

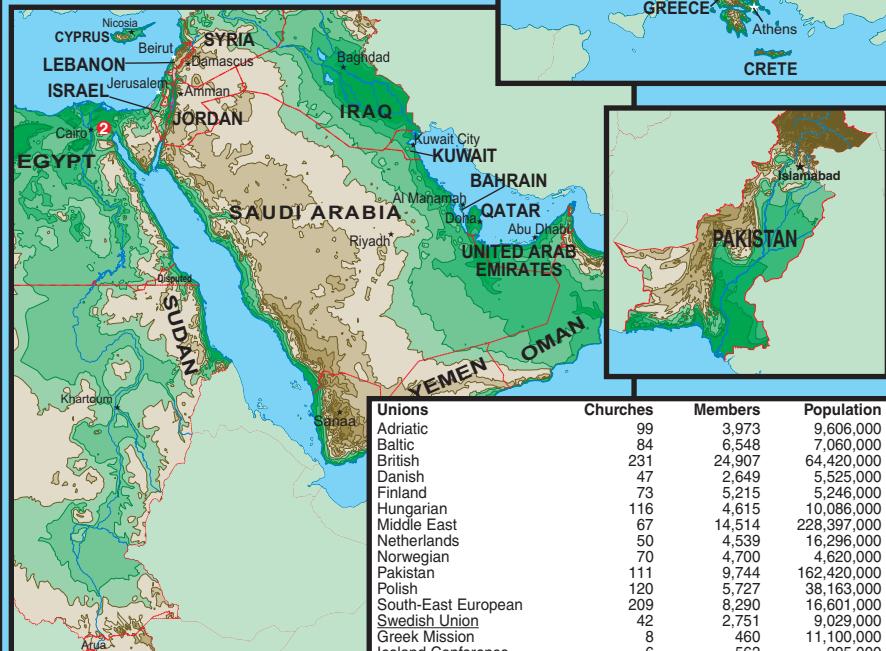
Trans-European DIVISION

Mission Projects

Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help provide the following projects:

- ① a church for the Ghanaian believers in Amsterdam, Netherlands
- ② vocational school and student center at Nile Union Academy, Cairo, Egypt
- ③ providing funds are available: permanent dormitories at Eyira Adventist Vocational Academy in the South Sudan Field

For more information, visit www.adventistmission.org



* Maps not drawn to scale

Unions	Churches	Members	Population
Adriatic	99	3,973	9,606,000
Baltic	84	6,548	7,060,000
British	231	24,907	64,420,000
Danish	47	2,649	5,525,000
Finland	73	5,215	5,246,000
Hungarian	116	4,615	10,086,000
Middle East	67	14,514	228,397,000
Netherlands	50	4,539	16,296,000
Norwegian	70	4,700	4,620,000
Pakistan	111	9,744	162,420,000
Polish	120	5,727	38,163,000
South-East European	209	8,290	16,601,000
Swedish Union	42	2,751	9,029,000
Greek Mission	8	460	11,100,000
Iceland Conference	6	563	295,000
Israel Field	15	803	7,105,000
Totals as of June 30, 2005		1,348	99,998
			595,969,000

Where legally possible, offerings will go to these projects; otherwise special arrangement will be made with the General Conference for distribution of funds based on the laws of the countries where these offerings are collected.



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ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
April • May • June 2007

ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET: THE BIBLE FOR TODAY April • May • June 2007

Thy Word Is a Lamp Unto My Feet: The Bible for Today



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH



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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, whose members serve as consulting editors. The published guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).

The Bible

People all over the world have found in the Bible the answers to their deepest needs.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians we believe that God reveals Himself to us in this fallen world. Among all the various ways He has done so, the Bible is, we believe, the greatest expression of that revelation available today—the final and ultimate standard of truth for a fallen world.

The Bible does, indeed, make claims about itself that very few books ever do. Even more so, it comes with a massive amount of evidence to back up those claims. It is self-authenticating; its proof comes built right in.

It's not just the incredible prophecies, however impressive; it's not just its historical accuracy, however authenticating; it's not just the revelation of God as revealed in its pages, however powerful. Though all these have their role in showing that the Bible is the Word of God, perhaps the greatest evidence for the Bible is the influence and impact for good it has had and still continues to have on the lives of those who apply its teaching to themselves. Despite all the evidence of prophecy, history, and so forth, in some ways the most powerful proof is found in the Bible's amazing ability to bring hope, joy, and promise to people thousands of years after it was first written. For many centuries now, people all over the world have found in the Bible the answers to their deepest needs. And why not? After all, it's the greatest revelation of the only One who can meet those needs—our Creator and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

With such claims made for the Bible, it's no wonder that people have challenged its authenticity and reliability. Is it truly the Word of God? Does the Creator of the universe really speak through its pages? How reliable are the texts? What scientific evidence, if any, backs up its claims? What does archaeology say

for Today

regarding the Bible? And even if we believed that the Book is inspired, is it applicable to us who live in the twenty-first century? And if it is, how and why?

These, and more, are some of the questions our Bible study guide for this quarter will address. We just as easily could have titled it “Why I believe in the Bible,” for in it the authors show why they do trust the Bible and have made it the spiritual and moral guide of their lives.

Even more important, during this quarter we seek to show just how relevant the Bible remains for us today—pretty impressive for a book whose latest sections were written about seventeen hundred years before doctors finally discovered that it might be a good idea to wash their hands before surgery. Again, it’s in this, the Bible’s power to change our lives for good, that we find some of the greatest proof of its relevancy and importance.

Jonathan Kuntaraf, also known as Oey Giok Kun, is a native of Indonesia. At the time of this writing he was associate director of the Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department at the General Conference. He and his wife, Dr. Kathleen Liwidjaja (an associate in the Health and Temperance Department at the General Conference), have two grown children.

Got Questions?

Sabbath School
University *has answers!*

Sabbath School University is a 28-minute discussion of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. SSU discusses the content and strategies to enrich your Sabbath School with fellowship, outreach, Bible study, and missions. Sabbath School leaders, don't miss this weekly broadcast on Hope Channel.



www.hopetv.org

Ghanaian Church Plant in Netherlands

Pessimistic, that was how I felt arriving in the Netherlands. I expected to find only a post-modern people, no one interested in God or the Bible. To my surprise, I discovered people on fire for God, desperate to reach out into the secular darkness.

One congregation I visited faces an immense challenge. Immigrants, mostly from Ghana in West Africa, comprise this 200-member congregation. Their dream is to own a church building from which ministry efforts could be expanded. Unfortunately, low individual income cripples any effort to buy or build. A rented day-care facility is all they have, and the costs are prohibitive, more than they would pay on a mortgage—if one could be gotten.

The Adventist Church in the Netherlands is working to help these wonderful people find a church home. And it makes me proud to see Adventists lending a hand to other Adventists in need. Our support of each other is essential to telling the world about Jesus.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will assist this congregation in buying a home. My mission offerings will make a difference for an amazing group of believers, and that's a great feeling. For me, it's personal.



The Voice *From* Heaven



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 3:8, 9; 2 Sam. 12:1-7; Isa. 59:2; Jer. 38:14-19; Ezekiel 4; Amos 3:7; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; 3:1.

Memory Text: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (*Hebrews 1:1, 2, NIV*).

Key Thought: Since the fall of humanity, the Lord has been communicating with us through various means.

How much is a human worth? From a purely chemical standpoint, quite a bit. According to various estimates, the value of the proteins, enzymes, RNA, DNA, amino acids, and biochemicals within the human body may make a person worth, literally, millions of dollars.

Of course, our true worth can be understood only through the life and death of Jesus. If our value wasn't infinite in the sight of God, such an infinite price would not have been paid for our redemption.

How, though, has the Lord revealed to us the good news of our worth and our redemption? This week we begin by looking at the various means in which God has been communicating with us.

Yes, God is still talking to us sinful and degraded creatures. The crucial question is, Will we listen to what He is saying?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 7.

God's Search for Humanity

Before sin, Adam and Eve were in direct communication with God; after sin, that communication was broken. They no longer could speak face to face with their Maker. It was not because God had changed, but because Adam and Eve's relationship to Him had.

Read Isaiah 59:2. What principle seen here helps explain what sin has done to our relationship with God?

Because of sin, Adam and Eve were unable to stand at the presence of the Lord (*see Gen. 3:8*). They were afraid of God. Sin had driven them from the Creator. Moreover, the sin that separated humankind from the Creator also has separated nations, kingdoms, tribes, communities, churches, and families from each other. This is an unfortunate fact of life that we all have experienced, one way or another.

Read Genesis 3:9. What is the significance of this verse? Why would God, who knows all things, ask this question?

How ironic that we sometimes hear such phrases as “Man’s search for God.” The truth is the opposite, actually: God is searching for us. He is seeking us, using all kinds of ways and means to lead us to salvation. From Genesis to Revelation, from Moses to John, the Bible reveals God’s search for humanity; it shows His desire to touch us, to let us know He is there and that He loves us despite our sins (*Isa. 5:1-5, Matt. 23:37*).

“Where are you?” The question isn’t so much about where we are physically as it is about our spiritual well-being. Where are we in relationship to our Creator and Redeemer, who has done so much for us? If you were to hear the question “Where are you?” from the Lord, how would you answer, and why?

God and the Prophets

Read Amos 3:7. What does that tell us about the importance of prophets to the human race?

From the earliest days—indeed, from the time that direct communication was broken—God used prophets to communicate with us. The prophets' work consisted of numerous things: They revealed both comings of Jesus; they showed that God values human beings enough to choose from among them prophets to represent Him; they were the means by which the Lord revealed His love and character to His people; they sent warnings about impending judgments. The prophets also revealed the plan of salvation. And the Lord used the prophets to write the Bible.

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-7, Jeremiah 38:14-19, Ezekiel 4, 2 Peter 3:1. How do the prophets deliver their messages?

Compare 2 Chronicles 20:20 and Luke 16:31. Here we see two attitudes toward the prophets displayed. In a sense, we are in one of the two camps depicted here. Either we believe in what God says to us (often through His prophets) or we don't. In the end, our attitude toward the prophets merely reflects our attitude toward Him.

How do we know if we really believe? Can we be deceived into thinking we believe when we really don't, as were many of the leaders in Israel all through the nation's history?

The answer is easy. Jesus said it numerous times. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (*John 14:15, NKJV*); “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (*Luke 6:46*).

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we say that we believe in the writings of the prophets. Do we really? Have your actions in the past week reflected belief or unbelief, faith or lack of faith? What's the only way you can answer this question correctly? If you could do something over, what would it be?

The Revelation Through Jesus Christ

While the revelation of God through His prophets is the most common method, the coming of Jesus Christ in this world is the greatest and most complete revelation of God ever given. After all, Jesus was God, here in the flesh. What more could we ask for?

Although Jesus came in a different form from what people had expected, His life and His teaching demonstrated to humanity the will of God. People who lived in the time of Christ looked for greatness to satisfy their physical expectations. They looked for power instead of humility, for majesty and not meekness. However, the coming of Jesus faithfully revealed the true character of God the Father.

How do the following texts show how Jesus fully revealed God?

Matt. 11:27

John 1:14, 18

John 14:8-11

2 Cor. 4:6

Heb. 1:1-3

Based on John 14:8-11 we know that those who have seen Him have seen the Father, because Jesus and the Father are “in” each other. Their intimate relationship is much more than that of a master and a disciple. The words that Jesus speaks are more than those of a mere human being; they are a revelation of the actions of God Himself. Therefore, when we become acquainted with Jesus, we become acquainted with God, the Father, as well. The best way to know God’s love and His goodness is to know Jesus Christ personally.

**If you claim to know Jesus, how would you answer this question:
What is Jesus like? Be prepared to share your answer with the
class on Sabbath.**

God Speaks Today

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

We have discussed divine communication through the prophets and through Jesus Christ. However, divine communication has not been confined to biblical times only.

In what way does God reveal Himself to us?

Job 12:7-10

Psalm 107:1-8

John 4:16-18, 26

John 5:39

Phil. 4:9

2 Tim. 1:5

The above texts clearly show that God never intended for us to be without certainty regarding the purpose of life. He made certain that we could know the truth and the means of salvation. God has revealed Himself through nature, science, the Bible, Jesus, divine providence in our lives, human relationships, and the Holy Spirit. He also reveals Himself through the image of God reflected in those who have dedicated their lives to Him.

What about you? How has God been communicating with you lately? The more important question, however, is, How well are you listening? Again, you can know the answer easily simply by asking yourself, Am I doing what the Lord is commanding me to, or not? There's your answer.

God Speaks Through the Bible

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20, 21. Summarize in your own words the basic message of these two texts. What should they be saying to each of us?

In many cases, the Lord specifically asked the prophets to write down His messages; many of them have been preserved. Those preserved writings are in the Bible. For example, “Moses wrote all the words of the Lord” (*Exod. 24:4; see also Exod. 34:27, Lev. 26:46*). Joshua was commissioned to write (*Josh. 24:26*). The Lord also asked Jeremiah to write a book containing the words He would give him. Years later the prophet Daniel (*Dan. 9:2*) tells of his reading Jeremiah’s message and how the Lord had promised deliverance for God’s people after the 70 years’ captivity. Daniel himself was told to write a book especially for those living at “the time of the end” (*12:4*). Thus the Lord reveals Himself through the Bible. As the written message, the Bible is an expression of God’s will.

It is interesting that the word *Bible* is not found in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word *biblia*, “books,” which comes from the Greek word *biblos*, meaning “a book.” The Holy Bible therefore means “the holy books.” This is indeed appropriate, because the Bible is composed of many books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New.

Despite a great deal of diversity in style and form, from the first book to the last, the Bible speaks about a loving God, the Creator of the universe, who reaches out to His sinful creatures. The theme of God’s love is the focus of the Bible, which is seen particularly through Christ, who came into this world, lived as a human being, and died on Calvary. This is the greatest truth of the universe. All major Bible truths, therefore, should be studied from this perspective.

What role has the Bible played in your relationship to God? What changes might you need to make so that the Bible could have an even greater impact in your walk with Jesus?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Temptation and Fall,” pp. 52–62; “The Plan of Redemption,” pp. 63–70 in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Introduction,” pp. v–xii in *The Great Controversy*.

“Jesus met the people on their own ground, as one who was acquainted with their perplexities. He made truth beautiful by presenting it in the most direct and simple way. His language was pure, refined, and clear as a running stream. His voice was as music to those who had listened to the monotonous tones of the rabbis. But while His teaching was simple, He spoke as one having authority. This characteristic set His teaching in contrast with that of all others. The rabbis spoke with doubt and hesitancy, as if the Scriptures might be interpreted to mean one thing or exactly the opposite. The hearers were daily involved in greater uncertainty. But Jesus taught the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority. Whatever His subject, it was presented with power, as if His words could not be controverted.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 253.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ God has never given up on us. What are the implications of this fact as we deal with our relatives, friends, or neighbors who belong to the unchurched community? How can we have the never-give-up spirit in reaching out to others?
- ❷ Discuss your answers to Tuesday’s question. What things do you see in common? What are the differences? What can you learn from one another?
- ❸ What can you say to someone who claims that he or she is earnestly seeking to know God and His will? What practical things can you say to help him or her hear the voice of God?
- ❹ Share various encounters in which God spoke to you in a powerful manner. What happened? How did you know for sure that it was the Lord? Did you have any means to test the experience to know if it truly was of God? If so, what were those means?

Walking by Faith

by PAULINE NGELO

I am the youngest of 12 children in a Kenyan family. My family attended church, but I could not see where their religion changed them. My parents often drank and fought. Then my brother began attending the Adventist church. He shared his faith with us, and I started attending church with him.

In high school my parents sent me to a religious boarding school. I learned that students from the Adventist University of Eastern Africa in Baraton came to our school to hold services one Sabbath a month. I attended and was impressed that these students knew their Bible and loved God. They shared their faith and encouraged us to stand up for Jesus. I joined the baptismal class, and at the end of the year I was baptized.

But then I faced new problems. My school no longer allowed the students from Baraton to lead our worships. So we were on our own. Then the headmaster told us we could no longer worship together on Sabbaths. We met in our dormitory rooms to read our Bibles and pray together.

We faced other problems. We could not make up school work or exams we missed on Sabbaths, and the headmaster refused to help us when final exams were scheduled on Sabbath. We prayed, and God helped us. We passed. However, the next year we were told to give up our Sabbath worship or leave the school. I chose to leave.

My brother helped me to find a school where I could keep the Sabbath. I finished high school and enrolled at the Adventist university. I had to stop school to work in order to pay my school fees, but now I am completing my studies. Just think, I, the youngest and least in my family, am the first to complete a university degree. Just as the witness of former stu-

dents at Baraton changed my life, I have sought to encourage other young people who face difficult times to trust Him, for He shall bring their desires to pass.

Our mission offerings help support this school and hundreds of others around the world. You can have a part in their ministry.



PAULINE NGELO (left) was a student at the University of Eastern Africa in Baraton, Kenya, when she shared her testimony.

The Final Word



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt. 4:4-10; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Gal. 1:11, 12; James 2; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:16.

Memory Text: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NIV).

Key Thought: From where does the Bible derive its authority?

We all live under one final authority or another, whatever it happens to be. As Christians, we believe that the final authority is God, whose will is expressed in the Bible. Hence, the Bible is the final Word.

But why should any one of us put ourselves under the authority of a book? The answer is that the Bible isn't just a book; it is, instead, the Word of God.

Thus, by virtue of who its Author is, the Lord God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Book comes with its divine authority built in. After all, who has authority over God? No one. That's why the Bible has to be the foundational and final Word.

This week we'll take a look at the authority of the Scripture. What does the Scripture say about itself? What claims does it make about itself and its origins? How did the Bible writers view other books of the Bible? And, most important, what does Jesus Himself have to say about the Scriptures? After all, He—the Lord Himself—would have, no doubt, the final word on the final Word.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 14.

The Word of the Lord

The Bible writers made incredible claims about the books they were writing. Phrases used to describe the original sources of their messages were expressed as “the Lord has spoken” (*Isa. 1:2, NIV*), “this is what the Lord says” (*Amos 1:3, NIV*), “the word of the Lord that came . . .” (*Mic. 1:1*), or “‘this is what the Lord has revealed to me’” (*Jer. 38:21, NIV*).

The Old Testament writers testify that their messages came directly from God. It is “the word of the Lord” that came to such Old Testament writers as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, and others (*Jer. 1:1, 2, 9; Ezek. 1:3*).

Read 2 Samuel 23:2; Ezekiel 2:2; 11:5, 24; Micah 3:8. What common thread runs through these texts?

Read Luke 1:70 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. What does the New Testament say concerning the inspiration of the Old Testament?

Read Romans 4:3 and Galatians 1:11, 12. What was Paul’s conviction concerning the Scriptures? What authority does Paul say lies behind the gospel he preached?

Scattered over the long centuries, all these men, regardless of the vast differences in their circumstances and background, testified to the same thing: that the messages they were writing weren’t their own but that they were moved by the power of God, who commanded them to write what He was telling them.

If we believe the prophets, that they were inspired by God, what practical implications does that belief have for our daily lives? That is, how well does your life reflect your belief in the authority of Scripture? What things, if any, have you done in the past 24 hours that violated the clear teaching of the Bible?

God-breathed

Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Where does Paul place the origin and authority of Scripture?

The Greek word for “inspiration” in 2 Timothy 3:16 means literally “God-breathed.” It clearly indicates that the Scriptures originated from God. God enabled His messengers, prophets, and apostles to grasp and then communicate that which He revealed to them in a trustworthy and authoritative fashion.

Keeping in mind the above text, especially the definition of “inspiration,” read Genesis 2:7 and Psalm 33:6. What commonality do you find between these texts? What message should this give to us about the authority of the Bible?

The same creative power that brought the world into existence was also behind the origins of Scripture! Dwell on the implications of this amazing truth.

The Lord communicated His Word through various means. Besides revealing Himself in visions and dreams, He sent messages in the form of direct appearance (*Exod. 3:2-7*), through an angel (*Dan. 8:15, 16*), or through eyewitnesses (*1 John 1:1-3*).

Regardless of how God communicated to them, the writers of the Bible were not acting merely as writing machines. God did not push them as He would keys on a typewriter to produce His message. Each writer had his own writing style; these differences are seen all through the Bible. The crucial point is that these messages were not their own; they were writing down what was delivered to them by God. They were His messages, not their messages (*2 Sam. 23:2, Amos 3:8*).

As a result of this divine revelation, the Bible also is called “the book of the Lord” (*Isa. 34:16*), “the gospel of God” (*Rom. 1:1*), “the oracles of God” (*Rom. 3:2*), “the word of Christ” (*Col. 3:16*), and “the good word of God” (*Heb. 6:5*).

Compare the various writing styles found in Scripture. For example, compare Paul to John, Isaiah to Moses, or Isaiah to John. Does one speak more clearly to you than others? If so, why? Also, what might be God’s reason for allowing the author’s own writing style to come through in what is His Word?

Christ's View of the Scriptures

Today there are all sorts of views about Scripture, about its authority, validity, role, and so forth. Unfortunately, many within Christianity don't view the Bible as the kind of authority it ought to be.

What authority is that? Well, let's go to the ultimate Authority Himself, Jesus. How did He view Scripture?

What do the following texts tell us about how Christ viewed the authority of Scripture? *Matt. 4:4-10; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Mark 2:25; 12:36; Luke 4:21.*

Those texts are but a few that reveal how truthful and authoritative Jesus' view of Scripture was. Jesus believed in the story of Creation (*Mark 10:6*), of Noah and the Flood (*Matt. 24:37-39*), and of Jonah and the large fish (*Matt. 12:39-41*). He also referred to the creation of the first couple (*Matt. 19:4*), and He quoted Genesis 2:24 in Matthew 19:5, which speaks about the original purpose of marriage.

Read Luke 24:25-27 and John 10:35. What did He say about His endorsement and acceptance of the Old Testament as a whole?

Jesus Himself verified His own mission by using scriptures. “‘For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?’” (*John 5:46, 47, NKJV*). After His resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus quoted Scripture to clarify the importance of His ministry. “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (*Luke 24:27, NKJV*). Throughout His life on earth, Jesus used Scripture, spoke from Scripture, promoted Scripture, uplifted Scripture, and interpreted Scripture. “Jesus is the true Interpreter of Holy Scripture. His message is our key to unlock the correct meaning of the Old Testament. . . . Christ’s use of Israel’s Scriptures is our model of biblical interpretation. Our guiding principle is based on the conviction that the redemptive activity of God in the history of Israel reached its fulfillment in Christ.”—Hans LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota, Fla.: First Impressions, 1997), p. 13.

Apostles and the Scriptures

The New Testament writers also showed full confidence in the Scriptures.

Read James 2. In what ways does he show his belief in the authority of the Old Testament?

In the book of Romans alone, Paul quotes more than forty times directly from the Old Testament, and chapters are essentially built upon quotations or allusions from the Old Testament scriptures. He quotes from Isaiah at least twenty-five times. Peter did the same thing in his books. All the epistles have a strong foundation in the Old Testament scriptures (*see also Matt. 1:23, 3:3; Heb. 10:7, 1 John 3:12*).

The New Testament authors have confidently assured us of their conviction regarding the authority of Scripture (*2 Tim. 3:16*). In his admonition to the rich, as stated in James 1:11, James used Isaiah 40:6, 7 and Psalm 103:15. The apostle Peter expressed his confidence in the Old Testament prophecies with emphatic words in 2 Peter 1:21. He was alluding to the Old Testament (*Exod. 12:5*) when he said in 1 Peter 1:19 that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

When Paul spoke about the gospel in Romans 1:17, he used the underlying principle of the gospel as found in Habakkuk 2:4. In describing humanity's sinful nature (*Rom. 3:10-12*), the apostle makes reference to Psalm 14:1-3. When Paul spoke to the Jews in Rome, he said, “ ‘The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet . . . ’ ” (*Acts 28:25, RSV*).

The apostles were solidly convicted that the Scriptures were the Word of God. At Pentecost Peter said, “ ‘This Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David’ ” (*Acts 1:16, NKJV*). Paul also said, “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (*1 Thess. 2:13, NKJV*).

What forces exist in your culture that work against having the kind of trust in the Scriptures as depicted in today’s and yesterday’s lessons? How can you recognize those forces? Even more important, what can you do to help protect yourself, and others, against them?

Unity Amid Diversity

Read 2 Peter 3:16. What is Peter referring to as Scripture?

With Peter's reference to Paul's writings as Scripture, we see internal evidence for the validity of both Testaments; both were considered the Word of God (*see also 1 Thess. 2:13*). And despite some vast differences in the backgrounds and authors of the Bible, there's also an incredible unity found within both.

A span of a thousand years covers the writings of the Old Testament. There was, then, a gap of about five hundred years when no Bible books were written, at least not until the birth of the New Testament church. The books of the New Testament were started and completed in the last half of the first century A.D. Thus, the Bible took more than a millennium and a half to be completed.

Read the following texts: Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:36-40, John 13:35, 1 Corinthians 13. What great unifying theme appears here?

One of the strongest evidences that the Bible was prepared under divine direction is its unity. Although the writers came from diversified backgrounds, its content has one predominant purpose. The Bible was written by kings, a prime minister, shepherds, fishermen, prophets, priests, a publican, a physician, and many other people with different occupations—but all of them wrote about the same God. Some books are historical; some are prophetic. Some writers wrote in poetry; others in prose. Some books are missionary reports; others are church letters or personal correspondence. However, each speaks about the same loving and caring God; each one informs us about the same plan of salvation; and each one uplifts the same standard of righteousness. All look forward to the same eternal reward. This is not coincidence. It all shows that the Bible writers have one Source of inspiration.

What common theme in Scripture is your favorite? Which speaks to your heart the best? Go through a few books in both Testaments and pull out texts that share this common theme. Bring them to class on Sabbath.

Further Study: “The Word of God,” pp. 11–21 in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (2005 ed.); Ellen G. White, “The Inspiration of the Prophetic Writers,” pp. 15–23 in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “The Primacy of the Word,” pp. 29–33 in *Selected Messages*, book 3.

“The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. . . . The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers. It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.

“The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. v.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, share your responses to Thursday’s question.
- ② What other sources of authority can be in competition with the Bible? Identify these sources (government, media, science, culture, etc.), and then as a class talk about what you can do to help balance these sources with the Bible while, at the same time, accepting the Bible as the final authority in your life.
- ③ No doubt there are some things in Scripture that are difficult to understand. Why should that not be surprising when one considers what this book is about and the themes it deals with? What can you do to help one another maintain faith in the Scriptures as the Word of God, despite some things in it that can be hard to grasp?

Breaking Satan's Chains: Part 1

by OLEG FARKHUTDINOV

I was serving a sentence in a maximum security prison for crimes I had committed. I hated myself for being in prison, for committing the crimes that I had. At age 30 I had spent nearly a third of my life in prison. Alcohol and drugs had dulled my sense of right and wrong. But sometimes, in my deepest and most thoughtful moments, my conscience spoke to me. But the words I heard were neither comforting nor reassuring.

When I was released from prison, I returned to my wife and young son. But the joy of reunion could not bring peace to my heart or stop the downward spiral of my life. Hardly had I spoken the promise to quit drinking and taking drugs when I found myself searching for any drink or a drug to dull the ache and forget the pain. When I tried to quit, the addictions roared back, enslaving me. And when my wife tried to stop me from getting drugs, I beat her.

Once again I awoke in a stinking prison. *What crime am I accused of now? Which part of my past have they uncovered this time?* I wondered. When the judge sentenced me to three more years of prison, I wondered what other crimes they would discover even as I paid for this crime.

My fear turned my mind to God, and I pleaded, "God, help me!" Someone gave me a New Testament, and I began reading it. There I found some answers to my search for meaning. Sometimes as I read I cried like a child and rejoiced like an adult. Then one day I gave up. I turned my life—whatever was left of it—over to God.

Jesus freed me from the fear that had dogged my past and replaced it with hope that He had good things planned for my future. Prison became my Bethel; here I saw a staircase to heaven and here I got sick in Christ, died with Him and came to live in Him.

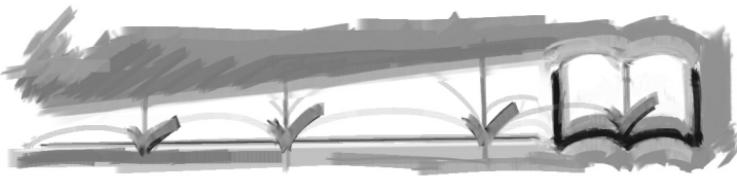
Then my mother came to visit. She was crying when I entered the visitors' area. "Poor Mother! I have brought you so much grief. How many prisons have you had to visit because of me?" My words only made her cry even more. She told me that she had saved her pension for four months to bring me some money, but two days earlier someone broke in and took the money. She started sobbing again.

Suddenly the spirit of revenge made my blood boil. I wanted to get out of prison and find the people who had hurt my mother. I wanted revenge.

(Continued next week)

OLEG FARKHUTDINOV works in prison ministries in the Southern Union Conference of the Euro-Asia Division.

Bible Prophecy Fulfilled



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Isa. 52:13–53:12, Daniel 2, Matt. 24:24, John 13:19.

Memory Text: “‘Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please’” (Isaiah 46:9, 10, NIV).

Key Thought: Biblical prophecy remains a powerful factor in helping establish our faith.

Every year people seek expert advice on how various stocks will do. Yet, in the end the experts can tell them everything about the stock except the one thing everyone wants to know: what it will do in the future.

God, though, knows the future. He has proved that to us, again and again, by some of the incredible prophecies in the Bible. Many of these prophecies were written well in advance of the predicted events. And, sure enough, time and again the events happened just as the Lord said in the prophecy. We know this because today, looking back over history, we see the prediction in the Bible, and then we can see that the prediction came true. “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7, NKJV).

Having seen that these past predictions were so accurate, we can trust the Lord on the prophecies yet future, such as the greatest future prophecy of all: the second coming of Jesus.

This week we'll take a look at some of the great prophecies in Scripture. What can we learn from them? What is the principle behind prophecy? How does prophecy help us learn to trust in the Bible as the Word of God?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 21.

Prophetic License

In Hebrew the verb *naba* means “to prophesy.” It carries the idea of someone pouring forth words with fervor or inspiration. The noun *nabi* means a spokesperson, a prophet, a person authorized to speak for another (*see Exod. 6:28-30, 7:1*). Another word used in the Bible for someone with the prophetic gift is *seer*, translated from two different Hebrew words, each with the meaning “to see.” Prophets, it seems, have been given the ability to prophesy regarding things that ordinary people might not see. Thus, not only do prophets see what others might not—they are called by God to speak those things, often with fervor and might, as well.

Read Matthew 24:24. What warning about prophets is Jesus giving to us? What’s implied in those words?

Jesus’ warning about false prophets can be understood to contain the idea that true ones will exist, as well. After all, if we were to reject all prophets—that is, reject the gift altogether—there would be no need of the warning about false ones.

Read Matthew 24:32, 33 and John 13:19. What principle about how prophecy should work is revealed here?

With these verses Jesus showed us that prophecy is not just about being able to tell the future. Instead, prophecy is given to strengthen our faith in God and His Word after the events have occurred. The more we see the fulfillment of the prophecy, the more we believe that the Bible really comes from the Lord.

There are various kinds of prophecies. One kind has to do with the predictions of a coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Others have to do with the future of the Israelites and of various nations; others deal with the end of the world, and even beyond.

Think over the role that prophecy has played in your own walk with the Lord. What lessons about prophecy have you learned over time? What words of advice or caution would you give to a new Christian or to someone studying prophecy for the first time, regarding this wonderful gift?

Early Prophecies

“Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper” (2 Chron. 20:20).

Beginning even in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we can see that prophecy plays an important role in the history of God's work with fallen humanity.

Look up the following texts. What was prophesied, and how and when were those prophecies fulfilled?

Gen. 3:15

Gen. 6:13

Gen. 12:1-3

Gen. 15:13, 14

Gen. 18:10

It's easy for us now, looking back, to see just how accurately those prophecies were fulfilled. But place yourself in the position, say, of Noah, who was told that water from the sky was going to wipe out the earth, even though, according to Ellen White, prior to that time it had never even rained! (See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 96, 97.) Or of Abraham and Sarah, that she would one day be the mother of their child when she was long past child-bearing age. It was surely a great test of faith on their part (*Heb. 11:8-11*) to trust God concerning the events that He said would come to pass.

What promises of God are you waiting to see fulfilled? What lessons can you learn from past examples of Bible characters who trusted in God's promises that can help you learn to trust Him, as well?

The Prophecy of Daniel 2

Review the prophecy of Daniel 2. What does it teach us about the power of God to foretell the future?

World history supports the accuracy of this amazing prophecy. Babylon's golden kingdom ruled the world from 605 to 539 B.C. Babylon's influence was greatly extended, and it became the dominant power in the ancient Near East. Today the ruins of the city of Babylon are located in Iraq, 70 miles south of Baghdad. Not only did the Bible predict the fall of Babylon (*Jer. 51:49, 53*), it clearly stated who was to direct the campaign against Babylon (*Isa. 45:1-4*). Cyrus and his army were at the gates of Babylon about one hundred seventy-five years after the prophecy was given.

The Medes and Persians ruled the world from 539 B.C. to 331 B.C. But then God said in Daniel 2:39, “‘Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth’” (*NIV*). Daniel 8:21 clearly explained that Greece was the third kingdom. Within a short time the Greek armies, led by Alexander the Great, conquered the world. Wearing bronze breastplates and helmets, they carried bronze shields and swords. What a fitting symbol for Greece.

The Greek Empire was then conquered by the iron monarchy of Rome in 168 B.C., another dramatic fulfillment of the prophecy. Rome had the longest reign of any other world power. For more than five hundred years Rome was dominant; from the British Isles to the Arabian Gulf, from the North Sea to the Sahara, and from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, Rome held sway.

But as Daniel said, “‘The kingdom shall be divided’” (*Dan. 2:41, NKJV*). Rome was divided into independent kingdoms that later became the nations of modern Europe, nations that would “not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay” (*vs. 43*). We, today, are living in the time of those feet and toes of the statue.

The next kingdom to come is the final one, God's eternal kingdom. Daniel was so right on all the others. How foolish it would be to not trust him on this, the last one.

Think about this amazing prophecy: Daniel, living more than five hundred years before Christ, described Europe even as it exists today! How could he have done this other than by the power of God? Is your faith wavering? Are you sometimes having trouble trusting in the Lord? Go back over this prophecy or others that have been fulfilled, asking the Lord to use them to help build your faith.

The Messiah in Prophecy

Of all the prophecies in the Old Testament, the ones concerning the first coming of Jesus are among the most powerful. There are about sixty Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. One of the most powerful is found in Isaiah.

Read **Isaiah 52:13–53:12.** What characteristics of the Messiah do you see here? How did Jesus fulfill them?

This has to be one of the most powerful examples of predictive prophecy in the Bible. It is full of contingencies that could not be rigged in advance in an attempt to produce fulfillment. This prophecy has been and still continues to be powerful proof for the Christian faith.

Below are a few Old Testament prophecies about Jesus and their New Testament fulfillment. What can we learn from these about the trustworthiness of God's Word?

Old Testament Prophecy	New Testament Fulfillment
Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
Micah 5:2	Luke 2:4-7
Daniel 9:25	Luke 3:1-23
Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:14

It is exciting to study how Jesus also refers to the predictive prophecies about Himself and their fulfillment after His resurrection. He told two disciples on the road to Emmaus, “ ‘Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (*Luke 24:26, 27, NIV*). The things concerning Himself may have included His birth (*Isa. 7:14*), ministry (*Isa. 9:1, 2*), His being rejected (*Isa. 53:3*), His hands and feet pierced (*Ps. 22:16*), His being mocked and insulted (vss. 6-8), His crucifixion with sinners (*Isa. 53:12*), and His resurrection (*Ps. 16:10*).

Because of what Jesus did in fulfilling these prophecies, you can stand forgiven before God right now, regardless of your past, simply by claiming His work in your behalf. How should this great truth, that of salvation by faith, change your life? How has it changed it already? What other changes need to come, as well?

The Second Coming

As we have been seeing all week, so many of the prophecies about past events have been fulfilled, just as predicted, and often in an amazing way. But these were all prophecies fulfilled in the past. The Bible, however, talks about prophecies yet to take place. Among the most important of these are, of course, the prophecies about Christ's second coming.

If all the prophecies about His first coming were so accurately fulfilled, what should that tell us regarding the certainty of the ones about the Second Coming?

Before leaving His disciples, Jesus had promised them concerning the certainty of His coming: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (*John 14:3, NIV*). Peter, one of the closest disciples of Jesus, wrote, "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (*2 Pet. 3:13, NIV*).

The Bible not only reveals the manner and the characteristics of the second coming of Christ but also describes the signs of His second coming. Read the following prophecies concerning the signs of His coming, and mark an X by the areas that are seeing fulfillment:

1. Increase of knowledge (*Dan. 12:4*)
2. False messiahs (*Matt. 24:4, 5*)
3. Wars and rumors of wars (*Matt. 24:6, 7a*)
4. Famine (*Matt. 24:7b*)
5. Earthquakes (*Matt. 24:7b*)
6. Preaching of the gospel (*Matt. 24:14*)
7. Pestilence (*Luke 21:11*)
8. Signs and wonders (*Luke 21:11*)
9. People living in fear (*Luke 21:26*)
10. Social problems (*2 Tim. 3:1-5*)
11. Increase of skepticism (*2 Pet. 3:3, 4*)

A pretty accurate description of our world, is it not? Amazing, too, if you consider that the passages were written many long centuries ago. Hence, even more proof that we can trust the Bible.

If you believed that Jesus were coming back tomorrow, would that thought make you happy or fearful? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your relationship to God?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream,” pp. 491–502 in *Prophets and Kings*; “The Bible Prophets Wrote for Our Time,” pp. 338, 339; “Can All Have the Gift of Prophecy?” pp. 340, 341 in *Selected Messages*, book 3.

“It is the voice of Christ that speaks through patriarchs and prophets, from the days of Adam even to the closing scenes of time. The Saviour is revealed in the Old Testament as clearly as in the New. It is the light from the prophetic past that brings out the life of Christ and the teachings of the New Testament with clearness and beauty. The miracles of Christ are a proof of His divinity; but a stronger proof that He is the world’s Redeemer is found in comparing the prophecies of the Old Testament with the history of the New.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 799.

“Every nation that has come upon the stage of action has been permitted to occupy its place on the earth, that the fact might be determined whether it would fulfill the purposes of the Watcher and the Holy One. Prophecy has traced the rise and progress of the world’s great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each of these, as with the nations of less power, history has repeated itself. Each has had its period of test; each has failed, its glory faded, its power departed.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 535.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, talk about the lesson in general this week. What things stood out that perhaps have helped you better understand the role of prophecy and how it works?
- ② With so much evidence for the validity of the Scriptures revealed in prophecy, why do you think many people—when presented with this evidence—still refuse to believe? What other factors might be involved? What things could you do that could help break down some of these barriers?
- ③ With so many strange teachings on prophecy out there, what can you, as a class, do to help church members, especially new ones, be more solidly grounded in Bible prophecy and the principles behind it?

Breaking Satan's Chains: Part 2

by OLEG FARKHUTDINOV

My mother sat across from me in the prison visiting room and cried as she told me how someone had broken into her home and stolen her pension. As I listened to her tearful account, the spirit of revenge welled up inside me. I wanted to get out of prison and find the people who had hurt my mother. I wanted revenge.

Then I remembered the time my sister had lost an entire summer's wages when thieves stole her bag. I had told her she needed to be more careful with her money. But suddenly I realized the grief I had caused people when I had stolen from them. God was showing me my own faults through my mother's loss. "Dear Mother," I said. "Forgive me; it's my fault."

I began to understand the words of the apostle Paul to the Galatians: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (*Gal. 6:7, NIV*). I asked God's forgiveness and embraced His commandments in my life, especially the commandment that says, "You shall not steal" (*Exod. 20:15, NIV*).

From that day forward, God prepared me for release from prison. The Lord and I fought against the habits and vices that had chained me in a prison far darker than the ones with bars. He healed my body and my spirit and turned my heart and mind around. I once had thought that honesty and morality did not exist, that there was no such thing as an honest person; therefore it was not immoral to steal, especially from the government. But God made me realize that stealing anything—goods, ideas, or time—is a sin in His eyes.

By the time I was released from prison, I was a changed man. Fear was gone, and in its place was a desire to make right all the wrongs I had committed over the years, to apologize to those whom I had wounded and to reimburse their losses.

God took me back to my family, and the changes He had wrought in my heart touched my wife's heart as well. Our roles had changed. It was I who wept and prayed for her, just as she had begged me to change years before. God answered my prayers, and my wife gave her life to Jesus. Now together we pray and work for others.

The Lord took a crooked, empty heart and filled it with His love while I was in prison. Now I find no greater joy than to help other prisoners find peace and forgiveness and freedom in Christ. Thank you for supporting ministry to prisoners through your mission offerings.

OLEG FARKHUTDINOV works in prison ministries in the Southern Union Conference of the Euro-Asia Division.

The Bible Is Reliable



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt. 5:17, 18; 24:35; John 10:34, 35; Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:6, 12-19; Gal. 3:22; 2 Tim. 3:16; James 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:25.

Memory Text: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Key Thought: Why would God give us His Word and not give us evidence that enables us to trust it?

Mark Twain once said that rumors of his death had been greatly exaggerated. One could make the same claim about the Bible. More than once people have declared that the Book one day would be deemed dead, a relic from a bygone era.

The Bible continues to come under attack. Interestingly enough, the critics come and go, but the Bible remains. Critical ideas about the Bible, once deemed cutting edge and revolutionary, have been long forgotten, but the Bible remains. Men deemed great scholars, whose work questioned the authenticity of the writings of Moses or Isaiah, are barely known anymore, while Moses and Isaiah are still being read all over the world.

For the past few weeks we have looked at elements that should give us confidence in the Bible. This week we continue to look at reliability. Thousands of years ago copy machines and digital scanners did not exist. How accurate are the manuscripts we have today? Why do we trust them?

Let's find some answers.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 28.

The Evidence

From the start, Satan always has hated the Bible. After all, it reveals the whole plan of salvation, from start to finish. In it everyone can find the path to eternal life. No wonder Satan hates it.

Many have been his attempts over the centuries to destroy it. When, finally, because of massive circulation, the destruction of the Bible became impossible, Satan tried a new tact: If he couldn't destroy the Scriptures themselves, then he could do the next best thing: destroy their credibility. Hence, the arrival of what's known as higher criticism, which has been very successful in destroying faith in the Bible as the Word of God. For many scholars, the Bible is just another ancient text, a Jewish version of, for instance, the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Full of historical interest, for sure, but not divinely inspired.

Look up Matthew 5:17, 18; 24:35; John 10:34, 35; 1 Peter 1:25. What do they say to us about the reliability of the Bible?

There is, however, one problem here. We are using what the Bible says about itself to verify the reliability of the Bible. That's circular reasoning. How can we use the Bible to verify itself when it's the reliability of the Bible itself that is coming into question? It's like defining by using that word itself in the definition.

On the other hand, God has given us plenty of reasons to trust in the reliability of the Bible. We have been given enough internal and external evidence so that we can trust what it says. We don't have to believe just because it tells us to believe. God gives us reasons to trust in the Bible as His Word, even though, in the end, we have to go by faith. The bottom line, however, is that we can trust the Bible because God has given us many good reasons to.

Suppose someone were to ask you, "Why do you trust the Bible? Why do you think the Bible is the Word of God? Why do you live according to what the Bible says?" How would you answer, and why?

The Old Testament

Read Mark 15:28; Luke 4:21; John 13:18; 17:12; 19:24; Galatians 3:22; 2 Timothy 3:16; James 2:23. What do these texts tell us about how the Old Testament was viewed by the writers of the New Testament? What message is in these words for us?

As we saw last week, there are amazing prophecies in the Bible that give powerful testimony to its accuracy in both the Old and the New Testaments. The fulfillment of these prophecies shows how both Testaments are reliable; each one works to help establish the validity of the other.

But there's even more. For many years higher critical scholars have told us that the Bible can't be trusted. After all, there are no complete copies of the Hebrew Old Testament dated earlier than around A.D. 900. Certainly, with no copy machines around, many errors got into the texts. Thus, how can the Old Testament be trusted?

Then, in early 1947, the world learned about what has been called "the greatest archaeological discovery of the century." In caves near the Dead Sea, ancient jars were discovered containing the now famous Dead Sea Scrolls, many of them dated from about 150 B.C. to A.D. 70, which means these biblical texts were more than one thousand years older than many of the other known texts. The find included the earliest manuscript copy yet known of the complete book of Isaiah and fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament. The books of Samuel, in a tattered copy, were also found, along with two complete chapters of Habakkuk.

In comparing the Dead Seas Scrolls with the other manuscripts, scholars were amazed to find just how accurate our modern Bibles are. In most cases there were just minor spelling differences. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has given us great external evidence on just how reliable the text of the Old Testament is.

How much sense would it make for God to give us His Word and it not be reliable? Or for Him not to give us reasons to trust its reliability? Should we not be able to trust the Bible in the same way that we trust in the God of the Bible?

The New Testament

Read Revelation 22:18, 19. What message about just how seriously the Lord takes the words of the Bible is found here?

"I'll be honest with you. . . . When I first found out that there are no surviving originals of the New Testament, I was really skeptical. I thought, If all we have are copies of copies of copies, how can I have any confidence that the New Testament we have today bears any resemblance whatsoever to what was originally written?"—Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 58, 59.

Good question. Here, too, we have to ask ourselves: Would God not leave us a reliable source to know His will? Even more so, would He not give us reasons to trust in whatever sources He left us?

Yesterday's lesson showed that the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is important for us to see the accuracy and reliability of the Old Testament. Can we find the same evidence for the New Testament?

One of the most amazing things about the New Testament, something that gives us incredible evidence for its reliability, comes from the fact that so many copies of its manuscripts are still in existence, so many more than other ancient manuscripts. The Lord has left us with a wealth of manuscript evidence that attests to the accuracy of the New Testament that we have today. According to scholars Norman Geisler and William Nix: "The New Testament, then, has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book—a form that is 99.5 percent pure."—Strobel, p. 65.

Then, too, there is so much external evidence; that is, there are many quotations and excerpts from the early copies of the New Testament found in commentaries, sermons, and letters of the early Church Fathers. The Apostolic Fathers, writing mostly between A.D. 90 and 160, showed great familiarity with most of the books of the New Testament. This external evidence, called the lectionaries, were the reading lessons used in public church services. By the middle of the twentieth century, more than eighteen hundred of these reading lessons had been classified. Because they so closely reflect the New Testament as we have it today, these early church manuscripts also give us many reasons to trust in the reliability of the New Testament texts as handed down through the years.

How firm is your faith in the Bible as the Word of God? Also, ask yourself this question: "If I can't trust the Bible, what can I trust?" What's left?

Internal Evidence: Part 1

What other evidence can help us trust in the Bible as the Word of God, besides what we've looked at in the past few days?

Think about the New Testament story of Jesus. Of all the things that happened to Him, which event is not only the most incredible (in that it is not something that happens very often) but has a great deal of importance to the whole Christian faith? See Rom. 8:34, 1 Cor. 15:12-19.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 makes it very clear how central the resurrection of Jesus is to our faith. In other words, even though Christ died for our sins, even though He was our Substitute, it all would have come to naught had He not been resurrected. That shows how important this event is to all that we believe.

Of course, it's one thing for a Jew to have been crucified by the Romans. That happened all the time. It's wholly another for that Jew to have been resurrected from the dead. And yet that's exactly what the New Testament writers declared happened to Jesus.

Read Matthew 27:51–28:20, Mark 16:9–14, Luke 24:35–53, John 20:19–31. What do all these accounts have in common?

Whatever the differences in the Gospel accounts (in that some writers recorded things that others didn't), one thing all have in common is that all testified to the resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

Now, some reject the idea that someone, anyone, could be raised from the dead after three days. It's crazy, they say—the product of a sick mind, of someone having hallucinations.

Now, that might be a reasonable assumption if only one person were making the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. But in this case, there were four! It's one thing for all four Gospel writers to be crazy. But for all four to be crazy in the same way? Hardly sounds as if the hallucination theory makes any sense.

Read again 1 Corinthians 15:12–19. Why is the resurrection of Christ so central to our faith? Now ask yourself this question: “Would God ask us to believe in something like this and not give us plenty of evidence to believe it?” Explain your answer.

Internal Evidence: Part 2

As we saw yesterday, the idea that the resurrection of Jesus was based on the claim that the disciples were crazy made no sense. Realizing that this idea wasn't too sensible, others claimed that the disciples conspired to make up the story of Christ's resurrection.

From what you know about the life and fate of those early followers of Jesus, why does the conspiracy theory make no sense either? See Luke 21:16, 17; John 16:2.

What reason would they have for making up this story? Power? Prestige? Money? Please! Shunned by their own people, rejected by the religious leaders, and mercilessly persecuted by just about everyone, the disciples never gained worldly power, influence, or money as a result of the Resurrection. On the contrary! They lost everything the world had to offer because of their insistence on it.

Some have argued that though the disciples had conspired in hopes of personal advantage, things went awry concerning their plans. However, because they already had committed themselves to the story of the Resurrection, they had no choice but to keep promoting it. The only problem is that the Gospels were not written until many years after the Resurrection. If the disciples had hopes that through the fabricated story of Jesus' resurrection they were going to get rich or powerful, they learned early that this was a vain hope. Why, decades later, long after they had had plenty of time to disassociate themselves from the whole failed endeavor, did they cling to it anyway—even at such a great personal cost?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:6 (NIV). What is Paul saying here that gives even more evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?

Paul is telling people that Jesus, after the Resurrection, appeared to more than five hundred people, “most of whom are still living.” In other words, Paul is so confident about the resurrection of Jesus that he is all but inviting people to talk to those among the 500 who are still alive and ask them to tell them what they saw. And, of course, one reason that Paul was certain of their testimony was because he, himself, had been a witness to the resurrected Jesus (Acts 9:1-8).

Go over in your own life and experience the reasons you have for your faith in Jesus. What things can you do to strengthen that faith? At the same time, what activities tend to weaken it?

Further Study: “The Languages, Manuscripts, and Canon of the Old Testament,” pp. 25–45 in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1.

“God has faithful witnesses, to whom He committed the truth, and who preserved the Word of God. The manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have been preserved through the ages by a miracle of God.”— Ellen G. White, *Letter 32*, 1899.

Aside from the Dead Sea Scrolls, there are two other ancient witnesses that attest to the accuracy of the copyists of the Old Testament. One of these is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint; another is the text that was preserved by the Samaritans that live today in Nablus, Palestine. No wonder R. Laird Harris, an Old Testament scholar, concluded: “We can now be sure that copyists worked with great care and accuracy on the Old Testament, even back to 225 B.C. At that time there were two or three types of text available for copying. These types differed among themselves so little, however, that we can infer that still earlier copyists had also faithfully and carefully transmitted the Old Testament text. Indeed, it would be rash skepticism that would now deny that we have our Old Testament in a form very close to that used by Ezra when he taught the Law to those who had returned from the Babylonian captivity.”—R. Laird Harris, *Can I Trust My Bible?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), p. 124.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Russian Leo Tolstoy wrote the great novel *Anna Karenina*. Could you imagine Tolstoy willing to face persecution, rejection, jail, and maybe even death, because he insisted that the whole story was true, even though he knew he had made it all up? How does this analogy help us understand why the disciples wouldn’t have made up the story of Christ’s resurrection?
- ② However much evidence God has given us to trust in His Word, there is always room for doubt; there are always unanswered questions. What can you as a class do to help those in your church who are struggling with questions about the reliability of the Bible?
- ③ As a class, go over your answers to Sunday’s final question. What can you learn from each other?

New Name, New Heart

by EMMANUEL A. ALLOTEY

Sabbah lives in a town in central Ghana. When she was 17 years old, some of her friends invited her to attend evangelistic meetings near her home. Sabbah wanted to go to the meetings, but she knew that her father would object, for he hated Christians. She decided it was best not to tell her parents where she was going each night, so she arranged to meet her girlfriends at their homes and walk to the meetings with them.

Sabbah was touched by what she learned about God. She gave her heart to God and asked to be baptized. But her father learned of her plans and forbade her to be baptized. He threatened to beat her and disown her if she even attended a Christian function. Sadly, Sabbah did not take part in the first baptism. But she was not willing to give up her love for Jesus just because her father said she must, and she continued attending worship services whenever she could.

When her father learned of Sabbah's continued interest in Christianity, he drove her from her home. However, Sabbah's mother had secretly encouraged her daughter's decision to become a Christian, and she tried to encourage her daughter's faith. When Sabbah's father learned of her mother's actions, she too was forced to leave her home.

On her baptismal day, Sabbah changed her name to Christine* to reflect her new faith.

Christine passed her junior high school exams and could enter high school, but without her parents' financial support, she had no way to continue her studies. As her pastor, I encouraged her to trust in the Lord and pray for a sponsor.

Not long after this conversation, I received a telephone call inviting me to the conference office. There I met a couple from overseas who wanted to sponsor Christine to finish her education. She could continue her studies!

Christine has done well in her high school years and wants to serve God in whatever capacity He leads her. She is thankful for those who have helped her finish her education, but is even more grateful for those who made it possible for her to be introduced to her Savior, Jesus Christ. Your mission offerings help make evangelism possible in Ghana and around the world. Thank you.

* Not her real name.

EMMANUEL A. ALLOTEY is a pastor in Ghana.

When *the* Rocks Cry Out



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Isa. 20:1, Nah. 3:2-7, Luke 19:40, John 20:24-31, Heb. 11:24-27.

Memory Text: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (*Hebrews 11:24, 25*).

Key Thought: Archaeology has played a key role in affirming the veracity of the Old Testament.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Bible faced an onslaught of attacks from many sources. The greatest were coming from, sad to say, Bible scholars themselves, who argued that we just couldn’t trust the Bible and its historical accounts. All sorts of new theories were proposed to explain the origin of the Bible, and though varying one from another, they had one major point in common: All brought the biblical accounts into disrepute. Interestingly enough, when these attacks were at the strongest, archaeologists began making startling discoveries, and, bit by bit, challenges against the Bible were being answered.

“In light of past discoveries,” wrote a well-known Bible scholar, “one may expect that future archaeological finds will continue to support the biblical traditions.”—Edwin Yamauchi, *The Stone and the Scriptures* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 168.

This week we’ll take a quick look at some discoveries and how they have answered some challenges.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 5.

Faith and Archaeology

“‘I tell you,’ he replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out’” (*Luke 19:40, NIV*).

Though Jesus probably wasn’t talking about archaeology when He made the above statement, He might as well have. Over the years various archaeological discoveries, such as the Rosetta Stone and the Behistun inscription, have done much to help confirm the Bible record.

Don’t, however, take our word for it. Read the few quotes below by these archaeologists:

Dr. W. F. Albright, perhaps the most famous archaeologist of the twentieth century, said: “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition.” —*Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942), p. 176.

Millar Burrows, from Yale: “On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.” —*What Mean These Stones?* (New Haven, Conn.: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1941), p. 1.

K. A. Kitchen: “In terms of general reliability. . . . the Old Testament comes out remarkably well, so long as its writings and writers are treated fairly and evenhandedly.” —*On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), p. 500.

However nice it is to have these quotes and others, we mustn’t base our faith on archaeology, because, like all disciplines, it is still a human endeavor. People have to interpret the evidence, and so a subjective element always arises. Also, what happens when someone makes a find that some scholars interpret as contradicting the biblical account? Is our faith then shattered? Though it’s nice when archaeological interpretations fit what we believe, our faith must rest, not on rocks and inscriptions, but on the promises of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Read John 20:24-31. What principle that has application in our own experience of faith in Jesus is revealed here? What lessons can you draw from this account, particularly verse 29, that helps us understand what faith is about?

Some Prophecies Confirmed

The Bible, as we know, is filled with prophecies, many of them already fulfilled. It's exciting, from our standpoint, to look back and see how archaeology shows us that these prophecies were fulfilled as the Bible said they would be.

For example, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria at the height of its power and glory. It was one of the centers of the world. From its administrative offices governors were dispatched to rule over a vast empire, reaching from Persia and Arabia in the east to the green shores of the Mediterranean in the west, and from the border of Ethiopia in the south to the Black Sea in the north. Yet, according to the Bible, it wasn't going to last.

According to Nahum, what was going to happen to this great city Nineveh? See Nah. 3:2-7.

Through the combined forces of the Medes and the Babylonians, the city was destroyed in 612 B.C. The palaces were burned, its temples were broken down, and its strong fortifications were demolished.

Read Isaiah 13:19-22. What was to be the fate of another great kingdom, Babylon?

Archaeological discoveries over the years have revealed that Babylon was once, indeed, a magnificent city that had, among other things, (1) a wall about the main city more than 11 miles long and 85 feet thick; (2) many gates, including the Ishtar Gate with its enameled bricks showing 575 dragons and bulls and 120 lions; and (3) the gorgeously decorated palace of Nebuchadnezzar with its banquet hall and throne room, 57 feet wide and 168 feet long. Yet, whatever its ancient glory, as affirmed by archaeology, the city today remains in ruins.

Babylon in ruins? Nineveh in ruins? Today it would be comparable if someone said that the United States would be in ruins. What lesson should there be here for us about how fleeting anything earthly is? What should our priorities in life be?

More Affirmations

Look up the following texts: *Genesis 15:20, Exodus 3:8, Joshua 1:4, 1 Kings 10:29, and 2 Chronicles 1:17.*

What nation is mentioned in each of these texts?

These were just a few times, out of dozens, that the Hittites were mentioned in the Bible. For many years, however, this was seen as evidence that the Bible couldn't be trusted historically. Why? Because no other ancient sources referred to the Hittites. Thus, some saw this lack of other sources as proof that the Bible couldn't be trusted. The Hittites were deemed a mythical people, or, at most, an insignificant tribe occupying a village or two. Thanks to numerous archaeological discoveries, however, we now know that the Hittites once ruled the greater part of Asia Minor, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River, and that their power was scarcely inferior to that of Assyria or Egypt. It was only when the empire ended around 1200 B.C. that they finally vanished from history, though small city-states remained. Again, the rocks have cried out testifying to the accuracy of the Bible.

Another biblical record also confirmed is the relationship between Israel and Moab. How does the Bible depict that relationship? *2 Kings 3:4-27.*

In a little village eastward from the Dead Sea the Moabite stone, a stone inscribed by King Mesha, was found. It tells of Moab's oppression by the nation of Israel, as depicted in the Bible. This stone is now in the Louvre museum in Paris. It is regarded as very precious since its writing differs very little from early Hebrew. It was engraved about 850 B.C.

Suppose no Moabite stone had ever been found. It's not hard to imagine critics saying, "Oh, more proof that the Bible is unreliable," just as they did with the Hittites. What lessons can we learn from this about what faith should and should not be based on?

Ebla and Other Discoveries

Another important discovery was the Ebla Tablets, found in the Syrian city of Ebla (Tell Mardikh) in the 1970s. These were a whole library of clay tablets, about fifteen thousand of them, dated from about twenty-three hundred years before Christ. The Ebla Tablets are “now considered more significant for elucidating ancient history and the early background of the Bible than any other archaeological discovery ever unearthed.”—*Thompson Chain Reference Bible*, pp. 1653, 1654.

Read Isaiah 20:1. What king is mentioned there?

For years it was claimed that there was no such king, and thus the Bible wasn’t trustworthy. But in the 1840s, archaeological discoveries uncovered a palace with a statue and inscription telling all about Sargon, king of Assyria. The Bible was, again, confirmed by archaeology.

What tragic end came to Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who took the throne after Sargon? 2 Kings 19:36, 37.

Interestingly enough, an unearthed Assyrian record says that on the twentieth day of the month Tebet, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed by his son in a revolt.

The discovery of the law code of Hammurabi in 1901–1902 in Susa and the excavation in Nuzi have shown that some of the practices of the patriarchs—such as the experience of Sarah giving her slave girl to Abraham (*Gen. 16:1–3*), the selling of the birthright for food (*Gen. 25:33*), and married daughters receiving a handmaid (*Gen. 29:24, 29*)—were common practices in the ancient world.

Whether in archaeology, science, history, or whatever, it’s always nice when things affirm what we believe, and we should be thankful for these affirmations. At the same time, what message is found in Hebrews 11:1 that is so important for us to remember?

More Insights

Read Hebrews 11:24-27. According to these texts, what did Moses give up for his God?

What might have been some of those treasures that Moses left behind? In 1922 Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Tutankhamen, who lived in the fourteenth century B.C. Carter's discovery helps us better understand the text regarding Moses and the treasures of Egypt. There are more than seventeen hundred objects on display in the Cairo Museum that were found in Tutankhamen's tomb. These include the king's mask of pure gold, a golden death boat, 143 jewels, and many other precious ornaments. This one tomb alone has a multimillion dollar treasure that dazzles the senses. Again, this is just one tomb of one pharaoh. Yet, according to the Bible, Moses left those precious treasures because "he saw him who is invisible" (*Heb. 11:27, NIV*).

Siegfried Horn said that the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb also has answered the Bible critics who said that "the mentioning of iron in the stories of the books of Joshua and Judges is strong proof of a late date for these books, because it was thought that iron had not been used before the twelfth century B.C. The iron objects of King Tutankhamen's tomb however, show that the critics were wrong and that iron objects were used in that very age."—*The Spade Confirms the Book* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 1957), p. 121. The discovery gives more evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible stories.

Read 1 Samuel 15:2, 3. What did God tell the Israelites to do?

Many find such texts as these disturbing. During the years, however, archaeology has added some light that can help us better understand what was going on. Some archaeologists have argued that the Canaanite religion was exceedingly cruel and bloodthirsty, and it led the Canaanites to violent and degrading acts. If this is true, it could help explain why the Lord used the Israelites to bring judgment upon them. Meanwhile, Genesis 15:16 unveils a principle that can help us better understand what was happening here.

Why is it so important for us to trust in the Lord and His goodness, despite such hard texts to understand, such as 1 Samuel 15:2, 3? Go over in your own mind examples of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. Ask the Lord to give you faith to trust, despite things that are hard to understand.

Further Study: “Archeology and the Recovery of Ancient History,” pp. 99–132 in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1.

“Skepticism toward ancient writings, well founded in many cases, was then also extended to the writings of the Bible. Many people thought that the Biblical records about this world’s ancient history, and the stories about the patriarchs, prophets, judges, and kings, were in most cases just as legendary as those of other ancient peoples which had come down to us through Greek and Latin writings. The most famous historians and theologians of the 19th century were the greatest doubters of the veracity of the stories of the Bible, and were among its most vigorous critics.

“This attitude has greatly changed since the turn of the [twentieth] century. Much more respect is now shown toward the Old Testament, its narratives, and its teachings than was shown a few decades ago. The results of explorations in the Near East have done more than anything else to bring this about.

“In the flood of light thrown by archeology upon the ancient civilizations the Old Testament stands forth not only as historically reliable but also as unique in scope, power, and lofty ideals in comparison with the best products of the ancient world.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 100.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, talk about the whole question of faith in God. What is faith? Where does it come from? What causes people to lose it? What role can archaeology have in our faith? At the same time, why must we not put too much emphasis on it, or any other discipline, such as science? What can we do to help strengthen each other’s faith?
- 2** Suppose evidence for the existence of the Hittites had never been found. Critics still would be using that lack of evidence to attack the Bible, despite the fact that the Hittites really did exist. In other words, just because proof isn’t readily available doesn’t mean something isn’t true. What lessons can we learn from this account about what our faith needs to be based on and what we shouldn’t base it on?

Margarita's Mission

by JEANE ZACHARY

In a village outside Tijuana, Mexico, a small company of Adventist believers are building a church. The first thing they built was the baptistry. These members were serious about leading people to Jesus.

One member, Margarita Carrillo, joined the Adventist Church four years earlier. Margarita has a passion to fill the church. And she is.

While other members were busy giving Bible studies and preaching, Margarita felt she couldn't. She could not read or write. Her husband and children tried to teach her, and slowly, painstakingly, she sounded out each syllable of a word. Then God showed Margarita she had other gifts she could use.

A family in the village had a 13-year-old daughter who was troubled by an evil spirit. The family was desperate to find a cure for their child. Margarita organized prayer vigils on behalf of the girl and her family. They prayed that God would drive out the evil spirit. Little by little they saw changes in the girl's life.

As neighbors also saw the difference, they began asking questions about God and the Bible. Some began studying with church members, and a few months later 14 people were baptized. Later another 16 people were baptized.

As Margarita saw these people make their decisions for Christ, she sensed God's power at work. She had felt that she could not be a leader unless she could read, but she stepped out in faith and began leading the weekly prayer meetings, memorizing the Bible texts she would need to share with the congregation.

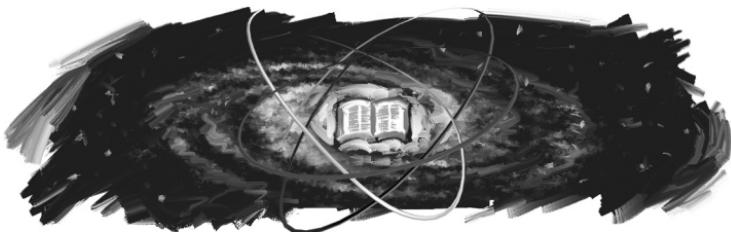
The believers continue building their church. Some make the bricks, others lay the bricks, and another has begun building a pulpit. Meanwhile, the congregation continues to grow. And Margarita continues to experience God's power growing in her. And in spite of her difficulty reading, she gladly shares God's love with those she meets.

Our mission offerings help congregations such as Margarita's buy Bible study guides and other materials to teach and nurture their new believers.



Margarita (left). Jeane Zachary lives in southern California.

The Bible *and* Science



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Gen. 1:1; 2:1, 2; 7:11-24; Deut. 4:32; Pss. 100:3; 139:14; Isa. 42:5; 45:18; Jer. 33:22; John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:2.

Memory Text: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline” (*Proverbs 1:7, NIV*).

Key Thought: Though often viewed as in opposition to the Bible, science can help strengthen our faith in the Word of God.

In the earliest years of the scientific revolution (the seventeenth century), science was viewed as a way to understand God. All the early giants (Descartes, Kepler, Galileo, Copernicus, Newton) believed their work was revealing the handiwork of the Creator. Kepler, talking about his achievements, wrote: “I am stealing the golden vessels of the Egyptians to build a tabernacle to my God from them. . . . I cast the die, and I write the book. Whether it is to be read by the people of the present or of the future makes no difference: let it await its reader for a hundred years, if God himself has stood ready for six thousand years for one to study him.” Over time, however, science started moving away from the idea of God, choosing instead to work in a purely materialistic, atheistic paradigm. This, of course, led to the struggle between faith and science that we often hear about today.

Though we certainly acknowledge the challenges that science can present, this week we'll focus on places where science has, indeed, given us reasons for our trust in the Bible.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 12.

Anthropic Coincidences

Look up Genesis 1:1; 2:1, 2; Deuteronomy 4:32; Psalm 100:3; Isaiah 42:5; 45:18; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2; Revelation 10:6; 14:7. What's the one point that all these texts have in common?

For many years, much of science worked on the presupposition that all existence, including human life, was the result of pure chance. We are just a big accident, nothing more.

Now, though, science seems to be moving in another direction. In fact, a new phrase has been coined: “anthropic coincidences,” from the Greek word *anthropos*, meaning “man.” Science reveals that many factors in the universe are so finely tuned that even the slightest variation would create an environment unfit for human existence. It’s almost as though the universe was created with the existence of humanity in mind!

What are some of these “anthropic coincidences”?

For starters, if the rate of expansion after the creation of the universe had been smaller by one part in a hundred million, the universe would have collapsed in on itself. On the other hand, had it been greater by one part in a hundred million, the universe would have expanded too rapidly for stars or planets to form.

Also, one of the known basic forces in nature is called the strong nuclear force. Had it been slightly weaker, there would have been only hydrogen in the universe; had it been slightly stronger, there would have been only helium. In either environment, humanity as we know it could never have been formed.

There are many other examples, enough to get even someone like the famed Stephen Hawking (hardly a biblical creationist) to admit: “The odds against a universe like ours emerging out of something like the Big Bang are enormous. . . . I think there are clearly religious implications.”—Quoted in Ian Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), p. 58.

American poet Walt Whitman once wrote: “And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery.” What other examples from nature put “to scorn all machinery”? What does this complexity and design say to us about a Creator? Be prepared to talk about your examples in class.

Astronomy

Have you ever stood outside on a clear night and looked at the stars? How many could you count? Though there are a lot, there are not more than can be counted, at least with the naked eye, which is how the Bible writers saw them.

Read Jeremiah 33:22. How many stars does he say are out there?

Ptolemy many centuries ago counted about 1,056 stars; Tycho Brahe counted up to 777; Kepler, 1,005. Before the invention of the telescope in the seventeenth century, people believed that the number of stars was 5,119. The telescope, of course, changed all this dramatically. Today, especially with the Hubble Space Telescope, the number of stars seems beyond counting. It is estimated that there are hundreds of billions of stars in our galaxy alone. Astronomers have estimated that there are about 10^{22} (that is, 10 thousand billion billion) stars in the universe. If one could count even as many as 10 different numbers per second, it would take at least 100 million billion years to count up to 10^{22} . And over time, who knows how many more will be discovered?

Read Job 22:12. What else is Eliphaz saying about the stars?

Many ancient people believed the stars were various distances away, from a few kilometers to a few hundred at most. Science over the past few centuries has shown just how far they really are. The sun is 93 million miles away, our closest star; others, even if we traveled at the speed of light (300,000 kilometers per second), would take us hundreds, thousands, even millions of years to reach! And though Eliphaz probably wasn't thinking about astronomy, he, nevertheless, made a statement that science certainly has proven correct.

Though it's good when science seems to affirm our faith, why must we be careful in not putting too much stock in science when it comes to matters of faith? Why, too, is it important to remember that science is still only a human endeavor? See Jer. 17:9, 1 Cor. 1:21, 3:19.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

Though possibly a bit overstated, the following quote tells us something about the complexity of the human brain. “There are trillions of neurons in a human brain; the number of possible ways of connecting them is greater than the number of atoms in the universe.”—Ian Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), p. 62.

With that above quote in mind, read Psalm 139:14. How has science affirmed the truth of this text?

As we said in Sunday’s lesson, more and more science has been moving away from the chance argument to explain the existence of human life. And no wonder. Over the years, as science has advanced steadily, as we learn more and more about the wonders of creation, the evidence for design gets only stronger and stronger. It’s so strong, in fact, that recently one vocal opponent of intelligent design (and the implications of a Creator behind it) argued that the universe is a thing that simply appears to be designed even though, of course, it isn’t. In other words, it just looks that way.

Meanwhile Francis Crick, probably the most famous biologist of the twentieth century and a vehement atheist, concluded that life was too complicated to have arisen in the supposed billions of years between the cooling off of the earth and the rapid emergence of life forms. Crick speculated, therefore, that life must have started somewhere else and was then brought here, perhaps by space aliens who wanted to see the earth (*see again 1 Cor. 3:19 and Ps. 14:1*).

Another exciting development came from the work of biochemist Michael Behe. Charles Darwin partially based his theory of evolution on the idea that changes came over time to species through a series of small, successive modifications. If, Darwin said, any complex organ could be shown not to have gone through these steps, his theory would break down.

Behe, not a biblical creationist, showed various aspects of the human body—the cilia, the eye, and blood clotting—that could not have arisen according to the basic evolutionary schema. According to Behe, they couldn’t have arisen over time because, in order for the organ to function at all, all the pieces already had to be in place at once. If one part, or even one step, wasn’t there from the beginning, the organ or process could not exist at all. His evidence presents a strong challenge to the evolutionary model of creation. The question, therefore, remains: If these things didn’t come by chance, through the evolutionary processes, then how did they arise (*John 1:1-4, Acts 17:28*)?

A Merry Heart, a Broken Spirit

Read Proverbs 17:22. What simple and yet, at the same time, profound message is found in this text? In what ways have you yourself experienced the truth of these principles?

Is it really true that a merry heart does good like a medicine? Over the years scientists more and more understand the inseparable link between the mind and the body. What impacts one impacts the other. Research shows that, for instance, something as simple as a hearty laugh exercises the lungs, stimulates the circulatory system, and increases oxygen intake. It also stimulates the sympathetic nervous system to make endorphins, the body's natural opiates, which can soothe and relax the mind and may even increase the activity of the immune cells.

On the other hand, there's the last half of the text, which implies that depression can impact the body in a negative manner.

"In recent years, however, evidence has accumulated that psychology can indeed affect biology. Studies have found, for example, that people who suffer from depression are at higher risk for heart disease and other illnesses. Other research has shown that wounds take longer to heal in women who care for patients with Alzheimer's disease than in other women who are not similarly stressed. And people under stress have been found to be more susceptible to colds and flu, and to have more severe symptoms after they fall ill."—Erica Goode, "Power of Positive Thinking May Have a Health Benefit, Study Says," *New York Times*, Sept. 2, 2003.

Moreover, a recent study from the University of Wisconsin shows that "the activation of brain regions associated with negative emotions appears to weaken people's immune response to a flu vaccine."—Ibid.

What's the message for us in Philippians 4:6-8? Though we often tend to view these passages in light of the spiritual aspect only, what kind of physical benefits can we get from Paul's words here, as well? What changes do you need to make in the things you read and watch and listen to in order to better realize the promises found in these texts?

Science and the Flood

Read Genesis 7:11-24. What kind of devastation would this Flood have wreaked on the earth?

If the Hebrew phrase “the great deep” (*Gen. 7:11, NIV*) refers to the ocean(s), then the implication is that on the first day of the Flood, when the rain began to fall, the ocean floor may have been disrupted by the bursting forth of “all the springs” (*vs. 11, NIV*). Such a catastrophic global event as the Flood should have left worldwide evidence of its occurrence. Science shows that, indeed, it did. There are global deposits in the layers of rock quite consistent with (though not proof of) the Genesis Flood. These deposits contribute to the way in which the rock layers are identified and defined. Gigantic sequences of sandstone covered by shale and limestone in what are called Cambrian rocks; massive, transported limestone found in certain rock levels; as well as coal and oil deposits found throughout these levels—all these deposits are consistent with the Flood.

Furthermore, the destruction of life on this earth during the Genesis Flood was extensive, as described in Genesis 7:21 and 22. In our modern world there is little preservation of plants and animals that die. These organisms are decomposed and recycled to provide the nutrients necessary for life to continue. However, buried within the earth are extensive fossil concentrations with evidence of a wide variety of plants and animals that do not exist in our world today, again evidence consistent with the Flood story.

Other evidence is the rapid, massive deposition of rocks, sands, and muds. There are layers of rock throughout the earth that have been deposited so quickly that there is no evidence of erosion between the layers. And though the geologic community often argues that these layers needed millions of years to form, the rocks show no direct evidence that such time has passed. These rock layers do not, however, resolve all of the time issues; thus, the dating methods and sequences of fossils in the rock record remain debatable, at least for now.

Though God gives us reasons for our faith, there is always room for doubt. How can you live in a way that feeds faith rather than doubt? That is, what practical daily things can you do to help strengthen yourself in what we believe?

Further Study: “Genesis and Geology,” pp. 70–97 in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1; Ellen G. White, “Mind Cure,” pp. 241–259; “In Contact With Nature,” pp. 260–268 in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“He who has a knowledge of God and His word through personal experience has a settled faith in the divinity of the Holy Scriptures. He has proved that God’s word is truth, and he knows that truth can never contradict itself. He does not test the Bible by men’s ideas of science; he brings these ideas to the test of the unerring standard. He knows that in true science there can be nothing contrary to the teaching of the word; since both have the same Author, a correct understanding of both will prove them to be in harmony. Whatever in so-called scientific teaching contradicts the testimony of God’s word is mere human guesswork.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 462.

“God is the foundation of everything. All true science is in harmony with His works; all true education leads to obedience to His government. Science opens new wonders to our view; she soars high, and explores new depths; but she brings nothing from her research that conflicts with divine revelation. Ignorance may seek to support false views of God by appeals to science, but the book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other. We are thus led to adore the Creator and to have an intelligent trust in His word.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 115, 116.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, share your answers to Sunday’s final question. What can you learn from each other’s examples?
- ❷ What can be done to help someone who, swayed by the arguments of science, finds it very hard to believe in the Bible? How can you help?
- ❸ If willing, share with the class some of your own personal experiences with the power of the mind over the body and health. What have you learned that could help others? What role can prayer, Bible study, witnessing, and ministering to the needs of others play in helping you heal mentally and even physically?

The Faithful Brothers

by ALFRED SIMUKOKO

Stewart and Jomo are brothers. They grew up in a small village in northern Malawi. When they were young teenagers, the boys attended evangelistic meetings being held nearby, even though their parents objected. The boys were touched by the message of God's love and gave their lives to Christ. Their parents learned that they planned to be baptized and warned the brothers that if they went through with the baptism, they would be killed. Stewart and Jomo chose to be baptized anyway. When the brothers returned home later that day, their parents forced them to leave.

Stewart and Jomo built a simple mud hut to sleep in, but their parents destroyed it and again chased their sons from home. The brothers went to the village chief to complain, but the chief had little sympathy for boys who disobey their parents. "Give up this church," he said. "Go home and submit yourselves to your parents."

"We cannot do that, sir," they explained. "We must obey God."

The boys built another hut, and again their parents destroyed it.

Frustrated and stranded, they turned to their pastor for help. The pastor took them in. Both boys had passed their primary school exams and wanted to study in secondary school, but the pastor could not afford to pay their school fees. He arranged for the field office and secondary school to pay the brothers' fees so that they could continue their studies.

The brothers soon will complete their secondary school education. During school vacations, the boys stay at the school and work to earn a little money for their personal needs.

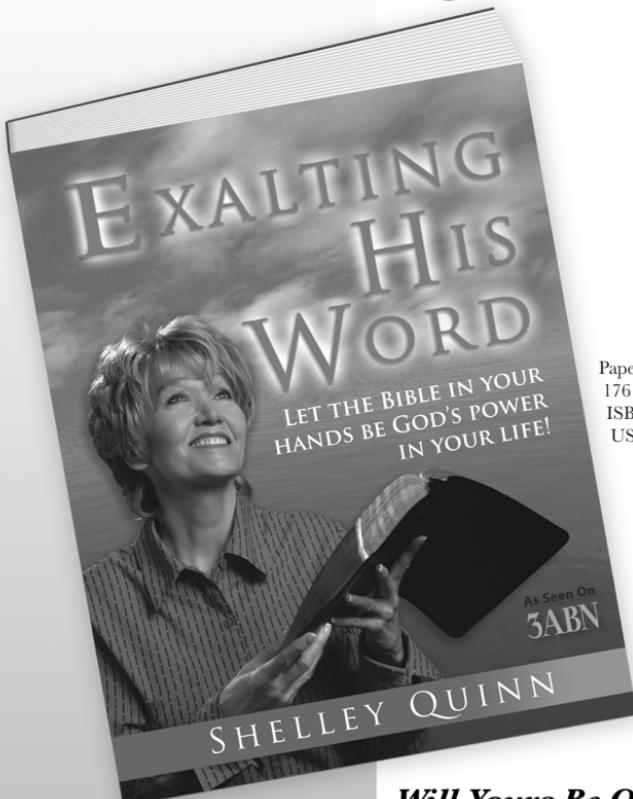
One day a package arrived at the school for the boys. In it they found a suitcase—an empty suitcase. The brothers investigated and learned that their parents had sent the suitcase to them, perhaps as a gesture of reconciliation, a way of saying, "We were wrong." The brothers returned home to their village to visit their parents. The family talked in peace. "We thought you were disobeying us," their father said, "but you were really obeying God."

Stewart and Jomo pray that their parents will step beyond reconciliation with them and will be reconciled with God. They ask other believers to join them in praying for their parents' salvation.

Your mission offerings helped provide the funds that led Stewart and Jomo to Christ; your mission offerings can help bring their parents to God as well.

ALFRED SIMUKOKO is Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Director of the North Malawi Field in Mzuzu, Malawi.

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The Word *in* Our Lives



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Pss. 19:7-11; 119:105; Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:24; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:24.

Memory Text: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (*Hebrews 4:12, NIV*).

Key Thought: The Bible must change how we live our lives.

Sam Tannyhill was sentenced to death for murder. While in prison he was visited by two Seventh-day Adventists who gave him a Bible. Sam, angry, threw it against the wall. But one night, filled with guilt, fear, and bitterness, he wanted something to divert his thoughts, and so he picked up the Bible. At first, not understanding what he read, he tore it apart. But then he started reading again, and the more he read the more he came to know the Christ of the Bible. Sam found Jesus Christ as his Savior in a lonely prison cell as he read the Scriptures. His life completely turned around, right there in jail. The bitterness and anger that dogged him his whole life left. Sam knelt and sobbed. He said, “God, if You'll have me, I'm Yours. Tonight I come. I want Your forgiveness, Your peace, Your power. Lord, change me.” He did, and Sam went with peace and assurance to his death.

What is it about the Bible that can so change even the worst among us? Maybe not all stories are so dramatic, but millions can testify to the impact that this Book has had in turning around their lives.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 19.

The Bible, Agent of Change

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. How have you experienced the promise found in that text?

The Bible paints a pretty dim picture of human nature in general (*Isa. 59:2-4; Jer. 13:23; Rom. 3:10-12*). And though that view often comes under attack by critics of the Bible, even the most cursory review of history proves the assertion right. Even worse, so often well-meaning attempts to improve our lot fail. Many of the great “isms” of the past few centuries, often predicated on the idea of changing humanity for the better, make things worse.

But there is hope, hope for us as individuals, hope for anyone who wants to be changed. And that’s because the Bible points us to Jesus Christ, our Creator and Redeemer, and in Him we have been given wonderful life-changing promises.

By studying the Bible, a sinner can get acquainted with Jesus, who is the Truth and who has the creative and redemptive and healing power to change us.

Read Psalm 19:7, John 17:17, Romans 6:4, Ephesians 4:24, Hebrews 4:12, and 1 Peter 2:24. What promises are found in here for us?

There’s no question: God’s Word can change our lives. Scripture pours out a flood of light on us, pushing back spiritual darkness and revealing to the world the truth about a loving, powerful God who seeks to transform the lives of all who come to Him in faith. Millions of people can testify to the power of the Word of God and what it has done to their lives. All who surrender themselves in faith and obedience to the God revealed in the Bible will experience for themselves just what a dramatic change can be wrought, even in the worst of sinners.

Pick one specific area in which your life has been changed through reading the Word. What is that area, what changes have come, and what changes are you still hoping to see?

Doers of the Word

Who of us hasn't, at one time or another, echoed the words of Paul: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (*Rom. 7:24, NIV*). Fortunately, in the next verse, Paul provides the answer: Jesus Christ alone will rescue us.

Jesus is the Source of our salvation. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (*Eph. 2:8, 9, NIV*). And though faith is a gift of God, how do we receive it?

Read Romans 10:17. What role does the Bible have in the way we receive faith?

The more we read the Bible, the more we know Jesus and the more faith we shall have. The more we listen to the Words of God, the more our faith in Him will increase and the more we will experience the power of God to change our lives.

Many, though, read the Bible, and it does nothing for them. Some scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' time were well versed in Scripture, but what good did it do them?

Read John 5:39, 40. What important spiritual principle is seen here?
See also James 1:22.

Knowledge, even of biblical truth, doesn't automatically change us for the good. A teachable spirit and a heart open to the leading of the Holy Spirit are crucial in the study of the Scriptures. It's not more information we need, not even more information about the Bible; it's instead a willingness to obey the Bible's teaching. It is not those who hear the Word of God who will be blessed but those who follow it (*Matt. 7:24-29*). We need to approach the Bible with a desire to apply it to our lives and to adjust our lives according to its teaching. If we come to the Scriptures with humility and the desire to do His will, God will give us a life-changing faith that will permeate all that we do.

Do you pick up the Bible with a humble and teachable heart or with a critical eye, an attitude of resistance, or a lack of trust? If the latter, why not begin right now, opening the Word with a prayerful heart, pleading for the Lord to reveal to you His will and to give you faith and power to follow it? That's the only way your life will change for the better.

Principles of Life

Read Psalms 19:7-11; 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. What promises are found here regarding how the Bible should guide how we live?

Every day we are confronted with difficult decisions on how to live. How do we know how to make the right choices, especially when so many moral theories exist? One ethicist even has developed a morality urging that we kill old people who have become a burden, even though he also argues against killing animals for food!

God, though, has given us His Word as a guide for how we should live. Whether sacred biographies, the life and teachings of Jesus, or specific direct biblical instructions—the Word gives us principles to guide our lives.

Read Genesis 39:7-14; John 8:3-11; and Philippians 2:3, 4. How might one take the principles found in these texts and apply them to real-life situations today? Be prepared to share your answers in class on Sabbath.

Though the Bible does not pretend to give instruction on every problem known to humanity, it does give us wonderful principles that we can apply to our daily lives. Using these principles, along with sanctified common sense and guided by the Holy Spirit, we can learn to walk in the Spirit and be sensitive to the leading of God. Learning the example of biblical heroes or following the guidelines of the Bible will change our lives.

We must see the Bible as more than a compilation of historical or even spiritual facts. We need to see it as the will of God, who desires the best for our lives. For that reason the Bible can educate our ethics and tell us what God expects us to do. God has shown us in His Word how to live. When we follow divine guidance for our happiness, our lives will be changed by His divine power.

What Saith the Word of God?

Yesterday we looked at some Bible texts that offered principles on how the Lord would have us live. Today let's look at situations people might find themselves in and ask, What help does the Bible offer, if any, in these situations? Which texts could you use to give guidance in the following scenarios?

A fellow co-worker, in desperate straits, is stealing money from the place where you both work. What should you do? Ignore it? Turn the person in? What saith the Word of God?

A young woman, unmarried, gets pregnant. She and her boyfriend are unable to take care of the child even if they were to marry, which she wants to do. He wants her to get an abortion. What saith the Word of God?

A beggar stands on the sidewalk and holds out his hand for money. What saith the Word of God?

A person you are witnessing to invites you over for a meal and places pork on the table before you. What saith the Word of God?

An elderly parent is comatose, kept alive only through very expensive medical procedures that are draining the family income. Should she be kept alive as long as possible, or do you pull the plug? What saith the Word of God?

How easy did you find these things to answer? Was the Bible very clear in providing answers for all the situations? Also, if you didn't have the Bible as your guide, how different might your answers have been? Be prepared to share your answers in class on Sabbath.

Revival and Reformation

So far we've been looking at the power of God's Word to work in our individual lives. But what about us as a church? What should the Word of God do for us corporately?

Read 2 Kings 22:8–23:25. What happened here? What role did the Bible have in the unfolding of this story?

There was a great reformation in Judah based on the Word of God. It was a corporate experience, something that impacted the entire nation.

"Thus Josiah, from his earliest manhood, had endeavored to take advantage of his position as king to exalt the principles of God's holy law. And now, while Shaphan the scribe was reading to him out of the book of the law, the king discerned in this volume a treasure of knowledge, a powerful ally, in the work of reform he so much desired to see wrought in the land. He resolved to walk in the light of its counsels, and also to do all in his power to acquaint his people with its teachings and to lead them, if possible, to cultivate reverence and love for the law of heaven."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 398.

Another example can be found in the time of King Jehoshaphat, who sent Bible teachers to teach the law of God. "And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people" (*2 Chron. 17:9*). Although the Bible doesn't say which specific book or books were used, the point is that the Written Word, the Scriptures, was at the basis of this revival and reformation.

Jehoshaphat himself brought about the judicial reforms in harmony with the moral values expressed in the Bible. By studying *2 Chronicles 19:4-11*, we can see the reformation being made in the judicial system of Jehoshaphat: " ‘Consider carefully what you do’ " (*2 Chron. 19:6, NIV*), " ‘judge carefully’ " (*vs. 7, NIV*), " ‘no injustice or partiality or bribery’ " (*vs. 7, NIV*), " ‘serve faithfully’ " (*vs. 9, NIV*), " ‘warn them not to sin against the Lord’ " (*vs. 10, NIV*), and " ‘act with courage’ " (*vs. 11, NIV*). All these principles are found in the Bible.

How easily apostasy from God's Word can come to the church as a whole! What can we do to protect our church from making the same mistakes as ancient Israel did?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Jehoshaphat,” pp. 190–203; “Hezekiah,” pp. 331–339 in *Prophets and Kings*; “Revival and Reformation,” pp. 119–152 in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“When the heart is brought into harmony with the word, a new life will spring up within you, a new light will shine upon every line of the word, and it will become the voice of God to your soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 183.

“In the Bible are found the only safe principles of action. It is a transcript of the will of God, an expression of divine wisdom. It opens to man’s understanding the great problems of life, and to all who heed its precepts it will prove an unerring guide, keeping them from wasting their lives in misdirected effort.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 506.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Knowing the importance of studying the Bible in order to bring change to our lives and to promote revival and reformation among God’s people, how can we renew our emphasis on Bible study? How can we bring the revival and reformation that we need as individuals and as a church?
- 2** As a class go over the questions presented in Tuesday’s and Wednesday’s lesson. How similar were your answers to the others? How different? What can we learn from one another’s responses?
- 3** Do you sense a need for the Word of God to have a greater impact in our lives, not just as individuals, but as a church? As a class, put together a midweek Bible study and invite as many members as possible.
- 4** Let members of the class give a testimony to the power of the Word and what it has done in each of their lives.
- 5** How can you help someone who seeks to have the Bible change their life and yet nothing seems to be happening? What counsel would you give?

My Faithful Son: Part 1

by GANTULGA TSEDEN

A few years ago life in Mongolia was simple—difficult, but simple. Then our country was flooded with new ideas, new activities. Young people, such as my son, Enkhtaivan [ENK-tai-van], discovered video games. He spent hours playing these games with his friends. But I feared the changes that these new ideas would bring to our country. I saw my sweet teenage son begin to stay out very late playing video games with his friends, and I worried.

Then someone gave my son a book about a man called Jesus. Then a friend invited him to a Christian church meeting, and he went. One day he told me that he had become a Christian.

I knew little about the Christian God and nothing about the church he was attending. But I had seen a story in the newspaper about some people who called themselves Christians who were doing crazy things such as jumping off a high building. I was frightened. Had my son joined a group such as this?

I began seeing changes in my son. He no longer stayed out late with his friends, but came home early. He obeyed and became so good to me! Christianity could not be all bad, I thought.

Then he invited me to go to church with him. “It will be good for you, Mother,” he said. “You need to change some things in your life, and God will help you do that.” I thought I was fine and didn’t need to change anything, so I resisted his invitations for several months. But finally I went with him. He was so excited!

The church met in a rented room, but that did not matter. I was touched by the speaker’s message. After church the speaker invited me to a small group Bible study that week. I finished my work early so I could go. I went to the health expo and evangelistic meetings that followed, and I enjoyed it all. As we prayed and studied the Bible together, I realized that Christianity was not just a story; Jesus died for me! Several months later I was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was just in time, for some terrible trials were heading our way.



GANTULGA TSEDEN (left) and her family live in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

(Continued next week)

Revelation of Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for this Week's Study: *Pss. 34:7, 91:4, Rom. 3:26, 1 Cor. 15:51-58, Col. 1:14, 2:13, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, 1 Pet. 3:18, 1 John 1:9, 2:12.*

Memory Text: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (*Romans 15:4, NIV*).

Key Thought: The Bible reveals to us a world of hope and promise.

Four World War II fliers, shot down, floated for 21 days on a small life raft in the middle of the Pacific. They had no water or food. However, when their thirst got so bad, it rained, and they caught the rain and drank it; when their hunger became unbearable, seagulls landed on the rafts, and they caught the birds and ate them.

When finally rescued, they were interviewed, separately, and each was asked the same question: “To whom do you attribute your survival?” All the men gave basically the same answer: There was a New Testament in the raft, which they read every day. And that book gave them the hope to press on, even when things looked hopeless.

In the Bible, *hope* isn’t used in the popular sense of the word, a wish with little basis in fact. In the Word, *hope* is presented as the truth about a loving, omnipotent God who cares about us, who will provide for us, and who offers us the promise of new existence in a new world.

This week we’ll look at the revelation of hope given to us in the Word of God.

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 26.

The “Comfort of the Scriptures”

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (*Rom. 15:4*).

Paul, in the above verse, talked about the “comfort of the scriptures” that would lead to hope. What particular things have you found in the Bible that give you, personally, hope?

The Bible speaks about the condition of humanity, that we all are sinners (*Rom. 3:10*) and that the wages of sin is death (*Rom. 6:23*). The struggle for humanity’s salvation is expressed by Paul when he said, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (*Rom. 7:24, NIV*). The answer is found in Jesus Christ our Lord (*Rom. 6:23*). Because of His love, Christ was willing to come to this world, live as a human being, and die the death that we should die. The Bible points us to the hope of salvation that we can have in Jesus because of His sacrifice in our behalf.

What hope is presented to us in these texts?

1. Rom. 3:26, 1 Pet. 3:18

2. John 16:13, 2 Tim. 3:16

3. Luke 18:29, 30; 1 John 5:13

At the cross, Jesus, the One through whom all things were made (*Col. 1:16*), bore in Himself the penalty for our sins. Jesus died in our place, suffered in our stead, all for us. Why would Christ have gone through so much, for us, if there wasn’t something incredibly worthwhile at the end of it for us? What is at the end, and what hope does it offer to us?

Hope of Forgiveness

A woman had been brutally murdered. Police psychologists, after examining the case, devised a plan to catch the killer. They placed a hidden microphone and video camera in the ground at her grave. And they waited. One night a man came to the grave, got on his knees, and begged the woman for forgiveness. The police got it all on tape.

What drove the man back to his victim? There's only one answer: guilt.

As fallen beings, as sinners, we all have done wrong. Even people who don't believe in the Bible, who don't understand the concept of sin as we do, have a sense of right and wrong, and often feel guilty when they do wrong. For some people the sense of guilt is overwhelming. It's the foundational emotion that drives all that they do. For many it has led to incredible despair, not only for themselves but for those who often suffer because of the guilty one's aberrant behavior.

But there's hope, and it's revealed to us in the Scriptures, because in the Scriptures we are given the story of Jesus and His death on our behalf.

What do Acts 26:18, Ephesians 1:7, 4:32, Colossians 1:14, 2:13, and 1 John 1:9, 2:12 tell us about the forgiveness offered to everyone through Jesus?

Yes, the Bible is clear that through Jesus we have forgiveness. As to the extent of forgiveness, Scripture represents God as saying that He has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west (*Ps. 103:12*); that He has cast them into the depths of the sea (*Mic. 7:19*) or behind His back (*Isa. 38:17*); that He has blotted them out or swept them away (*Ps. 51:1, 9; Isa. 43:25; 44:22*) and that He will remember them no more (*Jer. 31:34*). Indeed, it was for the sins of the whole world that Christ died as an atoning sacrifice, efficacious through faith (*Rom. 3:25, NIV*). No matter who you are or what you have done, your sins can be forgiven by God if you just claim His promises of forgiveness for yourself.

Are you still struggling with guilt? If so, go back over some of the texts presented today. Read them, pray over them, and pour out your heart to God, asking Him to give you the assurance that these promises are for you, regardless of whatever you might have done.

Hope to Overcome Sin

Read Proverbs 24:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:57. What hope is found in those verses?

Although we may fall, there is hope—hope that we can rise again and again if need be, hope that we are not cast away by God. And though we might sin, Jesus will defend us as our Mediator (*Heb. 7:25, 1 John 2:1*). Moreover, the Bible also says that through the power of Jesus we can have victory over sin.

It's one thing to claim God's promises of forgiveness. And there are many. But what about His promises of victory over sin? Are they not just as real? Are they not just as important? How crucial, then, that we make these promises our own and experience their reality in our own walk with Jesus.

Some members may be struggling to overcome their weaknesses, whatever they are. The following Scripture-based steps can lead us to victory:

1. Recognize your weaknesses and that you can't overcome them in your own strength (*see John 15:5*).
2. Claim God's promises of victory; make them your own (*see Phil. 4:13*).
3. Believe that the Lord has given you the victory to overcome those weaknesses and thank Him for the victory (*see 1 Cor. 10:13*).
4. Claim the promise of "death" to self in Christ (*see Rom. 6:11*).
5. Take concrete and practical steps to avoid the things that lead you into sin (*see Rom. 13:14*).
6. Live your life in an attitude of praise and prayer to the Lord, who gives you the power to overcome your weaknesses (*see 1 Cor. 15:57*).

What about you? You have claimed the Bible promises of forgiveness, but now are you struggling to get victory? Are you failing despite all the promises of victory found in the Bible? What changes do you need to make in order to better apply these above steps in your own walk with the Lord?

Provision and Protection

“I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread” (Ps. 37:25, NIV).

Read Matthew 6:25-34. What hope does Jesus offer us in these verses? What is He saying to each of us?

As Creator of the universe, the Lord certainly has filled the earth with His wonderful bounties. The ravages of sin, however, have taken their loathsome toll, and so not everyone has access to these bounties. Yet, even amid rampant wealth or abject poverty, we have the promises of God that He will provide what we need.

At the same time, God also gives us the hope of protection. We are not under what has been called “the tyranny of chance,” meaning that our life is ruled by unconscious forces that have no purpose in mind. Though bad things do happen, those who love God have wonderful promises that can give us great hope despite calamity.

Read Psalms 46:1-3, 34:7, 91:4, 125:2, and Matthew 28:20. What hope do you find in these texts?

The Lord has given us wonderful promises regarding His loving care and protection. We can find many examples in the Bible of just how wonderfully, even miraculously, the Lord protected His people. Yet, we can also find examples of God’s people suffering, even dying, while faithful (see Matt. 14:10, Acts 7:59, Heb. 11:35-39). Did the promise of God fail in those examples? Or, instead, can we—because of these promises—know that when bad things happen we can trust that the Lord is still in control and can have hope for the future despite trials and suffering?

How have you experienced the reality of these promises in your own life? What have you learned from your own trials and suffering that could help someone going through a hard situation right now?

Hope of Everlasting Life

No matter who we are, how rich, how powerful, how beautiful, how famous, we all face death. Medicine, diet, and exercise only can delay the inevitable. No matter our backgrounds, our education, our race, creed, or color, death always gets us. Life here, in and of itself, is always a losing proposition. Kind of tough, if you think about it: going through life, struggling with trials, tragedy, sickness, disappointment, only to have the one thing we fear the most, death, be the only sure way to end those trials.

Fortunately, the Bible shows us what nature, science, history, and philosophy never can: that death does not have the final word. On the contrary, thanks to Jesus, life, eternal life, is how the story ends for those who accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In your own words, write down what promise and hope are found for us in these verses.

In this world, itself offering no answer to death, it's nice to know that there is an answer, and it's found in Jesus. It's nice to know that death is not the end; it's not a long dreaded night that never comes to a morning. The grave is not a prison from which there's no deliverance. Jesus Christ went into the grave and came out triumphant; and, thanks to His triumph over death, we will triumph over it too. That's how powerful Christ's ministry was, that's how efficacious it is for us; even death can't beat it.

This is the hope that we find in the Bible, where the story of Jesus and what He has done for us, and what He will do for us, is found. In the Bible we find the answer to life's hardest question, and that is death. Even more so, in the Bible we find the hope that death doesn't have to be the last stop.

Imagine what life would be like if you believed that everything ended, forever, at death. How differently would your life be now? How differently would you act? What reasons could you give for going on living if, in the end, you knew it would all come to nothing? How should the hope of eternal life influence how you live now?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “God’s People Delivered,” pp. 635–652; “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 662–678 in *The Great Controversy*.

“In the word of God there are gracious promises, from which those who are suffering, whether in body or in mind, may receive comfort and hope and encouragement.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 213.

“We need to appreciate more fully the meaning of the words, ‘I sat down under His shadow with great delight.’ Song of Solomon 2:3. These words do not bring to our minds the picture of hasty transit, but of quiet rest. There are many professing Christians who are anxious and depressed, many who are so full of busy activity that they cannot find time to rest quietly in the promises of God, who act as if they could not afford to have peace and quietness. To all such Christ’s invitation is, ‘Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest.’ Matthew 11:28.”—Page 251.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** Why, despite the promises in the Bible, are there still so many suffering people? Why does the Lord allow all these things to happen? How can we use the Bible to give comfort and hope to those who are suffering?
- 2** As a class, discuss the role of the church and how the Lord uses it to help bring to people the hope found in the promises of God. How can your local church be better used by the Lord to bring some of these promises to pass in the lives of those who claim them in the name of Jesus?
- 3** Despite so many clear and unambiguous promises about victory over sin, why do church members often have so much trouble overcoming? As a class, talk about what steps can be taken to help each other find the victories that can be so elusive.
- 4** Have people go around the class and share a Bible text that gives them hope and let each one explain why that text means so much to him or her.

My Faithful Son: Part 2

by GANTULGA TSEDEN

I thank God that my teenage son, Enkhtaivan [ENK-tai-van], met some faithful Adventist Christians who led him to the Lord. I am even more thankful that my son shared his faith in God with me. For two days after my baptism, my husband had a stroke.

As I sat in the hospital waiting for the doctors to tell me what was wrong, I felt an incredible peace. Instead of blaming God for what happened to my husband, I was praising God that He had saved me before this crisis. Even after the doctors told me there was little hope for my husband, still I felt at peace. I know if I had not met God before this happened, I would have been so traumatized.

I stayed with my husband in the hospital for 40 days. Many people asked me how I survived the ordeal, and I told them, “I was not alone; God was with me. He gives me strength to carry on.” The members of our church joined us in prayer for my husband, and slowly he recovered. He can walk a little now, and when he feels better he wants to come to church with us. He too believes that God saved his life, and now he wants to worship God with us in church.

My son started a small group meeting in our home. Having Christians come to our home has helped us all, especially my husband. My son has encouraged me a lot. He keeps telling me that God won’t let us go. “Don’t worry, Mom,” he says. “God will bless us. We have a big family now that supports us.”

My husband cannot work, so I support the family. Life is difficult, but God is with us, just as He was when my husband had his stroke. I will not—cannot—let go of Jesus’ hand.

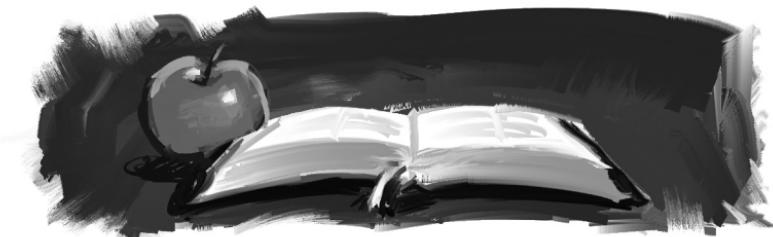
God is stretching our faith as He expands our ministry. Our little home has just three rooms—a bedroom, a kitchen, and a living room. But God has sent 11 young people from the countryside who want to study here in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia. Some of these students are Adventists, and some are not. We have divided the kitchen to make another room, and somehow we crowd everyone in. We invite all the young people who live with us to worship God with us, and they do.

Only one thing matters in our life, and that is God and our Lord Jesus. We want to spend time with Him and share His love with others.

Just think, if you had not given mission offerings to send missionaries to Mongolia, we might never have known that Jesus loves us! Thank you!

Gantulga Tseden and her family live in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

The Bible *and* Health



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt. 4:23; Luke 4:16-21; Rom. 6:4, 9-11; Phil. 4:4-9; Col. 1:20, 21; 3:8-10.

Memory Text: “I am the Lord, who heals you” (Exodus 15:26, NIV).

Key Thought: The Word of God gives us good reasons to take care of our health.

The Bible endorses the value of the physical body; after all, it was created by God. The believer should, therefore, seek to understand and intentionally put into practice measures that enhance health. Care for one’s health is a moral matter, evidence of loyalty and responsible service to God. At the practical level the condition of one’s health largely determines whether a person can carry out effective service for the Lord or for anyone they feel called to serve.

Although the foundational goals and values of health from a biblical perspective are conveyed through God’s Word, the exact means of achieving these goals has come largely from medical science, which often validates many of the principles of health found in the Bible.

It is incumbent on all Christians to do what they can to take care of their health. Health-building activities, including exercise, wholesome diet, proper systematic rest, practical satisfying work, avoidance of damaging substances or practices, good habits of cleanliness, cultivated efforts to live in peace with and help others, and a profound trust in God make the best possible use of the life God has given us. Our bodies are sacred gifts to us from God; we have the responsibility to take care of them the best we know how.

This week let’s take a look at what the Bible says about health and the principles found in its pages.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 2.

To Be in Health

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 2).

We tend to think of the Bible as dealing only with the spiritual side, yet, that's not the case. Scripture shows that God cares also about our physical being and that our spiritual side is linked with the physical. We can find in the Bible good reasons for taking care of our health.

Look up the following texts and write out what reasons you can find in them that would call us to take care of our health:

Rom. 12:1

Rom. 14:7

1 Cor. 3:16, 17

1 Cor. 6:19, 20

Eph. 5:29

3 John 2

Scripture makes it clear that God does care about health, our physical well-being. That makes sense, of course. After all, what loving parent doesn't care about the health, mental and physical, of their child? How much more so would the Lord care about ours?

It's been said that we never care about our health until we lose it. If healthy, do you take your health for granted? Talk to someone struggling with health problems. More than likely, you'll better understand why our health should be carefully guarded.

Health and Restoration

In the beginning God, our Creator, created us healthy, without sickness and disease. The plan of salvation is God's divine way to bring us back to what we originally lost. He wants to restore us to what we once had.

Read Romans 6:4; 9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Colossians 1:20, 21; 3:8-10; 1 John 3:2. What essential message is given to us from these texts? What hope do they offer?

Healing and restoration often are talked about in the Bible. God's promises to restore Israel spill forth in language filled with healing and curative terms (*Jer. 30:12-17, 33:6, Ezek. 47:12, Mal. 4:2*). So clear is the affinity in the New Testament that one of its principal words for healing (*soteria*) may be translated as either "healing" or "salvation." Salvation, then, may include not only rescue from sin and its consequences but also restoration, healing of the whole person.

All biblical teachings are predicated on the basis that, in the end, what was lost when sin entered will be restored when the One who created becomes the One who restores His creation. Having healed our wounds and borne our transgressions at Calvary, He appears at last in the book of Revelation as Christus Victor, in triumph over Satan and the forces of evil (*Rev. 20:14, 21:8*). Those who love and serve God will be restored to the perfect condition that once was; all that is evil, meanwhile, will be destroyed, never to rise again. In both Old Testament and New Testament prophecies this new earth is foreseen as free from sickness, pain, and death (*Isa. 33:24, Rev. 21:4*). The apostle Paul rejoices in Christ's resurrection as proof that He is Victor over all evil forces. Christ's victory has become ours (*1 Thess. 4:14-17*).

As Adventists we have been given precious light on health and health principles, all designed to give us a lifestyle that will prevent disease. How seriously do you follow these principles? How well do you even know them? Why wait until you get sick to start following principles that could help prevent sickness to begin with?

Jesus, the Great Healer

We often hear of Jesus as the Great Physician. And no wonder. Roughly calculated, approximately 20 percent of the Gospels is dedicated to His restoring sick people to health. Although in some cases duplication occurs, the four Gospels report 35 specific instances, alongside the general reports.

How central was healing to Jesus' earthly ministry? (*Matt. 4:23, Luke 6:7-19, 9:11*).

Through the miraculous healings Jesus gave great evidence regarding His role as the Savior. But He did so much more, as well. As humans, we have been damaged spiritually, emotionally, and physically by sin. The whole plan of salvation centers on *restoring* to us what we had once lost. In the beginning there was no sickness and no death; in the end there won't be either (*see Rev. 21:4*). By healing, Jesus was showing the world the power of God to bring about restoration, to bring about what was lost by sin. The healings weren't an end in themselves; they were all to point to something greater: salvation in Jesus.

Read Luke 4:16-21. What do these texts reveal to us about the purpose and ministry of Jesus?

Jesus' primary task was to proclaim that God is receiving His sinful, suffering creatures in a sweeping act of grace and love. His actions were evidence of final deliverance from a world of sin. He had come to deliver, to seek and to save, to forgive, to proclaim the day of God's mercy, to confer life everlasting, and to be the Restorer of all that was lost. He was first of all the Savior, and physical healings were evidences of His authority.

Whatever our illness, whatever our sicknesses, we have wonderful promises in the Bible of healing and restoration; that is, complete healing and complete restoration. Dwell on this, our greatest hope. Pray for more faith to believe in those promises. If you know someone struggling with sickness, point that person to this hope.

Moderation in All Things

Read Philippians 4:4-9. What practical principles can you find in these texts that can have a positive impact on our physical well-being?

Read 1 Corinthians 9:25, Galatians 5:23, and Titus 1:8, 2:2. What practical admonitions are found in these texts that can have a definite bearing on our physical health?

The Greek word used in many of these verses for “temperate” comes from a word often used in the context of athletic training, of an athlete who, in preparation for an event such as a race, takes special care to abstain from that which can hurt his or her body. How much more so should this principle apply to us as Christians in the race that we are running (*1 Cor. 9:24-27, Heb. 12:1*)?

We all know about health problems that can come from the use of liquor, illegal drugs, and so forth. Those are the obvious ones. Yet, so often bad health comes by overindulging in the gifts that God has given us to enjoy. Contrary to popular caricatures of biblical religion, it’s not sinful to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh. God made us to enjoy these things, but only in their proper sphere, and in moderation and with temperance, as so clearly shown in the Bible.

“True temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful, and to use judiciously that which is healthful. There are few who realize as they should how much their habits of diet have to do with their health, their character, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny. The appetite should ever be in subjection to the moral and intellectual powers.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 398. How much sense Ellen White’s words make! Examine yourself. How moderate and temperate are you, even with that which is good? What changes might you need to make?

Healthy Relationships

Again and again the Bible speaks about the need of loving one another. Jesus said that it is the greatest of all commandments (*Matt. 22:37-40*). When Paul speaks about Christian virtues, such as faith, hope, and love, he says that the greatest is love (*1 Cor. 13:13, NIV*). No wonder Jesus said that one significant characteristic of His followers is that they love one another (*John 13:35*).

How do the following texts characterize Christian love?

1 Cor. 13:4-7

1 John 4:7

1 John 4:18

Study after study shows how family love—a close loving relationship between parents and children—can stem a tide of evils in young people, evils that can bear terrible fruit in adulthood.

As God's people we need to love one another (*1 Thess. 3:2*), serve one another (*Gal. 5:13*), bear with one another (*Eph. 4:2*), be kind to one another (*Eph. 4:32*), admonish one another (*Rom. 15:14*), be tender-hearted and forgiving to one another (*Eph. 4:32*), comfort one another (*1 Thess. 4:18*), show compassion to one another (*1 Pet. 3:8*), be hospitable to one another (*1 Pet. 4:9*), and pray for one another (*James 5:16*). These commands, so clearly outlined in the Word, will help us to be connected with one another as God's people and will strengthen family relationships, which ultimately protect our youth from high-risk behavior. Through forming close bonds and thus giving and receiving love and care and concern, we can have such a positive moral, spiritual, and physical influence on one another. The Scriptures are so right in showing how important good relationships are for us, not just spiritually but physically, as well.

Review some of your most basic relationships. From your end, what motivates these relationships: self-serving or self-giving, greed or love, a desire for personal gain or a desire to be a blessing? Think about the good you have done for others. Were the principles elucidated in today's lesson the motivating force behind your relationships?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Use of Remedies,” pp. 234–240; “Diet and Health,” pp. 295–310 in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Health Reform,” pp. 271–296 in *Selected Messages*, book 3.

“The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health to a far greater degree than many realize. Many of the diseases from which men suffer are the result of mental depression. Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death. . . .

“Courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, promote health and prolong life. A contented mind, a cheerful spirit, is health to the body and strength to the soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 344.

“Many of those who came to Christ for help had brought disease upon themselves, yet He did not refuse to heal them. And when virtue from Him entered into these souls, they were convicted of sin, and many were healed of their spiritual disease as well as of their physical maladies.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 73.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Jesus’ healing ministry formed a crucial component of His work of leading people to salvation. How can your local church better use the light we have on health and healing as part of its outreach to the world?
- ❷ As a class, talk about what the Bible says about such things as diet, use of alcohol, rest, and so forth. What health principles on these topics do you find in the Bible? To the best of your knowledge, how has modern science validated these principles? How have members personally benefited from following what the Bible has to say on these things?
- ❸ As a class, take time to visit any members who are sick or hurting. Bring Bible promises to share with them. At the same time, in what practical ways can you minister to them and help relieve their sufferings?

The Pot-and-Pan Evangelist

by JOTA WASHINGTON F. ALVES

Geraldina Alves works in a small factory that makes household goods in eastern Brazil. She is a faithful Seventh-day Adventist who loves the Lord and wants to share her faith with others. But she wasn't sure how she could reach people outside her circle of friends. Then God showed her one way that was, quite literally, right under her nose.

"God inspired me to put a tract inside each pot or pan, each plate or cup we sell," she said. "We send out up to four thousand items a day; I could share that many tracts each day."

Geraldina spoke to the factory's owner, who gave her permission to include the tracts. She began inserting a tract on top of each pot, so it would be the first thing the new owners would see when they opened the box. Often during the day as Geraldina placed the tracts into the boxes, she prayed for the people who would find them. She doubted that she ever would know the outcome of her missionary adventure, but she was happy to do what she could for God.

In another city, Maria da Silva suffered from depression. Her life felt dark, and she could see little hope for her future. Then her husband bought her a pressure cooker from Geraldina's factory. As Maria opened the box, a colorful tract fell out. Picking it up, she looked at it.

As Maria read the tract, a glimmer of hope flickered across her heart. "God loves me?" she said to herself, trying to capture the truth of the statement. She forgot her new pan as she read the tract carefully. She found an address on the back where she could write for more information and to request Bible studies.

Maybe there is hope for me, she thought. She wrote to the address on the tract, and a few weeks later, she received her first Bible study lessons. Maria showed them to her family, and together they began studying God's Word in depth. In time the entire family was baptized together.

A few months later Geraldina Alves, the "pot evangelist" met Maria da Silva and her family on Adventist television's Novo Tempo. "Even though you did not know me, you and your tract saved my life," Maria told Geraldina.

Mission takes many forms. Sometimes it's a sacrificial offering or a caring visit with someone who needs to hear of God's love. And other times it's a tract in a pot.

Jota Washington F. Alves is strategic manager of Novo Tempo Television Network in Brazil.

The Bible *and* Happiness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Luke 21:36, John 8:32, 1 Cor. 10:13, Phil. 2:3, Col. 3:13, 1 Pet. 3:15, 4:12-14, 1 John 1:4.

Memory Text: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Key Thought: The Bible offers us answers for one of life's most elusive goals: happiness.

Everybody wants to be happy, yet, few know how to achieve it. The world offers all sorts of enticements that promise happiness but always prove in the end to be shallow, fleeting, and empty.

Can we find happiness in this sinful world? We can, but only by going back to the Source of all happiness: God. Pain, suffering, and unhappiness are the result of our separation from God; only to the degree, then, that we return to Him can we find the happiness that we all long for but that the world itself doesn't offer.

This week we'll look at some biblical principles regarding happiness. We'll also focus, at least for a few days, on the family unit itself, for here is where so much of our happiness or unhappiness originates. The Bible offers us wonderful principles that, if applied, can protect our families from so many things that all but guarantee misery and suffering. And regardless of the past, regardless of the mistakes made that have hurt us or that we have made that have hurt others, God, through His Word, offers us promises that can bring healing and happiness. “They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isa. 35:10, NIV).

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 9.

Life, Abundantly

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Read the above text. What is Jesus saying to us? How do we understand the idea of having life “more abundantly”? What do you think that includes? What does it not include?

At the foundation of all that we believe and hope for as Christians is the promise of eternal life (*1 John 2:25*). Without that, whatever else Jesus does for us, even now, is all in vain (*1 Cor. 15:16-19*).

Yet, the promises that God has given to us in the Bible aren’t all other-worldly; they don’t all pertain to life in a new heaven and a new earth without sin, suffering, and death. The Word of God promises us many things here and now, things that can greatly help us know now what Jesus means when He talked about giving us life “more abundantly.”

Look up *John 8:32, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Peter 3:15, and 1 John 1:4*. What promises are found in these texts? What do they offer us in this life, here and now?

God loves us; and because He loves us, He wants us to be happy. He wants what’s best for us. Through His Word, God has revealed Himself to us and has shown us what He is willing to do for us if we will but allow Him to. How often we, ourselves, are the biggest hindrance to our own happiness.

What things of your own doing stand in the way of your “more abundantly” enjoying life offered to us through Jesus? Once you admit what these things are, how can you get rid of them?

Rejoice Before the Lord

“God created the earth to be the abode of holy, happy beings.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 540. That happiness, of course, was disrupted by sin (*Gen. 3:16-18*); and not until sin finally is eradicated will we enjoy the full happiness that only sinless beings in a sinless world can enjoy.

Meanwhile, even in this sinful world, God has provided the means by which we can achieve a certain amount of happiness, contentment, and joy in this life.

What promises did God make to Israel, provided, of course, they were obedient? *Lev. 23:40; Deut. 12:7, 12, 18; 16:11?*

Study after study shows that in regard to the kinds of factors that give an indication of “happiness,” those who have faith in God come out better than those who live with no faith. After all, as Christians, think about what the Word has revealed to us: that we have a loving, caring God who loved us so much that He came down to earth, took on human flesh (*Rom. 8:3*), and in that flesh died for our sin (*Rom. 5:8*), and that because of His death we have the promise of eternal life in a world made new (*Rev. 21:1*). We have the hope that this life isn’t all that there is. Meanwhile, we have from Him many precious promises about Him being with us (*Matt. 28:20*), guiding us (*John 16:13*), helping us (*Heb. 4:16*), never leaving or forsaking us (*Heb. 13:5*), and so forth. No wonder we should be happier than those who know nothing about these promises.

Look up Exodus 20:1-17; Proverbs 3:5; Luke 21:36; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:13; 1 Peter 4:1, 2; and 2 John 1:5, and note the principles found in them. How would each one, in its own way, add to our happiness here if we were to obey what they say? Ask yourself, too: “How well am I seeking to follow the principles found in these texts?”

The Family Foundation: Part 1

The Bible says the world was created by the word of God and that He created humankind in His own image (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). He designed man and woman, He blessed the first marriage, and He made marriage the foundation of the family. And, as we all know so well, a strong, stable family is a crucial component in creating happy lives. As the psalmist says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (*Ps. 127:1, NIV*). In the family we can experience love and happiness. It is for this reason that the Word clearly says, “‘Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate’” (*Matt. 19:6, NIV*). The Lord desires His children to understand that if they marry, they have made a covenant to be faithful to each other for as long as they live. The Word also explains how this marriage relationship can be strengthened: marry only another believer (*2 Cor. 6:14-16*), be completely loyal to each other (*Heb. 13:4*), and express love and appreciation for each other (*Song of Sol. 7:1-9*). The family that abides by the Word of God will experience the joy of His presence as they follow His commandments.

What principles for a strong family can be found in the following texts?

Rom. 12:1

Rom. 14:7

1 Cor. 3:16, 17

1 Cor. 6:19, 20

How can you apply the principles stated in the above texts and strengthen your own family relationships? Meanwhile, what can you do to help heal the wounds from past family relationships that have gone sour?

The Family Foundation: Part 2

The family is the foundation of everything human; destroy or even weaken that foundation, and so much else crumbles with it. How crucial, as Christians, that we do everything we can to protect the sanctity of our homes (and “home” includes everything from living by ourselves to being part of a large family).

Go back over the Ten Commandments. How many of those commandments are directly related to family concerns, and how are they related? Why would families be stronger and more secure if all these commands were followed?

A crucial aspect of family life deals with responsibility. The Bible says that each person—husband, wife, or child—must bear responsibility for the choices they make (*2 Cor. 5:10*). If each individual knows and accepts his or her responsibility as spelled out by the Word, the family ties will be greatly strengthened. The Word gives guidelines about the responsibility of each individual. The Word says that Abraham commanded “his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord” (*Gen. 18:19, NIV*). To parents, the Word says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (*Prov. 22:6, NIV*). The Word also admonishes parents to avoid treating their children in a way that will cause them to become discouraged (*Col. 3:21*). To the children, the Word says, “‘Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you’” (*Exod. 20:12, NIV*), and “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (*Eph. 6:1, NIV*). To the husbands, the Word says, “love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (*Eph. 5:25, NIV*), and to the wives, “Submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body” (*vs. 22, 23, NIV*).

What are your own responsibilities in regard to your family? How well are you meeting those responsibilities? Are you doing anything that can damage the happiness and sanctity of your family? Which areas in your family relationships need improvement?

“Not As the World Giveth”

As we've said all week, God loves us and wants us to be happy. At the same time, we must remember that we are in a world of sin, of death, of suffering, a world in the midst of a war between good and evil. And as in all wars, there are casualties. In fact, we all have suffered in this war, one way or another. Thus, despite the many promises that we have in the Bible, promises that offer us much comfort and hope, we all are destined to suffer in this life.

Think about the lives of Abraham, David, Jesus, and Paul. Would you characterize them as “happy”? Defend your answer.

One of the crucial things to consider is how we understand happiness. Jesus Himself gives a key when He said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (*John 14:27*). In other words, we have to realize that worldly ideas of peace or even happiness aren't the same as biblical ideas. Worldly happiness can be based on fleeting and temporal things, things that in their time and place can be good. But sooner or later all these things vanish, and to build our hope and happiness on them is to build on sand. For the Christian, happiness has to be based on something deeper than the fleeting and uncertain joys of this life. That we can enjoy these things, and derive some pleasure and happiness from them, is important; but we must keep our hope based “where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal” (*Matt. 6:20*).

Read Luke 10:20, John 14:27, Philippians 3:7-11, 4:6-13, and 1 Peter 4:12-14. What principles are found in these texts that can help us better understand what it means to be “happy” in this life, even amid inevitable suffering and sorrow? Also, as you read them, ask yourself, “How well am I applying these principles to my own life?”

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Factors That Make for Success or Failure,” pp. 77–96; “From the Marriage Altar,” pp. 97–128 in *The Adventist Home*.

“This feeling of guiltiness must be laid at the foot of the cross of Calvary. The sense of sinfulness has poisoned the springs of life and true happiness. Now Jesus says, ‘Lay it all on Me; I will take your sin, I will give you peace. Destroy no longer your self-respect, for I have bought you with the price of My own blood. You are Mine, your weakened will I will strengthen; your remorse for sin, I will remove.’ Then turn your grateful heart, trembling with uncertainty, and lay hold upon the hope set before you. God accepts your broken contrite heart. He offers you free pardon. He offers to adopt you into His family with His grace to help your weakness, and the dear Jesus will lead you on step by step, if you will only put your hand in His and let Him guide you.”—Ellen G. White, *This Day With God*, p. 63.

“The children of God may rejoice in all things and at all times. When troubles and difficulties come, believing in the wise providences of God, you may rejoice. You need not wait for a happy flight of feeling, but by faith you may lay hold of the promises, and lift up a hymn of thanksgiving to God. When Satan tempts you, breathe not a word of doubt or darkness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 11, 1890.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about this whole idea of happiness. What are your definitions of happiness? Should we expect to be happy all the time? Is there something wrong with our walk with the Lord if we don't feel happy? How can happiness be used as a ploy by Satan to deceive us? At the same time, how can God use unhappiness as a means of reaching people?
- ❷ What do you say to a Christian who admits that he or she is not happy? What counsel would you give that person?
- ❸ As a class, discuss this thought: Can a person in the Lord be happy even while suffering for Christ's sake?

Holding Back Elephants and Rain

by ALAGAPPAN KATHAPERUMAL PILLAI

I must admit, I was dubious. I had been asked to conduct evangelistic meetings in a remote area of Sri Lanka, high in the hilly heart of this island nation. The region where we would hold the meetings was remote, without telephone or radio. How would we let people know of the meetings? Besides this, the meetings were scheduled for the rainy season, and we would meet outdoors. Finally, the pastor warned us that this area was home to a band of some twenty wild elephants, which are capable of killing people who get in their way.

My wife and I boarded a bus to take us into the hills. There we met our driver, who would take us to our destination. Along the roadside, our driver pointed to uprooted trees and bushes. "The elephants," he explained. "People in this area fear them and will not come to our meetings if the elephants are nearby. And if you see one, you must run and hide behind a large rock. If an elephant sees you in his path, he'll kill you." I prayed earnestly that God would send the elephants away.

When we arrived at our destination, we were told that the elephants had been seen leaving the area, but we still prayed that they would not come near our meetings and would not keep anyone from coming to the meetings.

Then there was the problem of rain. During the rainy season, we could expect it to rain all day and all night. Again we prayed that God would keep the rain away. The morning of our first meeting dawned rainy. Rain fell until mid-afternoon, then it stopped until the meetings ended. Not once during the meetings did it rain! And not once did we see an elephant! The one hundred or so people who came to the meetings noticed these miracles, and their faith was strengthened.

On the final Sabbath, we planned an all-day celebration. We met near a stream for Sabbath School and worship service, celebrated the baptism of 22 new believers, and had an afternoon praise service. Not once during this time did it rain, not even a drop. But about 7:00 P.M. it began raining and poured all night and most of the next day.

We thank God for keeping the rain and the elephants at bay so that His children could come and listen to God's precious truths without fear.

Your mission offerings help fund such evangelistic efforts and help pay for the Global Mission worker who is following up the interests and nurturing the new believers in this area. Thank God, and thank you.

ALAGAPPAN KATHAPERUMAL PILLAI is a pastor in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Daily Wisdom



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Pss. 19:7-14; 119:98-105; Prov. 3:13-16; 30:8, 9; Matt. 13:22; 16:26; Rom. 12:17, 18; 13:1-4.*

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

Key Thought: Scripture provides us with a lot of wisdom for our daily lives.

As we've been studying, though the Bible deals with grand themes of universal importance, such as the great controversy, the fall of Lucifer, and the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, it's also a book of practical wisdom. In it, we are given guidance for daily life. Though the Bible might not be specific (how could it?), the Lord through His Word has given us wonderful principles that—if followed and obeyed—will make a great difference in how we live, because it will impact the choices we make.

How important that when confronted with choices—whether about family relationships, social relationships, work, money, or leadership responsibilities—we have divine guidance. And why not? The God who knows when a sparrow falls (*Matt. 10:29*) obviously cares about us and wants what's best for us; thus, we can be sure that if we are open to His leading, if we are willing to open His Word with reverence, submission, and faith, He will guide us.

This week we'll look more at the wisdom God shares with us through His Word.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 16.

The Source of Wisdom

Everyone, every day, is confronted with choices, with decisions that must be made. As we all know, wrong choices are made every day too. Often selfishness is at the core of these choices, because—as fallen beings—we are, above all, selfish beings. How often, too, our wrong choices bring pain and suffering upon ourselves and others.

Think back about some wrong choices you have made and their dreadful consequences, not to berate yourself (there is forgiveness and healing at the Cross!) but simply to enforce the point that wrong decisions can be costly.

The good news is that God has given us His Word as a light and guide for us sinful, selfish beings (*Ps. 119:105*).

In the Bible we can find principles that can give us the wisdom we need to make the right decisions, particularly on moral issues.

Read Psalms 19:7-14, 119:98-105, Proverbs 3:13-16, and John 17:17. What promises and principles are found in these texts that can help us correctly make important moral decisions?

It's one thing to read about biblical principles; it's wholly another to follow them. As the psalmist said: "And in keeping of them there is great reward" (*Ps. 19:11*). The wisdom found in the Bible is useless unless applied. There are a lot of people out there who, though knowing the biblical principles, act contrary to them anyway. As Christians not only do we need to know what the Bible says; we need to obey what it says. Only then can we truly have the wisdom available to us through God's Word. A wise person isn't someone who simply has head knowledge or who can recite text after text; a wise person is someone who acts upon the truths given to us through Scripture.

What important decisions are you facing? Have you consulted the Scriptures as you face these decisions? Think through carefully the consequences of your choices. What Bible promises can you claim as you seek to make the right decision regarding your choices?

Social Wisdom

As humans we have our private lives, the lives we live at home behind closed doors; at the same time, we are also social creatures, living in a society with other people who do not share with us our privacy and intimacy.

Indeed, we are not only private persons but public citizens. Here, too, we can find wisdom in God's Word on how we can best live in our various communities.

In an earlier lesson, we looked at how obedience to the Ten Commandments could impact our family relationships. Read them again (*Exod. 20:1-17*) and ask yourself how following these principles will contribute to better social relationships, as well.

It has been estimated that throughout the centuries humanity has enacted more than thirty-two million laws, all in an effort to regulate human conduct. Often these laws are changed and abrogated in order to be kept up to date. Not so with the Ten Commandments; the principles behind them are unchanging and eternal, principles that can guide us in our private and public lives.

The Bible gives us wisdom regarding how we can best live as citizens within the larger community. Scripture provides us with more principles that, if followed, can make us better citizens and better witnesses for the Lord in the public arena.

What wisdom do you find in *Jeremiah 29:7; Romans 12:17, 18; 13:1-4; and 1 Peter 2:13, 14, 17*, that will help us better function in society? What other texts can you think of? As you read these verses, ask yourself: How am I best able to apply these words to the particular society in which I live?

Wisdom in the Workplace

Scripture acknowledges the reality and need of human work. Adam and Eve, as soon as they were created, were asked to dress and keep the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 2:15*). Even after the devastation of sin (*Gen. 3:17-19*), work was designed to be a blessing for humanity (*Eccles. 3:22*). Furthermore, the Bible recorded the teaching of Paul, who said that if a man refused to work, he had no right to eat (*2 Thess. 3:10*). Jesus was no less than 30 years of age when He emerged into public life (*Luke 3:23*), and the Bible says that people knew Him as a carpenter (*Mark 6:3*).

We know that obeying God's will is related to obeying His written Word. When we obey God's Word, we are obeying His will. But where the Bible reflects His general will, His will for our lives is specific. Though the Lord presents general principles on how to live, we can use those principles to guide us in the more specific areas of our lives, such as in our work.

Inasmuch as the Bible speaks about the need for humans to work, and that working is a major activity of human beings, it's no surprise that the Bible gives us wisdom regarding work.

What principles found in the following texts can apply to our work situation?

Eccles. 9:10

Matt. 25:14-30

Gal. 6:4

Col. 3:23, 24

The Bible shows some specific attitudes and characteristics of a good worker, which includes good use of time (*Matt. 25:14-28*), diligence (*Prov. 12:24*), integrity, and respect for authority (*Eph. 6:5, 6*). Most important, we should be honest in all our dealings, either as an employee or as an employer (*Prov. 11:1*).

What areas do you struggle with the most in your job, at least as far as following biblical principles? What's the reason for your struggles? What practical choices can you make to better follow biblical principles regarding work?

The Bible and Wealth

“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (*Prov. 30:8, 9, NIV*).

Read the above text. What wisdom is found here that can help us all deal with the topic of money and wealth?

Time and again we read in the Bible about how dangerous wealth can be to the spiritual well-being of the followers of the Lord. In His divine foresight the Lord saw the coming apostasy of ancient Israel, saying, “and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat” (*Deut. 31:20; see also Deut. 32:15*), and in that state they will turn away from Him and serve other gods. At the same time, the Bible talks about the slothfulness and laziness that can lead to poverty, which can in its own way lead to sin and ruin. Both pitfalls need to be avoided.

Read Matthew 13:22, 16:26, 19:24, and 1 Timothy 6:10. What do these texts say about the potential dangers of wealth?

Money can do strange things to people. Unlike food, water, or rest, no matter how much money people make, it never seems enough. Sometimes, in fact, the richer people are, the greedier they become. Scripture, however, gives us principles that can help us better understand how we should relate to money and the gathering of wealth. In our desire for money, how crucial that we remember that in the end, the only treasure that lasts is the “treasure in heaven” (*Mark 10:21*).

What do you think the Bible means when it talks about “treasure in heaven”? What is this treasure in heaven, how do we get it, and how can focusing on it help protect us from the pitfalls of seeking too much treasure here on earth?

Wise Leadership

Let's face it: In this world, as it exists now, there will always be a place and a role for leaders of one kind or another.

Unfortunately, oftentimes people who rise to the level of leadership will seize the opportunity to serve themselves without thinking of the people they are leading. The Bible gives examples of unselfish and successful leaders such as Moses, as well as dangerous and immoral ones, such as King Herod.

Read Matthew 20:25-27. What important principle about leadership comes from these verses?

Look at Matthew 20:28. How did Jesus manifest this principle of a leader serving others in His own life? What can we take from His example for ourselves?

According to Robert Greenleaf, a servant-leader is one who is a servant first. "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?"—*The Power of Servant Leadership* (San Francisco: Berrett-Kochler Publishers, Inc., 1998), p. 4.

If all leaders in the past two thousand years had followed the leadership style of Jesus, how different human history would have been!

Of course, leaders who are willing to serve are few and far between. But as Christians, we should be in the forefront of showing just how it can be done.

Are you in any kind of leadership role at all? If so, how well are you reflecting the principle about leadership revealed here today? How much selfishness and desire for power motivates you, in contrast to the desire to minister and serve?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “How Shall We Search the Scriptures?” pp. 105–111; “Dig Deeper,” p. 119; “Practical Instruction in Labor,” pp. 309–318 in *Testimonies to Ministers*.

“The Bible contains all the principles that men need to understand in order to be fitted either for this life or for the life to come. And these principles may be understood by all.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 123.

“Those who study the Bible, counsel with God, and rely upon Christ will be enabled to act wisely at all times and under all circumstances. Good principles will be illustrated in actual life.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 43.

“The Bible unfolds truth with a simplicity and a perfect adaptation to the needs and longings of the human heart, that has astonished and charmed the most highly cultivated minds, while it enables the humble and uncultured to discern the way of salvation. And yet these simply stated truths lay hold upon subjects so elevated, so far-reaching, so infinitely beyond the power of human comprehension, that we can accept them only because God has declared them.”—Page 700.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How can faithfulness in paying tithes and giving offerings help protect us against the dangers of greed?
- ❷ How seriously do we in our daily lives go to the Bible for wisdom in making decisions? As a class, talk about how, in a practical way, we can do that. Pick a few examples, such as Should I marry this person? Should I take this job? Should I move? How can you find in the Bible answers to these specific questions? Or can you?
- ❸ Discuss the question of leadership, and how easy it is for leaders to become selfish and use their power for selfish instead of selfless reasons. What have been some class members’ experiences in this area? What have you learned that could be of benefit to others?

A Better Way

by LUKA INDI

John and Nora Omanga live in southern Sudan, where they belonged to the major Protestant church in the area. One day Luka, a friend from their church, came to visit.

"I have found a better way," he said. "I have found God's true church." John and Nora listened as Luka explained. "I wondered why our church kept Sunday and asked our priest. He said that in Greek the word *Sabbath* means Sunday. But now I have learned the truth." Luka opened his Bible, written in the Moro language, and translated it for John and Nora.

The couple listened to Luka and wondered if what he said was true. The two men began studying the Bible together. John had no Bible of his own, so he tried to memorize what Luka read.

One day two Global Mission pioneers came to their area. They helped people work in their gardens in order to get to know them. When the pioneers learned of John and Nora's interest in the Bible, they offered to study with them. Eagerly the couple agreed. Three months later John and Nora joined the Adventist Church.

The chief had given the pioneers permission to live in the area, but when the local priest learned what they were doing, he angrily demanded that the chief send the pioneers away. The chief had given his word and could not make them leave, but he threatened to cane anyone who became an Adventist.

When the chief learned that John and Nora had become Seventh-day Adventists, he cursed them, saying that deadly snakes would strike them.

One day as John worked in his garden, a large viper leaped at him. He managed to kill it before it struck him, but John remembered the curse and prayed earnestly for God's protection.

On a hot sticky night some weeks later, the family slept outside their hut to avoid the mosquitoes that swarmed inside. Later, a noise awoke them, and they found their hut engulfed in flames. The family lost nearly everything, but they were safe. "For once we were glad that mosquitoes had driven us out of the house," John said.

Recently believers in their area have received the first Bibles in Avokaya, their own language. Now they can explain Bible truths to others in their own language.

Our mission offerings support Global Mission pioneers and other evangelistic outreaches in Sudan and other countries around the world.

LUKA INDI is a local elder in Bahar-olo, southern Sudan.

Growing Through *the Word*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: Matt 22:37, 38; Gal. 2:20; 5:14; Eph. 4:14, 15; Heb. 4:2; 5:12-14.

Memory Text: “We will no longer be infants. . . . We will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:14, 15, NIV).

Key Thought: The Bible plays a pivotal role in our spiritual growth.

The Bible makes it clear that our walk with Christ doesn't end on the day of conversion. On the contrary, when people give themselves totally to Christ, they begin a whole new life, a whole new existence (*Rom. 6:4*). It's not that a new Christian has to work to reach salvation, as in other faiths; instead, because he or she already has salvation, already stands perfect and accepted in God, the Christian begins to live a life that reveals and reflects that salvation. Sure, we are saved by faith, but what kind of faith? A faith that is expressed in a life that reveals a commitment to Jesus Christ.

Central to our new life in Christ is spiritual growth. As Christians, we can't remain static: We are always in the process of change as we should better reflect the image of Jesus Christ. And crucial to the whole growth process is the Word of God, which shows us how and why we must “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*2 Pet. 3:18, NIV*).

This week we'll study about what it means to grow in Christ, and we'll see the pivotal role the Word of God must play in that growth.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 23.

The Need for Growth

When Nicodemus went to see Jesus by night and asked Him how to have eternal life, Jesus immediately answered by saying that we need to be born again (*John 3:3, 5*). This condition indicates that a Christian life begins as a baby. When the beginning of Christian life is portrayed as a new birth, and the new believer is considered a babe in Christ, it's important for every Christian to be nurtured and have opportunity to grow into spiritual maturity.

Peter appealed to the believers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*2 Pet. 3:18, NIV*). Earlier, after using a new-birth illustration (*1 Pet. 1:23*), Peter urged those to whom he was writing to desire the “milk of the word” by which they would grow (*1 Pet. 2:1-3*).

Read Hebrews 5:12-14. What point is Paul making here about spiritual growth? How does he define spiritual immaturity, and how does he contrast it to spiritual maturity?

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul shows that accepting Jesus isn't the end of our spiritual walk but the beginning. There is a need for growth. “Perfecting holiness” means to bring it to completion. He also in Ephesians admonished followers of Christ to lead a life worthy of their calling (*Eph. 4:1*).

It's clear from the Word that though we are saved by faith, though our acceptance with God is based on the righteousness of Jesus credited to us by grace through faith alone, the Christian life is one of spiritual and moral progress. We are to change, and for the better; we are to reflect more and more the character of God (*see 1 Pet. 1:14-16*).

Look over your life as a Christian, regardless of how long you have been one. In what areas have you seen much spiritual growth and maturity? What are the weaker areas? Why, as you seek to advance in the Christian life, must your hope of salvation rest not on yourself but only on Jesus and the merits of His righteousness?

Growing in Faith

In Hebrews 3 and 4 Paul talked about the children of Israel, who, after escaping from Egypt, had wandered in the desert for 40 years. What's most fascinating, however, is what Paul said about them in Hebrews 4:2.

Read Hebrews 4:2. What was the problem with the children of Israel? What crucial element was lacking?

What makes the answer so troubling is the fact that this generation had so much evidence of God's leading. Go back over the story of the Exodus and of what happened to them in the desert. God performed miracle after miracle, everything from the parting of the Red Sea to the daily provision of the manna. *And yet, they still lacked faith!*

What lessons about faith, about what it means to have faith, can we draw from this account? See Heb. 3:12.

So often people think that if only they had more signs, more evidence, their faith in God would grow. But it doesn't work that way. Faith, or the lack thereof, isn't an intellectual matter, or even a matter of signs and wonders. It's a matter of the heart. We can grow in faith only to the degree that we surrender our hearts and souls to the Lord; we can grow in faith only through exercising our faith; we can grow in faith only to the degree that we study God's Word with a heart open to learn from Him.

God is the Source of faith, but we must put our trust in Him. Faith grows through study of the Word (*Rom. 10:17*), but we must take the time and put forth the effort for that study. The more we study, with a heart and mind surrendered to the Lord, the more we know about our loving God. And the more we know Him, the more we love and trust Him. The more we can trust Him, the more we do whatever He wants us to do. Study of the Word of God is absolutely essential if we want our faith to grow.

A number of years ago a scholar left Christianity. He told someone later, "Had I kept up reading my Bible, studying it, and applying it to my life, I probably wouldn't have lost my faith." How precious is your faith to you? You can know the answer by this simple question: How carefully do you guard and nurture that faith?

Growing in Love

The Scriptures say that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to love our enemies and our fellow believers. These are God's commands, and they aren't always easy to follow, because we are by nature selfish sinners who love self above and beyond everything else. If you love someone, usually it is someone who loves you back. But the Scriptures say that's not enough (*Matt. 5:44*). It really takes growing in the Lord to be able to love, not only those who don't love you, but those who are your enemies.

Read **1 Corinthians 13:8. What point is Paul making? Why is that point so important? What does that point tell us about the importance and power of love? See also Matt. 22:37, 38; Gal. 5:14; 1 John 3:14; 4:7, 8, 16.**

The word *love* is used so often that it is easy to lose sight of what it actually means. Biblical examples show that love is something we do rather than simply an emotion. Scripture speaks about love as attitude and actions (*1 Corinthians 13*). We know that love will motivate us to action. The Bible clearly gives an example of what true love really is: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (*1 John 3:16, NIV*). To love at this level, we need to get beyond our own rights, our own interests, and our own hurts; and we can do this only through the power of God, only as we grow in Him and His grace.

How often have you ever been wrong, wrong about theology, wrong about doctrine, wrong about the motives of other people? And yet, love never fails; that is, whatever errors and mistakes we make, we can never go wrong when we love others. We might make a million mistakes, but love can never be one, not when we are commanded to love even our enemies. It's hard to imagine what our witness would be like if all who professed the name of Christ loved the way Christ loved.

Look at your recent actions toward the people you frequently come in contact with. What do your actions say about how well you love these people, if at all? What do these actions say to you about your own need to learn more about how to love as God would have us love?

Growing in Christ

Read Ephesians 4:14, 15. How does Paul here describe growth in Christ?

Considering that the Bible is our final authority on all doctrine, how crucial then that studying the Word is for us to grow in Christ. Only through knowing the Word and what it teaches can we be protected from the “sleight of men.”

Yet, it’s not enough just to read the Bible. It needs to be obeyed. We need to follow what it says; otherwise, it will effect no change in us. By obeying, by seeking to be like Christ in our words, in acts, and even in our minds, we will grow in Him.

Paul wrote to the Romans that we are called to be like Christ (*Rom. 8:28, 29*), and that should be in every way possible, especially in our thoughts (*2 Cor. 10:5*), because if our thoughts are right, our words and actions and attitudes will be too. By keeping our hearts pure, our words and actions will be, as well.

Read Galatians 2:20. What crucial element about how we can grow in the Lord is revealed here?

We can never grow in Christ, into Christian maturity, without a surrender of self. Paul talked about his being crucified so that Jesus could live in him instead. We are no longer to follow the whims and the passions of the flesh but, rather, the commands of God. Our decisions are no longer based only on just what we think; rather, Christ is now Lord of our lives, and our actions should reveal His Lordship in us. This surrender is a day-by-day process, something that must be part of our walk with Christ. The moment we start letting self rule, sin lies at the door, and sin leads to death.

What are some of your own experiences with surrendering to Christ? What happens? How do you feel? What are the results? What have you learned that you could share with others who are seeking the same experience? Share your answers with your class on Sabbath.

Growing in the Spirit

Jesus told Nicodemus that “ ‘no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit’ ” (*John 3:5, NIV*). Born of water means baptism, and born of the Spirit is conversion, which means that the Holy Spirit comes within us at the moment of spiritual birth. As a baby needs to grow, the newly baptized member needs to grow in the Spirit. “ ‘When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth’ ” (*John 16:13, NIV*). This means that the Spirit has a very important role to guide every Christian into all truth by reminding us of the things that the Bible says, because the truth is the Word of God (*John 17:17*). The Spirit also has the role of convicting us about our own spiritual condition (*see John 16:8*).

As we grow in Christian living, we need to grow in the Spirit. Growing in the Spirit means that we are more and more sensitive to His leading; we know that He is talking to us because we know the Word of God, and the Spirit will guide us to the Word.

How can we grow in the Spirit? Read the texts listed below. What principles needed for spiritual growth are found there?

Matt. 5:6

Gal. 3:11

Gal. 5:16

2 Tim. 3:15

1 Pet. 3:11

1 John 1:9

Jesus in Luke 11:13 makes it clear how readily available the Holy Spirit is for those who want Him. Yet, God never forces Himself upon us. He has shown us who He is and what He has done for us. We, ourselves, in our hearts, have to make the daily choices—choices of faith, obedience, surrender, confession—that will enable us to grow in grace and in the Spirit or that will lead us toward eternal ruin.

Is there anything in your life, such as what you read or watch or do, that could be desensitizing you to the influence of the Holy Spirit? What might those things be? Why not let the Holy Spirit, right now, convict you about what you need to do regarding these things? After all, the longer you wait, the harder it will become even to heed His voice.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Growing Up Into Christ,” pp. 67–75 in *Steps to Christ*.

“The Author of this spiritual life is unseen, and the exact method by which that life is imparted and sustained, it is beyond the power of human philosophy to explain. Yet the operations of the Spirit are always in harmony with the written word. As in the natural, so in the spiritual world. The natural life is preserved moment by moment by divine power; yet it is not sustained by a direct miracle, but through the use of blessings placed within our reach. So the spiritual life is sustained by the use of those means that Providence has supplied. If the follower of Christ would grow up ‘unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ’ (*Ephesians 4:13*), he must eat of the bread of life and drink of the water of salvation. He must watch and pray and work, in all things giving heed to the instructions of God in His word.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 284, 285.

“The work of educating the mind and manners may be carried forward to perfection. If those who profess the truth do not now improve their privileges and opportunities to grow up to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus, they will be no honor to the cause of truth, no honor to Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 358, 359.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What practical steps can you take to help other church members who are seeking to grow in the Lord and yet feel frustrated at what they deem is a lack of progress? What hope and advice can you offer them?
- ❷ As a class, go over your answers to Wednesday’s final question. What can you learn from each other’s experiences in surrendering to God?
- ❸ What are some of the biggest obstacles we face regarding spiritual growth? What distinctive factors in your common culture work against spiritual growth? What are your defenses against these factors?

Joining the Opposition

Moshe lives in an isolated village in eastern India. One day Sattepondu, a Bible worker, and a pastor arrived in Moshe's village. The men visited homes, introducing themselves and offering to teach the people about Jesus. Some villagers objected to having Christians in their village. They threw stones at the men and tried to chase them out of the village. But the men did not leave.

Sattepondu began studying with those who wanted to know about Christ, and soon 25 villagers came to his little study group.

But Moshe and most of the other villagers wanted nothing to do with Christians. Moshe threw stones at Sattepondu and told the district police that Christians were disturbing his village. The police took Sattepondu to the station for questioning. Angry villagers filed complaints. "If these people don't want you in their village, why do you stay and force your religion on them?" the officer asked.

Sattepondu answered, "I am not forcing religion on these people. I simply teach those who want to learn."

Meanwhile, when the new believers learned of Sattepondu's arrest, they marched to the police station to demand his release. After eight hours of questioning, Sattepondu was released.

More villagers joined the Bible study group. When Sattepondu announced evangelistic meetings, Moshe and his friends did not object. In fact, Moshe attended the meetings to see what these Christians taught. He saw the positive changes these Christians were making in the village, and he listened to the sermons. At the end of the meetings some seventy people were baptized, but Moshe was not among them.

While the new believers started building a small church, Sattepondu visited those who had attended the meetings and invited them to come to Christ. Finally Moshe stopped fighting and accepted Jesus as his Lord.

Other villagers opposed the new church and again asked the police to stop the building. But this time Moshe stood with the Christians. He pleaded with officials on behalf of the church and the believers in his village. Some noticed that Moshe had switched sides and asked him why. Moshe answered, "I have met Jesus. I know this God is the true God."

Moshe's village now has a small church, and the villagers once more live in peace. Moshe once opposed Christians, but now he leads them as the local elder of his church. Most of his family have become Christians. Today in Moshe's village, one out of five people is a Seventh-day Adventist.

Your mission offerings help fund evangelism in more than two hundred countries around the world.

The Word of God Endures



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mic. 6:8, John 3:14-17, 10:10, Rom. 4:21, Eph. 2:8, Phil. 4:7, 2 Pet. 3:9.*

Memory Text: “‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever’” (*1 Peter 1:24, 25, NIV*).

Key Thought: The relevance of the Bible is for us today.

Many ancient texts are still in existence, everything from the Egyptian Book of the Dead to the Ugaritic legend of Keret to the writings of Aristotle, Epictetus, and Julius Caesar. But none of these command the kind of influence, power, and authority that the Bible has had and still continues to have today.

Yes, the Word of God endures, even in a world of space shuttles, high-definition television, cell phones, and laptops. And that's because, regardless of the many advances in science and technology, and art and culture, we are still human beings struggling with the same issues that humans have struggled with from the beginning. Issues about life, death, happiness, health, morals, family—these remain essentially unchanged across time. And the Bible's answers to them remains essentially unchanged, as well.

This week, our final week in this quarter, we'll look more at why the Word of God endures.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 30.

The Word of God Today

For many people, the Bible has no relevance now. Their reasons, though varied, can be boiled down to (1) the Book is so old; (2) the Book came from a relatively small group of people, the Jews; (3) the world is so different today than in the days that the Book was written that it can't possibly be relevant anymore.

How would you answer those objections?

The problem with those arguments can be boiled down to one thing: the premise upon which they are founded. If one believes that the Bible is merely a human book, a book composed only by humans expressing their own cultural ideas, then the argument would be valid.

However, as Christians, we reject that premise. We believe that the Bible is the Word of God; we believe that God, the Creator, has spoken to us through the Bible. We believe that He has revealed His will to all humanity through the Book. That it was written long ago or written by a small group of people or written in a world vastly different from today—all these things make no difference if we believe that God has spoken to us through the Bible.

Below are some texts that address issues found in the Bible. As you read these texts, ask yourself: (1) What issues are being addressed? (2) How relevant are those issues to us today?

Mic. 6:8

John 10:10

John 17:3

Acts 17:31

Phil. 4:7

Think about each of the topics listed above; if we didn't have the Bible, what answers would we have to these issues? Think how different your life would be were you left without the guidance, hope, and promises offered us in the Bible. Meanwhile, what can you do to help make what the Bible offers you more real for yourself?

God's Everlasting Plan

"But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations" (Ps. 33:11, NIV).

What important principle found in that text helps us understand the relevancy of the Bible today?

What are the purposes of God's heart? See John 3:14-17, 1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9.

The Bible is relevant today because the plans of God are revealed in it; the plan of salvation has been made known to us through the Word, and that salvation is to be for all people in every generation. "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (*Prov. 19:21, NIV*).

God is an eternal God (*Deut. 33:27*); He has an eternal kingdom (*Dan. 2:44*); His will for us as expressed in the Bible has not changed with the passing of time, for He never changes: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (*Heb. 13:8, NIV*). " 'You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end' " (*Heb. 1:12, NIV*).

Sure, times change, cultures change, attitudes change, and people change. Change is a fact of life; we see it all around us. But God Himself and His purposes for us remain the same.

Hence, it makes no difference that the Bible was written many centuries ago, or in a different culture; what matters is that God's love for us, and His desire for our salvation, remains the same, all through the ages.

This, then, is the secret of the Bible: It's relevant today because the God revealed in its pages is relevant today.

Think about all the changes that take place, either in your own life or in the world around you or both. Look at how much instability there is everywhere. Amid all this, what does it mean to you that the Lord's love for us and plan for our salvation never changes? What hope and assurance can you draw from this important truth?

The Eternal Cross

Perhaps the most significant reason the Bible is so relevant today is that it is God's chosen means of revealing to us the most important truth we can ever know: Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the grave. As long as this great truth is taught to us, what does it matter how old the Bible is or who wrote it or under what circumstances? What matters is that through it God has revealed to us the great truth of salvation through Jesus, a truth that will endure through all eternity, long after this old earth has vanished and a new one created. Thus, as long as the Word of God reveals to us Christ and Him crucified, its relevance for our fallen world will never end.

Look up the following texts. What messages do they have for us? As you read them, ask yourself, "Were it not for the Bible, where else could I have learned the truths taught here?"

Isa. 65:17

Matt. 24:30

1 Cor. 6:3

2 Cor. 5:21

Eph. 2:8

1 Thess. 4:16

1 Tim. 1:15

Titus 1:2

Heb. 2:14

Rev. 20:14

Rev. 21:4

Going over the texts listed above, write out the scenario presented to us here. Look at what has been revealed to us in the Bible. These are the promises we have been given. Why should this mean so much to each of us? Share your response with your class on Sabbath.

Unbroken Promises

“Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses” (*1 Kings 8:56, NIV*).

The Word of God exists forever because His promises never fail. Unlike human promises that are frequently broken, God always keeps His.

Read Romans 4:21. What hope is found in there for us? How have you experienced the reality of this text?

Read John 16:33. What special promise is here for all of us? How have you experienced the reality of that promise in your own life?

Read Matthew 28:20. How have you experienced the reality of this promise?

God also has given us His promises for everlasting life (*John 3:15*), answers to prayer (*Matt. 7:7*), unlimited blessings (*Mark 9:23*), removal of obstacles (*Luke 17:6*), spiritual fullness (*John 6:35*), salvation (*Rom. 1:16*), help with temptation (*Heb. 2:18*), and victory (*James 4:7*). “It is in these promises that Christ communicates to us His grace and power. They are leaves from the tree that is ‘for the healing of the nations.’ Rev. 22:2. Received, assimilated, they are to be the strength of the character, the inspiration and sustenance of the life. Nothing else can have such healing power.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 122.

What promises are you still waiting for to see fulfilled? How can you cling to the Lord in hope and trust in the meantime?

The Bible Endures . . .

Throughout history people have made predictions about the inevitable demise of the Bible, that it would soon fade into obscurity and be seen as nothing but an interesting historical relic of a bygone era, and on and on . . .

How wrong those predictions have been!

Read Matthew 24:35. How, in a sense, did these words of Jesus predict, many centuries ago, that the Bible would be around even to the last days?

Besides all the attempts to destroy the Bible through violence, the enemy of souls has tried to use science, philosophy, and higher criticism to eradicate the influence of the Bible. And yet, today, millions and millions of people believe in the Bible as God's Word and seek to claim its promises and live by its commands. Should this be a surprise? Of course not! After all, as we have been told: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (*Isa. 40:8*).

Meanwhile, according to the United Bible Societies: "At the start of the nineteenth century, Scriptures were available in just 68 languages. Today, Scriptures are available in no less than 2,303 languages, with the complete Bible having been translated into at least 405 languages, and the New Testament into some 1,034. In addition, portions of the Bible have been made available in some 864 languages." (See www.biblesociety.org.)

Read 1 Peter 1:24, 25. Consider that these words were written about nearly two thousand years ago. What message is here for us, today? How should these words help us trust in the Bible, in its promises and in its warnings?

The Bible endures, now and forever. The question is, What has it done in our lives? The Word can be on our shelves, on our desks, and even in our minds, but unless we allow it into our hearts, what good does it do? Look at your life. What does it say about how you relate to the enduring Word?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Scriptures a Safeguard,” pp. 593–602, *The Great Controversy*.

“God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

“The cross of Christ will be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. In Christ glorified they will behold Christ crucified. Never will it be forgotten that He whose power created and upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space, the Beloved of God, the Majesty of heaven, He whom cherub and shining seraph delighted to adore—humbled Himself to uplift fallen man; that He bore the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father’s face, till the woes of a lost world broke His heart and crushed out His life on Calvary’s cross. That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe.”—Page 651.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, go over your responses to Tuesday’s final question. What can you learn from each other?
- ❷ As a church family, what areas do you need to apply with more rigor the principles found in the Bible? How can you as a class help the church realize where it’s falling short and then help it reach a higher standard?
- ❸ Talk about the question of Bible promises that have yet to be fulfilled, or that look as if they can’t be fulfilled, at least as we would like. For example: Someone prayed for a sick friend or spouse or child who didn’t recover. How do we help each other grapple with these situations in light of the Word of God and the promises that we have in it?

“I Don’t Want to Go”

by ELSA VELASCO

Inday is a natural leader among the students in our little school in the mountains of the southern Philippines. She loved the Sabbath and loved worshiping with us. Then one day she seemed sad. I could tell something troubled her. Then she confided her problem to me. “My father does not want me to waste an entire day in church on Sabbath,” she said, hanging her head. “I do not dare disobey, or his fury will come down on me.” On Sabbath morning Inday did not come to help me carry Sabbath School materials to the church. I missed her sweet voice singing along the trails. As my teammate and I walked toward the church carrying our materials, we saw Inday walking quickly down the path behind her mother. She was not dressed for church. We waved at her, but she ducked her head and hurried on.

I asked a neighbor child about Inday, and she said Inday’s father had scolded her that morning. “Inday wanted to come to Sabbath School, but her father said she had to go with her mother to the big town down the mountain.” We all prayed that God would be with Inday that day.

Later that evening Inday came to my hut. She told me that she and her mother had planned to go to the city. They reached the next village where they would catch a ride down the mountain. “But I was praying that God would not send a jeep, so I would not dishonor the Sabbath,” Inday said shyly. Normally several jeeps make the trip every day. But Inday and her mother had waited all day, and no jeep came. Finally they gave up and returned to the village empty-handed.

“Father was angry because the whole day had been wasted,” Inday said. “But I was glad. God answered my prayer, and I did not violate the Sabbath.”

God answered my young friend’s prayer. And He answered our prayers for her, too. Pray that Inday’s parents will learn the importance of following Jesus, just as their daughter has.

Your mission offerings support Mountain View College, an Adventist college, which sends young people such as me into the mountain villages of southern Philippines to teach the people to read and write and give them the good news that Jesus is their Savior.

When she wrote this, Elsa Velasco was a student missionary from Mountain View College teaching in Bugahon Mission School in the southern Philippines.

This quarter's study, *For Better or Worse: Lessons From Old Testament Couples* by Gordon and Rosenita Christo, will explore the relationships of various married couples in the Old Testament just as its title states. The consequences of sin cause more harm than imaginable. This is nowhere more evident than when it occurs in a marriage. God clearly intended marriage to be a great blessing to us. This quarter we will examine the lessons of faith, hope, trust, and love along with what it means to be a follower of Christ in this fallen world.

Lesson 1—Adam and Eve: The Intended Ideal

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Image of God (*Gen. 1:27, Deut. 32:11, Hos. 13:8*)

MONDAY: A Suitable Helper (*Gen. 2:18*)

TUESDAY: Husband and Wife (*1 Cor. 11:11, 12*)

WEDNESDAY: Two Are Better Than One (*Gen. 39:15, 18*)

THURSDAY: The Curse on the Relationship (*Gen. 3:16*)

Memory Text—*Genesis 2:24*

Sabbath Gem: The marriage of Adam and Eve began better than any fairy tale. God provided them with everything they needed. After sin entered into their lives, the fairy tale became far from perfect. It is a powerful reminder of the detrimental cost of sin. A lesson that clearly demonstrates how deviation from God's will can cause us great pain, and how our heavenly Father indeed knows how best to supply all of our needs if we trust completely in Him.

Lesson 2—Abraham and Sarah: Faith Tested and Tried

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Human Solutions for God's Promise (*Gen. 15:6, Rom. 4:3*)

MONDAY: Telling Lies (*Gen. 12:11-13*)

TUESDAY: Laughing at God (*Gen. 17:15-17*)

WEDNESDAY: Trouble Because of Unbelief (*Gen. 16:1-6*)

THURSDAY: Ultimate Demonstration of Faith (*Gen. 22:5*)

Memory Text—*Hebrews 11:11*

Sabbath Gem: By delaying the birth of their promised child, God tested Abraham and Sarah's faith. When the pair deviate from God's plan for their family, serious consequences occur. Even though this couple was faithful, they too were flawed, providing us all hope for our relationships.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired

The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.