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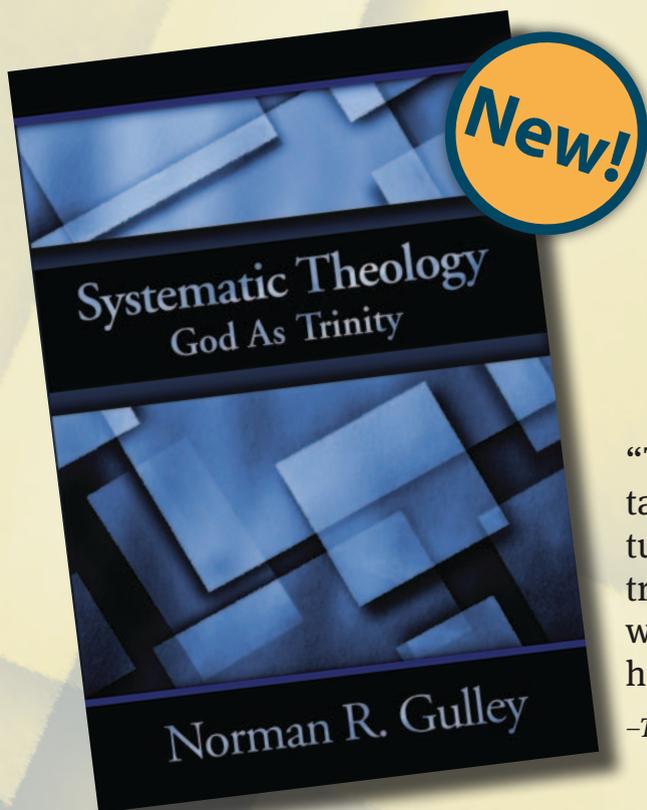
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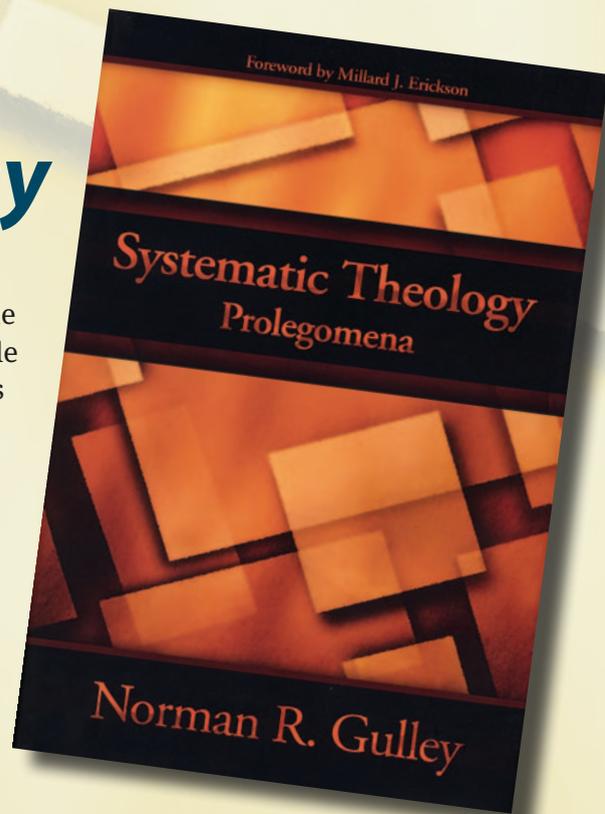
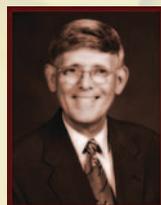


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06

Who authored the Bible?

While the Bible was written by numerous individuals, modern scholarship has questioned its authenticity. So, who really wrote the Scriptures?

Richard M. Davidson

09

Who decided which books should be included in the Bible?

How we address this question determines whether we believe that the Bible, as we have it, came into being as a result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the early church.

Kwabena Donkor

13

Revived by His Word

Revived by His Word is designed especially to strengthen the spiritual experience of those who know Christ deeply and motivate those who are struggling to know Him better.

Revival and Reformation Committee

15

A personal devotional journey

Read how the author traveled from conversion to ministry, from sermon preparation to motivation and to seeking to know his Lord better and better.

Jack Blanco

18

Archaeology and the authority of the Bible

This essay includes a review of some of the most important finds made during the last 25 years by archaeologists working in the Middle East.

Michael G. Hasel

21

The grand story

Have we yet explored the hermeneutical potential of permitting the Bible to speak to us with its own narrative power?

Jan Barna

25

Watch your priorities

Should you be considering leaving the ministry—read this article before you make that decision!

Larry Yeagley

CORRECTION: In the January 2012 issue of *Ministry*, Ángel Rodríguez's article ("Issues in the Interpretation of the Seven Trumpets of Revelation") includes an error. Page 7 ends with, "[T]he mention of the seal of God in the sixth trumpet (Rev. 9:4)." It should be the fifth trumpet. We apologize for the error.

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04

LETTERS

05

EDITORIAL

16&24

REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

28

DATeline

30

THE PASTOR AND HEALTH

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Interpreting the seven trumpets

Thank you for your thoughtful and very helpful overview of the history and current state of the interpretation of the seven trumpets of Revelation (January 2012). You make a signal contribution in not trying to referee the question of the correct details of each trumpet, but in sketching the parameters of the proper playing field. I think your five principles are judicious, well thought out, and most important, Bible based. Following them should help prevent many of the gross errors that crop up in the handling of the trumpets.

I share your openness to a greater role of the rise of secular/atheism of our prophetic outlook in the West. But still, I find the almost complete replacement of Islam by secularism (fifth trumpet) as carried out by Paulien, LaRondelle, and Stefanovic (PLS) to suffer a bit from a “presentist” approach to prophecy. Because secularism has dominated the West for the last 200 years or so, are we going to forget the conflict between Christendom and Islam that dominated the West for the last 1,000 years, especially in light of the recent resurgence of this conflict? Also, I agree with you that finding some role for secularism in the trumpets is not necessarily moving to an idealist/spiritualist approach, but that it can be consistent with historicism.

But I am concerned that PLS are tending towards an idealist position in their handling of the time periods, that is, the five months and the hour, day, month, and year. To empty these periods of chronological significance of some sort tends to unmoor the trumpets from actual historical periods. As a historian myself, I know the difficulties presented at times by trying to attach the often sparse

symbolism of prophetic outline [to] the messy details of real history. Yet, I think that this is an important part of keeping prophecy grounded in the actual flow of history. Indeed, this concern with prophetic time connected with history occurs so much in Daniel, for example, the 70 weeks, the 1,260 days, the 2,300 days, that one could consider making the attachment of prophetic periods to real, historical time, as almost another principle to add to the five you have in your article.

I am concerned that once we decide that the time periods in the fifth and sixth trumpets are symbolic and have no meaningful connection with real history, that this approach will expand to the 1,260 days (which some have already suggested) as well as to other periods. It is a short step from here to a completely idealized, spiritualized reading of prophecy that, in my view, will empty our prophetic message of much of its urgency and power. I do not believe that this is what our friends PLS intend, but I think it is where their handling of the time periods in the trumpets is tending, and will be taken even further that way by others.

Thank you for your careful work on this topic.

—Nick Miller, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States

In his article on the seven trumpets (January 2012), Ángel Rodríguez says that the historicist method is a nonnegotiable hermeneutical principle of apocalyptic interpretation. “Apocalyptic prophecy,” he says, “covers the whole span of history from the time of the prophet to the very history.” Rodríguez provides a chart of seven major Adventist students of prophecy who vary significantly in their understanding of

the historical events that fulfilled the various trumpets but who, he says, all follow the historicist method.

I find it interesting that two of the seven interpreters that Rodríguez cites do *not* follow that method. Uriah Smith and Alberto Treiyer both identify the first trumpet as the attack of the Visigoths against Rome under Alaric. However, Alaric was king of the Visigoths from A.D. 395 to 410, which was 300 years after John wrote Revelation. That’s hardly the time of the prophet!

—Marvin Moore, Caldwell, Idaho, United States

The informative essay by Ángel M. Rodríguez allows for differing interpretations of the seven trumpets as long as the historicist method is not put in question. In doing so, he makes several significant admissions: (1) SDA historicist interpreters differ widely in their interpretation and application of the seven trumpets. (2) Recent Adventist writings reveal “a major departure from the traditional [historicist] approach.” (3) Some apocalyptic time prophecies (e.g., Rev. 9:5) may be understood theologically rather than chronologically, that is, without the year-day principle. (4) Ellen White’s full and explicit support of Litch’s view does not settle the question; SDA scholars may still reexamine the biblical text in search for more accurate answers. (5) “Dogmatic interpretations” should be ruled out in interpreting the apocalypse (except when it comes to the historicist method itself?). (6) The “seal of God” in Revelation 9:4 does not fit well with the classical historicist approach.

Clearly, recent Adventist scholars (Paulien, LaRondelle, Stefanovic, Doukhan, etc.) have been stretching the limits of historicism beyond what this method traditionally entails,

Continued on page 29 ►



Give them something to eat

A large crowd had gathered on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. For many hours, they had listened attentively to the words of Jesus. Now, as the sun began to set, the disciples urged Jesus to dismiss the crowd so they could go into the surrounding villages and buy some food. The response of Jesus startled them. “ ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat’ ” (Matt. 14:16, NKJV).

We face that challenge on a weekly basis. Our hearers are spiritually hungry, perhaps even malnourished. Our assignment is clear: give them something to eat. We realize that our resources are meager. Our only hope consists in pointing our hearers to Jesus who is the Bread of Life. We can point them to the Word of God that testifies about the Living Bread that came down from heaven (see John 6:51).

I invite you to take an inventory of your preaching and teaching ministry. How would your hearers describe the focus of your public presentations and personal interactions? Are you giving them more substantial nourishment than the junk food of this present age? Are you encouraging them to search the Scriptures that they might know Him who is life eternal?

In a previous editorial, I shared about the Scottish cleric Robert Murray M’Cheyne, who lived and served in the early part of the nineteenth century.¹ Though his public ministry lasted only a few years before his untimely death, M’Cheyne left a lasting legacy. He encouraged his parishioners to read through the Bible each year and share what they were learning in family worship and in interactions with neighbors and friends. Whenever families journey

prayerfully through the Word of God together, lives are blessed. Marriages are blessed. Families are blessed. Communities are blessed.

I am excited about a new Bible reading initiative introduced in this issue of *Ministry*: Revived by His Word. This initiative encourages members of your church family to join together with other believers around the world in a journey through God’s Word—just one chapter per day. Church members can be encouraged to read the chapter, have someone read it in a group setting, or listen to an audio Bible. The goal is to spend quality time with the Word of God, take time to reflect on the Scriptures, and share what has been learned with others.

In one of my favorite devotional books, *Steps to Christ*, we find this counsel regarding reading the Scriptures:

[T]here is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the whole Bible through and yet fail to see its beauty or comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained. Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory. Even while you are walking the streets you may read a passage and meditate upon it, thus fixing it in the mind.²

As we engage in this journey together through the Bible, we will be revived and refreshed. His Word

will be a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths (see Ps. 119:105). The entrance of His words will give light; they will provide understanding to the simple (see v. 130).

AS A SPIRITUAL
LEADER IN YOUR
COMMUNITY, I
ENCOURAGE YOU TO
LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

Many articles in this issue of *Ministry* emphasize the importance and centrality of the Word of God. Glean insights that will help you as you preach and teach the Word, in and out of season.

As a spiritual leader in your community, I encourage you to lead by example. Make sure that you are saturating your life and ministry with the Word of God. Like the apostles, devote yourself to the ministry of the Word, both personally and in your ministry activities (Acts 6:4). When you visit families in your community, follow the instructions of Jesus and give them something to eat. Speak more about the Scriptures rather than television programs or sports events, and encourage others to join with you on this journey through the Bible. This will result in a bountiful harvest for the kingdom of heaven. 

¹ Derek J. Morris “Daily Bread,” *Ministry* 83, no. 5 (May 2011): 5.

² Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), 90.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

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Who authored the Bible?

According to the Bible writers' own claims, and in harmony with the traditional understanding held by ancient interpreters and most biblical scholars until the rise of historical criticism during the Enlightenment, approximately 35 individuals wrote the Bible over a period of 1,500 years. Old Testament writers include Moses (the Pentateuch, Job,¹ and Psalm 90), Joshua (the book of Joshua), Samuel (Judges; Ruth; 1 Samuel 1–24),² possibly Nathan and Gad (1 Samuel 25–2 Samuel 24),³ David (the majority of the book of Psalms), Asaph (Psalms 50; 73–83), the sons of Korah (Psalms 42–49; 84–88), Heman (Psalm 88), Ethan (Psalm 89), Solomon (Psalms 72; 127; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Solomon), Agur (Proverbs 30), Lemuel (Proverbs 31), the four Major Prophets, and 12 Minor Prophets (whose books are named after them, plus Jeremiah wrote also Lamentations; 1 and 2 Kings⁴), and Ezra (Ezra; Nehemiah; 1 and 2 Chronicles).⁵ New Testament writers include Matthew and Mark (the Gospels named after them), Luke (Luke and Acts), John (the Gospel of John; 1–3 John; and Revelation), Paul (the 14 epistles attributed to him),⁶ Peter (1 and 2 Peter), James, and Jude (the epistles named after them). Although modern critical scholarship has questioned the authenticity of many of these

conclusions regarding the identity of the Bible writers, solid support for the traditional understanding may be found in conservative commentaries and surveys of Old Testament introductions.⁷

While the Bible was *written* by numerous individuals, the question remains, Who really *authored* the Bible? By many and various means the Bible makes clear that the ultimate *Author* of Scripture is God Himself.

Scripture is “God-breathed”

Timothy summarized the self-testimony of Scripture regarding its ultimate divine authorship in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17: “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.”⁸ Scripture is “inspired by God” (*theopneustos*, literally “God-breathed”). The picture here involves that of the Divine “Wind” or Spirit coming upon the prophet, so that Scripture is a product of the Divine creative *Breath*. Thus, it is fully authoritative: profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

All Scripture—not just part—is “God-breathed.” This certainly includes the whole Old Testament and the canonical Scriptures of the apostolic church (see Luke 24:17,

32, 44, 45; Rom. 1:2; 3:2; 2 Pet. 1:21; etc.). But for Paul, it also includes the New Testament sacred writings as well. Paul’s use of the word *scripture* (*graphē*, “writing”) in his first epistle to Timothy (5:18) points in this direction. He introduces two quotations with the words *Scripture says*—one from Deuteronomy 25:4 in the Old Testament, and one from the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:7. The word *scripture* thus is used simultaneously and synonymously to refer to both the Old Testament and the Gospel accounts in the technical sense of “inspired, sacred, authoritative writings.”

Numerous passages in the Gospels assert their truthfulness and authority on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures (e.g., John 1:1–3 paralleling Gen. 1:1; John 14:26; 16:13; 19:35; 21:24; Luke 1:2–4; Matt. 1 paralleling Gen. 5; Matt. 23:34). Peter’s use of the term *scriptures* for Paul’s writings supports this conclusion (2 Pet. 3:15, 16): by comparing Paul’s letters to the “other Scriptures” (v. 16), Peter implies that Paul’s correspondence is part of Scripture.

The New Testament, as a whole, is the apostolic witness to Jesus and His fulfillment of the Old Testament types and prophecies. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the 12 apostles to bring to their remembrance the things He had said (John 14:26). Paul states that “the mystery

of Christ” was “revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:4, 5). The apostles held a unique, unrepeatable position in history (Eph. 2:20) as bearing witness of direct contact with the humanity of Christ (Luke 1:2; Gal. 1:11–17; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 John 1:1–4). This certainly validates the apostolic writings by the apostles such as Peter, John, and Matthew. Paul also was called to be an apostle (see Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; and the greetings in the other Pauline epistles), and he indicates that his writings are given under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and have full apostolic authority (1 Cor. 7:40; 12:13; 14:37; 2 Cor. 3:5, 6; 4:13; Gal. 1:11, 12; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Thess. 3:6–15). Thus, the New Testament embodies the witness of the apostles either directly or indirectly through their close associates Mark, Luke, James, and Jude (see Luke 1:1–3; Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37; Col. 4:10, 14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24). All Scripture, both Old Testament and New, is of divine origin, “inspired by God”—literally, “God-breathed.”

The relationship between the Divine Author and human writers

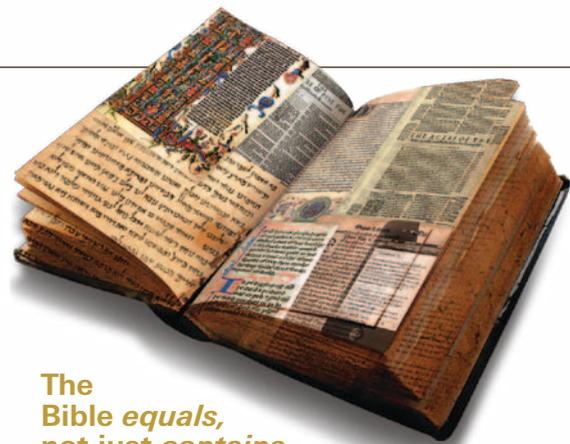
A key biblical passage that clarifies the ultimate divine authorship of Scripture in relation to the human dimensions of the biblical writers is 2 Peter 1:19–21: “And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will [*thelēma*] of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along [*pherō*] by the Holy Spirit” (NIV).

Several related points are developed in these verses. Verse 19 underscores the trustworthiness of Scripture: it is “the prophetic word made more sure.” In verse 20, we learn why this is so: because the

prophecy is not a matter of the prophet’s own interpretation; that is, the prophet does not intrude with his own interpretation. Verse 21 elaborates on this point: prophecy does not come by the *thelēma*—the initiative, the impulse, the will—of the human agents; the prophets are not communicating on their own. Rather, the Bible writers were prophets who spoke as they were moved, carried along, even driven (the force of the Greek *pherō*) by the Holy Spirit.

This Petrine passage makes clear that the Scriptures did not come directly from heaven, but rather God utilized human instrumentalities. An inductive look at the biblical writings confirms that the Holy Spirit did not abridge the freedom of the biblical writers, did not suppress their unique personalities, and did not destroy their individuality. Their writings sometimes involved human research (Luke 1:1–3); they sometimes gave their own experiences (Moses in Deuteronomy, Luke in Acts, the psalmists); they presented differences in style (contrast Isaiah and Ezekiel, John and Paul); they offered different perspectives on the same truth or event (e.g., the four Gospels). And yet, through all of this thought inspiration, the Holy Spirit carried along the biblical writers, guiding their minds in selecting what to speak and write, so that what they presented are not merely their own interpretations, but the utterly reliable Word of God, the prophetic word made more certain. The Holy Spirit imbued human instruments with divine truth in thoughts and so assisted them in writing that they faithfully committed to apt words the things divinely revealed to them (1 Cor. 2:10–13).

The human and divine elements in Scripture, the Written Word of God (Heb. 4:12), are inextricably bound together, just as in Jesus, the incarnate “Word of God” (Rev. 19:13). Just as Jesus, the incarnate Word of God was fully God and fully man (John 1:1–3, 14), so the Written Word is an inseparable union of the human and the divine.



The Bible equals, not just contains, the Word of God

The self-testimony of Scripture is overwhelming and unequivocal: it not only contains, but equals the Word of God. In the Old Testament, there are about 1,600 occurrences of four Hebrew words (in four different phrases with slight variations) that explicitly indicates that God has spoken: (1) “the utterance [*ne’um*] of Yahweh,” 361 times; (2) “Thus says [*amar*] the Lord,” 423 times; (3) “And God spoke [*dibber*],” 422 times; and (4) the “word [*dabar*] of the Lord,” 394 times. The equivalency between a prophet’s message and a divine message are recorded numerous times: the prophet speaks for God (Exod. 7:1, 2; cf. 4:15, 16); God puts His words in the prophet’s mouth (Deut. 18:18; Jer. 1:9); the hand of the Lord is strong upon the prophet (Isa. 8:11; Jer. 15:17; Ezek. 1:3; 3:22; 37:1); or the word of the Lord comes to the prophet (Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic. 1:1; etc.). Jeremiah rebukes his audience for not listening to the prophets (25:4), which then equates with not listening to the Lord (v. 7), and further equated with His words (v. 8).

Summarizing the prophetic messages sent to Israel, 2 Kings 21:10 records, “And the LORD said by his servants the prophets,” and 2 Chronicles 36:15, 16 adds, “The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers . . . but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets.” The prophets’ messages are God’s messages. For this reason, the prophets often naturally switch from the third person reference to God (He) to the first person direct



Who decided which books should be included in the Bible?

Many Christians find great value in reading the Bible because they believe that this Book was given by the inspiration of God. But have you ever wondered who decided which books should be included in the collection that we refer to as the “Bible”? *Canonization*, the term given to the process by which books were included or excluded from the Bible, is a word derived from the Greek *kanon* whose basic meaning is that of a “rule.” Sometimes the books included in our Bible are, therefore, called canonical books, although canonization deals with more than a mere list of books.

Consider canonization as a question about why certain books came to be regarded as sacred and authoritative in the early Christian communities. How we address this question determines whether we believe that the Bible, as we have it, came into being as a result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the early church or whether political forces in the time of Constantine were responsible, as some people claim. Since the Bible consists of the Old and New Testaments, the question will be answered in two parts.

The Old Testament canon

Who decided which books should be included in the Old Testament? The question cannot be answered definitively due to a lack of historical sources. The same applies to the question regarding what time the decision was made. Historical-critical scholars believe the Bible gained its authority progressively. They suggest that the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible, arranged in three major divisions (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings), indicate a three-step development in the canonization process. According to this view, the Law—meaning the books of Moses, also called the Pentateuch—was canonized by about 400 B.C., the Prophets during the first century B.C., and then the Writings during the first century A.D.¹

A conservative perspective. The story is quite different when viewed from a conservative perspective. Quite clearly the book of the Law (the Pentateuch) was regarded as the Word of God from its earliest existence. A number of biblical passages point to the self-authenticating authority of the Law from the very beginning. Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai “took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said,

‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’ ” (Exod. 24:7, NASB). Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, Ezra read from the “book of the law of Moses” and the people adopted it as the constitution of their restored commonwealth (Neh. 8:1, NASB). The reverence shown by the Jews to the books of Moses, variously called “the Law of Moses” (v. 1, NKJV), “the Book of the Law” (v. 3, NKJV), and “the Law of God” (v. 8, NKJV), points to the honored status of the books of Moses.

We do not have the details of how these books were brought together. It is conceivable that Ezra and Nehemiah may have been involved with the collection of the books composing the Old Testament canon. However, neither one person, or even several, decided which books should be included in the Old Testament because there were individuals throughout Israel’s history who were recognized as prophets of God, and what these people said and wrote was considered the Word of God. The writers did not have to wait for their work to pass the test of time for their authority to be acknowledged. Their work was received as Scripture because what

they said and wrote was believed to be from God.

When did the Hebrew canon come into being? Jewish tradition informs us that the greater part of the Hebrew canon came into being with Ezra and Nehemiah. The noncanonical book of 2 Maccabees refers to records and memoirs of Nehemiah as well as to his library with books about the kings, prophets, and the

Josephus clearly implies that the Prophets were in place as a body of writings by the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and regarded as Scripture. He notes, "It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time."⁴ No doubt, the prophetic books, like the Pentateuch, were considered authoritative from the moment they were written.

Apart from the testimony of historians, there is evidence in the Bible itself to indicate that by the time of Daniel and Zechariah, the Law and the earlier prophets (Joshua–Kings) were regarded as Scripture. For example, Zechariah 7:12 (ca. 518 B.C.) mentions the hardness of the hearts of the people " 'so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets' " (NASB). And Daniel considered the book of Jeremiah as well as the Law of Moses as authoritative (Dan. 9:2, 11).

The third division of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings, as a complete collection, dates somewhat later than the Prophets. The prologue to the Greek translation of Ecclesiasticus (an apocryphal book from the second century B.C.) refers repeatedly to the three sections of the Old Testament, indicating that the third section of the Old Testament was already recognized as canonical at that time.

The New Testament canon

The early Christian church followed the practice of Jesus and regarded the Old Testament as authoritative (Matt. 5:17–19; 21:42; 22:29; Mark 10:6–9; 12:29–31). Along with the Old Testament, the church revered the words of Jesus with equal authority (1 Cor. 9:14; 1 Thess. 4:15). It could not have been otherwise since Jesus was perceived not only as a prophet but also as the Messiah, the Son of God. Following the death and

resurrection of Jesus, the apostles came to occupy a unique position in spreading and bearing witness to the words of Jesus. Indeed, Christ had said of them that because they had been with Him from the beginning they would be His witnesses (John 15:27). As the church grew, and the apostles became conscious of the prospect of their own deaths, the need arose for the words of Jesus to be recorded (2 Pet. 1:12–15). None were keener to preserve and communicate authoritatively what had happened than the apostles who were witnesses of the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. Thus, the stage was set for the development of books that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, would in time become the New Testament canon.

For about two decades after the Cross, the message of Jesus was proclaimed orally. Then, from the mid-first century on, Paul's letters began to appear. Somewhat later, the three synoptic Gospels and the book of Acts were written; by the end of the first century, when John wrote the book of Revelation, all the books of the New Testament were completed. Throughout the New Testament, the focus is on what God had done in Christ (1 Cor. 15:1–3; Luke 1:1–3).

The New Testament books acknowledged as Scripture. As was the case with the books of the Old Testament prophets, the writings of Paul and the other apostles were immediately accepted as authoritative because the authors were known to be authentic spokesmen for God. The writers themselves were conscious of the fact that they were proclaiming God's message, not merely their own opinions. Paul, in 1 Timothy 5:18, follows up the formula "Scripture says" with a quote from Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7, thereby placing the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament Gospels on the same level of authority; and, in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul commends the Christians in Thessalonica for accepting his words as "the word of God" (NKJV). Peter in 2 Peter 3:15,

HISTORICAL-
CRITICAL SCHOLARS
BELIEVE THE
BIBLE GAINED
ITS AUTHORITY
PROGRESSIVELY.

writings of David (2 Macc. 2:13). The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus argues that unlike the Greeks, who had an innumerable multitude of books, the Hebrews had only 22 books;² he noted that these books "contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. . . . But as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, . . . the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life."³

16 also considered Paul's writings as Scripture.

During the second century, most churches came to possess and acknowledge a collection of inspired books that included the four Gospels, the book of Acts, 13 of Paul's letters, 1 Peter, and 1 John. The other seven books (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation) took longer to win general acceptance. The early church fathers—for example, Clement of Rome (flourished ca. 100), Polycarp (ca. 70–155), and Ignatius (died ca. 115)—quoted from most of the New Testament books (only Mark, 2 and 3 John, and 2 Peter are not attested) in a manner indicating that they accepted these books as authoritative. In this process, however, the authority that the books of the New Testament had was not subsequently attributed to them but inherently present in them from the beginning.

Reasons for the New Testament canon. Over a period of about four centuries when the New Testament canon took shape (specifically defining the list of books), a number of factors played a significant role. While the primary reason for the inclusion of the New Testament books in the canon was the self-authenticating nature of the books (i.e., their inspiration), other issues contributed to it.

One key motivating factor for establishing the New Testament canon was that during the second century several heretical movements developed in Christianity. Marcion, a prominent heretic, broke with the church around A.D. 140, and drew up his own list of Christian books that would provide a canon for faith and worship. Marcion accepted only a modified version of Luke's Gospel and ten of the Pauline epistles as inspired. At the same time, a growing number of Christian writings appeared that claimed to relate unknown details about Christ and the apostles. Many of these books were written by individuals who belonged to a heretical movement called

Gnosticism. The Gnostics stressed salvation through secret knowledge (Greek *gnosis*). A number of "infancy" gospels supplied details from the hidden years of Christ's life. Numerous apocryphal books of Acts related the deeds of Peter, Paul, John, and most of the other apostles, and several apocalypses described accounts of personally conducted tours of heaven and hell by the apostles. Today, these writings are known collectively as the New Testament apocrypha.

This period also saw the publication of lists of books known to have been written by the apostles or their associates. Among these lists were the Muratorian Canon, dated towards the end of the second century, the list of Eusebius of Caesarea from the early part of the fourth century, and the list of Athanasius of Alexandria from the middle of the fourth century. The first two lists were still incomplete, containing only about 20 of the 27 New Testament books. The complete New Testament canon is set out in detail in Athanasius's Easter letter of 367, which contains the 27 New Testament books to the exclusion of all others. During the fourth century, several church synods, such as the Councils of Rome (382), Hippo (393), and Carthage (397), accepted all 27 books of the New Testament as canonical.

While heretical movements and church councils played a certain role in the formation of the canon, the desire to preserve faithfully the events of what God had done through Christ, already evident in the New Testament, means that the driving force behind the history of the New Testament canon was the faith of the church. In fact, "much of what became the core of the New Testament canon . . . had already been unofficially and generally recognized as Scripture as the church began to consider making and approving a list that would set the limits of Christian Scripture."⁵ In reference to the New Testament canon, Bruce M. Metzger correctly says of the Synod of Laodicea: "The

decree adopted at this gathering merely recognizes the fact that there are already in existence certain books, generally recognized as suitable to be read in the public worship of the churches, which are known as the 'canonical' books."⁶

Conclusion

Who decided which books should be included in the Bible? Our brief discussion has shown that for both Testaments the books that came to be part of the biblical canon had their own self-authenticating authority. The Old Testament books carried their own authoritative credentials by virtue of the writers who unequivocally declared that what they said and wrote was from God. The New Testament books had immediate authority as faithfully witnessing to the events and meaning of God's action through Christ.

The Old Testament canon was, for the most part, settled within Judaism by the second century B.C., though discussions concerning it continued for several centuries. From history we know that the final shape of the New Testament canon existed by the fourth century A.D. Although heretical movements and church councils played a role in the actual formation of the New Testament canon, the church did not decide which books should be included in the canon. The church recognized and acknowledged the inspiration and self-authenticating authority of the 27 New Testament books and limited the canon to these books. ■

- 1 James A. Sanders, "Canon," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:843.
- 2 Among the Jews, the 12 Minor Prophets were counted as one book, as were 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Josephus may have counted Ruth as part of Judges and Lamentations as part of Jeremiah, but we do not really know how Josephus divided or grouped the books of the Old Testament to arrive at 22.
- 3 Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Steven M. Sheeley, "From 'Scripture' to 'Canon': The Development of the New Testament Canon," *Review & Expositor* 95 (Fall 1998): 518.
- 6 Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 210.

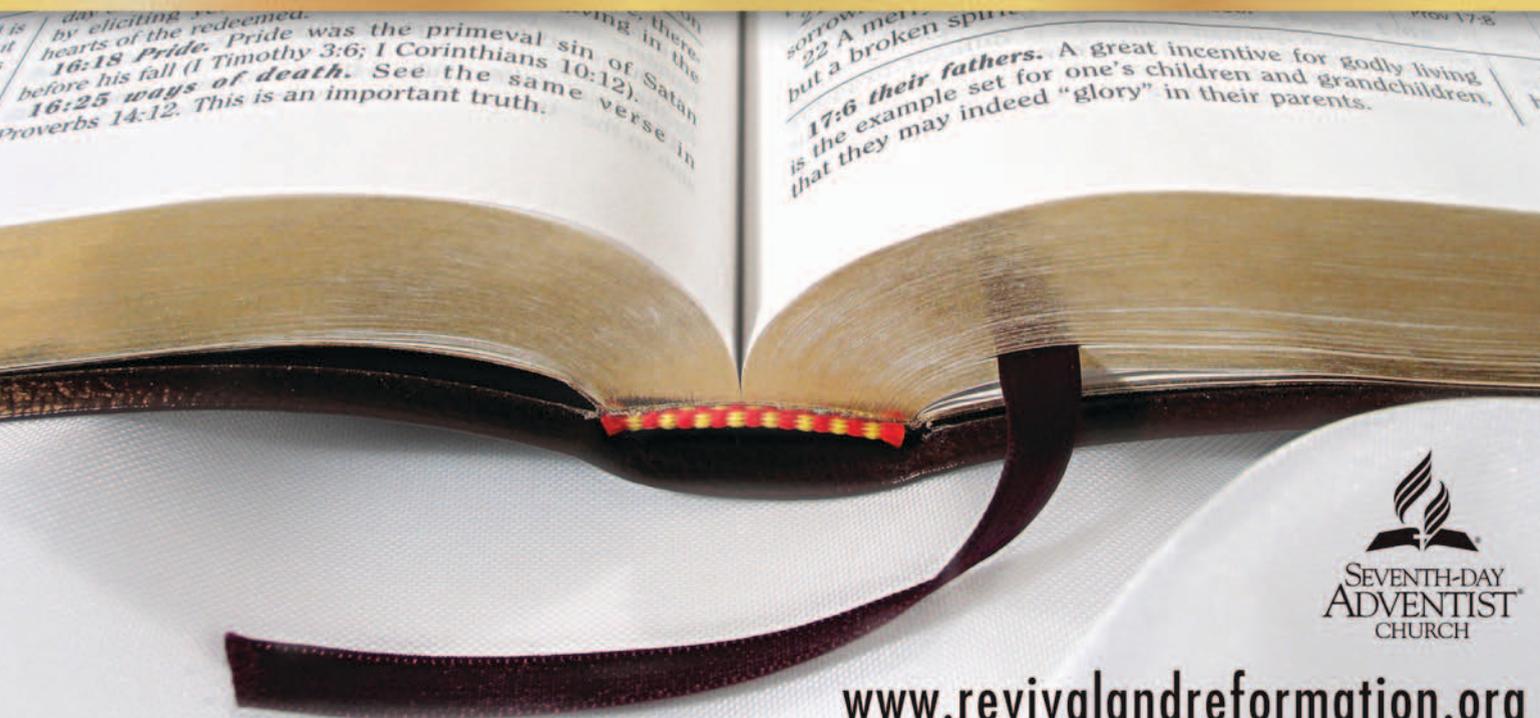
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SPRING COUNCIL
APRIL 17, 2012

GENERAL CONFERENCE
SESSION, JULY 2015

REVIVED BY HIS WORD

READING THROUGH THE BIBLE TOGETHER




SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST
CHURCH

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Revived by His Word

“A Journey of Discovery Together Through the Bible”

Throughout its history the Seventh-day Adventist Church has found the reason for its existence in the Bible. Adventists are a Bible-based, Bible-believing, Bible-reading people. Although millions of church members worldwide have a meaningful devotional life, recent research indicates that many do not. Revived by His Word is designed especially to strengthen the spiritual experience of those who know Christ deeply, and motivate those who are struggling to know Him better. Recently, we have lifted up the importance of God’s Word through the “Follow the Bible” initiative; now it is time to reflect carefully and listen to God speaking to our hearts personally as we are “revived by His Word.”

Spiritual renewal arises from a Christ-centered study of God’s Word. Although prayer is the heartbeat of revival, the Word of God is its foundation. The Bible writers repeatedly link revival and new life in Christ to God’s Word:

- “My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word” (Ps. 119:25).*

- “Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Pet. 1:23).
- “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Ellen White adds:

- “There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God’s word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose rarely seen in these times” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 90).
- “A revival in Bible study is needed throughout the world. Attention is to be called, not to the assertions of men, but to the Word of God. As this is done, a

mighty work will be wrought” (*Evangelism*, p. 456).

- “At every revival of God’s work the prince of evil is aroused to more intense activity; he is now putting forth his utmost efforts for a final struggle against Christ and His followers. The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 593).

The study of God’s Word accomplishes at least four major things in relationship to revival:

1. It provides a foundation for true revival.
2. It stimulates, fosters, and sustains true revival.
3. It counteracts false revivals.
4. It creates an understanding of and commitment to God’s mission.

Without a systematic study of God’s Word the current emphasis

on revival and reformation will die out quickly, degenerate into a sentimental slogan, or result in a counterfeit spiritual experience. The study of God's Word leading to a life-changing experience with Jesus is not optional in revival; it is foundational.

Nothing can possibly replace listening to God speak to us through His Word. Prayerfully meditating

SPIRITUAL
RENEWAL ARISES
FROM A CHRIST-
CENTERED STUDY
OF GOD'S WORD.

on Scripture is a primary source of spiritual strength. Although there are many ways of reading God's Word, the initiative outlined below has the possibility of uniting the international church around God's Word.

The initiative summarized

To encourage church members worldwide to unite in reading or listening to one chapter of the Bible each day, beginning April 17, 2012 (Spring Council), and concluding at the General Conference Session in 2015.

There are 1,171 days from Spring Council 2012 to the beginning of the General Conference Session July 2, 2015. There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. By reading one chapter each day and two chapters during the General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, the Bible Study

Plan will conclude by the end of the Session.

United by His Word

Revived by His Word will become much larger than reading or listening to one chapter of the Bible each day. It will direct the attention of the entire membership to the importance of knowing Jesus through His Word. It will encourage families to read the Bible completely through together. In many cultures where the Bible is not readily available, this initiative will encourage elders to gather the church family to read the Bible aloud. It will also stimulate members worldwide to place priority on the Bible. It is simple, practical, and affordable.

This plan envisions the General Conference president, along with the division presidents, reading Genesis 1 responsively at the opening meeting of Spring Council 2012, and concluding by reading Revelation 22 during the General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas.

Promotion and sustainability

To motivate successfully the largest number of Seventh-day Adventists to read the Bible through together will necessitate coordination with each of the church's media outlets. Hope Channel, *Ministry* magazine, *Adventist World/Adventist Review*, and the Communication Department will cooperate in preparing special programs and articles on the inspiration and life-changing ability of God's Word. A promotional DVD will be produced as well as a Revived by His Word brochure. These promotional pieces will precede and prepare for the launch of the program in April 2012.

Beginning with Spring Council 2012, the Bible chapter for the day with a Bible Blog will be featured on the Ministerial Department's Revival and Reformation Web page.

Each day a one- or two-paragraph reflection on the Bible reading for the day will be written for the Bible

Blog. Authors will be chosen to represent cultural and age diversity. Members internationally will have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion via the blog. An iPhone application will be especially helpful in some countries to allow members to download the Bible chapter and commentary for the day. The Bible Blog will regularly reference the weekly Sabbath School lesson to stimulate further study of the lesson by members, and the Sabbath School Bible Study Web page will reference the chapter-by-chapter Bible Study Reading Plan. Imagine the possibilities of church members sharing inspirational gems with one another from the unique perspective of their cultural, gender, and age backgrounds. Each day a few especially insightful spiritual comments will be chosen to post on the Web page.

Sharing the Word

Another feature of the plan is to challenge church membership worldwide to provide funding to purchase Bibles for members who do not have them as well as Godpods for members who are unable to read or who have difficulty reading. Church leadership can never rest satisfied until every member has access to God's Word in their mother tongue, reads or listens to God's Word daily, and shares its life-transforming message with others.

Revived by His Word can unite the entire church around God's Word and make a difference in millions of lives. It can be a catalyst for further regular, systematic Bible study. The goal of Revived by His Word is to encourage every church member to allow the Holy Spirit to transform their lives as they meditate and pray over one chapter of the Bible a day. It is to allow Jesus to speak to His people through His Word so they know Him better, seek Him more deeply, and share His love more fully. 

* All Bible texts are taken from the New King James Version.

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A personal devotional journey

The journey began with reading a most unusual “Bible” while I was in the military during the Korean War. After accepting Christ as my personal Savior, I decided to change my lifestyle and spend my free time, mostly weekends, in the base’s library. One day, walking among the shelves looking for something to read, I noticed a green-covered book titled “Bible.” Never having seen or read the Bible before, I pulled it off of the shelf, sat down at the reading table, and opened it. The first thing I saw was a picture of Jesus with outstretched arms; surrounding Him were all kinds of people—old, young, mothers with babes in their arms, those on crutches, and the sick. As I looked at the picture, I began to cry, wishing I could be as near to the Savior as they were. Quickly wiping the tears away, I began to read.

This “Bible” was in question-and-answer format and was fascinating. My heart and soul became attached to it, and, after several trips to the library, I decided I could not live without it, especially this particular copy. Because the library had another copy, I decided to keep this one, telling the librarian I had lost it and then paid the five-dollar fine. But, having given my heart to Christ, as I continued to read, I felt guilty for being dishonest, confessed to the librarian, and did not keep the book.

The search

Home on furlough in Chicago, I determined to buy a copy of this question-and-answer Bible. I went from one bookstore to another, looking for that Bible; but one clerk after another told me there was no such Bible, and asked if I wanted a King James Version or a Douay Version. I had no idea what King James or Douay had to do with the Bible and I insisted that I had seen a copy of a question-and-answer edition and had read it. Finally, one bookstore clerk suggested I go to a used bookstore on the north side of Chicago; he was sure the man there would have what I was desperately looking for.

The store owner, an elderly gentleman, looked puzzled, then scratched his head, took a ladder, climbed to one of the top shelves in the back room, dusted off the books, brought down one, and laid it on the table in front of me. It looked different from the one I had seen in the base’s library—thicker and older, with a publishing date of 1888. But, curious, I opened it and turned to the same subjects I had read. To my delight, it said the same thing. My joy knew no bounds. I had found it. I thanked the old man and asked him how much it cost. He looked at me and said, “For you, soldier, two dollars.” I could not believe it—a treasure such as this for only two dollars. With a spring in my step, I left the store and carried with me

what I later discovered was a copy of *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*, but for me it was the Bible.

Soon thereafter, I went to see the military chaplain’s assistant, who introduced me to the *real* Bible (the Douay Version since I was a Catholic then), and I read it avidly. Later, after being baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I felt a call to the ministry, attended college and the seminary, and then served as a pastor and a missionary.

Sermon preparation

All of this leads to another part of my journey, one that happened many years later. During a ministerial meeting that I attended, the ministerial director suggested that the best way to prepare sermons is to combine our devotional time with sermon preparation. I tried it for a while, but there seemed to be something missing. So I continued my devotional life with a deep heart-to-heart relationship with Jesus, which had begun in a military base library.

And I learned that there is a difference between personal devotions and preparing a sermon. The former includes a personal conversation with the Lord about strictly personal matters, while the latter focuses on the needs of people, which may or may not apply to you personally. The former includes surrender, acknowledgment of personal weaknesses, failings, and the hidden presence of pride (the “me” factor) that needs

Revival
and
REFORMATION

Seeking God before
pursuing the agenda

We were discussing a complex agenda item as I chaired the conference's executive committee. While many people contributed very good ideas regarding the issue, something was missing. Shouldn't our committees have a greater focus on seeking God's will instead of our own biased thoughts?

After that realization, we began seeking God's will in an hour-long Bible study and prayer at the beginning of each meeting. Doing this was a spiritual blessing and made our time together much more productive.

Our approach was simple. We went deeply into small portions of scripture. For several weeks, we immersed ourselves in the first two chapters of Acts. We were inspired by the early church making prayer, unity, and mission their priorities. That very diverse group was unified by a mutual love for Jesus, a longing for the Holy Spirit, and a shared mission. As a result, thousands of lives were transformed and the church advanced dramatically under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Our process also taught us the value of praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance before Bible study in order to more fully hear God's messages to us personally. Scripture then guided the focus of our prayers. My own experience taught me that prayer, springing from Scripture, tends to be less about me and more about aligning with God's will.

Is it possible that this describes what revival and reformation would look like when applied to committees? Try it! It will make a difference.

—DON LIVESAY SERVES AS PRESIDENT OF THE LAKE UNION CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, BERRIEN SPRINGS, MICHIGAN, UNITED STATES.

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to be made evident by the Holy Spirit and, with His help, eradicated. The latter involves reaching into the depths of Scripture for pulpit ministry, using such study helps as needed to make the sermon applicable to the congregation, not merely to share some biblical or theological insight but to make the presentation practical with a spiritual depth that can be felt in the hearts of people. Without question, the devotional life impacts the sermonic and vice versa, but they are distinct in pursuit and purpose.

Devotional methods vary from reading the Bible all the way through to journaling to simply spending time in prayer. Whatever method is used, it can become routine, to the detriment of the devotional experience and personal relationship with Christ. Therefore, it is important that the method needs to be occasionally changed in order to stay fresh and vigorous.

The mentor

When I gave my heart to Christ, I decided to make Him my Mentor, and the Model to follow. To be like Him became my passion, with all the frailties that accompany human nature. At times when my devotional life became little more than a habit, I would change my approach to reading or studying Scripture in order to keep the relationship fresh and new.

During my devotional life years ago, I was thinking how wonderful it would be if Jesus were here today and I could walk and talk with Him as the disciples did. As I was wondering what He would say to me today, the thought struck me that He would say the same thing He said to the disciples as recorded in the Scriptures. So the question was not what would He say, but how would He say what He said.

This insight led me to envision Him speaking to me in the car, visiting with me in my office, going hiking with me, or meeting me in the grocery store. I decided to begin reading the Gospel of Mark with this in mind, and writing out how He

would say what He said. I seemed to be walking by the Sea of Galilee, sitting next to Him on a hillside, and experiencing the joys and sorrows of His ministry.

Every morning at 3:30 A.M., I was living in another world, the world of biblical realities next to my Savior. This was the moment in time to live for. Sermon or class preparation could come at another time. Reading, writing, and praying for clarity, I got to the point where adherence to Scripture became a passion, not for the sake of having a devotional life but for a life with Jesus Christ. Passages I had paraphrased would often have to be reread; sentences scratched out and rewritten. The hours would go by so quickly while I was lost in the presence of the Son of God guided by the Holy Spirit.

Selecting at random the various books of the New Testament, I spent three years writing the Scriptures as I understood them. Then I continued my devotions by transcribing the written copy into the computer, polishing the sentences as I typed them. However, this process was more of a professional exercise than a heart-to-heart devotional with Christ. So I transcribed the New Testament and continued the personal heart-to-heart time with the Lord in the Old Testament, which took seven years to complete my transcription. Those ten years brought a change in my life and spiritual growth beyond words to describe. I'm forever grateful for the Holy Spirit's leading. Since then, the process has continued, always with Scripture and Jesus as the center.

Masterly deception

A devotional life must be guarded so it does not degenerate into "righteousness by devotions" or simply become a habit of Scripture journaling. We must always be distrustful of self, and, as we search our own hearts, we must be willing to correct any self-serving tendencies as the Holy Spirit points them out to us. This is an individual matter, for there is no

greater subtlety of sin than spiritual pride for what we have done or are doing for the Savior. Submission and resignation must be proportionate to God's gift of His Son for our redemption and must continue to deepen. God will not accept anything short of this surrender.

There will always be distractions that keep us from spending adequate time in personal devotions, whether from family or church members who call early in the morning. Some interruptions are legitimate; others are not. Also, there are administrative matters that weave a web of concern around our hearts and minds, which need attention, making it hard to concentrate. Needs never end, but whatever happens, guard against the thought, *I'll have my devotions later when I have more time or when I'm in a better mood.* The battle for devotions is a battle for our lives. Let us not value the pulpit more than

Christ or we will end up preaching ourselves instead of Christ.

Motivation

For me, the greatest inspiration for personal devotions was the example of Christ Himself, who felt the need to be alone with His Father and visit with Him no matter how tired He was, even if He had to do so during the middle of the night after a very busy day of ministry. There have been others whose commitment to personal Scripture study have strengthened my own, but it has always been the example of Christ that continues to create in me a deep desire to commune with Him personally as He did with His Father.

How has this affected the way I pray? It has made me pray earnestly for myself to be more like my Savior, acknowledging my shortcomings as husband, father, and pastor, and asking Him to do whatever is necessary

to change me. To be honest, my desire to be saved does not compare with my desire just to see His face; that would be enough. However, to be with Him forever is His wish for me, so that is mine as well.

As I become more intimately acquainted with Christ, I sense the contrast between Him and me and realize my personal inadequacy to reflect Him—His kindness, compassion, benevolence, forgiveness, and willingness to bear pain for the sake of others, but not without being firm on principles no matter what the cost. This is not always easy, but it continues as the basis of what a relationship with Him is all about.

Thus, the journey that began decades ago, in a military library, continues today as I seek to know my Lord better and better, awaiting the time when, though seeing now "through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). **M**

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Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 493



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Michael G. Hasel, PhD, is director of the Institute of Archaeology and professor of Near Eastern studies and archaeology, Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee, United States.



Archaeology and the authority of the Bible

In 1986, Professor Gabriel Barkay was introducing a new groundbreaking discovery made at Ketef Hinnom, a burial site southwest of Jerusalem, where the oldest biblical inscription was found. Along with hundreds of Old Testament scholars, I sat spellbound at a meeting of the International Organization for the Study of Old Testament in Jerusalem's Israel Museum. Two tiny strips of silver, tightly wound and appearing like miniature scrolls, had been carefully unrolled. They contained etched inscriptions bearing a shortened version of the Aaronic blessing (Num. 6:24–26). Based on the archaeological context and style of script, Barkay dated the inscription to the late seventh or early sixth centuries B.C.—400 years older than the Dead Sea Scrolls. The silence was profound in the room as many critical scholars, who dated this text in Numbers to the fourth century B.C., were suddenly confronted with new evidence. Recent photographic techniques and new computer imaging conclusively dated the amulets to before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. This means that they dated at least 150 years earlier than critical scholarship had assumed for the origin of Numbers, making the Ketef Hinnom inscription the earliest written biblical passage discovered to date.¹ This was my dramatic introduction to

archaeology's power to challenge current interpretations of the Bible.

Since the dawn of archaeological research in the ancient Near East in 1799, no other discipline has provided more new data and insights on the nations, people, and events of the Bible. Discoveries in the nineteenth century have been multiplied many times during the last 150 years of archaeology in the land of the Bible, as artifacts, cities, and ancient records reveal the trustworthiness of Scripture.² In this essay we will review some of the most important finds made during the last 25 years by archaeologists working in the Middle East who have contributed greatly to the understanding of the Bible.

Nations of the Bible

Canaan. The land of Canaan has been greatly illuminated in recent years through excavations at major sites such as Hazor, the largest Canaanite city in Israel (see Josh. 11:10; Judg. 4:2). Not only have modern excavations revealed a fortified site of more than 200 acres, but textual sources indicate that it was the southwesternmost city in an international trade system extending from Iran to the Mediterranean, which included other centers such as Babylon, Mari, and Qatna. The site is mentioned in omens and geographical lists from Babylon³ and in the Mari texts. Sixteen cuneiform

documents have been found at the site itself so far, ranging from administrative letters to court records.⁴ The most recent discovery of a law code fragment was made in 2010 on the surface of the site. These records attest to the central and significant role Hazor played in the geopolitical climate of Bronze Age Canaan.

Philistia. The Philistine cities of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath have been excavated extensively, revealing a sophisticated culture of architecture, art, and technology.⁵ In 1996, an inscription was uncovered at Ekron revealing a dynastic line of five kings including Achish, the son of Padi, who ruled over Ekron until the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar.⁶ The decorated Aegean-style pottery, elaborate architecture, and the technology of these cities reveal that the Philistines were the elite in the ancient land of Canaan.

Judah. Even in an age of skepticism toward some of the Bible's most famous kings, such as David and Solomon, new discoveries call for caution among those who claim that the Bible's record of the kingdom of Judah is mythical in proportion.⁷ New excavations since 2007 at Khirbet Qeiyafa by the Hebrew University and Southern Adventist University have revealed a massively fortified city dating to the time of Saul and David. Surrounded by 200,000 tons of a doubly fortified

walls, with evidence of city planning, this garrison town was situated on the Elah Valley overlooking the area where the famous battle between David and Goliath was fought (1 Sam. 17). The city is a precursor to later Judean cities with similar design elements. In 2009, a second gate was uncovered that now identifies Khirbet Qeiyafa with the biblical city of Shaaraim, mentioned in the narrative (v. 52).⁸ This has major implications for the early history of Judah and the establishment of the united monarchy.

People of the Bible

The existence of at least 70 biblical characters, including kings, servants, scribes, and courtiers, has been confirmed over the last two centuries of research. In the last two decades, many more people have been added to this list through the discovery of seals, seal impressions, ostraca, and monumental inscriptions.

Baalis. In 1984, at the site of Tall al-Umeiri in Jordan, archaeologists uncovered a clay seal impression bearing the name “Milkom’ur . . . servant of Baalyasha,”⁹ undoubtedly a reference to Baalis, the king of ancient Ammon, mentioned in Jeremiah 40:14. This obscure king was said to have plotted against the Judean king at the verge of the Babylonian destruction.

David. The excavations in 1993 at the northernmost biblical city of Tel Dan uncovered an inscription by a student volunteer.¹⁰ The campaign account by an Aramean king mentioned for the first time the “house of Israel” and the “house of David,” clearly a reference to the southern kingdom of Judah and Israel’s famous king. David not only existed, but he was remembered over a century later as the founder of a great dynasty.

Herod. Archaeologists have excavated Herod the Great’s luxurious palaces at Caesarea Maritima, Herodium, Masada, Jericho, and other sites. Herod spared no expense to decorate these buildings with

detailed mosaics, frescoes, and architectural elegance. At Masada, Herod’s desert fortress, the northern three-tiered palace had a nearly 360-degree view overlooking the Dead Sea. In 1996, I excavated with Ehud Netzer at Masada where we uncovered an imported fragment of a wine amphora. On the fragment was an inscription: *regi Herodi Iudaico* “for Herod, king of Judaea.” It was the first mention of Herod the Great’s title, outside of the New Testament and Josephus, found in an archaeological context.¹¹

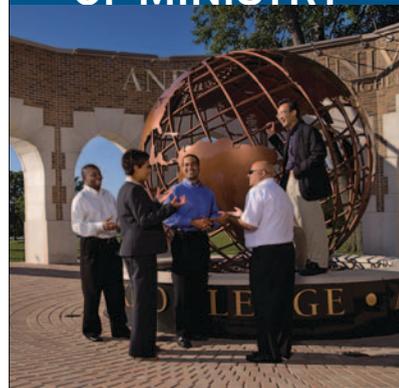
Nebu-sarsekim. In 2007, a researcher in the British Museum deciphered an inscription of a financial record of a donation made by a Babylonian official named Nebu-sarsekim. The inscription dates to the tenth year of the reign of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, about 595 B.C. (2 Kings 24:1–4; Dan. 1:1; 2:1). This official Nebu-sarsekim is also mentioned in Jeremiah 39:3, 11–14 where he appears in the account of Nebuchadnezzar’s second campaign against Jerusalem in 597 B.C. In the biblical account more than 10,000 captives are taken to Babylon, but Nebuchadnezzar orders Nebu-sarsekim with the task of taking care of Jeremiah who is left behind in Jerusalem. This mention of the same person in a financial record of Babylon indicates the importance of continued research in translating thousands of discovered texts in the basement of museums that have never been read or published.¹²

Writing the events of the Bible

The Dead Sea Scrolls, found by a Bedouin shepherd boy in 1947, were one of the most amazing discoveries that testified to the accuracy of the Bible’s transmission over 1,000 years of history. In more recent years, scholars have raised questions about the extent of literacy in ancient Israel. Some scholars question whether Hebrew writing extended back to the tenth century B.C., while others go so far as to claim that Hebrew was an invention of the Hellenistic

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period 700 years later.¹³ In the last six years, several discoveries have been made that challenge this hypothesis.

A tenth-century abecedary. In 2005, an ancient stone inscription was found at the site of Tel Zayit, excavated by the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. On it, an abecedary, or alphabet with 18 letters, was dated by the ceramic and archaeological evidence to the tenth century, the time of Solomon or shortly thereafter. The building in which it was found was destroyed in a massive fire, leaving debris nearly one meter thick over the area. Excavators have dated this destruction to Shishak (1 Kings 14:25–28), or possibly someone else, in 925 B.C. The Tel Zayit abecedary is one of the oldest attestations of the alphabet known. Since it was found in a clear archaeological context that dates it to the tenth century B.C., the abecedary also provides a distinct connection between the development of language in ancient Israel and the growing archaeological evidence of cities and buildings during the united monarchy.¹⁴

Oldest Hebrew inscription. During the second season excavations in 2008 at Khirbet Qeiyafa, a site in the Elah Valley already mentioned above, a text was found written on a broken piece of pottery. The ostrakon consisted of five separated lines and began with an injunction, “Do not do . . .” The initial phrase is only found in Hebrew and has led Haggai Misgav, the epigrapher, to suggest that the inscription is Hebrew.¹⁵ If this is true it would be the oldest Hebrew text ever found—800 years older than the Dead Sea Scrolls. Unfortunately, much of the rest of the text is incomplete with missing and obscure letters. One suggestion, although highly speculative, is that this text was written as an injunction for the protection of widows and orphans.¹⁶ As Gary A. Rendsburg has observed, “Taken together, the Tel Zayit abecedary, the Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription, and the Gezer calendar demonstrate

that writing was well-established in tenth-century Israel—certainly sufficiently so for many of the works later incorporated into the Hebrew Bible to have been composed at this time.”¹⁷ The existence of writing at such an early stage of the Iron Age is significant because it implies that historical data could have been documented and passed on from the early tenth century B.C. until the biblical narrative was finally formulated. This also indicates that the paucity of evidence for writing is less secure than previously thought.

Conclusion

Archaeology remains one of the most significant disciplines that provides new information for the world of the Bible. It may be tempting for some to ask, What about this person of the Bible? or Why do we not have evidence for this event yet? We need to be reminded that although more than 200 years have passed since this discipline was established in the ancient Near East, we have barely scratched the surface. Only a fraction of biblical sites are known. Of those that are, only a fraction have been excavated. Most of those excavated have only had 5 percent of the site uncovered; fewer yet are fully published. Of those that have been published, not everything has a direct bearing on the Bible. For these reasons, we need to be cautious in negative assessments of events and history. One thing is certain, with the continued support for archaeological research in this part of the world, the next five or ten years will reveal untold further discoveries that will illuminate, illustrate, and, in some dramatic cases, directly impact our understanding of the Bible. 

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- 3 Wayne Horowitz, “Two Late Bronze Age Tablets From Hazor,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 50 (2000): 16–28.
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- 6 Seymour Gitin, Trude Dothan, and Joseph Naveh, “A Royal Dedicatory Inscription From Ekron,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 47 (1997): 9–16.
- 7 Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible’s Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), and most recently John Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009).
- 8 Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, and Michael G. Hasel, “The Contribution of Khirbet Qeiyafa to Our Understanding of the Iron Age Period,” *Strata: Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 28 (2010), 39–54; Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, and Michael G. Hasel, “The Iron Age City of Khirbet Qeiyafa After Four Seasons of Excavation,” in *The Ancient Near East in the 12th–10th Centuries BCE: Culture and History*, ed. Gershon Galil (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, forthcoming); Michael G. Hasel, “New Excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa and the Early History of Judah,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Analysis to Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, eds. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming).
- 9 Randall W. Younker, “Israel, Judah, and Ammon and the Motifs on the Baalis Seal From Tell el-‘Umeiri,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 48 (1985): 173–180.
- 10 Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, “An Aramaic Stele Fragment From Tel Dan,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993): 81–98; Fant and Reddish, *Lost Treasures of the Bible*, 103–106.
- 11 Michael G. Hasel, “He Missed the Opportunity of His Life,” *Adventist Review* (August 9, 2007), 15–17.
- 12 The official translation from Michael Jursa is forthcoming, see provisionally Bob Becking, “The Identity of Nabu-sharrussu-ukin, the Chamberlain: An Epigraphic Note on Jeremiah 39:3. With an Appendix on the Nebu(!) sarsekim Tablet,” *Biblistische Notizen* 140 (2009): 35–46.
- 13 See Finkelstein and Silberman, *David and Solomon*, 142; Philip R. Davies, “In Search of ‘Ancient Israel,’” supplement, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 148 (1992).
- 14 Ron E. Tappy et al., “An Abecedary of the Tenth Century B.C.E. From the Judean Shephelah,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 344 (2006): 5–46; Ron E. Tappy and P. Kyle McCarter, eds., *Literate Culture and Tenth-Century Canaan: The Tel Zayit Abecedary in Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008).
- 15 Haggai Misgav, Yosef Garfinkel, and Saar Ganor, “The Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostrakon,” in *New Studies in the Archaeology of Jerusalem and Its Region*, eds. D. Amit, G. D. Stiebel, and O. Peleg-Barkat (Jerusalem: Hebrew, 2008), 111–123; Haggai Misgav, Yosef Garfinkel, and Saar Ganor, “The Ostrakon,” in *Khirbet Qeiyafa Vol. 1. Excavation Report 2007–2008*, eds. Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2009), 243–257.
- 16 Gershon Galil, “The Hebrew Inscription From Khirbet Qeiyafa/Neta’im: Script, Language, Literature and History,” *Ugarit Forschungen* 41 (2009): 193–242.
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The grand story

Reading and preaching the Bible as an overarching story with its own plot, predicament, development, and resolution remains a powerful method to bring people to Christianity. Yet the Christian church, including Protestant traditions, has read the Bible in a fragmented and dogmatic way. Early apostolic creeds, scholastic speculations, and Protestant orthodoxy have all documented this practice. The idea of the Bible as a grand story has been so lost that many are surprised to hear that the Bible presents a coherent and powerful narrative.

Adventism, standing in the tradition of radical reformation, has attempted to break away from the traditional dogmatic and creedal formulations. But, in pursuing this impressive and challenging task, have we allowed the Bible to be what it fundamentally is—a grand narrative? Have we yet explored the hermeneutical potential of permitting the Bible to speak to us with its own narrative power?

Narrative power

In the past few decades, biblical scholars have recognized that doctrinal and fragmented Bible reading and preaching do not do justice to Scripture's overall narrative form.¹ Even though the canon of Scripture consists of many genres and topics, the Bible is, as N. T. Wright observes, "[N]ot only . . . irreducibly narrative in form, but also displays an

extraordinary . . . overall storyline of astonishing power and consistency. . . . [W]hat we have, from Genesis to Revelation, is a massive narrative structure."²

The task of allowing the Bible to speak with its own narrative power should, therefore, start with the recognition that the diverse biblical writings are much like pieces of a puzzle that, together, make up one grand picture. One of the Adventist pioneers, Ellen G. White, wrote that reading the Bible requires more than just "searching out the various parts" but also "studying their relationship." Furthermore, she implied that readers need to make "the effort" to view individual parts "in their relation to the grand central thought" of the Bible. Indeed, the study of the great whole of Scripture "is the highest study in which it is possible for man to engage. As no other study can, it will quicken the mind and uplift the soul."³

The author's suggestion seems to point beyond the mere compare-text-with-text methodology; rather, Ellen G. White makes the radical suggestion that readers will get the best value out of their study when reading the Bible as a coherent great whole with a "grand central thought." Such an approach, she implies, will shape the minds of readers as nothing else can.

If we, therefore, tried to follow what she and others say, what kind of grand picture could we piece together? What could reading and preaching the Bible as a grand story

look like? Here is one proposal that we have been developing in several European countries.

First principles

First, the "piecing together" begins with formulating the first principles of the grand story. These are given at the beginning of the biblical canon, the first two chapters of Genesis. They proclaim that, in the universe, there are only God and the creation, and that the creation, by the way of being brought into existence, is dependent on God (Gen. 1:1; 2:7). These first principles (God-creation-dependence) provide readers with the universal theistic worldview orientation, which in a particular way shapes the developments, stories, and statements at every stage in the Bible's big narrative. These first principles inform us that humans are on a life-support system and that God is the existential necessity who keeps the whole creation, including life on earth, running.⁴

The theme of evil

Before we can discuss the individual stages, we need also to mention the theme of human evil, which runs through the biblical story like a central thread and unites the individual stages. This central theme, that of human evil, does not stand alone, however; rather it is intertwined with the two-way response of God's blessing and curse. The interaction between the central theme and the two motifs consequently creates the grand narrative's

plotline, and it advances this plotline through individual stages, to which we can now turn.

Seven stages

The narrative-stages principle arises from the nature of the biblical material itself; it can be divided into seven major stages. The stages themselves are discernible by major transitional events that advance the narrative. These are (1) Creation, (2) the Fall, (3) the Promise and the People, (4) the Fulfillment in Jesus, (5) the Fulfillment and the People, (6) the Day of the Lord, and (7) the New Creation. Seeing these stages as they proceed and gradually build up a much larger story enables readers to hear the powerful symphony of Scripture.

The first stage, Creation (Gen. 1; 2), constitutes a “preamble” to the grand story. It tells about the good creation God had made, one with no hint of evil or deficiency (Gen. 1:31). All was harmonious; the Sabbath rest of God and His creation is the expression of this harmony.

Then the narrative enters into a new stage, when the serpent deceived humanity by lying to them about God and their dependency upon Him (Gen. 3). Something went horribly wrong. As a result of the Fall (the second stage), humanity is exiled, excluded from participating in the Creator’s immortality (vv. 22–24).

But then in the middle of the Fall story, a promise (the third stage) is given to Adam and Eve (v. 15) to undo the serpent’s lies and all he brought to the human experience. This promise will be fulfilled through one of their seed—or descendants. The genealogies in Genesis 5, 10, and 11 parade descendants who are seen as part of the same family. With the appearance of Abraham (the first substage), the story for the first time “slows” and narrows down. Readers can now see how God advances the promise specifically through the family of Abraham (Gen. 12; 15; 17).

When the nation of Israel enters onto the scene in the book of Exodus, it is the collective seed of Abraham. Faithful to the covenant promise, God hears their cries and redeems them from slavery and all oppression (Exod. 3:20). The story advances through the nation of Israel, even though often it is not a straightforward journey.

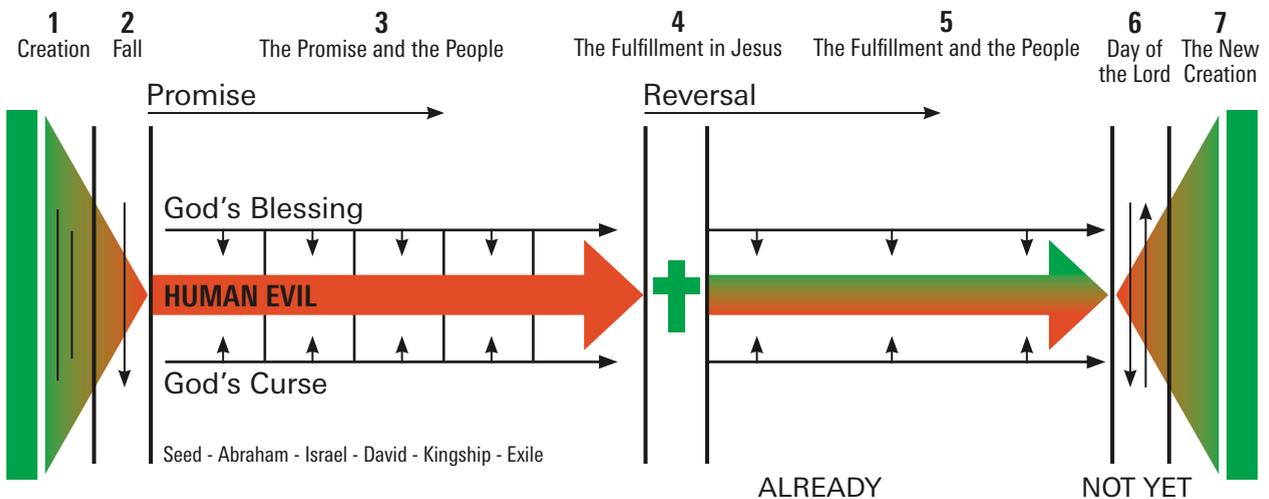
With the appearance of David and his kingdom, the narrative narrows down once more. David receives an extraordinary promise, which sits firmly on all the previous promises, but also sets out a new agenda for the kingdom theme (2 Sam. 7; cf. Gen. 17:6, 16). From now on, the idea of the kingdom and David as the king will become dominant in the story. The story of the kingdom will also take various turns, but the

poetic literature and the preexilic and postexilic prophets will look back with great anticipation to the promise given to David about his seed and the kingdom. And all Israel will be expecting the fulfillment of this kingdom.

Then the grand narrative enters into its central stage (the fourth) in the New Testament Gospels. Jesus is immediately presented as the promised Descendant of Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1). His life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension are all part of the “great exodus” from the continuing exile in which humanity has been ever since the Fall (Luke 9:31; John 8:33–36). He deals with more than one nation’s problems; He addresses the problems of all humanity. While we have not been part of the first four stages of this great narrative, we nevertheless live with their preconditions and the consequences of what happened at these stages. In Jesus, all of the previous promises, mentioned at previous stages, come to fulfillment and the readers can see a decisive turn in the story.

However, the narrative does not end with Jesus’ death, resurrection, or even ascension. Immediately after His ascension, a new stage opens. In this new phase, the people of God (the fifth stage) are once again reestablished and Israel—now with a new disposition of hearts towards God—is relaunched as a new community (Acts 2–4, 10; Rom. 3:28,

The Grand Story of the Bible



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The word *revival* points out an important Christian experience; it actually means to recover the previous state of being fully alive as a Christian (Col. 2:13, 14). Life has its origin in God Himself as testified to by King David when he wrote, “For with You [God] is the fountain of life” (Ps. 36:9, NASB). Being alive in God also includes the spiritual dimension from the One who is the Origin, Source, and Sustainer of life. David was sure of such a vital demonstration of spiritual life when he wrote, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul” (Ps. 19:7, NIV). The Scriptures indicate clearly that such a revival has its source in God Himself and in His Word.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12, NIV). Walking in the light signifies a permanent and sufficient inner experience to continue shining for Christ. Such a revival echoes Jesus’ promise and teaching for abundant life, “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Being a revived person in that context means walking as a disciple of Jesus and being transformed daily by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18) until we reach eternal glory (John 5:24).

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29; 9–11). People become part of the new Israel, not through national or blood connections with the seed of Abraham anymore, but through the faith connection with the Seed. In this stage, the newly constituted community of believers now tells the story of the Creator God, humanity, and the Fall. But now they add the story of Jesus, and, by so doing, they announce that Jesus is now the promised Davidic King and in charge of humanity (Rev. 5). But before He will reign as the King in His eschatological kingdom, He must serve as the Priest in the heavenly sanctuary (Ps. 110; Heb. 8; 9) to mediate to humanity the benefits of His past work so that as many as possible may be part of His future work.

According to the narrative, the Day of the Lord and the New Creation phases are both in the future from our perspective. The Day of the Lord stage (sixth) is a separating stage that effectuates the final great exodus of all humanity. The big questions are answered here. The Day of the Lord is not only about the second coming of Jesus; it includes pre-Advent, Advent, and post-Advent judicial aspects too (Dan. 7–9, Rev. 20). Questions regarding God’s character and His dealing with evil are of interest to the whole universe and must be dealt with and answered on the basis of the evidence. Just as stage two mysteriously introduced a certain serpent who attacked the character of God and brought all of the evil to the world of God’s creation, so stage six directly corresponds with the second stage: it addresses the evil by unmasking the lies of the serpent, his character, and consequently justifies God’s reign and His people (Rev. 12–20).

Only after this, the narrative finally arrives at the last (seventh) stage, the New Creation phase (Rev. 21; 22). This is where the curse ends, where sin, death, and all evil are no more. Everything is created anew. With the curse of the Fall reversed, humanity continues its eternal journey with

God. Then even Jesus will hand over the kingdom to God (1 Cor. 15:24–28).

But the earlier stages are not forgotten either; they are immortalized through the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles written on the foundations of the New Jerusalem as an everlasting reminder of God’s infinite faithfulness to His creation.

The potential of Scripture

Reading the Scriptures through these seven stages—within the framework of its first principles and the curse-of-the-Fall theme with God’s double response of curse and blessing—has a great worldview formation promise because a worldview is best captured in a narrative. Adventism and Protestantism confess that the Bible is God’s central means on how to inform, reform, and transform the minds and hearts of people. Allowing the Bible to be read and preached consciously and methodically as a grand story could, in a fresh and powerful way, shape our minds and lives. **M**

- 1 For example, among the most prominent authors who published widely on the metanarrative potential of the Bible are Walter Kaiser Jr. (*The Promise-Plan of God: Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose*), T. Desmond Alexander (*From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*), Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen (*The Drama of Scripture*), Christopher J. H. Wright (*The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*), Graeme Goldsworthy (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*), Tom Holland (*Contours of Pauline Theology*), and N. T. Wright (*Scripture and the Authority of God*).
- 2 N. T. Wright, “Reading Paul, Thinking Scripture,” in *Scriptures’ Doctrine and Theology’s Bible: How the New Testament Shapes Christian Dogmatics*, eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Alan J. Torrance (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 60, 61. Tom Wright, being one of the leading and most influential New Testament (NT) scholars in this generation, has been greatly shaped by narrative framework of Scripture. The “new perspective” in NT studies and Paul, of which Wright is one of the main proponents, fosters a distinctively narrative reading of the NT (and the Old Testament as well). See, for example, N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspectives* (London: SPCK, 2005), especially 7–13; *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), especially chapters 3 and 5; and *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005), especially 89–95. (This book was published in the United States as *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God* [New York: HarperCollins, 2006].)
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 124–126.
- 4 Exod. 20:11; Job 38:2–10; Pss. 8:3–9; 24:1–6; 90:1, 2; Isa. 42:5; John 1:1–5; Acts 17:24–29; Col. 1:15–18; Heb. 1:2, 3; Rev. 14:7.

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Watch your priorities

Ed seriously considered leaving the ministry. He felt pulled by church administrators, parishioners, family, and his own unrealistic expectations. Leaving seemed the only way to avoid burnout.

Fortunately, a veteran pastor sensed Ed's predicament, met with him to explore the role of a pastor, and helped him rearrange his priorities. Ed soon rediscovered the joys of ministry.

You may be thinking about leaving the ministry as well. Before you make that decision, think about the following concepts that make for job satisfaction.

Understand your role

Warren interviewed for a staff position in a large church. The senior pastor gave him a list of responsibilities that would be his, should he be chosen. The pastor left the room so Warren could take his time examining the list. When the pastor returned, he said to the prospective associate, "As you may have gathered, I am looking for someone to care for the minutiae of running the church."

Running the church can be a great way to erode the pastor's role of praying, studying, teaching, discipling, encouraging, and preaching. Church members may applaud you for chairing all the committees, working out the budget, managing church maintenance, fund-raising, improving the church sign, and eliminating the church debt. They

may even brag about their hard working pastor, but their concept of a pastor's role is wrong.

Eugene H. Peterson found that running the church can be hazardous to the role of the pastor. When he told his church leaders he was thinking of resigning, they came up with a brilliant solution. They offered to run the church while he focused on being a pastor.* They had resources for caring for the day-to-day operations of the institutional church. He enjoyed praying for and with people, encouraging, comforting, studying, preaching, and teaching.

Understanding your role and preserving it at all costs will prevent burnout and departure from a rewarding calling.

Be patient

Some church leaders have adopted the world's passion for getting things done in a hurry. They urge pastors to hurry and finish the work, and conferences and workshops are produced nonstop in an effort to hasten the Lord's coming.

Hurry, hurry, hurry remains as an enemy of a pastor's role. You cannot expect church members to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him if you are on a never-ending treadmill.

I live in chicken country. Thousands of chicks are fed growth hormones so they can be butchered at seven weeks. As a result, their bodies grow faster than their hearts, and hundreds die and are incinerated

before they reach the processing plant. As with the chicken illustration, the hurry syndrome is not conducive to good spiritual health for the pastor and parishioners.

Pastors are not, necessarily, initiators. Long before a pastor makes contact with a person, God has been touching him or her. Pastors thrill at watching what God is doing. Then the pastor prays, "Lord, show me how I can fall in step with what You are doing." Psalm 27:14 says twice, "Wait for the LORD" (NIV).

If you are faithful in your role as a pastor and trust the results with God, you will be able to shed the pressures to finish the work. Wait for the Lord and avoid the stress that can drive you from ministry.

Set your own priorities

Set your own priorities before someone else tries to set them for you. When meeting with a pastoral search committee, be clear and decisive in stating your priorities. If church administrators offer you a position, let them know what you believe to be your most important ministry initiatives. Your interviewers deserve to know your position on implementing programs generated by those who are unfamiliar with the nature of a particular church and the community demographics.

Keep your flame alive

A Methodist pastor gave me his secret for keeping his flame alive.

He scheduled time for recreation, reflection, and rejuvenation and took minivacations every month. He followed a devotional time apart from sermon preparation. Whenever he learned about a seminar that could deepen his relationship with God, he attended. Running the church keeps the wheels spinning, but it may not fan the flames of the pastor's friendship with Jesus.

Be a wordsmith

Pastors who practice the artistry of creating word pictures for their members live for the joy of bringing the Bible alive. Turning words into memorable sermons keeps them looking forward to next week's and next month's masterpieces.

Since I retired, I have listened to many preachers but very few wordsmiths. I walk out of church feeling that I was handed what was thrown together at the last minute. I feel cheated. I think such preachers miss the real joy of ministry. To them, preaching has become a chore they can easily do without.

Since boyhood, I was an admirer of H. M. S. Richards Sr., and I considered him a student and master at word pictures. I attended the Lectureship on Biblical Preaching named in his honor in 1957. Pastor Richards upheld the role of the pastor, and he told us that if we can write it, we can preach it. Writing requires thinking and research, guards against slipshod preaching, and creates a desire to preach the rest of your life.

Once writing the sermon has been completed on paper, it needs to be written on the heart of the preacher. A complete manuscript or notes taken to the pulpit will be a guide for an organized presentation. Pastors gifted with an excellent memory may preach without a manuscript or notes. This is admirable as long as the pastor does not ramble.

The church I attend shares a pastor with two other churches. When he cannot be present, other members fill the pulpit. They have a natural ability for public speaking, but the pastor

wisely tutors them in preaching God's Word. The youngest speaker often seeks a critique from the others.

Jesus was a Master Wordsmith. His parables were not meant to answer all the questions, but His hearers went away processing what they heard. They could not forget the thought-provoking pictures he painted with words. He did not use big words. Small words, like small brushstrokes on a canvas, have proved to be in demand for centuries.

Love your family

When church members and activities gobble up most of the pastor's time, his or her family suffers, and home life is no longer a blessing. This can be a reason why some pastors leave. Pastors who build and enjoy happy families will not be eager to leave the ministry. Their families will stand behind them as they set good priorities.

In our family, we laughed about our weekly days away from church. We went on excursions come rain or shine. One day we took a picnic lunch and badminton equipment to Sleeping Giant State Park in Connecticut. The rain was coming down in torrents, but we were under a shelter. We were the only people in the park. A ranger could not believe we were serious about enjoying the day. He came to the shelter on the pretense of emptying the trash cans although he really came to see this silly family up close.

A pastor and his or her family are living sermons for the congregation. The greatest mission of the pastor centers around the mission of the home. Church members often live in upheaval, and therefore they need to have a model. They need to be invited to the pastor's home to see lives lived in a Christian environment.

Avoid solitary ministry syndrome

Most Seventh-day Adventist pastors work alone unless they are part of a multiple pastor staff. This creates a problem that the church has

failed to address. Loneliness in the workplace is a reality in the church.

I presented a seminar on clergy loneliness at a ministers' retreat. I could not convince them to talk about their loneliness in the seminar time, but in the evening some would seek me out and talk about it. One pastor told me he was lonely and knew of two ministers who had left because of the lack of camaraderie. Clergy loneliness filters down to clergy spouses. I know because I spent five days at a camp meeting listening to heartbreaking stories of spousal loneliness.

I have spoken to church administrators about the solitary-ministry syndrome, but solo pastorates have not decreased. Well-qualified pastors are being lost to the denomination because the problem is not being addressed.

Here are a few ideas you can implement to avoid loneliness. Join the ministerial alliance in your area. If you have more than one church, join the alliance in both places. The pastors of other faiths are grateful to have a close friendship with clergy of other faiths. Plan social times with other pastors who live and/or work near you. Exchange pulpits and special programs. When we were pastoring in Michigan, pastors and their families in one area planned several picnics every year.

I developed a close friendship with a pastor of a denomination different from my own. He became as close as a brother to me. We shared book titles, personal problems, and I conducted several seminars in his church. We swapped stories about church polity and congregational idiosyncrasies. It feels good to laugh together. A Catholic priest taught at a nursing school in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Because he invited me to teach his class on death and dying, our relationship developed into a rewarding relationship.

Use your creativity to avoid the solitary-ministry syndrome. If you wait for church administrators to address the problem, you may find yourself leaving the ministry due to loneliness.

Be prepared for some difficult people

I can remember a few times when I gave serious consideration to leaving the ministry. A church deacon grabbed me by the lapels and said, "I hate you." I was shaking in my shoes. With time I became aware of factors that led to his anger, but initially I questioned whether being a pastor was worth the stress. Another church member backed me into a corner and angrily accused me of ruining the church. After he left, I spent a half hour gaining my composure.

No church member should be allowed to drive pastors from the ministry. I believe the role of church administrators should include being advocates for pastors who are being tormented. They should meet with the church in question and spell out their expectations of civil behavior. If necessary, they should confront the offender individually. Pastors need to know they have advocates.

Most churches are respectful and kind to pastors. One pastor of five churches is welcomed like royalty when he comes to each church, and the members provide lodging and meals. Parents ask him to counsel their children about their schoolwork. Newly married couples report their progress and seek his help for difficult decisions. The members await his arrival for baptisms and baby dedications. His arrival composes a joyful homecoming.

Find a shoulder to lean on

I became acquainted with the pastors of a megachurch in Texas. Their church board hires a counselor to meet with the pastors individually on a regular basis. The counselor never reports to the church board. This provides a safe haven for pastors who may need help in dealing with personal, personnel, or congregational problems.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has traditionally elected ministerial directors. These men have not had the exclusive role of supporting clergy for, in many cases, most of their time involves evangelism coordination

and personnel selection. If the church wants to be serious about maintaining the health of pastors and their families, professional people should be hired to make that their exclusive responsibility.

A professional shoulder to lean on would prevent highly qualified pastors from leaving parish ministry for secular work or other branches of church-related endeavors.

Master your craft

Pastors are ordained to preach just as Jesus came preaching. Once a pastor masters the craft of preaching, he or she can rise above any negative aspects of the calling by God's grace. My heart rejoices when I hear a pastor say, "I love to preach." When a pastor spends half or more of each week in study, research, writing, and memorizing, preaching becomes the thrill that keeps away thoughts of leaving the ministry.

Mastering the craft of preaching requires the proper tools. Years ago, this required investing a small fortune on books. Access to tools has become cheaper in our age of technology.

A preacher can be compared to a gourmet cook, insisting on fresh ingredients for sermons. One of my sources was my involvement with the community. I became involved with the ministerial association, hospice, food banks, health seminars, and lay counseling services. In addition to sharing God's love, I gained rich sermon material. My community experience kept me from bookish preaching, and this also set an example for church members.

Preaching means conveying the good news that comes from Scripture. Sermons should be full of Scripture, which results in congregations bringing their Bibles to church. Bibles should be placed in pew racks for those who do not bring a Bible.

Congregational reading of Scripture during the sermon has been made easier by projecting texts on a screen—an excellent way of making people in the pews participants in worship.

Master preachers do not shout with angry voices and facial expressions. They do not spend precious time attempting to be humorous. As Jesus did, the preacher makes his or her listeners think and also brings hope, comfort, and encouragement to people.

Samuel Chadwick, an English preacher, said that whenever the pastor steps into the pulpit he or she should speak as one broken to those who are broken.

Sermon preparation done prayerfully and sermon delivery bathed in the presence of the Spirit is exciting. As you see God touching hearts week after week, you become addicted to preaching. You want to do it in and out of season.

Conclusion

Ed discovered that he could not pattern his style of ministry after a model promoted by his church administration or some published successful minister. He, fortunately, realized that pastoral ministry is different for every pastor. When he created his own style, thoughts of leaving ministry no longer lurked in his mind.

Our son asked me, "Daddy, what would you think if I decided to become a minister?"

I told him, "If you can be imaginative, creative, innovative, and true to the person you are, I'd be happy with your decision." That has been my advice to many young men and women contemplating ministry as a life work.

Unrewarding ministry compares to moving into a house with the kitchen too cramped, the bedrooms too small, and the living room and dining areas not conducive to entertaining guests. You never feel at home.

Designing your own house or totally renovating the house you bought results in a different story. You personalize the living spaces. You move into *your* house. You feel at home. You want to stay. 

* Eugene H. Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 217.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or write to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

Student writing contest winners

Ministry recently conducted its third Ministerial Student Writing Contest. We are pleased to announce the winners.

We thank all of the students worldwide who submitted a manuscript for the Ministerial Student Writing Contest. We appreciate your participation.

Grand Prize	Daniel Xisto, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States
First Prize	Philip Michael Forness, Princeton, New Jersey, United States
Second Prize	Vikram Panchal, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States
Second Prize	Warren Suya Simatele, Silang, Cavite, Philippines
Third Prize	Andrew Abbott, Walla Walla, Washington, United States
Third Prize	Peter Barnabas Pamula, Silang, Cavite, Philippines
Third Prize	Reed Richardi, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States
Third Prize	Patrick Etoughé Anani, Silang, Cavite, Philippines
Third Prize	Jonny Moor, College Place, Washington, United States

Reintroduced law jeopardizes status of some churches in Hungary

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—The saga of securing official church status in Hungary continues, despite what religious liberty advocates called encouraging news late last year when the constitutional court struck down the country’s controversial law of churches.

Prior to that ruling, more than 300 minority faiths—among them the Seventh-day Adventist Church—were set to lose official legal status in Hungary on January 1, after which they would undergo a reapplication process.

With the new year, those churches are facing a similar situation. The country’s constitutional court overturned the law of churches purely on technical grounds; and on December 30, Hungary’s majority conservative party “easily” reintroduced and passed essentially the

same law, effective January 1, said **Dwayne Leslie**, the Adventist world church’s legislative representative in Washington, D.C.

Hungary’s parliament claims the law is necessary to weed out businesses or individuals posing as churches just to gain the accompanying rights and privileges. Furthermore, the majority government maintains that the law does not infringe on religious liberty. It does not “forbid” worship according to any faith tradition, Hungary’s minister of state for government communication, **Zoltan Kovacs**, wrote in a recent *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece. Kovacs said the law merely outlines how churches can gain official recognition “if they show themselves to be popular enough.” One condition requires a church to prove a decades-long history in the country and count more than 1,000 members.

The Hungarian government is “making efforts to explain to the international community that this is not a human rights issue,” said **Ganoune Diop**, the Adventist world church’s representative to the United Nations. “The situation

in Hungary is very complex, and there are several issues at play, from economic to judicial and legislative—and in front of these issues, religion. The government sees the de-registration of churches as a response, in part, to the tremendous challenges the country is facing. We must voice our concerns over the de-registration of churches, but whatever we say about the situation in Hungary must be prudent and sensitive to the context and sovereignty of Hungary,” Diop said.

Many members of the international religious liberty community maintain that, regardless of the country’s internal struggles, the law poses undue challenges for legitimate religious organizations. “Now we not only have an objective standard of what constitutes a church, but we also need a two-thirds vote of Parliament just to become an official religion, and we think that’s problematic,” Leslie said.

Currently, 82 of the some 300 minority religions deregistered under the latest law have reapplied for official status, among them the Seventh-day Adventist Church, denomination officials in Hungary said.



Religious liberty analysts said provisions of the new law indicate that those churches that have already applied for status will not experience a gap in official recognition. They will maintain previous recognition while a decision regarding their ultimate status is pending in parliament. Members of parliament have indicated that they will

arrive at a decision by the end of February. Church leaders in Hungary report that “communication with the government” suggests that the Seventh-day Adventist Church will regain official church status.

“One positive improvement in the new law is that it does not prohibit denominations to use the term ‘church,’ even if they are not accepted

by Parliament,” said **Tamás Ócsai**, president of the church’s Hungarian Union Conference. Churches to which parliament does not grant official recognition will receive a “religious association” status, he said.  [Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN]

(Editor’s Note: Update to follow in the Dateline section of the May 2012 issue.)

LETTERS



Continued from page 4 ►

causing Rodríguez to argue at some length that their deviation actually isn’t what it appears to be. It would have been helpful to mention that there exists still another alternative to the historical approach of preterism, historicism, and futurism, on the one hand, and the ahistorical approach of idealism, on the other, namely, the salvation-historical method. The latter is gradually emerging from the writings of the best Adventist scholars. What we may need, therefore, is a new openness to a more theological interpretation of the apocalypse, rather than declaring the question of proper hermeneutics to be nonnegotiable and closed.

—Rolf J. Pöhler, Friedensau, Germany

Both good and bad people

I really appreciated Laurence A. Turner’s article “All Kinds of Stuff” (January 2012). Another parable that he could have cited is the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1–14. In it, Jesus says, “So the servants went out into the streets

and gathered all the people they could find, *both good and bad*, and the wedding hall was filled with guests” (Matt. 22:10, NIV; emphasis added).

For me, this answers the age-old question, Does God send those who have never heard of Christ to hell? No. Truly, God desires every person whom He has created to be with Him in heaven. However, whether persons are permitted to *enter* and *remain* in heaven or not depends on if they are wearing the wedding garments that symbolize their faith in Christ—a faith that may have been theirs for decades, or that is brand-new, born at that heavenly moment of decision.

—Dan Owen, Erie, Pennsylvania, United States

I want to share my appreciation for Dr. Turner’s article. It’s a message I wish more congregations embraced: Welcome all! Is there risk in doing so? Absolutely. But the most refreshing couple of sentences I read in this piece were, “The harvest has not arrived yet. And even when it does,

judging between one and the other is not your business but God’s.”

When Turner quoted from the parable at the beginning, I had to reach for my own Bible and reread it myself. I had forgotten about it completely. I’m glad he helped me see God’s kingdom is indeed indiscriminate.

—Mike Hansen, Parker, Colorado, United States

Living in retirement

Thank you for Reinder Bruinsma’s article “The Joys (and Challenges) of Retirement” (January 2012). He covered the subject very comprehensively.

I spent 47 richly fulfilling and exciting years in full-time denominational employment up to my retirement in 2007. It is so easy for those of us in our twilight years to talk about the “good, old days,” but we must recognize that good things are happening in today’s vastly different world. We should never forget that God will lead us to even better days in the future.

—John Arthur, Crieff, Scotland, United Kingdom 

Fred Hardinge, DrPH, RD, is associate director, Health Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



Keeping those good resolutions

January, the time normally reserved for making resolutions, was months ago. How are you doing? Are you still working on the resolutions, or have you become discouraged like most of your members and just put that list, or some of the items, out of mind?

Perhaps your list included things such as the following:

- This year, I'm going to relax and not worry so much.
- I will eat less and exercise more so I can lose weight.
- I will spend more time each day in Bible study and sermon preparation.
- I'll spend more quality time with my family.

I had to ask myself a question the other day: Why are some of my resolutions the same as last year and the year before? The answer is very disconcerting, especially when I recognize that my church members watch my example.

How is the brain involved in our resolutions?

Our brains have enormous "plasticity." That means we can create new cells and pathways in the most remarkable ways. At the same time, our brains create strong tendencies to do the same things over and over and over again. These pathways persist for a lifetime, never completely going away.

Lasting change requires establishing new pathways and that takes a lot of practice. Many brain scientists tell us it takes six to nine months to create new pathways that are stronger than the old ones.

Sadly, there are no weeklong programs that magically change us for good.

Making a list of resolutions is easy, but it is far harder to put them into practice. Sometimes we fall into common resolution pitfalls, such as the following:

- Being vague about what we want. The more specific the resolution, the easier it will be to accomplish. (For example, I will not snack between meals versus I will eat less.)
- Not making a serious commitment. (Sometime this year I will . . .)
- Becoming discouraged and turning slipups into "give ups." All of us blow it every once in a while. Remember, we only fail when we fail to try again.

A book by the well-known psychologist Dr. Roy F. Baumeister, entitled *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*,* provides some fascinating insights into how our brains work to bring about changes in our lives.

To truly change requires willpower, known as a finite commodity that gets depleted as we use it. Yet at the same time, we strengthen willpower by repetitive use. In many ways, this character trait resembles a muscle. Doing a number of push-ups and then immediately jumping up to see how much you can bench press does not work. Over time, muscles can be built up, but in the short run they get fatigued.

Willpower should be recognized as a precious commodity, so how do we best manage it? Dr. Baumeister suggests several ways:

- *Know when it is freshest and strongest.* Willpower is at its peak in the morning after a good night's rest.
- *Spent it wisely.* Prioritize what you spend it on. Do not waste it on insignificant, worthless endeavors. Spend it to cultivate right habits.
- *Be aware of decision fatigue.* Few people are aware of this phenomenon. Yet it affects all of us. The more decisions you have to make, the greater the risk of a foolish one.
- *Set goals, but not too many at one time.* Working on too many changes at one time usually leads to discouragements and failure.

Too often we try to make our resolutions a reality by ourselves. The help of family and friends can be crucial to success. However, too often we overlook God in our process.

Dr. Baumeister fails to mention this in his book, but the Bible teaches that God is the Great Restorer of the will. Praying, studying the Bible, and meditating on His love restores, does not deplete, willpower. This exists as the one act of will that actually replenishes it!

To be the example God calls me to be, I need to rely more on Him. Fortunately, the apostle Paul described it best when he proclaimed, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

As I look at my resolution history, I need that help. How about you? 

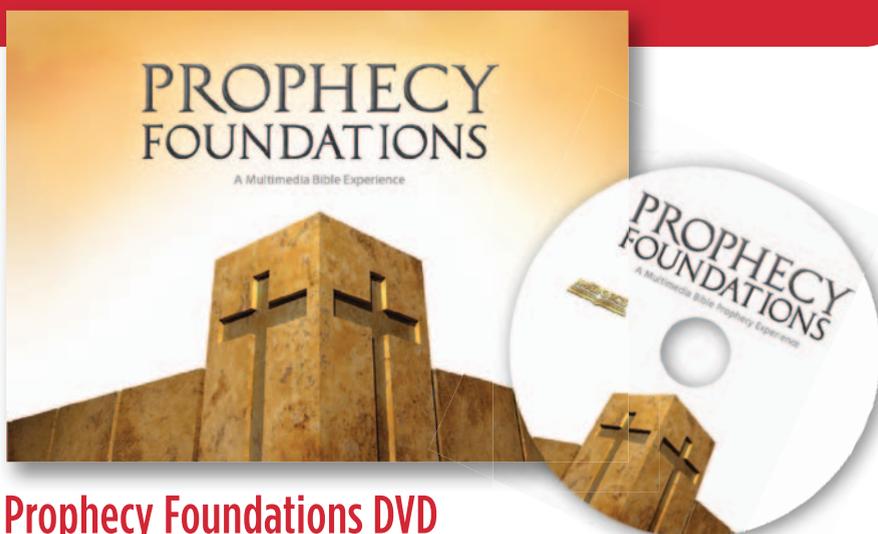
* Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

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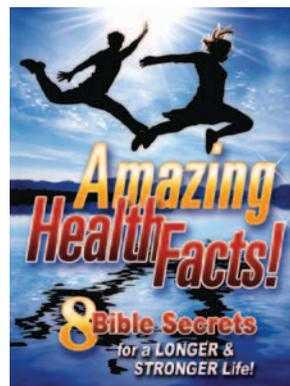


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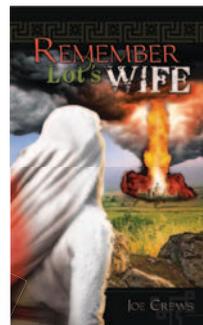
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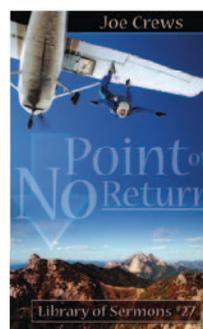
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