were but a few of the thoughts that raced through my mind.

I hadn't spoken to or seen her since graduation. The only contact we'd had was an occasional letter. How much can you get from a letter?

As Adventists, we believe that the Bible is God's letter to us. At this point in our history, the inspiration of the Bible is being questioned even by many Christians. Adventists believe that the Bible is especially important now, as we are preparing for our reunion with Jesus Christ. This week we study a number of ways in which our church affirms the importance of the Bible.

The Bible Is God's Word (1 Thess. 2:13)

In order for Renee's letters to be meaningful to me, I had to believe that they actually came from her, the person I remembered as my friend. I had to believe that

The only contact we'd had was an occasional letter.

they weren't being fabricated by someone in the post office. It's the same with the Bible. How can we know that it was actually written by God?

In this text, Paul affirms that the Bible is the Word of God. It is becoming increasingly popular now to focus on the human component of inspiration and to downplay the hand that God had in writing the Scriptures. But Paul counteracts the notion that the Scriptures are humanmade; he commends the Thessalonians for treating the gospel not as human words but as God's words. The Bible has come to us *through* human beings, but it comes *from* God.

The Bible Contains All the Truth We Need (2 Pet. 1:2-4)

During the time of our separation, I would occasionally hear a rumor about Renee: She was pregnant, she'd dropped out of school, she was getting married. It turned out that none of these rumors was true. Fortunately, I relied on Renee's reports of her life more than those by others. This is how friendships are supposed to work. The best person to tell about your friend is your friend. Friendships are often damaged when we rely on third-party sources about our friends. It's the same with God. How do we deal with people who tell us they have some message or knowledge about God?

Although the text is usually seen as a promise, it is also an affirmation that the Bible contains all that we need to know about life and godliness, that it contains the "knowledge of Him who called us to glory and virtue." Other writers or thinkers may be very helpful. They may have some useful things to say about God,

may give us new insights or perspectives, but they are not *necessary*. Other people's ideas about God are to be tested with the Bible, not the other way around.

The text also points out the result of studying God's Word: a relationship with Him. His purpose in giving us the Scriptures, Peter says, is to make us "partakers of the divine nature." God promises to share all that He is—His nature—with us, if we rely on His report of Himself.

The Bible Is a Necessary Witnessing Tool (Jer. 31:10)

Renee would occasionally send greetings to my family or friends in her letters to me. None of them had ever met her, but over the years that we corresponded, they got to know her through the parts of her letters I read to them. They also know a lot about her through my descriptions of her, of course, but the letters let them know her for themselves. It's the same with God. Our two best ways of sharing Him with our friends are telling them about our experiences with Him and showing them what He has to say to them in His Word.

As Christians living in the last part of earth's history, Adventists have traditionally had a missionary focus. In order for others to be ready to meet God as a friend rather than as a stranger, it is up to us to introduce them to Him. Sharing our personal experiences with Him is one way we can do this, but another very important way is simply to point them to the messages He has for them in the Bible. Jeremiah urges us to "make it known to coasts and islands far away" (31:10, NEB). In this case, accurately reporting what God says or giving people the opportunity to see for themselves is far more important than providing our own interpretations.

God wants to be our friend. The only way for true friendship to develop is by listening to what our Friend has to say to us.

REACT

1. What is the relationship, if any, between studying the Bible and developing a close friendship with God?
2. How would you introduce a non-Christian friend to God?
3. How would you respond to someone who claims that the Bible is nothing more than an old book with many interesting tales and good poetry?

By Richard Thompson, a doctoral student in psychology at McGill University, in Montreal; and Elijah James, an economics and finance professor at Dawson College and Concordian University, in Montreal.

“You’re All I Need to Get By”

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Pet. 1:3

If you are in tune with the “hip hop R & B” music scene, then this title from the song “You Are All I Need to Get By” must ring a bell. Honestly, I love the song. What does this song have to do with this week’s lesson?

I was sitting on my bed reflecting on spiritual matters when suddenly, out of nowhere, the song popped into my head. I was upset at myself for allowing the rude interruption of my thoughts by a secular tune. Instead of dismissing the secular song, I tried to think of someone to whom I could dedicate the song.

I thought of friends, but they have all disappointed me in the past. This does not mean that I love them any less, but it does mean that I cannot put my life in their hands. Then I thought of someone who has always been there for me through the roughest of times: none other than my Lord, Comforter, and Friend.

We are told in 2 Peter 1:3 that if we seek Christ we will realize that He has equipped us with everything we need for life. “The reason why the youth, and even those of mature years, are so easily led into temptation and sin, is that they do not study the word of God and meditate upon it as they should.”¹

The time of Jacob’s trouble is upon us. In order to stand firm, God’s church

Out of nowhere, the song popped into my head.

must fortify itself with God’s Word. We are told that “if the people of God would appreciate His word, we should have a heaven in the church here below. . . . They would be anxious for time to compare scripture with scripture. . . . And, as a result, their lives would be conformed to the principles and promises of the word. Its instruction would be to them as the leaves of the tree of life.”²

As young people, we are constantly battling with relationships, our spirituality, school, finances, the future, etc. But we need to remember that “to get by” we need to spend time each day elevating ourselves to a higher level of spirituality. It is only by developing that close relationship with God that we will feel confident in saying “Yes Lord, You are all I need to get by.”

REACT

1. How is it possible for us to achieve a special relationship with God in which we are confident that He takes care of our every need?
2. What provisions should Christians be making for the time of Jacob’s trouble?
3. What relationship, if any, should examples from secular pop culture (music, books, motion pictures, TV shows) have with one’s spiritual life?

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 198.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 193.

By Tanya Sinclair, an English literature student at Concordia University, in Montreal, Canada.

Facing the Dragon

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 12:17

Dreams of dragons and other monsters always scared me as a child. Of course, I would awake in the morning realizing that they were not real. The great red dragon that John saw in vision, however, is symbolic of a real situation in the controversy between God and Satan.

The apostle John has been shown a number of strange beasts. This is God's method of "show and tell." He sees "another wonder in heaven . . . a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads" (Rev. 12:3). Who can face such a powerful enemy? There is One who has prevailed over him many times before and who will one day defeat him forever. John witnesses another victory, because "Michael stands up" (verse 7) and fights the dragon. The controversy is still not over. The dragon, "called the Devil, and Satan" (verse 9) is angry, and his fury is directed toward a remnant. Having been unsuccessful in his attempts to devour the woman (the church), he attacks the remnant of her seed.

That there is a group of people who have allowed Christ to dwell in them by faith and continue to "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus" stirs Satan to wage war against them (verse 17). These two characteristics

God's remnant ought to be "a peculiar people."

identify God's people just before Jesus returns. Their identity is unmistakably clear.

God's remnant ought to be "a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9), who exemplify these two qualities. Our behavior must be consistent with our beliefs. Our talk must be in harmony with our testimony. Our preaching must be evidenced by our profession. We must live by the Book, having its author feed us with the Bread of Life daily. "None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict."¹ "This small remnant, unable to defend themselves in the deadly conflict with the powers of earth that are marshaled by the dragon host, make God their defense. . . . May God help His people now, for what can they then do in such a fearful conflict without His assistance!"²

REACT

1. How will God's people, the remnant, be identified in the last days?
2. How will God's people be fortified against the dragon?
3. Briefly discuss the role of the Bible in the great controversy between God and Satan in the last days.

1. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594.

2. *Last Day Events*, p. 259.

Building a Firm Foundation

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Pet. 1:2-11

Warning: Are you experiencing blindness of faith; shortsightedness to God's unlimited power, and forgetfulness of God's grace? Do you desire more knowledge of who Christ is? These are all serious side effects of having a shallow knowledge of God's power. The following instructions are means whereby you can build a foundation that will enable you to stand firm in times of trouble.

1. Learn to know God better. It's not enough to have a superficial knowledge of God—taking only a surface view of the Scriptures. We need to get to know Him intimately. Search. Dig. Devour the Word of God. Once this is done, your heart and mind are open to the limitless treasure of knowledge, peace, power, and promises that God has left us to claim. The more you believe and know of Him, the better equipped you will be to claim His promises. "For as you know Him better, He will give you through His great power, everything you need for living a truly good life" (2 Pet. 1:3, TLB).

2. Discover what He wants you to do. Once you claim the promises, you will know the plan that He has in store for your life. "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into His plans" (Rom. 8:28).

The more you know of Him, the better equipped you will be to claim His promises.

3. Let go and let God. Learn to put aside your desires, because when you believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour, the Holy Spirit of God Himself comes to live in you. You will then become patient and godly, gladly letting God have His way with you.

4. Share God's treasure. Let the treasure (God's Word) live inside you. When the knowledge of God and the light of His love dwell within, you can't help having that unconditional love for humanity. You will enjoy other people, you will like them, and finally you will grow to love them deeply.

"So dear brothers [and sisters], work hard to prove that you are really among those God has called and chosen and then you will never stumble or fall away. And God will open wide the gates of heaven for you to enter into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:10, 11).

REACT

1. What steps can you take personally to build a solid foundation on which you can stand in times of trouble?
2. How can you know God's plans for your life?
3. How can you be equipped to claim God's promises?

By Donnelly Julien and Nicole Scott, special care counselors in Montreal.

The Three Gods

OPINION

Key Text: Mark 16:15

Recently, I was having a biblical discussion with a group of Adventist and non-Adventist friends, during which the following question was raised. It caused me to reflect. "What do Adventists believe about the Trinity?" Immediately, a Sunday worshiper said the word *trinity* cannot be found in the Bible. All the Adventists conceded. One answered that there is one God, one being with three personalities, meaning that God the Father has a kind of split personality.

Another Adventist answered that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all equal in power and in thought. A third Adventist said that when we get to heaven we will see God the Father and Jesus Christ, but the Holy Spirit will not be in evidence because there would no longer be a need for Him. A fourth said that all three Gods exist, but God the Father is most powerful, Jesus less powerful, and the Holy Spirit the least powerful. Finally, a fifth Adventist said that the Father is God, but Jesus Christ was not God.

Understandably, my non-Adventist friends were confused. "How could five people from the same church have such different opinions about God?" they asked. A Jewish friend remarked, "That means every time Adventists pray, some are praying to one God and some are praying to many Gods." "Your church sounds

"How could five people from the same church have such different opinions about God?"

like confusion," a Muslim interjected.

This incident troubled me for the entire week. I had always believed in the Trinity as stated in *The Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*, so it never occurred to me that some Adventists believed otherwise.

The following Sabbath, I went to church and asked various people their belief about the Trinity. Amazingly, I received radically different opinions. It seems clear that we do not know what we believe.

If Adventists cannot agree on one of our fundamental beliefs, how can we then go "into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature?" "Go ye into all the world" is a divine commission. To carry out that commission successfully, we must have unity of purpose and a common message. This requires a thorough knowledge of what we believe and a sound understanding of God's Word. God's church must know what it believes and what it stands for.

REACT

1. How would you describe the Trinity?
2. Why do you consider it necessary for one to be equipped with the Word of God before one can successfully "preach the gospel to every creature?"

By Mornie Sinclair Knight, a health-science student at Dawson College, in Montreal.

Next Quarter's Lessons

NATURE OF MAN

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 1999, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Created in God's Image

Scriptures: Gen. 1:26-31; 2:18-25

Theme: God created all things out of nothing. But above all His creation is humankind, whom He created in His image. Even though, because of Adam's sin, we now have a fallen nature, God enables us, through Christ, to continue reflecting our Creator's love to one another.

Lesson 2: Our Physical Nature

Scriptures: Ps. 8:1-9

Theme: What affects the body easily affects the mind. And what affects the mind easily affects the body. Because God created our bodies, and because He dwells in us through the Holy Spirit, we should strive, with His help, to maintain optimum physical and mental health.

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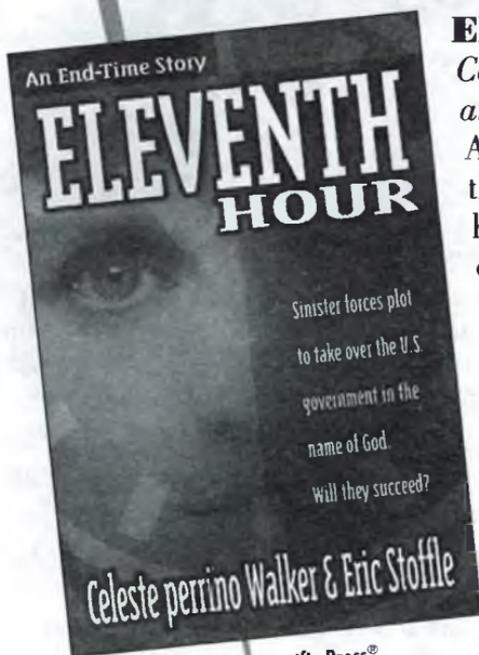
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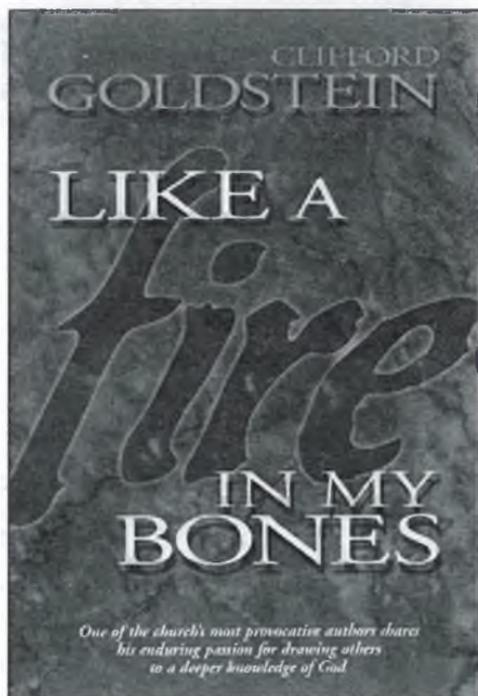
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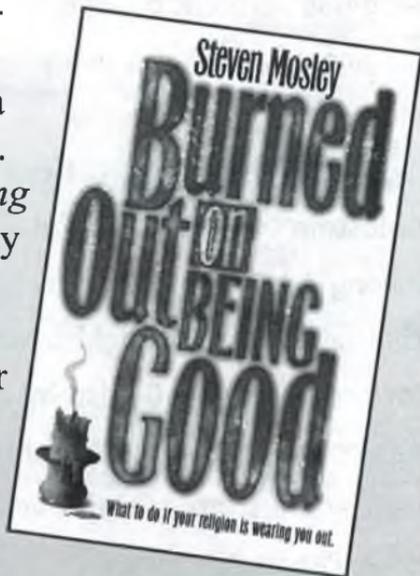
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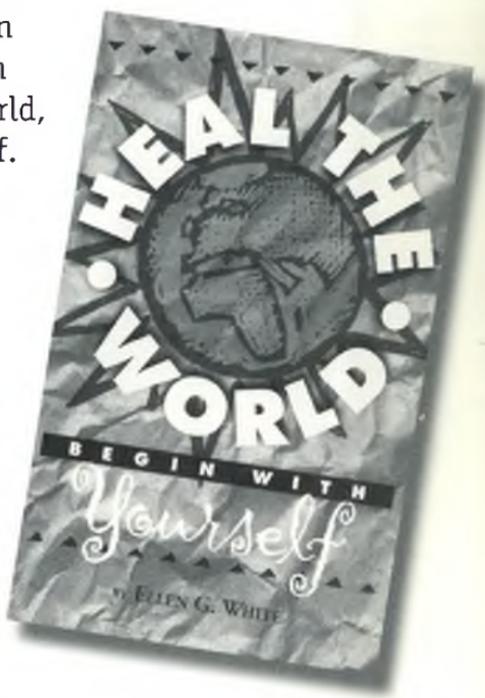
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MISSION PROFILE



NAME:

Huang, from Shanghai, China

BACKGROUND:

Huang's family all worshiped their ancestors, and at school he was taught that there was

no God. But Huang set out to find out for himself just who God was. One day he chanced to hear a program on the radio that not only told about God but read from the Bible that God should be worshiped on Saturday. Amazed by this, he immediately began keeping Sabbath right away, all alone at home. Later he thought, There ought to be other Sabbath keepers in this city, so the next Sabbath he set out on his bicycle looking for them. He found one church meeting and asked, "Does this church keep the Sabbath?" "No," they said, "we are only here today because we can't get together on Sundays, but there is a group of Sabbath keepers across town." Huang finally found the Adventist Sabbath keepers that day and now is an active member in that church.

THE THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERING:

The special mission offering for the Northern Asia-Pacific Division will be used to meet the need for church buildings in China and to establish a lay training center in South Korea.



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