

Adventist World November 18 WOP INTRODUCTION

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: Introduction

HEAD: The Importance of God's Word

Word count: 289 [including biography and endnotes]

During this special Week of Prayer, we will consider the most important, influential, and controversial book of all time: the Bible. Without question the Bible is the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book. According to recent estimates, more than 5 billion copies have been printed. The Bible is the most translated book in the world, with various individual books of Scripture translated into 2,932 languages. The entire New Testament is available in 1,333 languages, and the complete Bible in 553 languages.*

Over the centuries the Bible has been a source of guidance, comfort, and courage to millions. It has also been banned, burned, maligned, and misrepresented by its opponents.

As Seventh-day Adventists, what impact does this ancient yet timeless Book have on us? How can we be faithful to God and His Word while living in a postmodern world? You will find these timely readings addressing these questions and more as we explore God's Word.

Questions regarding revelation and the inspiration of the Bible will be addressed in a practical way. Broad principles about how to read the Bible in a faithful and relevant way are presented. Other vital topics are also included: How does the Bible show me Jesus? How does it help me tell the difference between right and wrong? How will it give me hope and courage for these last days?

I encourage you to set aside time each day to “come apart” as a world church family to learn more about the Bible, pray, and listen to God’s voice through the pages of His Word.

May the Lord bless you as we prepare for His soon return. Maranatha!

Ted N. C. Wilson is president of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. Additional articles and commentaries are available from the president’s office on Twitter: @PastorTedWilson, and on Facebook: @PastorTed Wilson.

(Endnotes)

*Statistics from [Wycliffe Global Alliance](#), Oct. 2015, cited in *Biblica*, International Bible Society, www.biblica.com/resources/bible-faqs/how-many-different-languages-has-the-bible-been-translated-into/.

Adventist World November 18 WOP First Sabbath

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: First Sabbath

HEAD: Why Scripture?

SUBHEAD: Building faith on the sure Word of God

Word count: 1,752 [including article, 1622; prayer suggestions 60; bio 11; endnotes 100 words]

The man had been dead and buried for more than 40 years. Then, one gray day the peace was broken in a church graveyard in Lutterworth, England, as a strange group approached a certain plot with shovels in their hands. Gathering around the grave, clergymen ordered the diggers to exhume the remains of John Wycliffe, a much-loved priest and highly esteemed Oxford scholar who had died on December 31, 1384. Wycliffe's exhumed bones were then burned and the ashes scattered in the river Swift.

What had he done to deserve such a fate? Why was the Church of Rome so intent on ridding the earth of his remains? John Wycliffe had dared to speak the truth and provide the Word of God to people in their native tongue.

A century before the birth of Martin Luther, Wycliffe proclaimed, "Trust wholly in Christ; rely altogether on his sufferings; beware of seeking to be justified in any other way than by his righteousness."¹

Power of Scripture

Wycliffe knew the power of Scripture and was determined to provide it in the common language, rather than in Latin only—the language of the learned. While facing fierce opposition, he carried forward this important work, explaining that “Englishmen learn Christ’s law best in English. Moses heard God’s law in his own tongue; so did Christ’s apostles.”²

The Wycliffe Bible had a profound influence as it gave thousands direct access to God’s Word. In the classic *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* John Foxe wrote: “Though they digged up his [Wycliffe’s] body, burnt his bones, and drowned his ashes, yet the Word of God and the truth of his doctrine, with the fruit and success thereof, they could not burn; which yet to this day . . . doth remain.”³

The Tyndale Bible

William Tyndale, a gifted Oxford and Cambridge scholar who was fluent in eight languages, is perhaps the most well-known Bible translator and martyr. Living in sixteenth-century England, Tyndale was familiar with Wycliffe’s Bible. Although it was still banned, manuscript copies were available on the black market, but they were expensive and hard to find.

Printing was becoming more common by the mid-1500s, so Tyndale decided the time was right for an updated English translation that would be accessible to more people. Tyndale translated from original Greek and Hebrew texts, rather than Latin, as Wycliffe had done.

Because of the religious climate in England, Tyndale traveled to Germany, where the Reformation was well under way and Martin Luther had completed a German translation of the Scriptures.

Tyndale worked quickly, and by 1525 copies of his New Testament were smuggled into England. Religious leaders were furious that they could not stop the spread of God's Word. Meanwhile, Tyndale worked on translating the Old Testament while still living on the European continent. He translated and published roughly half of the Old Testament before he was betrayed by a fellow Englishman.

William Tyndale was imprisoned for more than 500 days in a castle near Brussels before he was removed from its dungeon in October 1536, tied to a stake in the castle courtyard, then strangled with a thick chain before his body was burned.

John Hus, a Czech priest, was another such translator and martyr.⁴ Others suffered a similar fate.

What was so precious about Scripture that they, and thousands more, were willing to suffer and die? Is God's Word as important to us today?

The Bible is now widely available. It has the distinction of being the bestseller of all time. It is the most translated book in the world. Various individual books of Scripture have been translated into 2,932 different languages. The entire New Testament is available in 1,333 languages. The complete Bible has been translated into 553 languages.⁵

Most Besieged Book

Despite its widespread availability, the Bible is perhaps one of the least read and most besieged books of this age. While persecution for owning a Bible still occurs in some places, in much of the world, attacks on Scripture come more subtly.

One of the most pernicious attacks comes through the historical-critical method of Bible study. In this method readers decide what is and what is not important, what is trustworthy, and what can be set aside. Readers put themselves above Scripture.

Another subtle attack is the insinuation that one needs to be a scholar or theologian to understand the Bible; otherwise one can obtain only a “surface reading” of the text. This reasoning harkens back to the Roman Catholic Church which claimed that only scholars of the church are capable of interpreting Scripture.

God, on the other hand, promised in His Word, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:5, 6).

Why are the Scriptures so important? Let’s briefly look at three of the many reasons:

The Bible Reveals God.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Through God’s Word we learn about Him. It shows how God deals with the problem of sin, and how He longs to reconcile us to Himself. It reveals His creativity, His majesty, His mercy, His justice, and His plans. “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

Our first Fundamental Belief states: “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the

knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definite revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history."⁶

God's Word Is Truth.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life," said Jesus (John 14:6). In His prayer to His Father recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (verse 17).

When Jesus was confronted by religious leaders who were angry because He claimed to be the Son of God, Jesus went to Scripture for authority. "The Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me," Jesus told them. "But you do not have His word abiding in you. . . . Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (John 5:37-45).

Scripture, Jesus affirms, testifies of Him. They reveal God's divine purposes and plans, and explain how sin entered the world. They reveal God's response to sin and His relationship with human beings, and give insight into the character and nature of God.

The Scriptures Are Instructive

"The Bible is the most comprehensive and the most instructive history which men possess," wrote Ellen White. "It [the Bible] came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth, and a divine hand has preserved its purity through all the ages. Its bright rays shine into the far distant past, where human research seeks vainly to penetrate. In God's Word alone we find an account of creation. Here we behold the power that laid the foundation of the earth, and that

stretched out the heavens. Here, only, can we find a history of our race, unsullied by human prejudice or human pride.”⁷

The Bible, like Jesus, rises above culture, prejudice, and pride. It reveals to us the truth about ourselves, about our world, and beyond. It teaches us how to have a genuine relationship with God and with each other, and gives us powerful promises that we may live a consistent spiritual life.

“A great work can be done by presenting to the people the Bible just as it reads,” wrote Ellen White.⁸ “Admonish them to take the Bible as it is, to implore divine enlightenment, and then, when the light shines, to gladly accept each precious ray, and fearlessly abide the consequences.”⁹

Scripture Our Safeguard

While on earth, the subject of Christ’s teaching and preaching was the Word of God. We are told, “Christ’s servants are to do the same work. In our day, as of old, the vital truths of God’s Word are set aside for human theories and speculations. Many professed ministers of the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired Word They set up their judgment as superior to the Word; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their own authority. Its divine authenticity is destroyed. Thus the seeds of infidelity are sown broadcast; for the people become confused and know not what to believe.

“[Christ] taught that the Word of God was to be understood by all. He pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be

presented as the Word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith.”¹⁰

As we remember the faithful martyrs—those who were willing to sacrifice self rather than Scripture—let us treasure, teach, and preach the mighty, living Word of God until Jesus comes, and be able to say with David, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:11).

Suggestions for Prayer:

1. Ask God to give you, personally, a greater appreciation for, and dedication to, God’s Word.
2. Ask God to bless those who “break the bread of life” to your community of faith with understanding.
3. Pray for those, worldwide, who may not have the privilege of access to Scripture because of scarcity or persecution.

Ted N. C. Wilson is president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Pull-quote: “Despite its widespread availability, the Bible is perhaps one of the least read and most besieged books of this age.”

(Endnotes)

- 1 “John Wycliffe, Pre-Reformation Reformer,” Christian History, *Christianity Today*, www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/moversandshakers/john-wycliffe.html

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Emma Mason, "The murderous history of Bible translations," *BBC History Magazine*, www.historyextra.com/article/feature/murderous-history-bible-translations; "John Huss, Pre-Reformation Reformer," *Christian History, Christianity Today*, www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/martyrs/john-huss.html

5 Statistics from Wycliffe Global Alliance, Oct. 2015, cited in *Biblica*, International Bible Society, www.biblica.com/resources/bible-faqs/how-many-different-languages-has-the-bible-been-translated-into/

6 *28 Fundamental Beliefs*, 2015 edition, Seventh-day Adventist Church, szu.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/28_Beliefs.pdf.

7 Ellen G. White, *Christian Education*, p. 37.

8 White, *Christian Service*, p. 144.

9 White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 38, 39.

Adventist World November 18 WOP SUNDAY

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: Sunday

HEAD: Why Scripture Is the Supreme Authority

SUBHEAD: Inspired counsel as relevant today as when it was written

By Alejandro Medina Villareal Word count: 1,198 [incl. article: 1117, bio: 23, questions: 58]

In 606 B.C. Israel was about to face one of the worst crises in its history. Within a few years, in 586 B.C., the kingdom of Judah would be destroyed. King Jehoiakim (reigned 609-598 B.C.) had submitted to the dominion of Egypt, paying high tributes (2 Kings 23:35). The next year (605 B.C.), in the battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar II defeated Pharaoh Necho II and the Egyptian army, changing the political landscape of the region. Jehoiakim was now forced to switch his allegiance and covenant loyalty from Egypt to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1).

Sadly, the young Jehoiakim turned out to be a pathetic leader at a crucial moment for God's people. He thought only about amassing wealth that led to corruption, injustice, and other abuses (Jer. 22).

A Message From Heaven

Around 605 B.C., the Lord sent King Jehoiakim an important message through the Prophet Jeremiah: "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on

them, they will each turn from their wicked ways; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin" (Jer. 36:2, 3, NIV).

Jeremiah obeyed and dictated to Baruch the words the Lord inspired. Baruch read the scroll before the people (verses 9, 10).

When the people heard the message, they were alarmed and said, "We must report all these words to the king" (verse 16, NIV). They did so, but not before asking Baruch and Jeremiah to go hide.

A King With a Postmodern Attitude

The King of Judah responded with particular boldness. Jeremiah relays, "It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire" (verses 22, 23, NIV). Jehoiakim reveals a rather Postmodern attitude:

He was not interested in the Word of God.

He thought that its content was completely irrelevant.

He believed that God's Word had no authority.

He thought he could live without divine counsel.

He went beyond indifference and had no problem destroying Scripture.

He didn't understand that he was rejecting his last opportunity to avoid the crisis.

Throughout history, Satan has instigated various actions against the Bible and its authority:

- 1. In the premodern Age, destruction and persecution.**

2. **In the modern age**, ideological attacks.

3. **In the postmodern age**, an indifferent and disdainful attitude.

The Present-Day Challenge Regarding the Bible

Today we also live in a time of crises: existential, economic, environmental. In our families we face crises related to food, health, and security. Where can we search for answers to these issues? The Bible says: “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jer. 33:3, NIV). Yes, the Word of God has effective solutions for the challenges of daily life.

But what does postmodern society do? It shows indifference to the Scriptures, and rejects them because it feels as though the Bible does not have any authority; there are even attempts to literally destroy copies of the Bible.

Are these responses helpful? No, because people still have real spiritual needs. In the secular world people search for spirituality from false sources, but in the church we experience another consequence: biblical illiteracy.

What are the results of biblical illiteracy? The rise of biblical mysticism and the increase of spiritual legends; the search for a spectacular and oversentimental worship experience; the appearance of Christian “superstars,” whose declarations and interpretations are followed by their admirers; and the building of a church that is vulnerable to all kinds of deceptions and absurdities preached in the name of God.

Countering the Rejection of Scripture

The Word of God cannot be destroyed: “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever” (Isa. 40:8, NIV). Although King Jehoiakim destroyed the scroll, God ordered Jeremiah to write a new scroll *adding even more points* (Jer. 36:28-31). Nobody can stop the advance of the gospel. God’s Word does not depend on capricious human hearts (Luke 19:14).

Egypt was the great hope of King Jehoiakim. As a result, in 598 B.C., encouraged by Pharaoh, he rebelled openly against Nebuchadnezzar. The king of Judah convinced his people that if they fought against Babylon the Egyptians would help them. Instead, the rebellion provoked a new invasion by the powerful Chaldean army. The truth is that Egypt had never intended to help Judah; they were just buying time to fulfill their own interests.

God sent King Jehoiakim a message of hope to save his people, but he rejected it because he put his trust in a false hope.

As messengers of the Word of God, we cannot assume that biblical preaching will be welcomed. Today many just want to hear a word approving their iniquities. Ellen White wrote: “Many refuse to heed repeated warnings, preferring rather to listen to false teachers who flatter their vanity and overlook their evil-doing. In the day of trouble such will have no sure refuge, no help from heaven. God’s chosen servants should meet with courage and patience the trials and sufferings that befall them through reproach, neglect, and misrepresentation. They should continue to discharge faithfully the work God has given them to do, ever remembering that the prophets of old and the Savior of mankind and His apostles also endured abuse and persecution for the Word’s sake.”*

Conclusions About Scriptural Authority

1. God is the only one who knows the future. He is the Source of all the information that appears in the Bible (Isa. 46:10; 2 Tim. 3:16).

2. We must not expect people to easily accept biblical messages (John 15:18, 19).

3. Postmodern society tends to reject the Word of God through indifference and disdain, preferring to trust in false concepts and philosophies (Rev. 3:17).

4. Biblical illiteracy promotes an uncertain religious experience based in personal interests (Matt. 7:21-23).

5. God's message will remain despite people's rejection (and sometimes destruction) of Scripture (Matt. 24:35).

6. The Bible holds supreme authority. We must, therefore, pay attention to its message (Ps. 119:160).

**Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), p. 437.*

Alejandro Medina Villarreal is a local church pastor in Villahermosa, Mexico.

Suggestions for Prayer:

Pray that the Lord will help us understand how we can respect and obey His Word.

Pray for the Lord to help His church remain faithful to His Word as we share His end-time message.

Pray for those in your family and friendship circle who have yet to understand and accept the authority of Scripture.

Adventist World November 18 WOP MONDAY

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: Monday

HEAD: How to Read Scripture

SUBHEAD: "Did not our hearts burn within us . . . while he opened to us the Scriptures?"¹

by Félix H. Cortez

Word count: 1176 [incl. article: 1027; biography: 33, Prayer Suggestions: 80 and endnotes: 36]

One of the things in the Bible I find most astonishing is that the disciples were completely discouraged by Jesus' death on the cross. If you think about it, it is very startling.

During His ministry Jesus taught the disciples several times in plain and explicit language that He was going to be killed, but also that He would rise from the dead.² The cross, however, caught the disciples by surprise, and when Jesus arose they failed to believe! How could this have happened?

When I think about it, the disciples' failure disturbs me, because I sense that it could also happen to me. The good news I have, however, is that it doesn't have to be this way. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained how we should read the Bible.

Place Your Faith in the Bible

Jesus explained that the reason His disciples failed to understand was that they failed to "believe" (Luke 24:25). Faith in the Word of God is the first step toward understanding (Heb. 11:3).

Some readers place their trust in the church or church leaders. They are happy to let them do the thinking and tell them what the Bible means. Some do it for convenience, but others think that the Bible has a kind of “spiritual” or “secret” meaning that only a select few can understand. This is the basis for allegory.

For example, Bernard of Clairvaux, a French abbot in the twelfth century, wrote a sermon on the “teeth” of the bride in Song of Solomon 4:2. He argued that the teeth represented the monks of the higher and lower orders in a monastery. His sermon is fascinating, but it doesn’t have anything to do with the original meaning of Song of Songs 4:2.

A similar phenomenon happens today when preachers interpret Scripture in ways different from the original meaning of the passage. Allegory tells us more about the ability of the interpreters and the meaning they want to convey than about the meaning of the passage. It places our trust in human beings and exalts them.

But the Bible says that God gave His Word to everyone, and that all can understand it, even children (Matt. 11:25, 26; John 7:17; 2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Other readers place their trust in human reason. God gave us the ability to reason. He wants us to use it in our relationship with Him (e.g., Isa. 1:18). For some readers, however, reason neutralizes the power of God’s Word. When a biblical assertion does not meet human logic, they push it aside considering it an error that somehow crept into the Bible. But God is greater than our ability to understand Him. We need to trust Him anyway (Matt. 22:29-32; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25).

Some readers trust in themselves. They take the words but forget the context and the original intent of that passage, setting themselves up unwittingly as the determinant factor of interpretation.

For example, what does 1 Peter 2:21 mean when it says that Jesus left us an “example” so that we might “follow in his steps”(NIV)? If we ignore the context, this passage could mean that we should wear the same kind of clothes Jesus wore, be single as He was, and similar things the interpreter may want it to say.

The context of the passage is clear, however. God meant that we should not “commit sin,” “revile,” or “threaten” when we are mistreated. When we disregard the context of Scripture, we set up ourselves as the determinant factor of interpretation.

Others have given up faith altogether. Frustrated by the diversity of interpretations, some have come to believe that no one has the truth. But Scripture says that God has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us “into all truth” (John 16:13).

God desires that we place our faith in Him, not the church, its leaders, human reason, even ourselves, because we are all fallible.

Read All the Scriptures

Another reason that Jesus’ death on the cross caught the disciples by surprise is that they had not read “all” the Scriptures. They had focused, instead, on sections of the Bible that they liked. The disciples loved the title Son of man, because it identified Jesus with the heavenly figure of Daniel 7:13, 14 who would receive dominion and a kingdom that would never be destroyed.

But Scripture also said that the Messiah would die for the sins of the people (Isa. 53) and be cut off (Dan. 9:26). The disciples did not “understand” these passages, or Jesus’ own warnings, because it went against what the disciples had always believed and against all their own desires. They did not have “ears to hear.”

In contrast, Jesus explained to the disciples, “beginning at Moses and *all the Prophets*, . . . [and] in *all the Scriptures* the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:26). We need to do the same. To read “all the Scriptures” means asking God to give us “ears to hear” all the Scriptures, even those passages we would prefer not to be true or that we don’t like.

Practice What Is Learned

Obedience is the last step in understanding Scripture. Jesus said that those who are willing to do God’s will will know the truth (John 7:17). The same happened with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. When they urged Jesus to stay at their home, suggesting that they had accepted His message and wanted more, “their eyes were opened” and they recognized Him (Luke 24:31).

The opposite is also true. Those who do not “love . . . the truth” will be deceived at the end of time (2 Thess. 2:9-12; cf. 2 Tim. 4:3, 4).

Understanding is not a place at which one arrives, but a journey on which one embarks. Intimacy with God is the result of a life of risks taken to follow His counsel, and the certainty it produces that His Word is true and His promises are sure. Once disciples have experienced this, they will not want to remain silent. Just like the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

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Suggestions for prayer:

1. Pray that the Lord will give us “ears to hear,” and the will to apply what we learn in Scripture.
2. Pray that, as a community of faith, we will place our faith explicitly in God’s Word.
3. As Adventists, we feel a special mission to help others learn about the three angels’ messages. Pray that we may apply the principle of considering “all the Scriptures” to our understanding and teaching of God’s Word. Luke 24:32, ESV. From The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

(Endnotes)

2 First prediction: Mark 8:31 and parallels. Second prediction: Mark 9:31 and parallels. The third was in the last trip to Jerusalem: Mark 10:32-34 and parallels. See also John 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:4, 21, 32; 17:1.

Adventist World November 18 WOP TUESDAY

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: Tuesday

HEAD: The Difference Scripture Makes

SUBHEAD: How can we know God, unless we know His story in the Bible?

By Karen Holford

Word count: 1187 [incl. article: 1064; biography: 24, Prayer Suggestions: 68 and endnotes: 31]

My husband is looking for a home for our young family. We have small children and the new town is far away. So Bernie is searching alone. He tries to look at houses through my eyes. He explores each room carefully, imagining our life together. Is the kitchen big enough? Is the yard safe for young children? Will everyone be happy here?

After 14 years of marriage and seven different homes, Bernie knows exactly what I like. He knows what I will appreciate about each home, what will annoy me, and what we will be able to change.

Eventually Bernie finds the home where our family will live, love, laugh, cry, and learn for the next 11 years. It's an exciting moment when he takes me on a guided tour through our new home. I can see that he has looked at everything through my eyes. It needs gallons of paint and a good scrub. But it's perfect. His careful choice was based on everything he had learned from living with me, listening to me, and studying me closely every day of our life together.

Facing Complexity

Choosing a new home is relatively easy. Life, however, is filled with many decisions that are far more challenging. “My wife has been offered a three-year contract to work in another country. She will be able to come home only twice a year. But it will pay for our children’s education. Is it a good idea?” “Should we become pioneer missionaries?” “I’m in love with an amazing man! How will I know if God wants us to get married?” “My husband beats me and our children. How can I keep us safe?”

How can we make the “best” decisions when we are enmeshed in a web of conflicting information, beliefs, and ideas? And the “best” decisions from a human perspective are not always the best decisions from God’s perspective.

Invitation to intimacy

The Bible does not give clear, step-by-step instructions for every challenge in our lives. It would be impossible to write a manual for every situation, from the beginning of time until now. People, cultures, and dilemmas change as the world changes.

The Bible is far richer and more useful than a do-it-yourself manual for life. It is an invitation from God to search for Him and find *Him* in every story and every situation. The Bible is filled with detailed pictures of His loving character. These snapshots are like separate frames of a brain scan. Only when we put all the images together can we build a virtual model of the brain and start to understand it as a whole.

The Bible helps us discover the many dimensions of God’s loving character and understand how central He wants to be in our lives, and how to love Him and each other.

We asked our children to help us create a list of adjectives describing God's character. "Almighty!" "Accepting!" "Brave!" "Bountiful!" "Creative!" "Caring!" We scribbled down the almost 200 words as fast as they could call them out. The atmosphere exploded into joy. We knew that God was incredible. While our human vocabulary was barely adequate to describe His wonder, glory, and love, we suddenly had a much richer picture of our breathtaking God.

Face to Face

"The whole Bible is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ," wrote Ellen White. "Received, believed, obeyed, it is the great instrumentality in the transformation of character. It is the grand stimulus, the constraining force, that quickens the physical, mental, and spiritual powers and directs the life into right channels."*

By reading the Bible, and by focusing on the character of God perfectly expressed through the life of Jesus, we come face to face with the Source of all the love in the universe, and we become changed into His likeness. The more closely we become acquainted with Him, the more closely we can listen to His guidance in our lives.

Through God's Loving Eyes

The more intimately we know God, the more deeply we experience how much He loves us and everyone else. When we view our messy lives from God's loving and patient perspective we are more likely to make wise decisions.

When we face complex situations and we have no idea what to do, we can try listing the names of everyone involved. Then imagine that we are looking at each person, including ourselves, through God's eyes, and ask:

What are this person's spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical needs?

What is the best way to show this person God's love?

Which aspects of His character does God want me to develop in this situation?

How will my responses inspire others to come closer to God?

We can use prayerful reflection to guide us through the complexity of the situation. Remember, even if we don't make the perfect decision, God still loves us and wants the best for us. He will continue to work His loving purpose through our imperfect choices, just as He did with Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; Joseph and his brothers; David and Bathsheba.

The Greatest of These Is Love

Of all the magnificent characteristics of God, love is the greatest. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. . . .Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:7-11).

The most important reason for becoming more closely acquainted with God is that we can experience His kind, patient, forgiving, comforting, accepting, generous love, and fall in love with Him. Once we experience this amazing love for ourselves, we are much better equipped to share His love with the world, and to help others fall in love with Him too.

When life is unbearably painful and our hearts break, our greatest comfort comes from our experience of God's loving character. We discover that He cares deeply about our tragedies and struggles (Ps. 34:18); He notices every tear we shed (Ps. 56:8); and He understands our vulnerabilities (Ps. 103:13-18). He longs for the day we can live with Him in heaven and He will wipe away all our tears (Rev. 21:1-4).

Karen Holford is qualified in occupational therapy, family therapy, and systemic psychotherapy. She is family ministries director for the Trans-European Division.

Suggestions for Prayer:

1. Pray for God to help you see how He is lovingly guiding you to answers in His Word to your real-life questions.
2. Ask God to help you develop into His likeness as you focus on His love in the Word.
3. As you study His Word, pray that God will reveal His love to you, and shine His love through you into the lives of others.

(Endnotes)

* Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character and Personality*, (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1977), vol. 1, pp. 93, 94.

Adventist World November 18 WOP WEDNESDAY

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: Wednesday

HEAD: The Scriptures Reveal Jesus

SUBHEAD: Christ is revealed in both Old and New Testaments

By David Thomas

Word count: 1734 [incl. article: 1661; biography: 17, Prayer Suggestions: 56 and endnotes: 25]

How does the Bible show us Jesus? It turns out the answer to this question is quite expansive and interesting. It is also encouraging and potentially life-changing.

A most obvious place to catch a glimpse of Jesus in the Bible is in the Gospels—in the stories told about Him. Anyone who has read the Gospels knows that there are many stories about the things Jesus did and said. We look at the things Jesus did, and by observing them, we learn about Him. We can also learn from what He said. By observing both of these elements, we can learn how we should act. Let's see in what ways the Bible tells us about Jesus:

His Story

First, we can read the narratives about Jesus. The narrative of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, for example, is probably one of the better-known stories about Jesus. It is found in John 8. When we read it carefully, we see that the whole scenario was clearly set up to trap Jesus.

The scene portrayed is a disturbing one: the hard faces of the accusers, the total fear and embarrassment of the woman, the curiosity of bystanders, and Jesus in the middle of it all.

The most telling thing in this story is the reaction of Jesus to the woman that comes at the very end of the story. He did not condemn her, scold her, point out her sins, or delight in pointing out her failures. He did not dismiss her as no longer eligible for inclusion in the life of the community. Rather, he was kind to her. He acted as redemptively as possible. He had in mind the best course of action toward restoring the woman to the more noble state God attributed to humans at the very beginning.

Ellen White's commentary in *The Desire of Ages* on the effect of Jesus' kindness is heartening: "Her heart was melted, and she cast herself at the feet of Jesus, sobbing out her grateful love, and with bitter tears confessing her sins. This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to the service of God."¹

In this story, we learn not only how Jesus behaved in the face of wrong, but also how He worked things around so as to be as redemptive as possible. We learn that kindness often opens the way for transformation. We learn also of Jesus' power to transform lives; that He is always looking for opportunities and ways to do so.

His Words

Second, we can take a close look at the sayings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. Here we look at what might be called the short, pithy sayings of Jesus rather than the larger lessons He taught. One example of this category: "The good person out of the good treasure of his

heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45, ESV).²

Here is a foundational truth about life: what we put into our innermost being—the heart—ends up being manifested in public. If we school ourselves in the ways of goodness and righteousness, that’s what comes out of us. If we give ourselves to evil and wrongdoing, that’s what our lives will produce. It almost goes without saying that those who desire to be in the kingdom will be very careful about the things they give their time and attention to, for those things end up being transformative.

His Identity

Third, we can learn about Jesus is by reflecting on what He said about Himself. These statements are significant, for through them we learn about Jesus’ self-perception. There are quite a few of these personal statements, particularly in the Gospel of John.

In John 5:17, 18, Jesus says, ““My Father is still working, and I am working too.” (CEB).³ For this reason the Jewish leaders wanted even more to kill him—not only because he was doing away with the Sabbath but also because he called God his own Father, thereby making himself equal with God” (verse 18, CEB). Here is a very clear statement that Jesus made about Himself. By reading it, we learn directly from Jesus who He was.

Jesus tells us that He is not an ordinary human being like the rest of us. Rather, He has direct links to eternity, to God, whom He called His Father. That Jesus meant that He was divine is clearly seen by the reaction that came from those who heard Him. They understood very well

what He was saying, and thought His self-description to be so blasphemous, so offensive, that they wanted to kill Him.

This self-revealing statement made by Jesus is one place we find support for the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus, a truth that is essential to His ability to bring us redemption.

His Sermons

Fourth, we can learn a lot about Jesus from His more expansive teachings recorded in the Bible. Some of these teachings were conveyed by way of parables, many of which are well known even to this day. One that is not so well known but has a wonderful lesson is the one found in Luke 18:1-8.

It is about a widow, one of the most powerless members of that society, and a judge who turned out to be unjust. This judge refused to do right by the poor widow, so she, intending to obtain justice, kept going back to the judge, petitioning him to act on her behalf until he, out of a desire to simply to be rid of her, settled the issue in her favor.

This is an interesting parable, not just because of the tension produced by the inequities in social standing and power in the story, but because of the lesson it teaches by way of contrast. The message is that we ought to be, not like the judge, but rather like the widow. And the lesson? It is stated quite clearly right at the beginning of the parable: "To show them that they should always pray and not give up" (verse 1, NIV).

From this parable, we learn that persistence, perseverance are characteristics or qualities valued by Jesus. We are encouraged that if we are careful to develop persistence, it

will serve us well as we navigate the rough-and-tumble lives we have to live on Planet Earth. So often even a little trouble sets us to doubting and whining, wondering if God cares for us anymore. Here we see that prayer and persistence are a great combination for helping us endure. Through this parable and others, we learn of Jesus.

We could, of course, look at any number of Jesus other parables with good effect, but we continue searching out an answer to our initial question, “How does the Bible show us Jesus?”

The Testimony of Others

Fifth, we can also learn about Jesus by looking into the comments made by those who were with Jesus, and who, in consequence, developed opinions about Him. This evidence is significant because it comes from those who were present and saw Jesus in real life.

One of the most profound and engaging comments in this category is the one made by John the Beloved Disciple in John 1:1-3. To a lot of people, this formulation of words is challenging because the language tends to sound a little funny. But it reveals an enormous truth: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (verse 1).

John, having been with Jesus, seeing Him at work, having listened to His teachings, observing all this in light of established Scripture, came to the remarkable conclusion that Jesus was God, something that flies in the face of anything that we would consider normal. The evidences were so profound that John came unavoidably to this conclusion.

From this episode we learn a lot about Jesus. He was not just another human being. He was, to use His own words, the Son of God. That was clearly understood by those who associated with Him.

The ways mentioned thus far in our attempt to understand how Jesus is revealed in the Bible are quite plain and not so difficult to trace. They teach us about Jesus in rather obvious and clear ways.

His Prophecies

Finally, we can go to another place in Scripture where we can learn of Jesus that is a bit more complicated, but one that can give us lots of added insight. It emerges from the discussion of the concept of a Deliverer, or Messiah.

Christians claim that in the person of Jesus we have the fulfillment of the many and various promises—particularly in the Old Testament—about a coming Messiah. When we link Jesus to these promises, we have an abundance of information that is truly engaging: information that goes all the way back to the book of Genesis where that first promise was made to Adam and Eve after they sinned, a promise made obtusely to them via the curse that was placed on the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15, ESV).

Here in its most embryonic form, is an inkling of the first promise of many about deliverance, through Jesus, from the curse that came with sin.

In various ways the Bible tells us about Jesus. The Bible is a grand book with many strains of thought, but one central theme. God has acted decisively in history in the person of Jesus Christ, through whom we have redemption. Let us be among those who persistently believe!

David Thomas, D.Min, is dean of the School of Theology at Walla Walla University, College Place, Washington, United States.

Payer Suggestions:

1. Pray for persistence in reading about Jesus in His Word, so that we may know our Savior.
2. Pray for a desire to study the Bible with the intentionality that brings a better knowledge of Jesus.
3. Pray for an ensuing love of Jesus that will compel us to tell others about Him.

(Endnotes)

1 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), p. 462.

2 Scripture quotations marked ESV are from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

3 Scripture quotations credited to CEB are from the Common English Bible, copyright 2011. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Adventist World November 18 WOP THURSDAY

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: Thursday

HEAD: Inspiring Hope in a Hopeless World

SUBHEAD: The sufferings of this world are nothing compared with its future glory.

By Keldie Paroschi

Word count: 1188 [incl. article: 1083; biography: 34, Prayer Suggestions: 50 and endnotes: 21]

Knowing that death was near, Moses stood on top of Mount Nebo, overlooking the Promised Land. He could see the lush plains and vineyards, exactly as God had promised. Moses had seen Israel's sufferings in Egypt, their harsh treatment, and he had chosen to listen to God's call to lead them out of slavery. He had relinquished his luxurious life and promising prospects in Egypt, choosing instead "to be mistreated along with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25, NIV). He had served as a lowly shepherd, then patiently endured Israel's complaints for years. Now, he faced death alone, knowing he would not enter the Promised Land and see the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. It almost seemed as if his life of sacrifice and hardship had been in vain. He was deeply distressed.¹

What Moses may have felt at that moment reflected everything that is fundamentally wrong with this world. It seems that no matter how hard we try, people are still ungrateful. We

still look on helplessly as loved ones suffer. Ultimately, we are faced with the unsurpassable enemy, which is death.

Thankfully, the Bible sheds light on the situation of our world and provides us with a glorious hope.

The Wages of Sin

The Bible begins with a beautiful account of God's creative masterpiece. Everything was ingeniously designed by God and harmony reigned. In Eden, suffering and death were unheard-of. But humanity's freedom depended on its loyalty to God: in choosing to disobey God, suffering and death became the lot of humanity (Gen. 2:16, 17; Prov. 16:25; James 1:15). Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, and with them, all creation became marred with sin and corruption (Gen. 3:16-24; Rom. 8:20-22). We, their descendants, have been suffering the consequences ever since (Rom. 5:18).

Scripture affirms that death is not a normal or natural part of life. In fact, death is the opposite of natural. It had no place whatsoever in God's perfect world. God creates and breathes life into existence (Gen. 2:7; Job 33:4; Eze. 37:5), while death reverses and destroys life. Diseases, wars, and famines are the painful consequences of sin, ultimately leading to death. Adam's sin allowed Satan to usurp his place as prince of this world (Job 1:6; Matt. 4:8, 9; 2 Cor. 4:4). Since "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), Satan considered it his right to claim "all who were in the tomb . . . as his captives."² He had successfully provoked Moses to sin against God, costing him entrance into the Promised Land (Num. 20:8-12). But when Satan stepped up to claim Moses' body, Christ intervened (Jude 9).

The Gift of God

Moses' belief in God's promise encouraged him to endure those decades of hardship in the desert. He witnessed countless signs of God's power and might; he knew that God would be faithful to His word. Since the entrance of sin God has promised time and again that He would deliver us from the bondage of sin and death, providing evidence that He had power to fulfill His promise (Deut. 7:9; Heb. 10:23). Isaac was born, despite Abraham and Sarah's old age (Gen. 12:2; 21:2, 3). Israel was led miraculously out of Egypt, crossing the Red Sea on dry ground (Ex. 2:23-25; 14:29). God sustained the people during their 40 years in the desert, feeding them daily with manna (Deut. 8:1-10). Countless times God delivered Israel in battle: through Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, and others.

The greatest evidence, however, that God would indeed fulfill His promise is Jesus. Many passages in the Old Testament, including the first promise of deliverance after Adam and Eve sinned, point forward to the Messiah (Gen. 3:15; Num. 24:17; Deut. 18:15; Isa. 53). Jesus' ministry was a glimpse of God's power over sin and death. His miracles showed Him restoring vigor to people plagued with disease and suffering. The expulsion of demons showed His authority over the forces of evil.

It was at the cross, however, that the full significance of sin and death became evident. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, bore the sins of the whole world. He died alone, crushed with the weight of complete separation from the Father. But Jesus rose on the third day, demonstrating His power over death, clothed with the eternal life God intended for His people.

Jesus' resurrection is the foundation of our faith. Had He not risen from the dead, there would be no reason to believe in a better future (John 11:25, 26; 1 Cor. 15:13-26). But because He defeated death, we can be assured that Christ will return as promised, to restore this world to its original glory. In that day, "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4; ESV; cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-53).³

Moses believed in this promise. He knew that the sufferings of this world are nothing compared to the glorious future God has prepared for us. Because of this, he remained faithful until the very end. And though he was denied entrance into Canaan, Christ claimed him as His child, blessing him with eternal life (Heb. 11:26; cf. Rom. 8:18).

Practicing Hope

In our world, sin, suffering, and death are the norm. Still, we can be assured that God will keep His promise to create all things new, forever eliminating pain and death. While there is no need for despair, we should not simply sit and wait for God to intervene. Although we should live with our eyes set on the future, we still have a responsibility to the present.

That includes acknowledging the suffering of those around us, lending a shoulder to cry on, giving to those in need. It includes being faithful to God's law, trusting that "the fear of the Lord leads to life" (Prov. 19:23; cf. 12:28).

Finally, it means sharing the good news of salvation and our glorious hope to everyone within our reach. Without this message of hope, people's best efforts will still lead them

straight to the tomb. But we can enthusiastically proclaim Christ's victory over death! Through faith in Him, we can live confidently today, knowing that the Promised Land awaits.

Keldie Paroschi, originally from São Paulo, Brazil, completed her bachelor's degree in theology at the Adventist University Centre of São Paulo. She is working on an M.A. in Religion at Andrews University, United States.

Prayer Suggestions:

1. Pray that the hope we have in Jesus will catch fire in our hearts.
2. Ask God to help us share our hope with someone every day.
3. Pray for our missionaries worldwide and our local churches as we minister this hope to others in practical ways.

(Endnotes)

1 See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890), chap. 43.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 478.

Adventist World November 18 WOP FRIDAY

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: Friday

HEAD: Discerning Right From Wrong

SUBHEAD: Students of Scripture know how to make wise decisions.

By Vanderlei Dorneles da Silva

Word count: 1158 [incl. article: 1075; biography: 26, Prayer Suggestions: 57 and endnotes: 0]

When I was a teenager, I read the following graffiti on a wall that left me perplexed:

“Freedom is too little. What I desire still has no name.”

Our world seems to have reached the extremes in terms of relativism. People desire the end of all authority and tradition. Many want to be free to alter the own physical anatomy. Pluralism fosters the most diverse readings of the Scriptures. Postmodern theologies seek to dismantle oppressive social structures, supposedly maintained by the Bible, and promote a wide emancipation. Human opinions prevail to the detriment of the knowledge of divine truth.

How is it possible to know what is good and right in this relativistic age?

The Knowledge of God

Hosea prophesied to the tribes of northern Israel shortly before the fall of this kingdom in 722 B.C. Israel had broken its covenant with God and idolatry had plunged the nation into a deep crisis. The worship of the golden calves (Hosea 8:5, 6; 10:5), made by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12), fomented immorality as had happened at Sinai (Ex. 32:6, 7).

In this crisis, the Lord warns that Samaria “is held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God” and “shall fall by the sword” (Hosea 13:16). Israel’s fall is attributed to the lack of three main virtues: “There is no truth or mercy, or knowledge of God” (Hosea 4:1), the absence of “knowledge” because of the neglect of God’s law (Ps. 119:66) and “the fear of the Lord” (Prov. 1:7, 2:5).

In His mercy the Lord promises restoration. Captivity would be like a “wilderness,” where God would speak to the hearts of His children (Hosea 2:14). Then He would break the enemy’s strength and make His people “lie down safely” again (verse 18). The Messiah would restore Israel because He would be filled with “knowledge” by virtue of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2). By Christ’s manifestation the earth would be filled with the knowledge of God (Isa. 33:6; Hab. 2:14).

The children of Israel were to study and meditate on God’s law, the witness to the covenant with God, in order to have this knowledge. Moses recommended, “These words [the law] shall be in your heart” and “you shall bind them as sign on your hand” (Deut. 6:6, 8). The “meditation” on the law of God was the delight of the psalmist (Ps. 119:97). He had hidden it in his “heart” in order not to sin (verse 11). This “knowledge” depends on meditating on God’s commandments and learning to do good and turning away from evil.

In this sense, biblical religion is an intelligent and instructive experience. The study of, meditation on, and teaching of God’s law is the primary activity by which knowledge of what is good, just, and holy becomes widespread among the people of God and, through them, potentially, the world. God’s people are light as they spread such knowledge among their neighbors.

There is an evident similarity between our time and the context of Hosea. Although religious practices and Bible reading are common today, ethics and biblical values that promote the fear of God are becoming bankrupt. How can we hold the knowledge of God?

Teaching Knowledge

In Israel the knowledge of God was transmitted through worship and the work of the priests, whose lips were to “keep knowledge,” and in whose mouth “people should seek the law” (Mal. 2:7).

Teaching the will of God was a constant activity. In the temple, apart from the rituals, worship had an instructive purpose. David separated the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to “prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals” (1 Chron. 25:1). In the synagogues, serving the Lord was synonymous to studying God’s law.

In the New Testament, the knowledge of God is manifested in the teaching of Christ (Luke 1:77) and the apostles based on Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). John states that “eternal life” consists in “knowing” God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). Paul refers to the knowledge of God as the content of true religion (Col. 1:9). The rejection of this knowledge results in practicing “things which are not fitting” and a life of “unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness” (Rom. 1:28, 29).

On the other hand, the knowledge of God leads to “the unity of the faith” and the “perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

Why wouldn’t we want to have God’s law in our hearts?

The Love of Truth

From an end-time point of view Paul predicts that the Holy Spirit will withdraw from the earth. The reason given is that those who reject the truth are so disoriented that they “believe the lie,” have “pleasure in unrighteousness,” and consider the wicked as divine (2 Thess. 2:7-11; 4; see Rev. 13:3, 4).

Ellen White echoes Paul’s words, saying, “Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive.”¹

Simple Bible preaching and story reading is not enough to address the complexity of current-day relativism and disappearing ethics. The fear of God depends on meditating on God’s law, which was given to guide us in moral and ethical decisions and choices.

As the psalmist did (Ps. 119: 97, 113), God’s people are called to “love” the truth. Those who love the Word of God long to study it in depth, feed on it, and abide by it. In fact, biblical truth is learned and loved when it is obeyed.

Ellen White adds, “The study of the Scriptures is the means divinely ordained to bring men into closer connection with their Creator and to give them a clearer knowledge of His will.”² According to her, “the people of God are directed to the Scriptures as their safeguard against the influence of false teachers and the delusive power of spirits of darkness.”³ In our current context, the counterfeit is so similar to the truth that it is impossible to distinguish between them without scriptural discernment.

To face postmodern relativism, God’s people must maintain a personal experience with the will of God as revealed in His Word. The experiential knowledge of heavenly ethics revealed

through the Scriptures enables us to distinguish between holy and profane, and to disciple others to make the same choices.

Vanderlei Dorneles da Silva has worked as church pastor, editor, and teacher. He is coordinator of graduate programs in theology at the Adventist University Centre of São Paulo, Brazil.

Suggestions for Prayer:

1. Ask God to help us dedicate ourselves to regular Bible study.
2. Pray that, through our study of the Scripture, the Lord will protect us from deception.
3. Ask God to bring into our lives others who are thirsting for truth, so that we can share our knowledge of Him with them.

(Endnotes)

1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911) p. 625.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 593.

Adventist World November 18 WOP SECOND SABBATH

AW11.WOP.18

FLAG: Second Sabbath

HEAD: The Importance of Scripture for the End-times

SUBHEAD: Staying grounded in Scripture is essential for staying Christian.

By Ellen G. White

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isaiah 8:20, KJV. The people of God are directed to the Scriptures as their safeguard against the influence of false teachers and the delusive power of spirits of darkness.

Satan employs every possible device to prevent men from obtaining a knowledge of the Bible; for its plain utterances reveal his deceptions. At every revival of God’s work the prince of evil is aroused to more intense activity; he is now putting forth his utmost efforts for a final struggle against Christ and His followers.

The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony every statement and every miracle must be tested.

Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His Word; they can honor Him only as they have a

right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.

To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God's immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?

Before His crucifixion the Saviour explained to His disciples that He was to be put to death and to rise again from the tomb, and angels were present to impress His words on minds and hearts. But the disciples were looking for temporal deliverance from the Roman yoke, and they could not tolerate the thought that He in whom all their hopes centered should suffer an ignominious death. The words which they needed to remember were banished from their minds; and when the time of trial came, it found them unprepared. The death of Jesus as fully destroyed their hopes as if He had not forewarned them.

So in the prophecies the future is opened before us as plainly as it was opened to the disciples by the words of Christ. The events connected with the close of probation and the work of preparation for the time of trouble are clearly presented. But multitudes have no more understanding of these important truths than if they had never been revealed. Satan watches to catch away every impression that would make them wise unto salvation, and the time of trouble will find them unready.

Strong Doctrine Overlooked

When God sends to men warnings so important that they are represented as proclaimed by holy angels flying in the midst of heaven, He requires every person endowed with reasoning powers to heed the message. The fearful judgments denounced against the worship of the beast and his image (Revelation 14:9-11) should lead all to a diligent study of the prophecies to learn what the mark of the beast is, and how they are to avoid receiving it.

But the masses of the people turn away their ears from hearing the truth and are turned unto fables. The apostle Paul declared, looking down to the last days: "The time will come when they will no endure sound doctrine." 2 Timothy 4:3, KJV. That time has fully come. The multitudes do not want Bible truth, because it interferes with the desires of the sinful, world-loving heart; and Satan supplies the deceptions which they love.

But 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.

Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves. Then, by controlling the minds of these leaders, he can influence the multitudes according to his will.

When Christ came to speak the words of life, the common people heard Him gladly; and many, even of the priests and rulers, believed on Him. But the chief of the priesthood and the leading men of the nation were determined to condemn and repudiate His teachings. Though they were baffled in all their efforts to find accusations against Him, though they could not but feel the influence of the divine power and wisdom attending His words, yet they incased themselves in prejudice; they rejected the clearest evidence of His Messiahship, lest they should be forced to become His disciples. These opponents of Jesus were men whom the people had been taught from infancy to reverence, to whose authority they had been accustomed implicitly to bow. "How is it," they asked, "that our rulers and learned scribes do not believe on Jesus? Would not these pious men receive Him if He were the Christ?" It was the influence of such teachers that led the Jewish nation to reject their Redeemer.

The spirit which actuated those priests and rulers is still manifested by many who make a high profession of piety. They refuse to examine the testimony of the Scriptures concerning the special truths for this time. They point to their own numbers, wealth, and popularity, and look with contempt upon the advocates of truth as few, poor, and unpopular, having a faith that separates them from the world.

Christ foresaw that the undue assumption of authority indulged by the scribes and Pharisees would not cease with the dispersion of the Jews. He had a prophetic view of the work of exalting human authority to rule the conscience, which has been so terrible a curse to the church in all ages. And His fearful denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees, and His warnings to the people not to follow these blind leaders, were placed on record as an admonition to future generations. . . .

Reason for the Word

God has given us His Word that we may become acquainted with its teachings and know for ourselves what He requires of us. When the lawyer came to Jesus with the inquiry, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" the Saviour referred him to the Scriptures, saying: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Ignorance will not excuse young or old, nor release them from the punishment due for the transgression of God's law; because there is in their hands a faithful presentation of that law and of its principles and claims.

It is not enough to have good intentions; it is not enough to do what a man thinks is right or what the minister tells him is right. His soul's salvation is at stake, and he should search the Scriptures for himself. However strong may be his convictions, however confident he may be that the minister knows what is truth, this is not his foundation. He has a chart pointing out every waymark on the heavenward journey, and he ought not to guess at anything. . . .

We are living in the most solemn period of this world's history. The destiny of earth's teeming multitudes is about to be decided. Our own future well-being and also the salvation of other souls depend upon the course which we now pursue. We need to be guided by the Spirit of truth. Every follower of Christ should earnestly inquire: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

We need to humble ourselves before the Lord, with fasting and prayer, and to meditate much upon His Word, especially upon the scenes of the judgment. We should now seek a deep and living experience in the things of God. We have not a moment to lose. Events of vital importance are taking place around us; we are on Satan's enchanted ground. Sleep not,

sentinels of God; the foe is lurking near, ready at any moment, should you become lax and drowsy, to spring upon you and make you his prey.

Many are deceived as to their true condition before God. They congratulate themselves upon the wrong acts which they do not commit, and forget to enumerate the good and noble deeds which God requires of them, but which they have neglected to perform. It is not enough that they are trees in the garden of God. They are to answer His expectation by bearing fruit. He holds them accountable for their failure to accomplish all the good which they could have done, through His grace strengthening them. In the books of heaven they are registered as cumberers of the ground. Yet the case of even this class is not utterly hopeless. . . .

When the testing time shall come, those who have made God's Word their rule of life will be revealed. In summer there is no noticeable difference between evergreens and other trees; but when the blasts of winter come, the evergreens remain unchanged, while other trees are stripped of their foliage.

So the falsehearted professor may not now be distinguished from the real Christian, but the time is just upon us when the difference will be apparent. Let opposition arise, let bigotry and intolerance again bear sway, let persecution be kindled, and the halfhearted and hypocritical will waver and yield the faith; but the true Christian will stand firm as a rock, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, than in days of prosperity.

This article is excerpted from *The Great Controversy*, (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911) pages 593-602. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.

Suggestions for Prayer

1. Pray that as we study God's Word, His Spirit will guide us to people with whom we can share His love.

2. Pray to be so captivated by God's character that worldly distractions will lose their attractiveness.

3. Pray that our study of God's Word will open our eyes to those for whom we can minister.