

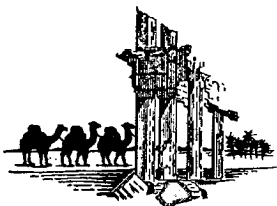
DAYBREAK



SERIES

God Is Not Silent





Afro-Mideast Division

GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

P.O. BOX 7392 · BEIRUT · LEBANON · TELEPHONE: 260258, 264356 · CABLES: ADVENTIST · BEIRUT

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members of the Sabbath School:

Afro-Mideast is the focus of world attention and apprehension. It is where once the garden of Eden blossomed in sinless perfection; where the children of Israel slaved under tyrannical Pharaohs; where the Queen of Sheba founded a dynasty that has lasted until recently when a new generation took over, and where David Livingstone blazed a trail of modern missions through the Eastern part of the then dark continent of Africa. It is where you will invest your generous 13th Sabbath Offering this quarter. We invite you to lighten our burdens and to share with us our hopes and aspirations.

Three worthy projects, out of many, have been carefully selected for their crying needs and deserving merits:

1. Bugema Adventist College in lovely Uganda has been approved by the General Conference Department of Education for upgrading to senior status, provided we can meet certain requirements, one of which is a library that will meet the requirements of a senior college. Bugema will be the only educational institution of this kind in the African section of our Division. The time is long overdue when we should provide a full college education to our wonderful youth of these great territories: they crave it; the work demands it; God expects it. Therefore we appeal to you to assist us.

2. The Middle East College in Lebanon suffers from acute growing pains. Over 30 nationalities are represented in the student body. This institution, which is affiliated with Loma Linda University, is in desperate need of dormitory facilities for the young men. The existing dormitory is so built that we can add another storey to it provided you will help us with the necessary funds. To invest in our youth is to invest in eternal values. In anticipation that you will give heed to our plea we express our gratitude for your help with this much-needed addition.

3. The Africa Herald Publishing House in Kenya is without doubt one of the busiest publishing houses anywhere in the world. Even so it cannot cope with the ever-increasing demand of our zealous literature evangelists, of which we have about 800 alone in two of our East African unions. We can sell everything we can import and produce. Realizing the important role our literature will play in the finishing of the work we feel confident that you, our warmhearted Sabbath School members, will help Manager D C Swan acquire the equipment so desperately needed to increase production; a 2-colour offset press.

Our hearts go out to you in Christian love and with sincere gratitude for all you have done in the past, and for all you are going to do for us this quarter. May God richly bless you!

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'E. W. Pedersen', written over a horizontal line.

E W Pedersen
President

Afro-Mideast Division



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SABBATH SCHOOL MEMO

Use to check off for daily study, reminder for Mission
Spotlight, etc. Jot memos above week-day dates.

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I pledge myself to the prayerful study of part of
the Sabbath School lesson each day.

(Signed) _____

GOD IS NOT SILENT

Introduction

Never have so many known so much and yet understood so little; never has man been so able, and yet so helpless; so sure, and yet so afraid—as today. Why is this the case? Does not science answer all his questions? Apparently not. What about religion? Has not God spoken and answered some of man's basic questions? Unfortunately there are many, even among the best educated, who question that God has spoken or that He even exists. Why is He silent, they ask, if He really exists and is the kind of person Christians claim Him to be?

The lessons this quarter are a declaration of faith, both that God is, and that He has not been, is not, and will not be silent. He has spoken and continues to speak today so that man need not be ignorant on basic issues. Furthermore, God is not discovered by human search, nor is He created by human need; God *is*. He is all that the needs and possibilities of the human race would require Him to be—the infinite, eternal, personal, loving, speaking God. How urgently men and women need to hear and to heed the counsel: “the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20).

In this quarter's lessons, may every student learn more perfectly the blessing to be found in keeping silent before the Lord, and listening to the redeeming yet authoritative words of the God who speaks. In this way faith may be confirmed, salvation assured, and calm restored to troubled and fearful hearts.

On one occasion, after Jesus had used the parable of the unjust judge to illustrate God's willingness to speak and to act in behalf of men in answer to their prayers, He asked the plaintive question: “Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Will faith in the gospel, the saving trust in the God who speaks to man, be much in evidence when Christ returns? The answer to that question would seem to depend directly upon the willingness of each person to believe that there is a God who communicates with man, who has something meaningful to say to him.

This quarter, then, is an opportunity for each Sabbath School member to renew his or her own skills in listening to the voice of God, permitting Him to show and to tell, through each one, that God is there and that He is not silent.*

*The theme of a book by Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972).

He Reveals Himself



“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me” (Isa. 46:9).

The prophet Isaiah was frequently the Lord’s mouthpiece for challenging the peoples of the nations round about Israel concerning their allegiance to their gods. The true God repeatedly demands that a comparison be made between Him and all other gods. (See verse 5.)

Not only is God utterly independent of man, but He claims distinction from the gods of wood, gold, and silver in that He is able to speak, to make known His will, to tell what has happened in days past and what is to happen in days to come. (See verses 9 and 10.)

This distinctiveness of the God of Israel from the so-called gods of the nations round about forms the main topic of our lessons this quarter, and for this reason this week we study about the God who reveals Himself. God is not a “god” who has been discovered as a result of man’s long and deep searchings. On the contrary, He is the God who has been there from the beginning and before all beginnings. He is of such a nature—for God is love—as to share Himself with others and to reveal Himself to them.

While philosophers, ancient and modern, have asked themselves the great basic questions—Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is right? How do I know what I know?—they have provided no answers more certain than the echo of their own questions. Unless there is a God out there—a personal, infinite, loving, communicating God—man has only his own philosophical conjectures and imaginings for his answers. Unlike the silent and helpless gods of ancient Israel’s neighbors, gods made from wood, stone, or precious metals, the “god” who is truly God and to whom no other god can be likened, is and must be the self-revealing God.

LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. His Unsearchable Greatness (Ps. 145:3)**
- 2. His Immeasurable Condescension (Isa. 57:15)**
- 3. His Inimitable Attributes (Ex. 34:6)**
- 4. His Supreme Transcendence (1 Chron. 16:23-27)**
- 5. His Beneficent Activity (Ex. 34:10)**
- 6. His Life-giving Power (John 17:3)**

Part 1
HIS
UNSEARCHABLE
GREATNESS

What does the psalmist say is a characteristic of God's greatness?

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable" (Ps. 145:3).

The unsearchableness of God should be a constant reminder to man that his comprehension of God will always be limited, and that his attempts to prove the existence of God are likewise beyond his capacity. (See Job 11:7, 8.)

What request made by Philip reflects man's desire to see and know the unsearchable God? How did Jesus respond to Philip's request? John 14:8, 9.

If man could accept the words of Jesus to Philip at their face value, the great theological quest of the ages would be resolved. This statement to Philip is perhaps the most profound revelation from God to man about God that was ever made. Surely Christ's life on earth was the crowning revelation to man of that which was and is most essential for him to know about God. It may be said that while Jesus veiled the divine glory from man, He revealed the divine character perfectly. It may also be said that the divine character is the key to the divine glory. (Compare Ps. 145:5-9.)

THINK IT THROUGH

Why is it a good thing that God's greatness is unsearchable? What does this indicate regarding the limitations of human reason?

"It is the duty and privilege of all to use reason as far as man's finite faculties can go; but there is a boundary where man's resources must cease. There are many things that can never be reasoned out by the strongest intellect or discerned by the most penetrating mind. Philosophy cannot determine the ways and works of God; the human mind cannot measure infinity.

"Jehovah is the fountain of all wisdom, of all truth, of all knowledge. There are high attainments that man can reach in this life through the wisdom that God imparts; but there is an infinity beyond that will be the study and the joy of the saints throughout eternal ages. Man can now only linger upon the borders of that vast expanse, and let imagination take its flight. Finite man cannot fathom the deep things of God; for spiritual things are spiritually discerned. The human mind cannot comprehend the wisdom and power of God."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1079.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 217, 218.

Part 2 **Although God is so high and exalted, with whom does He**
HIS **say He is willing to dwell?**

**IMMEASURABLE
CONDESCENSION**

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15).

God's condescension is immeasurable when we consider the position He occupies as the Creator and Ruler of the universe and contrast it with the humblest of men and their position as sinners. God says He is right there where the need is known and felt to bring about a change and a revival. It does not matter how low man has fallen; there is no depth that God's love cannot reach. (See Ps. 136:23-26.)

How did Mary express her concept of God's great condescension? Luke 1:46-48.

Mary is known now as a woman of great consecration and devotion. But when the angel Gabriel came to her, she was a humble maiden unknown except within her immediate circle.

We can recognize something of God's great condescension when we remember that Jesus, who was the express image of the Father, was meek and lowly (Matt. 11:29). Furthermore, Jesus, in order to bring us full and free salvation, "emptied himself" (Phil. 2:7, RSV), or "made himself of no reputation" (Phil. 2:7, KJV).

In view of God's great condescension, how should you and I relate to one another and to God? Rom. 12:16.

THINK IT THROUGH **To what extent can God be described? How far does the Bible reflect the truth of God?**

"The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 22.

FURTHER STUDY *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

Part 3
HIS
INIMITABLE
ATTRIBUTES

When God revealed Himself to Moses, what attributes did He emphasize?

“And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Ex. 34:6).

The relationship between God and His servant Moses was so close that Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory. While the Lord indicated to Moses that he could not look upon His face, he was given all the revelation that a human being could endure. The Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed Himself “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”

How has God demonstrated His mercy, kindness, and faithfulness? Hosea 11:9; 2:19, 20; Eph. 2:4-8. Can you give an example from your own experience?

It is significant to note that God is eternal (Gen. 21:33), immutable (Num. 23:19), omniscient (Ps. 139:4), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-12), etc. Yet it is not these characteristics that He presents to man, although they are characteristics that properly belong to God. The emphasis is on a personal relationship to man in which God is gracious, loving, faithful, etc. God’s power and deity are the guarantee that He can do what He sets out to do. His love and faithfulness are the assurance that we need not despair in our sins.

THINK IT THROUGH **In view of God’s goodness to us, how should we respond to Him? Am I a good reflector of God’s image in relation to my fellowmen?**

“Even though a church may be composed of poor and uneducated and unknown persons, yet if they are believing, praying members, their influence will be felt for time and for eternity. If they go forth in simple faith, replying upon the promises of the Word of God, they may accomplish great good. If they let their light shine, Christ is glorified in them, and the interests of His kingdom are advanced. If they have a sense of their individual accountability to God, they will seek for opportunities to work, and will shine as lights in the world. They will be examples of sincerity and of zealous fervor in working out God’s plan for the salvation of souls.”—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 265.

FURTHER STUDY

Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 236.

Part 4
HIS SUPREME
TRANSCENDENCE

How does the one true God compare with all other gods? What makes Him what He is?

"Sing unto the Lord, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation. Declare his glory among the heathen; his marvellous works among all nations. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are idols: but the Lord made the heavens" (1 Chron. 16:23-27).

Since God is the creator of heaven and earth, we must always approach Him with reverence and awe. In fact we should humbly bow before Him and worship Him. This is what Moses did. (See Ex. 34:8.) Others who were similarly affected were Daniel (Dan. 10:1-9) and John the revelator (Rev. 22:8, 9).

What was the response of the prophet Isaiah to the revelation of the glory of God in the temple? Isa. 6:1-5.

It is interesting to note that Isaiah immediately became conscious of his sin when he was in the presence of the holy God. Those who receive the clearest and fullest revelation of the character and glory of God are the most conscious of the great gulf between God and man, conscious of the degree to which the character and nature of God transcends the character and nature of man.

It is important to note that there is a modern tendency to blur the distinctions between the natural and the supernatural, between man and God, between nature and God, between reason and revelation, between nature and grace, and all that distinguishes the life and character of sinful man from the life and character of God. Christians must always keep these distinctions sharp. The God who reveals Himself is the unsearchable God, the condescending God, the God who is compassionate and gracious, and also the transcendent God.

THINK IT THROUGH **How will the transcendence of God affect the redeemed through eternity?**

"Since God is infinite, and in Him are all the treasures of wisdom, we may to all eternity be ever searching, ever learning, yet never exhaust the riches of His wisdom, His goodness, or His power."—*Education*, p. 172.

FURTHER STUDY *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 301, 317.

Part 5 **How does God relate to His people? What does He do for**
HIS **them?**
BENEFACT **"The Lord said, Here and now I make a covenant. In full**
ACTIVITY **view of all your people I will do such miracles as have never**
 been performed in all the world or in any nation. All the sur-
 rounding peoples shall see the work of the Lord, for fearful
 is that which I will do for you" (Ex. 34:10, NEB).

The one true God is known by His mighty acts and His messages of truth, righteousness, and love. In fact, His messages are the unfolding of the meaning of His acts.

Among God's mighty and beneficent acts are the covenants He has made with men. First God gave man dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:28). When man sinned God gave the assurance that there would be enmity between Satan and the seed of the woman and that the seed of the woman would triumph (Gen. 3:15). After the Flood God promised seedtime and harvest and regular cycles of nature (Gen. 8:22). Abraham received a covenant that was repeated to his descendants (Gen. 12:1-4). At Sinai God made a covenant with His people, a covenant which they broke. Then through Jeremiah God promised another covenant, a new and better one (Jer. 31:31-34). Thus God has always been engaged in providing for man and helping him out of his difficulties.

What do you think is the most significant activity of God on behalf of man? What kind of activity should you and I be engaged in?

"God calls upon us to awake, for the end is near. Every passing hour is one of activity in the heavenly courts to make ready a people upon the earth to act a part in the great scenes that are soon to open upon us. . . . The words we utter today in the ears of the people, the works we are doing, the spirit of the message we are bearing, will be a savor of life unto life or of death unto death."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 716.

THINK IT THROUGH **How far is God in control of events taking place in the world today? What evidence do you see of God's activity?**

In the kingdom "there will be open to the student, history of infinite scope and of wealth inexpressible. Here, from the vantage ground of God's word, the student is afforded a view of the vast field of history and may gain some knowledge of the principles that govern the course of human events. But his vision is still clouded, and his knowledge incomplete. Not until he stands in the light of eternity will he see all things clearly."—*Education*, p. 304.

FURTHER STUDY *Education*, pp. 39-41.

Part 6
HIS
LIFE-GIVING
POWER

If we really know God and Jesus Christ, what is a natural consequence?

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

It cannot be purely theoretical knowledge which Jesus included in this precious promise. Such a conclusion could be drawn from the experience of Judas Iscariot who had the same opportunities to know Jesus Christ as did the rest of the apostles. But what to them was life eternal was to him death eternal. Therefore it must be a knowing of God that involves a saving relationship to Him and to His Son Jesus Christ whom He has sent. It must involve a relationship of love whereby the love that was in Christ becomes the love that is in the believer, the knower of the one true God.

How much does Jesus say we can do for ourselves in the matter of doing good? By contrast, what can our lives produce if we abide in Christ? John 15:5.

A process of sanctification and unification takes place in the lives of those who know God and Jesus Christ. And this sanctification and unification is wrapped up with truth. Truth applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit's presence and power is the process or means through which sanctification is to take place and the fruitage of this sanctification will be the unification of those sanctified. (See John 17:17-21.) How grateful we should be that Jesus' intercessory prayer was not limited to His immediate disciples but included "them also which shall believe on me through their word" (verse 20).

THINK IT THROUGH How does a knowledge of God effect a change in my life?

"In a knowledge of God all true knowledge and real development have their source. Wherever we turn, in the physical, the mental, or the spiritual realm; in whatever we behold, apart from the blight of sin, this knowledge is revealed. Whatever line of investigation we pursue, with a sincere purpose to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen, mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all. The mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite. The effect of such communion on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate."—*Education*, p. 14.

FURTHER STUDY *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Hidden Treasure," pp. 113, 114.

Channels of His Revelation

**“For I neither received it of man,
neither was I taught it, but by
the revelation of Jesus Christ”
(Gal. 1:12).**



“For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12).

A man receives an understanding of God and His universe in many ways. He may be taught it as a child; he may have learned it by association with others who had the desired information; he may have reached it by careful study and research; or—and this is more unusual—he may have had a direct revelation from God.

Paul claims that he did not receive his information regarding the gospel by any natural means; he received it by revelation. This fact gives his teaching an authority that far exceeds the authority of any merely human source.

In our lesson this week we look at the various means that God has used to reveal Himself to man. One thing should be made perfectly clear: man can never know anything about God unless God is willing to reveal Himself. This is obviously so from the very nature of things, because God antedates everything. How can anyone know of the process of creation unless the Creator reveals how and what He did? Furthermore, we cannot know anything of the future, unless the God who is eternal tells us of His plans and purposes.

Thus without a God who speaks, man is limited as to what he can know of the past. He is in the dark regarding the future and he is confused regarding the meaning of the present. As a rational being he cannot live a meaningful life without asking questions regarding his origin and destiny and receiving logical and authoritative answers. He is fortunate indeed that the One who made him has not left him to his own devices but has communicated with him and made it possible for him to cooperate with his Creator's plans.

The lesson this week is a preview and summary of lessons that follow. Before we study in detail the various channels of communication that God has used in reaching man, we will get a general picture of the communication field so that we can see that the God of the universe has made it virtually impossible for man not to know Him.

LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. Visible Reflects Invisible (Rom. 1:20)**
- 2. The Message of History (Ex. 19:4)**
- 3. Revelation in Jesus (Heb. 1:1, 2)**
- 4. The Witness of Men (Heb. 2:3)**
- 5. The Written Record (Luke 1:3, 4)**
- 6. God Speaks Today (John 16:13)**

**Part 1
VISIBLE
REFLECTS
INVISIBLE**

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

Paul makes it clear that nature reveals God's power and deity. But looking around us we may be convinced that we did not make ourselves, nor did we provide our environment. There must have been a Creator. The psalmist suggests that anyone who thinks otherwise must be a fool. (See Ps. 53:1.)

The psalmist is convinced that the heavens declare the glory of God, and though there is no audible speech connected with the communication, the message is clear. (See Psalm 19.)

As you look at various aspects of nature, what attributes of God do you find reflected?

"Look at the wonderful and beautiful things of nature. Think of their marvelous adaptation to the needs and happiness, not only of man, but of all living creatures. The sunshine and the rain, that gladden and refresh the earth, the hills and seas and plains, all speak to us of the Creator's love."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 9.

"The fruit is first seen in the bud, enclosing the future pear, peach, or apple, and the Lord develops these in their proper season, because they do not resist His working. They do not oppose the order of His arrangements. His works, as seen in the natural world, are not one half comprehended or appreciated. These silent preachers will teach human beings their lessons, if they will only be attentive hearers."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1068.

THINK IT THROUGH **How do you explain the discordant elements in nature such as earthquakes, famines, etc?**

"God made man perfectly holy and happy; and the fair earth, as it came from the Creator's hand, bore no blight of decay or shadow of the curse. It is transgression of God's law—the law of love—that has brought woe and death. Yet even amid the suffering that results from sin, God's love is revealed. It is written that God cursed the ground for man's sake. Genesis 3:17. The thorn and the thistle—the difficulties and trials that make his life one of toil and care—were appointed for his good as a part of the training needful in God's plan for his uplifting from the ruin and degradation that sin has wrought. The world, though fallen, is not all sorrow and misery. In nature itself are messages of hope and comfort. There are flowers upon the thistles, and the thorns are covered with roses."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 9, 10.

FURTHER STUDY *Education*, p. 128; *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 409-413.

Part 2
THE MESSAGE
OF HISTORY

What should the experiences of Israel have taught the Israelites regarding God?

“Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Ex. 19:4).

What God did for Israel between Egypt and Canaan should have been an unforgettable revelation of God’s tender, loving care. Truly, she had her troubles and tests, as an eaglet tossed out of his lofty nest when unaware of the potential of his growing wings. With what unbelievable precision the parent pinions swoop beneath the helplessly tumbling fledgling, bearing him up to the security of heights to try again. Again and again this occurs, until the youngster discovers the latent coordination and lift of those magnificent wings.

So the Lord bore Israel, as on eagles’ wings, watching out for her every need, protecting her from her enemies, yet seeking always the development of her potential strength—in Him.

“The Lord showed them [the Egyptians] by His servant Moses that the Maker of the heavens and the earth is the living and all-powerful God, above all gods. That His strength was mightier than the strongest—that OMNIPOTENCE could bring forth His people with a high hand and with an out-stretched arm. The signs and miracles performed in the presence of Pharaoh were not given for his benefit alone, but for the advantage of God’s people, to give them more clear and exalted views of God, and that all Israel should fear Him, and be willing and anxious to leave Egypt, and choose the service of the true and merciful God. Had it not been for these wonderful manifestations, many would have been satisfied to remain in Egypt rather than to journey through the wilderness.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1120.

Even in the midst of disappointment, frustration and sorrow, what assurance can the believer in Christ gain? Rom. 8:28.

“In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. . . . But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.”—*Education*, p. 173.

THINK IT THROUGH **Why is it difficult to see God’s hand in history? Are there evidences of God’s leading in your life?**

FURTHER STUDY *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 115, 116.

Part 3
REVELATION
IN JESUS

What does the writer to the Hebrews declare to be the climactic revelation of God?

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb. 1:1, 2 RSV).

Without diminishing in the least the revelation of Himself which God gave in His acts of creation, in His saving acts in history—particularly the history of Israel—it is necessary to say that in Jesus, the Christ, the Sent of God, man has been granted the most complete and wholly adequate revelation of God.

What were the main features of Christ's condescension? Phil. 2:5-8.

God steps down to meet man. This is an eternal characteristic of God, seen in all His recorded acts before Bethlehem's hills echoed to angels' songs. But then, *all heaven* was poured out in the One Sent from God, the Babe lying in a manger. The infinite, the transcendent God had veiled Himself in the flesh of man that He might "tabernacle" among us. Such condescension is the supreme revelation of the love of God.

THINK IT THROUGH **How can I more fully reflect the condescending spirit of my Lord?**

"After Christ had condescended to leave His high command, step down from an infinite height and assume humanity, He could have taken upon Him any condition of humanity He might choose. But greatness and rank were nothing to Him, and He selected the lowest and most humble walk of life. The place of His birth was Bethlehem, and on one side His parentage was poor, but God, the owner of the world, was His Father.

"No trace of luxury, ease, selfish gratification, or indulgence was brought into His life, which was a continual round of self-denial and self-sacrifice. In accordance with His humble birth, He had apparently no greatness or riches, in order that the humblest believer need not say Christ never knew the stress of pinching poverty. Had He possessed the semblance of outward show, or riches, of grandeur, the poorest class of humanity would have shunned His society; therefore He chose the lowly condition of the far greater number of the people."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 903, 904.

FURTHER STUDY

Testimonies, vol. 2, pp. 426, 427.

Part 4
THE WITNESS
OF MEN

What part may individuals play in the revelation of God to men?

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Heb. 2:3).

When a person has experienced a relationship with Christ, he is duty bound to go and tell others. He becomes an important channel of communication whereby God reveals Himself to the world.

What do men need in order to be effective witnesses for God? Isa. 43:12; Acts 1:8.

Men do not have to be perfect in order to be effective witnesses for God. The early disciples certainly had their weaknesses. Look at Peter who denied his Lord; James and John with their overriding ambition to sit, one on the right hand and the other on the left of Christ in the kingdom; Thomas, the doubter, who would not believe until he had put his hands into Christ's wounds and seen with his own eyes. Yet it was to these men that Jesus entrusted the preaching of the gospel, and it was these men who "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

This is not to condone weaknesses or excuse faults. The fact is that all men have their weaknesses and faults. It is to point out that when men accept God's call, it is God who works in and through them to accomplish His purposes. The least that a person can do is to say, "Come" (Rev. 22:17). If God has been good to us we can always say so. (See Ps. 107:2.) Men in the past have sometimes been reluctant to obey God's call. For example, Moses (Ex. 4:1, 10), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6). Yet God promised to give the power, and they accomplished great good in witnessing for God.

THINK IT THROUGH **Does my life speak louder than my words? Do I turn people away from the truth by carelessness or fanaticism?**

"Speak as He [Christ] would speak, act as He would act. Constantly reveal the sweetness of His character. Reveal that wealth of love which underlies all His teachings and all His dealings with men. The humblest workers, in co-operation with Christ, may touch chords whose vibrations shall ring to the ends of the earth and make melody throughout eternal ages."
—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 159.

FURTHER STUDY

The Ministry of Healing, pp. 469, 470.

Part 5
THE WRITTEN
RECORD

In order to make His revelation available to succeeding generations, what did God lead such witnesses as Luke to do?

"It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:3, 4).

God made provision for those who were eyewitnesses (or their co-workers, as in the case of Luke) of the ministry of Jesus to make a written record of His life. These records would enable those who had never seen nor heard Him to have the essential knowledge of how and why He came.

In Jesus' prayer how are later Christians designated? John 17:20.

Even in the recorded prayer of Jesus, we ("those who shall believe on me through their word") are included.

When those faithful eyewitnesses closed their eyes in death, they would leave behind the inspired record, a confirming witness, left to us in writing. In questions of doubt, in points at issue, there would be the authoritative testimony to which to refer and to appeal.

THINK IT THROUGH **Even the inspired writer of one of the Gospels, and the historian of "The Acts of the Apostles," had the humility to submit his work "for examination and criticism."**

"Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, and Theophilus, to whom it is addressed, had been pleasantly associated. From Luke, Theophilus had received much instruction and great light. Luke had been Theophilus' teacher, and he still felt a responsibility to direct and instruct him, and to sustain and protect him in his work.

"At that time it was customary for a writer to send his manuscript to someone for examination and criticism. Luke chose Theophilus, as a man in whom he had confidence, to perform this important work. He first directs the attention of Theophilus to the record of Christ's life as given in the book of Luke, which had also been addressed by the same writer to Theophilus. . . . The teachings of Christ were to be preserved in manuscripts and books."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1051.

FURTHER STUDY

The Ministry of Healing, pp. 140, 141.

Part 6
GOD SPEAKS
TODAY

Beside the recorded testimony about Jesus, what other means remained for God's revelation of Himself?

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come" (John 16:13).

What a comfort to know that the Father and the Son have not abandoned the church. Jesus promised the apostles, "I will not leave you comfortless" (John 14:18). (The Greek word for "comfortless" means "orphans.") Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit the Father and the Son would make their "abode" with the men and women who love Jesus. (See verse 23.)

How long will the Holy Spirit maintain His ministry to the followers of the Lord? John 14:16. See also Eph. 4:12, 13.

It is vital for us to recognize that the various means which God has chosen to use in His revelation of Himself are not actually in conflict with each other.

THINK IT THROUGH

How can I be sure that I am understanding the Bible aright? How do I relate to scientific facts that seem to contradict the Bible?

If we find contradictions between two propositions, each coming from an inspired source, there must be something wrong with our understanding of the propositions. We should look for a deeper meaning, an inner harmony. God, who is the Author of science and the Scriptures cannot contradict Himself.

Are we sure that all that poses as science is true science? Are we sure that the interpretation we give to the Scriptures is the right interpretation? There is a "science falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20). And there are interpretations that are twisted. (See 2 Peter 3:16.)

"Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony. By different methods, and in different languages, they witness to the same great truths. Science is ever discovering new wonders; but she brings from her research nothing that, rightly understood, conflicts with divine revelation. The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other. They make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the laws through which He works."—*Education*, p. 128.

FURTHER STUDY

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 111-116.

He Speaks Through Nature



“He stretched out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing” (Job 26:7).

Wherever man has turned his eyes and his instruments in his perpetual striving to take the measure of the universe, he has found it orderly, under perfect control, and in over-all balance. The behavior of the universe has been found to be guided by principles and eminently predictable.

Whether it be the incredible energy of the quasars, the silent depths of the ocean troughs, the exquisite shapes, colors, and forms of the shells of the sea, the infinite smallness of the virus, the unerring flight of migrant flocks, or the numerous and varied processes of reproduction in plant or animal life, there is order, function, and purpose in the universe, a marvel to the searching eye of man.

Although the language of the Bible is not that of a science textbook, yet it consistently insists that God, the God who hangs the earth “upon nothing” is speaking to man by “the things that are made” and that these in turn speak to us of His “eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20).

But nature’s message about God is not entirely clear, not entirely consistent. There is some confusion and disorder within order. There is

the berserk, the amok, and the cruel. The word of God in nature does not always do Him justice, because there seem to be elements of injustice.

Let us consider this week the limitations of natural or general revelation, and yet the extent to which God still speaks through nature.

LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. A Perfect Creation (Gen. 1:31)**
- 2. Sin in the World (Gen. 6:6, 7)**
- 3. God Still in Control (Gen. 8:20-22)**
- 4. God’s Glory Declared (Ps. 19:1-4)**
- 5. A Special Revelation Needed (Rom. 8:22, 23)**
- 6. Harmony Restored (2 Peter 3:10, 13)**

Part 1
A PERFECT
CREATION

When God had completed His work of creation, how did He describe it?

“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Thus Scripture summarizes and evaluates the work of God’s hand during the six days of Creation week leading up to the first Sabbath day—“it was very good.” (See verses 1-30.)

And it could have stayed that way; indeed, it should have. But it did not. Hence all our woe and sorrow. The Bible records four thousand years of strife, bloodshed, disease, and death as a result.

What were some of the immediate consequences of the first sin committed by our first parents? Gen. 3:10, 14-24.

Note the following consequences:

1. Separation from God.
2. Estrangement between man and the rest of creation.
3. Struggle for survival on the part of all creatures.
4. Pain in childbirth and many other aspects of life.
5. The domination of man over woman.
6. The ground is cursed so that it brings forth weeds and thorns.
7. Death and separation from loved ones.

The question may be asked: How far are the above consequences of sin turned into a blessing by God to correct and to save man? For instance, is it an altogether bad thing that man has to work hard in order to earn a living?

A major question would be: Do we get a correct revelation of God when we look into every phase of nature?

“Upon all created things is seen the impress of the Deity. Nature testifies of God. The susceptible mind, brought in contact with the miracle and mystery of the universe, cannot but recognize the working of infinite power.”—*Education*, p. 99.

“In briar and thorn, in thistle and tare, is represented the evil that blights and mars. In singing bird and opening blossom, in rain and sunshine, in summer breeze and gentle dew . . . is seen the love that restores. And nature still speaks to us of God’s goodness.”—*Education*, p. 101.

THINK IT THROUGH **How only can I be sure that I understand the lessons of nature correctly?**

“Only in the light that shines from Calvary can nature’s teaching be read aright. Through the story of Bethlehem and the cross let it be shown how good is to conquer evil, and how every blessing that comes to us is a gift of redemption.”—*Education*, p. 101.

FURTHER STUDY

Testimonies, vol. 7, p. 87.

Part 2
SIN IN
THE WORLD

How did God relate to a world full of sinners who persisted in going their own way?

"And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them" (Gen. 6:6, 7).

Man's sin results in death to an innocent creation, a creation that was placed under his dominion. No man can sin and not have his sin affect others. All creation is so interrelated that even God is "grieved" at His heart when man persists in sinning and bringing destruction to himself and others.

A world of sin cannot be a true reflection of God's plans and purposes. Yet what happens to the world because of sin tells us something about God and His character; it tells us that God cannot permit sin and sinners to continue forever. God has made ample provision for man to be saved, but if man refuses to be helped by God, then he must suffer the consequences.

How are events in our day comparable to activities in the days before the Flood? How may we expect God to act? Matt. 24:36-39.

In Noah's day God destroyed the world by the Flood. He has promised not to do this again. (See Gen. 9:11.) But He will destroy it with fire. (See 2 Peter 3:7.) Furthermore, as Noah was commissioned to warn the antediluvians of coming destruction, so God has a message going to the world today warning of judgment to come.

"The inhabitants of the antediluvian world turned from Jehovah, refusing to do His holy will. They followed their own unholy imagination and perverted ideas. It was because of their wickedness that they were destroyed; and today the world is following the same way. It presents no flattering signs of millennial glory. The transgressors of God's law are filling the earth with wickedness. Their betting, their horse racing, their gambling, their dissipation, their lustful practices, their untamable passions, are fast filling the world with violence."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 633.

THINK IT THROUGH **How far is it possible to resist the tide of evil? Do you see God's mercy in His delay of execution of judgment?**

"The rainbow spanning the heavens with its arch of light is a token of 'the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature.' Genesis 9:16. And the rainbow encircling the throne on high is also a token to God's children of His covenant of peace."—*Education*, p. 115.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 633-636.

Part 3
GOD STILL
IN CONTROL

Amid the prevailing chaos and catastrophe resulting from the universal Flood, how was the overruling purpose of God declared?

"And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:20-22).

The hand that piloted the ark amidst the crushing forces of wind, water, and sweeping debris would not now abandon the earth and man to the whim of that one who was a "murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

The orderly return of seedtime and harvest, day and night would be seen until this present age shall be no more (Gen. 8:22).

"Those who have a true knowledge of God will not become so infatuated with the laws of matter or the operations of nature as to overlook, or refuse to acknowledge, the continual working of God in nature. Nature is not God, nor was it ever God. The voice of nature testifies of God, but nature is not God. As His created work, it simply bears a testimony to God's power. Deity is the author of nature. The natural world has, in itself, no power but that which God supplies."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 293.

"God is constantly employed in upholding and using as His servants the things that He has made. He works through the laws of nature, using them as His instruments. They are not self-acting. Nature in her work testifies of the intelligent presence and active agency of a Being who moves in all things according to His will."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 416.

THINK IT THROUGH

How would you show that even when God permits evil He is still in control of what happens? Does a man always reap what he sows?

"The Bible shows us God in His high and holy place, not in a state of inactivity, not in silence and solitude, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy beings, all waiting to do His will. Through these messengers He is in active communication with every part of His dominion. By His Spirit He is everywhere present. Through the agency of His Spirit and His angels He ministers to the children of men."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 417.

FURTHER STUDY

Education, pp. 133, 134.

Part 4
GOD'S GLORY
DECLARED

Despite the erosion of sin and the catastrophic destruction of the Flood, what did the psalmist declare was the message of the "voice" of God in nature?

**"The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world."**

Ps. 19:1-4, RSV.

The sweet shepherd singer of Israel whose mind had been opened to the message of God amid the night hills of Bethlehem was led by the Spirit to record in beauty and in simplicity the way God speaks to man through the work of His fingers. (See Psalm 8.) And this contemplation made him aware of the condescension of God and the exalted plan of God for men.

"Nature testifies that One infinite in power, great in goodness, mercy, and love, created the earth, and filled it with life and gladness. Even in their blighted state, all things reveal the handiwork of the great Master Artist. Wherever we turn, we may hear the voice of God, and see evidences of His goodness."
—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 411.

What is it that helps us appreciate nature and its revelation of God?

"The poet and the naturalist have many things to say about nature, but it is the Christian who enjoys the beauty of the earth with the highest appreciation, because he recognizes his Father's handiwork and perceives His love in flower and shrub and tree. No one can fully appreciate the significance of hill and vale, river and sea, who does not look upon them as an expression of God's love to man."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 87.

THINK IT THROUGH

How does city life take us away from the opportunity of appreciating God's glory as revealed in nature? Of what should the beauties of nature remind us?

"As your senses delight in the attractive loveliness of the earth, think of the world that is to come, that shall never know the blight of sin and death; where the face of nature will no more wear the shadow of the curse. Let your imagination picture the home of the saved, and remember that it will be more glorious than your brightest imagination can portray. In the varied gifts of God in nature we see but the faintest gleaming of His glory."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 86, 87.

FURTHER STUDY

Hebrews 2:5-8; Education, pp. 20, 21.

Part 5
A SPECIAL
REVELATION
NEEDED

How has the universe been affected by the presence of sin?

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22, 23, RSV).

Paul makes it clear that man is not the only one who is in trouble because of sin; the "whole creation" is "groaning" and in pain. Furthermore, just as man is looking forward to a better existence as a result of his redemption, the whole of nature is in some sense aware of deficiencies and is itself looking forward to a change.

The figure of speech is that of a woman in labor before a child is born. There is the pain and the agony, but also a joyful anticipation of the birth of a child.

How only can I interpret the "groanings" of nature?

"Today man cannot of himself read aright the teaching of nature. Unless guided by divine wisdom, he exalts nature and the laws of nature above nature's God. This is why mere human ideas in regard to science so often contradict the teaching of God's word. But for those who receive the light of the life of Christ, nature is again illuminated. In the light shining from the cross, we can rightly interpret nature's teaching."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 462.

Jesus drew many lessons from nature. His parables were stories of everyday life. But it is only when the Author of nature points out its lessons that we can be certain of our conclusions. A study of nature without the light which the Word of God throws upon it will only lead to false understandings. This explains why there are so many contradictory philosophies and religions. One can know the truth only through Him who is the Truth. (See John 14:6.)

THINK IT THROUGH

Am I tending to exalt science and human reasoning above their legitimate roles in God's revelation of Himself?

"Through man's disobedience a change was wrought in nature itself. Marred by the curse of sin, nature can bear but an imperfect testimony regarding the Creator. It cannot reveal His character in its perfection."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 256.

FURTHER STUDY

Testimonies, vol. 8, pp. 255-262; *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 290-295.

**Part 6
HARMONY
RESTORED**

What solution to all sin-related consequences is assured to the believing, converted child of God?

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, . . . and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. . . .

"But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:10, 13, RSV).

Glory! Alleluiah! Does not your heart burn within you to contemplate that glorious day? All the consequences and all the causes of the consequences are removed, and the original state of God's clear revelation of Himself in nature is fully restored.

Man will again be able to read nature as Adam and Eve did before they sinned. And through the cross of Jesus, His righteousness will dwell permanently, and by choice, in every heart. There will be no discordant note to mar the exquisite and infinite harmonies of heaven and earth. Courage in the Lord, brother, sister, the day of creation's groaning in travail seems long and endless; but when the eternal day comes, this long night will be as the fleeting shadow cast by a wind-driven cloud crossing the face of the sun. (See 2 Peter 3:1-9.)

What are the features of the earth made new? Isaiah 65. Of the New Jerusalem? Revelation 21, 22.

These visions of harmony in the earth made new cannot but contrast with what we see in the world around us. Therefore the discords and deficiencies that we see today are a means of reminding us that it will not always be so. Our spirits long for change, and we sympathize with Abraham who was never satisfied with what he had in this life but looked for a city that had foundations (Heb. 11:10). We are grateful for the promise of Jesus that He was going to prepare a place for us (John 14:3).

"The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 678.

THINK IT THROUGH

How can I hasten the time when peace and harmony will be restored?

FURTHER STUDY

The Ministry of Healing, pp. 506-508.

He Speaks by His Acts

**“To him that overcometh
will I give to eat of the tree
of life, which is in the midst
of the paradise of God”
(Rev. 2:7).**



“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7).

It is an axiom that deeds are more significant than words, that what a man is is more important than what he says. Similarly, it is not what God says that counts so much as what He does. And yet what God says is what He does. His words, in fact, are His acts. God’s words have power in them, power to create and to re-create.

Thus it is that when God, the Lord Jesus Christ, says He will give the overcomer access to the tree of life, it shall be so because He said it. He is One whose words are deeds and whose words and deeds are a revelation of Himself. He will do what He says He will do.

Theologians have long referred to the self-revealing God as the God who acts in human history. His acts are real and knowable. His great saving acts proclaim Him to be what He is. There is a glorious harmony between His words and His deeds; but it is a question whether man could rightly interpret and understand His deeds were they not explained by the divine words. For example, Jesus said: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilder-

ness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14, 15). With these words the act of Moses was shown to have a new depth of meaning for Nicodemus and all who have received these words since.

All the acts of God, recorded or unrecorded, seemingly great, seemingly small, have been a part of His revelation to man and the universe. The acts presented in this lesson are just a few of the major phases of God’s acting for man’s salvation. We should never tire of rehearsing all His mighty acts. We should never forget them, although forgetting is a human weakness.

Let us, this week, hear God speaking to us through His recorded deeds in history.

LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. God of Creation (Gen. 1:1)**
- 2. God of the Flood (Gen. 6:5)**
- 3. God of the Exodus (Ex. 3:7, 8)**
- 4. God of the Incarnation (Matt. 1:22, 23)**
- 5. God of the Church (Eph. 3:10)**
- 6. God of the Restoration (Matt. 25:34)**

**Part 1
GOD OF
CREATION**

In what role is God first presented to us in the book of Genesis?

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

In the majestic simplicity of the first words of the written revelation of God, that which distinguished Him from all of nature, from man, was the fact that He was there and that He brought into existence our world, all its environment, and all upon it.

A study of the first three chapters of Genesis lays a foundation for a knowledge of God. Here are some aspects of the revelation:

1. God created by His word. The psalmist was impressed with this aspect of God's power. (See Ps. 33:9.)

2. God created in six days and then rested on the seventh. This cycle is the basis of Sabbathkeeping. (See Ex. 20:8-10.)

3. All that God created is good, very good. Thus, anything that is evil does not come from God. (See Luke 18:19.)

4. Man was created in the image of God. God intended that man should enjoy the grandest of privileges. He is a loving God. (See 1 John 4:8.)

5. God communicated with Adam, treating him as a person. God is a personal God. (See Gen. 3:9-11.)

6. God had a plan of salvation and sought out man after he had sinned. Thus man had a second chance; he could be restored to the image in which he was created. God sees the end from the beginning. (See Rev. 1:8.)

7. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden. God is a just as well as a merciful God. (See Ex. 20:5, 6.)

These are but a few aspects of God's revelation of Himself. But they are fundamental to a proper understanding of God.

THINK IT THROUGH

If God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the world, why is it that many have decided to worship other gods? Is it possible that I serve a false god?

"Profound theories and speculations may abound, men may try to set science in opposition to revelation, and thus do away with the law of God; but stronger and still stronger will the Holy Spirit bring before them the command: 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.' Matthew 4:10."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 10.

FURTHER STUDY

Education, pp. 99-101.

Part 2
GOD OF
THE FLOOD

What was the situation that brought about the Flood?

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

It is possible for us to think of the Flood as an act of an angry God seeking to take revenge upon a race that had not chosen to follow His plan. But if we do so, we misunderstand God. In fact, we misread the Bible account of the Flood and the persons concerned. Here are a few principles that come out of a study of Scripture:

1. The antediluvians were determined in following their course of wickedness. Man had not only done much evil, but his thoughts and inclinations were evil continually. He had apparently rejected God completely. In a situation like this there was only one thing to do, destroy sin and the sinner. As a God of moral worth and justice, there was no other course that God could take.

2. Yet God was loath to take such a step. He would rather save than condemn. (See John 3:17.) Hence we read that He was grieved at His heart (Gen. 6:6). He wished with all His heart that the situation could be otherwise.

3. God was pleased to find at least one person who was righteous. He therefore planned to save him and anyone else who would be saved. God never destroys the righteous with the wicked. Read the experience of Abraham in Genesis 18:23-26.

4. Noah proved himself a man of faith (Heb. 11:7). He did exactly what God asked him to do, although the building of an ark and the expectation of rain and flood were not reasonable in his day. The very center of salvation is faith and trust in God. God is trustworthy, and we must place implicit confidence in Him at all times.

5. God was long-suffering. He stayed judgment on the antediluvians until after Noah had built the ark and given them ample opportunity to repent.

THINK IT THROUGH

What is it that makes the world attractive to many people? Is it ignorance of what God is like?

"The sins that called for vengeance upon the antediluvian world exist today. The fear of God is banished from the hearts of men, and His law is treated with indifference and contempt. The intense worldliness of that generation is equaled by that of the generation now living."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 101.

FURTHER STUDY

The Story of Redemption, pp. 62-71.

Part 3
GOD OF
THE EXODUS

What was God's attitude toward the Israelites in slavery?

"And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:7, 8).

The history of the Exodus as revealed in the Bible is the story of God's concern for His people under oppression in Egypt. God is not pleased when His people suffer hardships. He wants to see them enjoy all the benefits that life can offer. (See Ps. 37:3-6.)

God was as much concerned about the Egyptians and their king as He was about His own people. Therefore He proceeded to give all the evidences He could to show that He is the true God, and that the gods they worshiped were no gods. The plagues were not mere nuisances; they were attacks on various objects held in reverence by the Egyptians. (See Ex. 12:12.)

The different treatment that the Israelites and the Egyptians received indicates that a man gains or suffers according to the company he keeps. God is no respecter of persons. It is not God who decides a man's destiny; it is the man himself.

The Passover experience with the slaying of the lamb and the sprinkling of the blood were all symbolic of God's plan for the salvation of man. All that one had to do was to accept the plan and act accordingly. There is something very simple and utterly reasonable in what God asks a person to do.

The miracles connected with the Exodus were all manifestations of the power of God. Who else could do such great things? Who else could be worthy of man's gratitude and worship? What else could God do to bring a knowledge of Himself to the people?

With the giving of the Ten Commandments in permanent form, the Exodus leading to Sinai was a beautiful lesson in the divine harmony between the law and the gospel, between grace and obedience.

THINK IT THROUGH

Are my heart and my home covered by the blood of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"?

"By obedience the people [of Israel] were to give evidence of their faith. So all who hope to be saved by the merits of the blood of Christ should realize that they themselves have something to do in securing their salvation."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 279.

FURTHER STUDY

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 278, 289.

Part 4
GOD OF THE
INCARNATION

As an example of God's utter self-abnegation, what step did He take in fulfillment of prophecy to make Himself one with man?

"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:22, 23).

The incarnation, God becoming flesh, is a mystery that no human mind can fathom. (See 1 Tim. 3:16.) Yet the truth of it cannot be questioned. The events surrounding the incarnation are well known and some of the lessons we can draw from them might be as follows:

1. Jesus came to His own, yet His own did not receive Him. (See John 1:11.) To come to His own was the logical and loving thing to do; to be rejected by His own was surely a very disappointing experience. Yet Jesus did not give up.

2. Jesus was born in very humble circumstances. He grew up in a town that was not famous for piety. In other words, Jesus did not choose the easy things for Himself. He would gain the victory over Satan under the most adverse conditions.

3. The circumstances of His birth lent themselves to scandal. He was falsely accused on many occasions. Yet He gave incontrovertible evidence of His divinity. A few believed; many called out, "Crucify him!" Yet He was not discouraged, nor did He turn aside from His goal. What a man! What a God!

THINK IT THROUGH

To what extent does my life reveal God?

"It is the work of the Christian in this life to represent Christ to the world, in life and character unfolding the blessed Jesus. If God has given us light, it is that we may reveal it to others. But in comparison with the light we have received, and the opportunities and privileges granted us to reach the hearts of the people, the results of our work thus far have been far too small. God designs that the truth which He has brought to our understanding shall produce more fruit than has yet been revealed. But when our minds are filled with gloom and sadness, dwelling upon the darkness and evil around us, how can we represent Christ to the world? How can our testimony have power to win souls? What we need is to know God and the power of His love, as revealed in Christ, by an experimental knowledge. . . .

"Through the merits of Christ, through His righteousness, which by faith is imputed unto us, we are to attain to the perfection of Christian character."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 743, 744.

FURTHER STUDY

The Ministry of Healing, pp. 29-33.

Part 5
GOD OF
THE CHURCH

What exalted purpose does Jesus have for His church?

"That through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10, RSV).

Perhaps the reputation of the Christian church as a whole has never been so low as now. Even children and youth increasingly question the reason for the church's existence.

But it is actually the purpose of God to continue, through the church, to give to the world the same revelation of Himself which He had given through the incarnate Christ. Thus from Pentecost to the second advent God's greatest interest on earth has moved from a revelation given by His Son to a revelation given by the church. (See Rev. 12:4, 13-17.)

How does the church fulfill its mission of manifesting to the world the "manifold wisdom of God"?

1. The church has evidence that it is God's power within it that causes it to shine. Members seem to be naive; they are not always classified among the wise. Yet the church is blessed. (See Matt. 11:25, 26.)

2. The church is where members love one another. (See John 13:35.) This is rather unusual in a worldly society.

3. The leaders in the church do not lord it over others, but are happy to serve. (See Matt. 20:26.) In this way they follow the example of their Lord. (See Matt. 20:28.)

4. The church members are a holy people, sanctified by the truth that is in them. (See John 17:17; 1 Peter 1:15, 16.)

5. The church is always praising God for what God has done for them and is doing in and through them. The members recognize that by themselves they can do nothing. (See 1 Peter 2:9.)

What other characteristics would you add to the above list to indicate how the church can reveal the true nature of God?

THINK IT THROUGH

If the church is not fulfilling its obligations as it ought, what do you think are the reasons for its failure? What contributions are you personally making to help the church?

"Just before us is the closing struggle of the great controversy when, with "all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness," Satan is to work to misrepresent the character of God, that he may 'seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.' If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 746.

FURTHER STUDY

The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 9-16.

Part 6
GOD OF THE
RESTORATION

What key phrase in the following text is an assurance that the kingdom of glory will be a restoration or completion of God's original purpose?

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

The revelation of God which Adam and Eve would have progressively received if they had not sinned will be restored when the kingdom prepared "from the foundation of the world" is finally established.

How close will be the restored communication between God and man? Rev. 22:4; 1 John 3:2; Matt. 5:8.

The restoration of a face-to-face relationship between man and God reveals a great condescension on the part of God in that He permits those who once rebelled against His government and His law to be brought back into His very presence. Obviously He could have wiped sinful man out of existence or kept him at a remote distance. This a gracious God has not done.

THINK IT THROUGH

What special honor and privilege is to be bestowed on those who constitute the final and complete demonstration of God's grace on human lives? Rev. 14:1-5.

"As the people of God afflict their souls before Him, pleading for purity of heart, the command is given, 'Take away the filthy garments' from them, and the encouraging words are spoken, 'Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.' The spotless robe of Christ's righteousness is placed upon the tried, tempted, yet faithful children of God. The despised remnant are clothed in glorious apparel, nevermore to be defiled by the corruptions of the world. Their names are retained in the Lamb's book of life, enrolled among the faithful of all ages. They have resisted the wiles of the deceiver; they have not been turned from their loyalty by the dragon's roar. Now they are eternally secure from the tempter's devices. Their sins are transferred to the originator of sin. And the remnant are not only pardoned and accepted, but honored. 'A fair miter' is set upon their heads. They are to be as kings and priests unto God."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 475, 476.

FURTHER STUDY

The Great Controversy, pp. 648, 649.

He Speaks Supremely in Christ



“He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power” (Heb. 1:3, RSV).

So identical are the nature, the character, and the purpose of Christ with those of God the Father that Christ is portrayed by the apostle as “the very stamp” of His Father. As the mark or stamp made by a seal is identical—a very duplicate or replica—of the seal itself, so is the image of God in Christ, only more perfectly so—so that to see Christ is to see God. To know Christ is to know God.

It is of vital importance to recognize this truth because so many have accepted the devil’s distortion of the character of the Father that they think of Jesus Christ as one who shields us from the persistent and pursuing anger of God. In this way the devil attributes his own characteristics to God.

All men before Christ’s first advent could have known the true character of God, but those who were to be His chosen people, His envoys, so lost sight of His true revelation of Himself that they only played into the devil’s hands, because, like him, they espoused the spirit of pride instead of humility; self-centeredness instead of concern for others. (See Isa. 14:12-17.)

So dismally had Israel failed to be a revelation of God to men that by the time the Messiah was born “sin had become a science, and vice was consecrated as a part of religion.”—“The Desire of Ages,” p. 37.

Thus, in “the fullness of time”—in earth’s most hopeless and helpless hour—Immanuel came to be “God with us.” No longer would men have to wonder whether anyone was speaking for God. God Himself had come to pitch His tent among them. He who had been the Word from the beginning was in their midst. Those who would be willing to look upon Him in humility, in faith, would see God in Him. To the rest He was a peasant, a rebel, a de-

ceiver, one who cast out devils by the power of the devil, and, above all, a hypocrite.

But God spoke supremely in Christ the Word because Christ was what He taught. His words illuminated His actions. His actions endorsed and confirmed His words. And all were of God.

When some of Jesus’ own disciples could not see the Father in Him because of their unbelief and dullness, they asked to be shown the Father. Jesus then made what some consider to be the greatest theological statement given to man; He established the most vital theological fact of all time, namely, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

May humility, faith, and a willingness to obey Him open our eyes to God’s supreme revelation of Himself as we prayerfully contemplate Christ within the brief limitations of our study this week.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **The Unpretentious Christ (Isa. 53:2)**
2. **The Condescending Christ (Phil. 2:5-8)**
3. **The Judging Christ (John 5:22; Rom. 14:10, last part)**
4. **The Forgiving Christ (Luke 5:20)**
5. **The Suffering Christ (Luke 22:44)**
6. **The Conquering Christ (Rev. 3:21)**

Part 1
THE
UNPRETENTIOUS
CHRIST

Whereas men are often attracted by appearance in a leader, what was prophesied about Jesus that suggests that He did not make use of this factor to draw attention to Himself?

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2).

According to Isaiah the Messiah's appearance was not to be particularly impressive. Jesus did not use any of the means normally used to draw attention to Himself. He did not acquire learning from the schools of His day. He did not wear robes to indicate special piety. But He was a Jew among Jews, in many ways blending in with His society and doing the things that a devout Jew would be expected to do.

Yet Jesus stood apart from the people of His day. His understanding of Scripture, even as a youth, was remarkable. (See Luke 2:46, 47.) When He spoke in public everyone noted the graciousness of His words. (See Luke 4:22.) Children and their mothers were attracted to Him. (See Luke 18:16.) He spent long nights in prayer, traveled incessantly, healed the sick, fed the hungry, spoke comforting words to sinners, and condemned scathingly all hypocrisy.

Jesus may not have drawn attention to Himself in outward appearance, but He did draw attention to the truth. Since He was the way, the truth, and the life, it was only in this sense that He stood out among men. Men and women were drawn to Him, not by what He looked like, but by what He was.

Why did the Jews not recognize the Messiah in Jesus? John 1:11.

"For more than a thousand years the Jewish people had awaited the Saviour's coming. Upon this event they had rested their brightest hopes. In song and prophecy, in temple rite and household prayer, they had enshrined His name. And yet at His coming they knew Him not. The Beloved of heaven was to them 'as a root out of a dry ground;' He had 'no form nor comeliness;' and they saw in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.' Isa. 53:2; John 1:11."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 27.

THINK IT THROUGH

To what means do I resort for the favor of others? Do I draw attention to myself or the truth I represent?

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, p. 458.

Part 2 **What characteristic of Christ is pointed out by Paul as one**
THE **that every Christian should emulate?**

**CONDESCENDING
CHRIST**

"Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8, RSV).

Human minds may never plumb the depths of the condescension of Christ in becoming the Saviour of men. No human experience begins to be comparable, because no man was first God—as was Jesus the Christ. No other person was ever called upon to endure what the Godhead endured in Christ.

It is in utter selflessness that Jesus reveals God. It is this selflessness that comes as a surprise to both men and the devil because both are basically selfish and self-seeking.

How did Satan react to the birth of Jesus? Why was the event so great a mystery to him?

"At the birth of Jesus, Satan knew that One had come with a divine commission to dispute his dominion. He trembled at the angel's message attesting the authority of the newborn King. Satan well knew the position that Christ had held in heaven as the Beloved of the Father. That the Son of God should come to this earth as a man filled him with amazement and with apprehension. He could not fathom the mystery of this great sacrifice. His selfish soul could not understand such love for the deceived race. The glory and peace of heaven, and the joy of communion with God, were but dimly comprehended by men; but they were well known to Lucifer, the covering cherub. Since he had lost heaven, he was determined to find revenge by causing others to share his fall. This he would do by causing them to undervalue heavenly things, and to set the heart upon things of earth."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 115, 116.

THINK IT THROUGH **Is my life so filled with Christ that those who know me find me a "mystery"? Does Satan so consider me?**

"The Lord Jesus is making experiments on human hearts through the exhibition of His mercy and abundant grace. He is effecting transformations so amazing that Satan, with all his triumphant boasting, with all his confederacy of evil united against God and the laws of His government, stands viewing them as a fortress impregnable to his sophistries and delusions. They are to him an incomprehensible mystery."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 18.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 19-26.

Part 3
THE JUDGING
CHRIST

In His infinite wisdom, to whom has God committed the judgment of man?

"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22).

"For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10).

How is it that Jesus is qualified to be our judge? Heb. 2:10, 14.

It was in connection with His claim to do the same work as the Father that Jesus indicated that the work of judgment had been given to Him.

Jesus is supremely qualified to be our judge because He was appointed a judge, His perfect life enables Him to apply the law, and His incarnation means that He has taken our place and can understand our infirmities.

Since Jesus is the Judge of all, what should our relation be to others? Matt. 7:1.

Does this mean that there are no occasions when men may be called upon to judge others? John 7:24; 1 Cor. 6:3.

How does Jesus as a judge reveal the Father? John 5:30; 2:13-17; Mark 11:15-19.

There is something fearsome about a judgment. (See Heb. 10:27.) Yet it is the wicked and not the righteous who have reason to be afraid. (See Psalm 1:5.) Both the Father and the Son love the sinner supremely, but They cannot condone sin. When the sinner persists in his sin, he can only look forward to a righteous judge who will give to everyone according to what his deeds merit.

THINK IT THROUGH **In what way is Christ's work in judging men a part of God's supreme revelation of Himself to man?**

"He [Christ] has given light and life to all, and according to the measure of light given, each is to be judged. And He who has given the light, He who has followed the soul with tenderest entreaty, seeking to win it from sin to holiness, is in one its advocate and judge. From the opening of the great controversy in heaven, Satan has maintained his cause through deception; and Christ has been working to unveil his schemes and to break his power. It is He who has encountered the deceiver, and who through all the ages has been seeking to wrest the captives from his grasp, who will pass judgment upon every soul."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 210.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 209-211.

Part 4
THE
FORGIVING
CHRIST

When Jesus saw that a man had faith, what else did He do besides healing the disease?

"And when he saw their faith he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you' " (Luke 5:20, RSV).

There is no way for fallen human beings to grasp the offense which contact with sin and sinners brought to the infinitely pure and holy Son of God. We have already studied into His condescension in becoming man, but have we really thought deeply and appreciatively of His readiness to forgive the sins of men and of women?

Note the question in verse 23. Which is easier, to forgive or to heal? Both could be said with equal ease. For the scribes and Pharisees, to really forgive or to heal were equally difficult, for they could do neither. How could it be known that Jesus really could forgive sins? He gave evidence by also healing the poor sufferer whom His accusers not only could not heal, but whom they had "refused . . . hope or sympathy," and who they "declared . . . was suffering the curse of God for his sins."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 268. What was in their power to do they withheld. They viewed the acts of Jesus as blasphemous and devilish because His aims and theirs were opposite.

"When God pardons the sinner, remits the punishment he deserves, and treats him as though he had not sinned, He receives him into divine favor, and justifies him through the merits of Christ's righteousness. The sinner can be justified only through faith in the atonement made through God's dear Son, who became a sacrifice for the sins of the guilty world. No one can be justified by any works of his own. He can be delivered from the guilt of sin, from the condemnation of the law, from the penalty of transgression, only by virtue of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Faith is the only condition upon which justification can be obtained, and faith includes not only belief but trust."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 389.

THINK IT THROUGH

What evaluation do I put on my need of Christ's forgiveness? Do I need much? or little? How do I compare my need with that of others?

"Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away. He does not tell to any all that He might reveal, but He bids every trembling soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

FURTHER STUDY

Messages to Young People, pp. 111-113.

Part 5
THE
SUFFERING
CHRIST

What vivid picture is given of Christ in Gethsemane?

"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44, RSV).

We have spoken of Christ's condescension, of His merciful approach to judgment, of His forgiving love. But there is a supreme moment when Jesus most deeply, most fully, revealed God to man, to all heaven, and to the universe. It was in Gethsemane.

We speak and sing of the cross, and we should. But without victory in Gethsemane there could have been no Calvary. It was there "neath the old olive trees" that the cup of suffering and anguish was taken. It was there that Jesus entered upon a new, different, and terrifying experience involving His relationship to God as it never had been involved in all eternity.

THINK IT THROUGH

What did my sins really cost the Son of God in Gethsemane?

"Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, 'Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.' Zech. 13:7. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.

"As Christ felt His unity with the Father broken up, He feared that in His human nature He would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the powers of darkness. In the wilderness of temptation the destiny of the human race had been at stake. Christ was then conqueror. Now the tempter had come for the last fearful struggle. For this he had been preparing during the three years of Christ's ministry. Everything was at stake with him. If he failed here, his hope of mastery was lost; the kingdoms of the world would finally become Christ's; he himself would be overthrown and cast out. But if Christ could be overcome, the earth would become Satan's kingdom, and the human race would be forever in his power. With the issues of the conflict before Him, Christ's soul was filled with dread of separation from God. Satan told Him that if He became the surety for a sinful world, the separation would be eternal. He would be identified with Satan's kingdom, and would nevermore be one with God."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 686, 687.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 690-694.

**Part 6
THE
CONQUERING
CHRIST**

What experience of Jesus led to His sitting on the throne of His Father? What experience must the Christian enjoy if he is to be with Christ in His kingdom?

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21).

When on the cross Jesus cried in clarion tones, "It is finished," He was conqueror. Having defeated the combined efforts of man and devil to break up His unity of will with His Father, He bowed His head and died—a conqueror.

What was to be the result of this victory? Heb. 2:14, 15.

Jesus Christ was conqueror of sin, death, the devil, and perfectly revealed the desire of God to step down to man.

It is possible to concentrate upon the unpretentious, the condescending, the forgiving, and the suffering Christ so that the fact that He is and is to be the judging and conquering Christ can be overlooked and forgotten. In His perfect revelation of God, Jesus Christ exhibits all of the characteristics and attributes of God.

So it is with God; He is always in control over every situation. His plans and purposes are certain to triumph. The conquering Christ is the perfect image of the conquering God, and the Christian who truly reflects the image of his Maker is one who triumphs over every difficulty and presents a contrast between his own selflessness with the utter selfishness of the world.

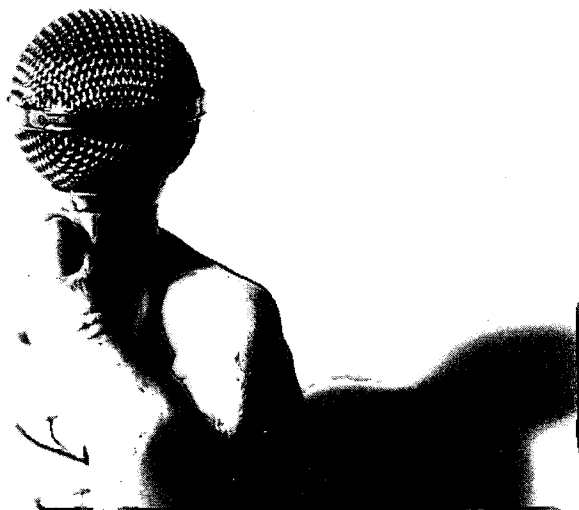
THINK IT THROUGH **Do I exhibit the characteristics of the Overcomer in my dealings with others? Am I looking to the future kingdom for the victory which God would give me now?**

"As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. We respond to His invitation, Come, learn of Me, and in thus coming we begin the life eternal. Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ. The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness. As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence. All that human nature can bear, we may receive here."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 331, 332.

FURTHER STUDY *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 372.

He Speaks Through Men

**“The revelation of Jesus Christ,
which God gave him to show
to his servants what must soon
take place”
(Rev. 1:1, RSV).**



“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw” (Rev. 1:1, 2, RSV).

If the condescension of God was most perfectly seen in Jesus Christ stepping down in the incarnation, there is to be seen a parallel revelation of that condescension in the selection of men to be God’s spokesmen, to be His penmen for the transmission of the revelation of Himself which God chose to give to mankind.

God, by the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, prepared a human body for His Son. So He called men and prepared them to have the Holy Spirit dwell in them. In this way the word of the Lord came to them and through them to those who were in need of the divine communication.

The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, provides a glimpse into the communication process—from God the Father to the Son, the Son to an angel, an angel to John, who then gives his witness to all who will listen to or read his testimony. Thus it is that God has ordained a system of communication in which man has a part in reaching

other men.

It is interesting and significant to note that the initiative for the communication was God’s. The apostle Peter says, “No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21, RSV). It is essential to recognize the origin and flow of the divine communication for this provides sure ground for the authority of the divine revelation. If man were left free to find God by any process he desired, through nature or without it, then there would be an infinite variety of possible pictures of God. But the question would then be, which one is true, which one is accurate? (Would it be only the good in man that would reveal God? What about the evil in him?) We would be left without any clear answers.

It does say something to us again about God’s condescension that He would entrust the revelation of Himself—the record of the supreme revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ—to men, even to sinful men. To think that He would permit their conveyance of His revelation of Himself to reflect their thought patterns, their rhetoric, their environment as the chosen human channels, and still the resultant message be proclaimed the Word of God!

May we develop a new and deeper appreciation for the divine-human mystery which provides us with the authoritative revelation of God to man, the Bible, as we study together this week.

LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. Men “Moved” by God (2 Peter 1:21)**
- 2. God Spoke Unto Moses (Ex. 6:2)**
- 3. The Word of the Lord Came (Zech. 1:1)**
- 4. Seal the Book! (Dan. 12:4)**
- 5. Eyewitnesses of the Christ (2 Peter 1:16)**
- 6. Blessed Readers (Rev. 1:3)**

Part 1
MEN "MOVED"
BY GOD

What does Peter state to be the source of prophecy?

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

We are not sure exactly what happens when men are moved by the Holy Spirit. This is a part of the "mystery of godliness" and parallels the incarnation of Jesus Christ—God manifest in the flesh. Prophets did not take the initiative in writing; neither did they write down their own thoughts. They recorded what the Spirit revealed to them, but they used their own words. Thus the reader could learn what God wanted him to learn.

How does Paul describe how he received a vision? Did he consider that this experience was something to boast about? 2 Cor. 12:1-4.

"The apostle Paul was highly honored of God, being taken in holy vision to the third heaven, where he looked upon scenes whose glories might not be revealed to mortals. Yet all this did not lead him to boastfulness or self-confidence."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1107.

What is the difference between men moved by God and men who understand and teach the truth?

"Sister White, do you think we must understand the truth for ourselves? . . . Do you not think that these men who have brought out the truth in the past were inspired of God?"

[Answer.] "I dare not say they were not led of God, for Christ leads into all truth; but when it comes to inspiration in the fullest sense of the word, I answer, No. . . ."

"You should say, 'If God has anything for me, I want it. If God has given evidence from his word to this or that brother that a certain thing is truth, he will give it to me. I can find that evidence if I search the Scriptures with constant prayer, and I can know that I do know what is truth.' You need not preach the truth as the product of another man's mind, you must make it your own."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 25, 1890.

THINK IT THROUGH

How do I differentiate between those who give God's message and those who do not?

"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."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 593.

FURTHER STUDY

The Great Controversy, Introduction, p. vii.

Part 2
GOD SPAKE
UNTO MOSES

"And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the Lord" (Ex. 6:2).

The Bible does not explain *how* God speaks. The simple assertion is that God spoke. It is equally clear from the Bible record that Moses spoke to God, "sharing" with Him the appeals and complaints of the chosen people, Israel. (See Ex. 5:22, 23.)

God spoke directly to individuals and people. He gave dreams to Pharaoh. (See Gen. 41:25.) He spoke to Israel at Sinai until the people begged Moses to be the intermediary. (See Ex. 20:19.)

When God chooses a man to speak for Him, is the communication any less authoritative than the direct approach? Ex. 7:1, 2.

We may wonder *why* God chose to have human spokesmen or penmen for Himself when angel messengers were available or when He could as easily communicate to individuals or groups directly. But God shows no disposition to meet our idle curiosity. *That* He communicated is recorded, and pertinent portions of *what* He has communicated are available. But on the *how* and *why* of it God does not put Himself on trial before human judges. Unquestionably, His infinite love, mercy, and wisdom are the reason for the choice of this communication pattern.

As we shall see in next week's lesson, certain of God's words and deeds were recorded by some of these same men whom He used as His communicators, and those records, found in the Inspired Word—the Bible—are often the only basis we have for knowing what God has done.

There are some who want to insist on receiving a direct communication on a matter before they can be convinced of its truth. In this regard they are telling God what to do. If God has already made Himself clear through the prophets and the written Word, there is no need to expect another communication.

THINK IT THROUGH **Is my relationship with God such that He could deign to speak to men through me?**

"As God called Daniel to witness for Him in Babylon, so He calls us to be His witnesses in the world today. In the smallest as well as the largest affairs of life, He desires us to reveal to men the principles of His kingdom. Many are waiting for some great work to be brought to them, while daily they lose opportunities for revealing faithfulness to God."—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 487, 488.

FURTHER STUDY *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 22, 23.

Part 3
THE WORD OF
THE LORD CAME

What other expression, common to the Old Testament is indicative of the divine condescension in communicating to men through chosen men?

"In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet" (Zech. 1:1).

There is here no explanation, no rationale, no introduction. We are told in the plainest way that the word of the Lord came to a man. Yet when we read the book of Zechariah we are reading the words of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet; and yet, in another and special sense, we are reading the "word of the Lord."

Here we are at the heart of the process by which the self-revealing God has chosen to speak to the sinful race. With the limitations of human language fully operative, it is "*the word of the Lord*" that comes to and through His chosen channels of communication, as given in the Bible.

Changes have taken place in attitudes toward the Bible. Many no longer consider the Bible to *be* the Word of God, but rather consider it to *contain* the Word of God. To put it in reverse, the Word of God, it is claimed, is not the Bible, but it is *in* the Bible. It is further claimed that the Word of God is not confined to what is in the Bible. It can be in the morning sermon, in the testimony of a Christian layman, in any human experience, wherever the "Spirit of God" is, there is the "word of God."

It is important that Christians become aware of these subtle distinctions. Sheltered within our own school system, building on a heritage of the Bible as the only infallible guide of faith and practice, we have a blind side to the actual meanings behind the language of modern theology.

THINK IT THROUGH **Do I accept the words of Scripture as "the word of God" to my own soul?**

"God committed the preparation of His divinely inspired Word to finite man. This Word, arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world, bequeathed to them that, by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 16.

FURTHER STUDY

The Great Controversy, pp. 598, 599.

Part 4
SEAL THE BOOK

What instruction to the prophet Daniel made a portion of his writing a link between the Old and the New Testaments and between the experience of God's people before and after the cross?

"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Dan. 12:4).

There is a hidden power and a deeper truth in the inspired words of God entrusted to His prophets which gives them an authority beyond their own time and place, significant to people other than their contemporaries.

In this same twelfth chapter of Daniel we hear the prophet pleading with the heavenly messenger to explain to him (Daniel) something of the deeper meaning of the messages he had heard and which he was to record. (See verses 8-10, 12, 13.)

But Daniel was instructed to rest content with his limited knowledge and insight and to know that in their time his "sealed" words would come into their own in "the time of the end."

Why was John the revelator told not to seal the sayings of his prophecy? Rev. 22:10.

As the Preacher has said: There is a time and a purpose for everything. (See Eccl. 3:1.) Even the Word of God has passages with a local meaning and also a meaning that goes far beyond the present. For example, see Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:21-23. There is a relevancy about the Word that makes it a living word for every man, though every man will find a different portion of Scripture speaking to his soul. There is also a word that applies to every age, and a word that has particular application to the end of time. It is characteristic of the Word that it reflects the Divine Author in its beauty, aptness, and power.

THINK IT THROUGH **Am I searching as diligently for the meaning of the words whose time has come as did the prophets to whom the words first came? (See 1 Peter 1:10-16.)**

"Yet while it was not given to the prophets to understand fully the things revealed to them, they earnestly sought to obtain all the light which God had been pleased to make manifest. . . . What a lesson to the people of God in the Christian age, for whose benefit these prophecies were given to His servants! . . . Contrast their [prophets'] holy zeal with the listless unconcern with which the favored ones of later ages treat this gift of Heaven. What a rebuke to the ease-loving, world-loving indifference which is content to declare that the prophecies cannot be understood!"—*The Great Controversy*, p. 344.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 20.

**Part 5
EYEWITNESSES
OF THE CHRIST**

What particular privilege was accorded simple, humble men, in the revelation of God to men?

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

In courts of law witnesses are limited to the statement of facts as known to them and especially to what they themselves have seen, heard or otherwise experienced about an event. In the same way God has given to us the testimony of a handful of men who were privileged to be contemporaries and companions of Jesus Christ, whom we have already agreed was the supreme revelation of God to man.

From another point of view we can marvel that God even entrusted the revelation through His Son to be conveyed to men through men. Christ's brief stay in this world and His briefer period of public ministry are known to all subsequent generations through the testimony of human witnesses, for Christ wrote no books. These witnesses were not dependent upon their eyesight alone for their qualification for a vital responsibility. They claimed a comparable qualification to that granted to the Old Testament prophets such as Moses, Isaiah, and Daniel.

How does Peter express this shared authority of prophets and apostle? 2 Peter 3:1,2.

Not only does Peter claim equal authority for the inspired word through apostle and prophet, but he even asserts that the words of the prophets were "more sure" than those of eyewitnesses to an event. And it is in this context that he claims, as the reason for their authority, that holy men were "moved" by the Holy Ghost. (See 2 Peter 1:16-21.)

THINK IT THROUGH

How would you show that the Old Testament is as important to the Christian as the New Testament? (See Rom. 15:4.)

"The word of God includes the Scriptures of the Old Testament as well as of the New. One is not complete without the other. Christ declared that the truths of the Old Testament are as valuable as those of the New. . . .

"Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 126, 128.

FURTHER STUDY

The Great Controversy, Introduction, pp. vi, vii.

**Part 6
BLESSED
READERS**

What does God promise to those who read, hear, and keep the things written in the Word of God?

"Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3, RSV).

A blessing is promised to the one who reads the book of Revelation aloud. In John's day it would be a very small minority of the people who would be able to read. They would depend on readers who would read the book aloud to them. This kind of reading would be done in congregational worship. It would be easy for a reader to ignore the book or hide it, especially if he thought that it was difficult to understand or would be unpopular with the hearers. But the book is important as a revelation of Jesus Christ. (See Rev. 1:1.) It is especially important to those who live near the close of the world's history.

The book of Revelation contains many figures and symbols and these may be difficult for the hearer to follow. But if the listener will pay earnest attention, he will find guidance and comfort as he follows the history of the church and the struggle that goes on between Christ and Satan. He will be encouraged to know that although the church often seems defeated, it will triumph gloriously. Thus he receives a blessing that Satan would very much like to keep away from him.

Finally, he who keeps the sayings of the prophecy in his heart and follows the instruction given is the one who receives the blessing of salvation. The one who perseveres to the end will be saved. (See Matt. 10:22.)

THINK IT THROUGH **Do I neglect certain parts of the Bible because they are difficult to understand? How can I overcome this weakness?**

"When a real love for the Bible is awakened, and the student begins to realize how vast is the field and how precious its treasure, he will desire to seize upon every opportunity for acquainting himself with God's word. Its study will be restricted to no special time or place. And this continuous study is one of the best means of cultivating a love for the Scriptures. Let the student keep his Bible always with him. As you have opportunity, read a text and meditate upon it. While walking the streets, waiting at a railway station, waiting to meet an engagement, improve the opportunity to gain some precious thought from the treasure house of truth."—*Education*, p. 191.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 369-372.

He Speaks Through Scripture



“You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me” (John 5:39, RSV).

The Jews studied the Scriptures diligently because they recognized that they were the source of eternal life. Yet they failed to see in them the One who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). This type of experience warns us that it is possible to read the Bible from cover to cover and yet miss its central message.

Some study the Bible as though it were a history book. There is no doubt that the Bible is a valuable historical source, but it is more than history. In some respects it does not meet the requirements of modern historical method, but it is a witness to what has happened in the past, and from this standpoint we can all learn lessons to guide us in the present and the future.

The secular historian usually questions the validity of accounts that tell of miracles. He feels that he cannot evaluate miracles. They are certainly not subject to the scientific method. But does that make the miracle any the less true? Are we to limit God's acts by human scientific method?

The fact is that many events in

history can be explained only in terms of a miracle or a series of miracles. Men may try to write history from the standpoint of purely natural events, but they soon find that the history they are writing has inexplicable twists and turns. Since history tries to make sense of the past, history that ignores a very real element in human experience must of necessity fail.

The Bible testifies to what God has done in history. That there is a God; that He has created man; that He is concerned with man's ultimate salvation; that in order to pursue His purpose He interjects Himself into history—these are truths that underlie all Biblical thinking. Without these truths the Bible is a book with very little meaning.

The Bible can be understood best as a revelation from God. God inspired men to keep a record of what happened. He gave them information on topics that they could not know by themselves. He preserved the records down through the centuries. He illumines the minds of all those who will study the writings diligently. Thus He keeps ever before men the truths that are necessary for them to know about Himself and His plans—of the nature of man, his origin, and possible destiny, and of the great conflict between Christ and Satan that will end in victory for truth and righteousness.

The lesson this week surveys the revelation that God makes of Himself through Scripture.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Prophecy Fulfilled (Luke 24:25-27)**
2. **Historical Events (Heb. 1:1-3)**
3. **Purposes Accomplished (Luke 1:1-4)**
4. **Events Attested (John 21:24; 19:35)**
5. **The Seal of Truth (Heb. 2:1-4)**
6. **Events Still Future (Rev. 22:6, 7)**

**Part 1
PROPHECY
FULFILLED**

What relationship did Jesus claim existed between the Old Testament and Himself?

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

The apostles taught that the key events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth were the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

What events in the life of Jesus were direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies? (See, for example, Matt. 1:22, 23; 2:5, 6, 17, 18; 4:13-15.)

At what time did Jesus come into the world? Gal. 4:4?

THINK IT THROUGH

What is the significance of knowing that events in the life of Jesus had been foretold by the prophets?

It is fascinating to contemplate that He who wrote no books, commanded no armies, held no office, made no political speeches, who was so misunderstood by His own lowly family, by His own disciples, and by His own people, has completely revolutionized the history of this world. His life was, in event and in word, a series of *fulfilled prophecies*.

"The Saviour's coming was foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their first-born son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise tarried."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 31.

"Like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay. . . .

"Providence had directed the movements of nations, and the tide of human impulse and influence, until the world was ripe for the coming of the Deliverer."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32.

"Through nature, through types and symbols, through patriarchs and prophets, God had spoken to the world. Lessons must be given to humanity in the language of humanity. The Messenger of the covenant must speak. His voice must be heard in His own temple. Christ must come to utter words which should be clearly and definitely understood. He, the author of truth, must separate truth from the chaff of man's utterance, which had made it of no effect. The principles of God's government and the plan of redemption must be clearly defined. The lessons of the Old Testament must be fully set before men."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 34.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 31-34.

Part 2
HISTORICAL
EVENTS

What marks of deity closely identify Jesus with the Father?

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Heb. 1:1-3).

Every event in the life of Jesus reflected another ray of light identifying God for man, interpreting God to man.

How did Jesus describe His work and mission? Luke 4:18.

"He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by Satan. There were whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house, for He had passed through them and healed all their sick. His work gave evidence of His divine anointing. Love, mercy, and compassion were revealed in every act of His life; His heart went out in tender sympathy to the children of men. He took man's nature, that He might reach man's wants."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 11, 12.

"It was to redeem us that Jesus lived and suffered and died. He became 'a Man of Sorrows,' that we might be made partakers of everlasting joy. God permitted His beloved Son, full of grace and truth, to come from a world of indescribable glory, to a world marred and blighted with sin, darkened with the shadow of death and the curse."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 13.

THINK IT THROUGH

Take the Bible out of the world, obliterate it from human history, and how much would sinful man know of God?

"This is a time when the question with all propriety may be asked, 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:8).

"Spiritual darkness has covered the earth and gross darkness the people. There are in many churches skepticism and infidelity in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Many, very many, are questioning the verity and truth of the Scriptures. Human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted, is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom. This is one of the marked signs of the last days."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 15.

FURTHER STUDY

Steps to Christ, "A Knowledge of God," pp. 87-90.

Part 3
PURPOSES
ACCOMPLISHED

What reason does Luke give for writing his Gospel?

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed” (Luke 1:1-4, RSV).

Luke was not an eyewitness of the events of the life of Jesus, but he felt it was his duty, seeing he had met and spoken to eyewitnesses, to set in order the things that he had learned so that others in general, and Theophilus in particular, should have strong evidence to believe the testimony of the apostles.

“It is clear from Luke’s experience that Inspiration functions in a manner consistent with the natural operation of the mental faculties and does not set them aside. Here is an inspired writer who was led by the Holy Spirit to give diligent study to the available oral and written source materials on the life of Christ, and then to combine into a connected narrative the information thus gathered.”—*SDA Bible Commentary*, on Luke 1:2

The purpose of Scripture is to give a continuing testimony to the truths recorded. Through Scripture the life and words of Jesus continue to live and bear their message.

In former times what had God ordered the Jews to do with the written law? Deut. 6:6-9.

“These words [Deut. 6:8] have a deep meaning. As the word of God is meditated upon and practiced, the whole man will be ennobled. In righteous and merciful dealing, the hands will be kept clean from bribes, and from all that is corrupt and deceptive. They will be active in works of love and compassion. The eyes, directed toward a noble purpose, will be clear and true. The expressive countenance, the speaking eye, will testify to the blameless character of him who loves and honors the word of God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 612.

THINK IT THROUGH

How can Christians today keep the commandments of God “as frontlets between thine eyes” and written “upon the posts of thy house” in accordance with the instruction of Deuteronomy 6:8, 9? How did Jesus attack all outward show of piety? Matt. 23:5-12.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 21, 22.

Part 4
EVENTS
ATTESTED

How extremely careful was John (as no doubt were other Bible writers) in recording the things God has said and done?

"This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24).

"And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (John 19:35).

These words convey a strong yet unegotistic assurance on the part of God's chosen witnesses of the Sent of God that they were testifying truly and truthfully. For some of them, the price paid for bearing this testimony was nothing less than death. And for all of them this ultimate price could be exacted at any moment, from any quarter. Yet fearlessly, selflessly they went about the quiet but effectual work of turning the world upside down with their teachings (Acts 17:6).

The thought may be running in some minds that surely the inspiration and authority of the Bible rests on firmer ground than the testimony of human eyewitnesses of the words and works of Jesus. And if that qualification alone were all, there could be a question. But the pervading, directing, teaching, judging work of the Holy Spirit must be seen in it all. Even so, we must still recognize the central place of faith on the part of the one who comes to the Bible and accepts its testified things.

The Jews had a high regard for Scripture. (See John 5:39.) Yet Jesus said that they had false understandings because they did not know the Scriptures as they ought. (See Matt. 22:29.)

What was the attitude of Jesus to the Scriptures? John 10:35.

Some modern translations of the expression "scripture cannot be broken" are as follows:

"Scripture cannot be set aside." NEB.

"Scripture cannot be rejected." Jerusalem.

"What the scripture says is true forever." TEV.

What did Jesus say was the basis of coming to know whether certain teachings were true or not? John 7:17.

"Those who study the word of God with hearts open to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, will not remain in darkness as to the meaning of the word. . . . All who come to Christ for a clearer knowledge of the truth will receive it. He will unfold to them the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and these mysteries will be understood by the heart that longs to know the truth."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 36.

THINK IT THROUGH

John was very confident that what he believed was true. (See 1 John 1:1-4.) How can we be equally confident?

FURTHER STUDY

The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 517-521.

Part 5
THE SEAL
OF TRUTH

How does inspiration place the seal of approval upon the testimony of those who heard the Lord when He was here?

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb. 2:1-4).

The writer to the Hebrews here summarizes the way the message of salvation has been passed on to men:

1. There was the declaration of the Lord Jesus Himself. (Who could doubt such a source?)
2. There was the testimony of those who heard the Lord.
3. God Himself confirmed the testimony by signs and miracles. (What further testimony do we need?)
4. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were given the church so that it could testify to the truth of the Scriptures.

The act of the believer's faith in the acceptance of the testimony of God's witnesses does not have to operate without divine confirmation. God bore witness to the authenticity of His apostolic witnesses. After Jesus ascended to heaven the apostles' witness was marked by signs, wonders, miracles, and spiritual gifts, as the Holy Ghost saw the need.

How sadly the human and demon enemies of Christ underestimated what God would entrust to mere men. Just as the evil powers were about to exult over His departure from this world, His followers began to preach the Word with power.

The words of truth with which Christ had silenced opponents were now heard upon the lips of these Galileans. The anticipated collapse of Christ's mission never came. The days from Passover to Pentecost were days of regrouping, reequipping, and reorganizing—for, with, and by the Holy Spirit.

THINK IT THROUGH

In view of the strong evidence for the authenticity of the why do so many reject it? Is the church to blame?

"The church is God's agency for the proclamation of truth, empowered by Him to do a special work; and if she is loyal to Him, obedient to all His commandments, there will dwell within her the excellency of divine grace. If she will be true to her allegiance, if she will honor the Lord God of Israel, there is no power that can stand against her."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 600.

FURTHER STUDY

The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 599-602.

Part 6
EVENTS STILL
FUTURE

What does John the revelator say about events that are still future?

"And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:6, 7).

Some are afraid of the study of prophecy. They shy away from figures and symbols, and when there are differences of interpretation current among Bible scholars, they wonder whether they can profit from the study of prophecy. But Ellen White says:

"The book of Revelation, in connection with the book of Daniel, especially demands study. . . . None should become discouraged in the study of the Revelation because of its apparently mystical symbols. 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not.' James 1:5."—*Education*, p. 191.

What does Isaiah say is one of God's special characteristics? Isa. 46:10; 42:9.

Only God can look into the future and see what will happen. Only God can reveal the future. Fulfilled prophecy is evidence that God has spoken, that prophecies yet unfulfilled will certainly come to pass.

"To John were opened scenes of deep and thrilling interest in the experience of the church. He saw the position, dangers, conflicts, and final deliverance of the people of God. He records the closing messages which are to ripen the harvest of the earth, either as sheaves for the heavenly garner or as fagots for the fires of destruction. Subjects of vast importance were revealed to him, especially for the last church, that those who should turn from error to truth might be instructed concerning the perils and conflicts before them. None need be in darkness in regard to what is coming upon the earth."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 341, 342.

THINK IT THROUGH **Why is it that some portions of Scripture are difficult to understand? What should we not do with difficult passages? (See 2 Peter 3:16.)**

FURTHER STUDY *The Great Controversy*, pp. 599, 600.

He Speaks by His Spirit

**“But the Comforter, which is
the Holy Ghost, whom the Father
will send in my name, he shall
teach you all things”
(John 14:26).**



“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26).

Anyone who is even a little sensitive to what is going on in the Christian world today knows that our day has been increasingly proclaimed the era of the Spirit. In prayer groups, meditation sessions, or meetings sometimes filled with emotion, noise, and action, men and women are seeking the “spirit.”

There are services of healing, attempts at prophesying, speaking with tongues, and the performance of miracles of various kinds, all sweeping into public prominence wherever the name of Christ is heard.

What does all this current emphasis on the Holy Spirit mean? Does God speak to us by His Spirit, or does He not? If He does, how does He do so? How does this relate to Scripture? Is God’s revelation limited to the Scriptures, or is it possible to have revelations in other areas of activity? Is there any tension between the Scriptural revelation and the speaking of the Spirit to men today?

If the Spirit does not speak to men today, what explanation is there to show a fulfillment of Christ’s promise to His church and to His disciples?

If the Spirit speaks directly to men today, in the environment, the context of this year, do I still need the 2000-year-old revelation of Scripture?

It does not require special discernment to recognize the significance of these questions and issues. The sweep of the charismatic movement—whether through classical Pentecostalism or the interdenominational neo-Pentecostalism—is an undeniable phenomenon of the day. Where does it lead? Where will it end?

To Christians everywhere these are vital questions. While we profess to expect the increasing manifestation and work of the Holy Spirit

in the church that looks for the returning Lord, we are very much a people of the Book. We have been taught to regard the Scriptures as our main fortress and safeguard against the machinations of conspiring evil men and angels, as the conflict between Christ and Satan rises to the final climax in earth’s history.

Is there any real conflict of interest between the Spirit and the Scriptures? Does an experience with either negate the value and power of the other? Since the Spirit is so immediate, so personal, so current, could I afford to let the Scriptures slip into a subordinate place, slip into the background of my consciousness now that I am led of the Spirit?

To the underlying principle behind these questions let us now address ourselves.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **A Promised Guide (John 14:16)**
2. **Walking After the Spirit (Rom. 8:4)**
3. **The Spirit and Obedience (Acts 5:32)**
4. **The Spirit Moves and Interprets (2 Peter 1:20, 21)**
5. **The Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:10, 11)**
6. **In the Spirit (Rev. 1:10)**

Part 1
A PROMISED
GUIDE

Before the trial of the cross, what help did Jesus promise to His disciples?

"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16).

Sometimes individuals who come into contact with the church and learn new truths protest as follows: "Well, when the Spirit tells me personally that this teaching is true, I will accept it. But now, no matter what you show me in the Bible, I will not believe it."

This difference which some Christians see between the authority of the Bible and that of the Holy Spirit is a matter of major importance, especially in these days when the "charismatic" movement is gaining such prominence.

We believe Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit, and we acknowledge the record of the work that the Spirit performed for the disciples on the day of Pentecost. That was a revolutionizing experience and shows what can happen to ordinary men and women when they are "baptized with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 1:5).

But is there anything about the true Pentecostal experience that would support the frequently held feeling that the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit should take precedence over the teachings of the Word of God? Is there any valid difference between the teachings of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

"The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. . . .

"Great reproach has been cast upon the work of the Holy Spirit by the errors of a class that, claiming its enlightenment, profess to have no further need of guidance from the word of God. They are governed by impressions which they regard as the voice of God in the soul. But the spirit that controls them is not the Spirit of God."—*The Great Controversy*, Introduction, p. vii.

THINK IT THROUGH **What was to be the source of those things which the Holy Spirit would bring to the disciples? (See John 16:13, 14.)**

The Spirit would not only instruct the disciples in the things of Christ which they had not yet understood, but He would bring back to their minds those things which they had understood, but had forgotten. (See John 14:26.) So, it may be asked, How can there be any essential conflict between the teachings of Christ and the promptings of the Spirit?

FURTHER STUDY

The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 47-53.

Part 2
WALKING AFTER
THE SPIRIT

What evidence is there that the Spirit will teach in harmony with the law of God?

"That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Those who profess to be following the guidance of the Spirit as an authority superior to that of the Bible often make such a claim of authority when faced with previously unrecognized demands of the law of God. Yet the apostle Paul sees no conflict between the two authorities when he is writing to the Roman church. Those who walk in the way of the Spirit's teaching will find their lives brought into growing harmony with the law of God. (See Rom. 8:4-7).

"To them that believe, Christ is precious. His Spirit moving upon the mind and heart of the believer is in perfect agreement with that which is written in the Word. The Spirit and the Word agree perfectly. Thus the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are born of God."—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 144.

"In searching for Heaven-revealed truths, the Spirit of God is brought into close connection with the sincere searcher of the Scriptures. An understanding of the revealed will of God enlarges the mind, expands, elevates, and endows it with new vigor by bringing its faculties into contact with stupendous truth."—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 133.

How willing is God to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? Luke 11:13.

THINK IT THROUGH

Does my personal relationship with the Holy Spirit strengthen the rule of God's commandments in my life?

"The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection. We behold in it the goodness of God, who by revealing to men the immutable principles of righteousness, seeks to shield them from the evils that result from transgression."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 235.

What a tragedy if any of God's people today should repeat the error of some who, in 1888, opposed the teaching of righteousness by faith presented by Ellen White and Brethren Waggoner and Jones. To restore us to harmony with the law is the goal of the Spirit as He seeks to bring us into harmony with God.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 233-235.

Part 3
THE SPIRIT AND
OBEDIENCE

To whom has God given the Holy Spirit?

"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32).

The occasion for this bold assertion by Peter was the arrest of himself and his brethren when summoned before the Sanhedrin. They had already been released from the common prison by the angel of the Lord and had been instructed to teach in the temple again.

The anger of the high priest against them was heightened by their seeming indifference to the authority of his threats of punishment. He demanded that their obedience be to men; but Peter asserted that they must be obedient to a higher authority—that of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name and for whose cause they preached. The Holy Ghost was a witness to the truth of what they preached and was given "to them that obey him."

Heaven, said Peter, has vindicated our determination to "obey God rather than men" (verse 29). The evidence is in the gift of His Spirit to them that obey Him.

What is the contrast between the believer and the world as concerning the Holy Spirit? John 14:17.

The Spirit is given only to those who obey God; but obedience to God is possible only through the Spirit. Man cannot work at cross purposes to the Spirit and still retain His presence. Thus the world does not receive Him because they are traveling a different road.

THINK IT THROUGH

Could there be any disposition to disobey God that is hindering the gift of His Spirit to me?

"Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, p. 827.

Part 4
THE SPIRIT
MOVES AND
INTERPRETS

What is the importance of the Holy Spirit both in the giving of prophecy and its interpretation?

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:20, 21).

While it is true that Peter is here speaking especially of the *prophecies* of the Old Testament, there is no indication that his statement would not be applicable to the *whole* of the Old Testament, and by analogy, to the New. (See 2 Peter 3:15, 16.) Thus, if the Holy Spirit was the source of the inspiration of the Bible writers, that same Spirit could never counsel at any time, including today, in a manner contrary to the teaching of the Bible. To think otherwise would be to suggest that God contradicts Himself, and this is an untenable viewpoint.

Thus it is clear that professed followers of Jesus who want to believe that their relationship with the Holy Spirit gives them license to negate the instructions of the Bible have failed to see the inseparable relationship of the Spirit with the Scripture.

What does Paul teach is the way that men may know the things of God? 1 Cor. 2:9-12.

THINK IT THROUGH

How safe is my impression that the Spirit of God is leading me if the way seems contrary to the Spirit's instruction in the Bible and in the spirit of prophecy?

"'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them' (Isa. 8:20). Even the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart is to be tested by the Word of God. The Spirit which inspired the Scriptures, always leads to the Scriptures."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 43.

In justice to a balanced view of this issue between the comparative authorities of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, let it be clearly understood that without the Spirit's guidance today the believer is in danger of misinterpreting the Scriptures. Likewise, without the rule of faith and practice provided by the Scriptures, the so-called impressions of the Holy Spirit (or those believed to be from the Holy Spirit) could be subject to misinterpretation.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 671, 672.

Part 5
THE SPIRIT
OF CHRIST

What does Peter call the Spirit that moved the prophets to write and to examine their prophecies?

"Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:10, 11).

The essential harmony and unity of the Old Testament era, the gospel era of Jesus Christ, and the era of the Christian church are clearly indicated by the apostle Peter in his first epistle. When those today whose claim to the Spirit's guidance leads them to neglect the requirements of the Word of God, it is often the Old Testament to which they take particular exception. Such an attitude finds no support in the Word which the Spirit inspired.

It may come as a shock to some believers to recognize Peter's claim that it was the Spirit of *Christ* in the Old Testament prophets which gave them their insights into salvation. The indwelling of that Spirit and His revelations to the prophets led them to study earnestly the portrayals granted them. They longed to understand the future more fully, but they were gently advised, as was Daniel (see Dan. 12:8-13), that aspects of their testimony were for a later time—the time of Jesus and the church. And now, says Peter, the same Holy Spirit in us has led us to report to you, the church, the things of the gospel which we have witnessed.

THINK IT THROUGH

For what did David pray for which a Christian today may also pray? Ps. 51:11.

Is the Spirit of Christ in me leading me to search the things written by prophets and apostles respecting my salvation and the meaning of fulfilling events?

"Having brought conviction of sin, and presented before the mind the standard of righteousness, the Holy Spirit withdraws the affections from the things of this earth and fills the soul with a desire for holiness. 'He will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13), the Saviour declared. If men are willing to be molded, there will be brought about a sanctification of the whole being. The Spirit will take the things of God and stamp them on the soul. By His power the way of life will be made so plain that none need err therein."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 52, 53.

FURTHER STUDY

The Great Controversy, pp. 461-465.

**Part 6
IN THE SPIRIT**

What was the experience of John that made him receptive to a revelation from God?

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet" (Rev. 1:10).

Earlier in these lessons we discussed the instruction which the opening verses of Revelation provide us concerning the process of divine revelation to man, as God, Jesus Christ, the angel, and the "servant John" provide a chain of communication from heaven to the church on earth. Does this chain of communication ignore the work of the Holy Spirit? No! In the above verse the expression "in the Spirit" and the context of the phrase indicate a state or condition in which the revelator was receptive to the communications of the Spirit of God. (Note also the refrain in the seven letters to the churches: "Let him hear what the *Spirit* saith unto the churches.")

We are thus brought back once more to the essential harmony between Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Father, and the "Revelation of Jesus Christ." When Jesus was challenged on earth as to His authority, His appeal was often to the Word. (See Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 10:1-9.)

THINK IT THROUGH

If there appears to be a conflict between the impressions of the mind and the teachings of the Bible, which should I follow? (See 1 John 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:15, 16; 1:13, 14.)

It is significant to note Paul's concern that Timothy prove himself a man of "sound doctrine." And this is in harmony with the principle found in Isaiah 8:19, 20, and with the repeated insistence of the spirit of prophecy, such as this paragraph:

"Some who have all their lives been led by feeling have thought that an education or a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures was of no consequence if they only had the Spirit. But God never sends His Spirit to sanction ignorance. Those who have not knowledge, and who are so situated that it is impossible for them to obtain it, the Lord may, and does, pity and bless, and sometimes condescends to make His strength perfect in their weakness. But He makes it the duty of such to study His word. A lack of knowledge in the sciences is no excuse for a neglect of Bible study; for the words of inspiration are so plain that the unlearned may understand them."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 342.

FURTHER STUDY

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 279; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 418.

He Speaks Through His Church



“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Acts 15:28).

The title of this week’s lesson does not express the most acceptable doctrine for some church members these days, and it is even less acceptable outside the church. The spirit of independence and self-dependence, the general disillusionment with leadership and bureaucracy, the challenging of all forms of authority, the determination of so many to do things their own way, to strike out alone—all of these make the voice of the church less acceptable today than possibly at any previous time since its founding. While the youth tend to receive most of the blame for this current attitude, they are either not as guilty as some claim or the adult world has absorbed from them much of the same attitude.

There is no use trying to deny that a growing disillusionment with the institutional church exists at the same time that a growing wave of interest and involvement in religious activity and commitment has developed, much of it in the name of Jesus Christ. So the one who makes bold to claim that God speaks to man through His church must expect to be seriously challenged today.

Nevertheless, if a person can bring himself to take an unimpassioned and objective look at the New Testament church, the evidence will indicate that the church was indeed entrusted by God to be one of His key channels of communication to man. The record of Pentecost itself, when the power and presence of the Holy Spirit were so signally manifested to and through the followers of Jesus, shows that those who were being saved by their acceptance of the Saviour and by the ministry of the Spirit continued in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles. And where can these be found outside the church of Jesus Christ? (See Acts 2:41-47.)

When Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit proceeded to guide the church of apostles and believers “into all truth” (John 16:13) and to resolve issues and problems which arose within the inexperienced and youthful church.

The same Holy Spirit, working through the apostles of Jesus Christ, gave us the New Testament and guided the church in the development of the canon of Scripture, determining which writings were “given by inspiration of God.” (See John 15:26, 27.)

The same Spirit (promised by Jesus to His followers for the period of His own absence from the realms of men) gives authority to the Spirit-guided decisions of the church even today and will do so until the work of the church on earth is completed and Jesus comes again. (See Acts 1:8; Eph. 4:4-30.) Hence the declaration of the early church: “It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us.”

Before we proceed with this week’s lesson, let us pause to note that with lesson 8 we completed the more detailed study of six channels of God’s self-revelation which were outlined in lesson 2. Now we turn to one channel often overlooked, the church. This will be closely followed by the consideration of the spirit of prophecy as a channel. Then we shall consider the individual’s role as an interpreter of God’s messages and also my response to them before we climax the quarter with the joyous assurance that God will speak to me face-to-face.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Call and Commission (Luke 6:13; Matt. 28:19, 20)**
2. **Divine Authority (Matt. 18:18, 19)**
3. **Christ’s Body (Eph. 1:22, 23)**
4. **The Brotherhood (Matt. 23:8)**
5. **The Kingdom Incomparable (Mark 4:30-32)**
6. **Preparation for Triumph (Rev. 14:5)**

**Part 1
CALL AND
COMMISSION**

On what two occasions did Jesus take steps to call the church into existence and give her a divine commission?

"And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles" (Luke 6:13).

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19, 20).

It was following a night of earnest prayer for the disciples (Luke 6:12) that Jesus took the step of calling His church into existence. Concerning the calling of those disciples who were to be apostles, the inspired comment is that "the first step was now to be taken in the organization of the church that after Christ's departure was to be His representative on earth."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 291.

We have noted the condescension of God in using men as His channels of revelation to other men, and it was this divine-human link which gave the apostolic church its commission. While noting the divine-human combination in Christ Himself, God's messenger to the remnant asserts that "divinity needed humanity; for it required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world. Divinity needed humanity, that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man. So with the servants and messengers of Christ. Man needs a power outside of and beyond himself, to restore him to the likeness of God, and enable him to do the work of God; but this does not make the human agency unessential. Humanity lays hold upon divine power, Christ dwells in the heart by faith; and through co-operation with the divine, the power of man becomes efficient for good."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 296, 297.

THINK IT THROUGH

How do I know that I am included in the divine commission given to the apostles?

"He who called the fishermen of Galilee is still calling men to His service. And He is just as willing to manifest His power through us as through the first disciples."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 297.

The oft-quoted gospel commission (Matt. 28:19, 20) is a reaffirmation of the original purpose for calling the church of apostles into existence; it was that it might be an authoritative witness to the truth of the gospel through the work of the Holy Spirit, a witness in which men and women would be equally involved. Out of that authoritative witness came the New Testament record.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 296, 297.

Part 2
DIVINE
AUTHORITY

What authority did Christ commit to His apostles, and the church?

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:18, 19).

This bestowal of authority to the Spirit-led church was later repeated after the resurrection of Christ. (See John 20:21-23, and *The Desire of Ages*, p. 805).

What danger is there in rejecting the authority of the church?

"Christ here [in John 20:23] gives no liberty for any man to pass judgment upon others. In the Sermon on the Mount He forbade this. It is the prerogative of God. But on the church in its organized capacity He places a responsibility for the individual members. Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. . . . She [the church] must say about sin what God says about it. She must deal with it as God directs, and her action is ratified in heaven. He who despises the authority of the church despises the authority of Christ Himself."—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 805, 806.

While "the church in its organized capacity" has a solemn work in rebuking sin, wherever found, she also has a message of hope to speak for Christ: "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted." John 20:23. This side of the church's work should ever "be kept uppermost." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 806.

THINK IT THROUGH

Why is it that in many quarters the church is not recognized as authoritative in matters of doctrine and discipline? Is the church to blame? How do I regard the church and its authority?

"The church is God's fortress, His city of refuge, which He holds in a revolted world. Any betrayal of the church is treachery to Him who has bought mankind with the blood of His only-begotten Son. . . . God brought these witnesses into covenant relation with Himself, uniting the church on earth with the church in heaven. He has sent forth His angels to minister to His church, and the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against His people."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 11.

FURTHER STUDY

Testimonies, vol. 3, p. 433.

Part 3 **How close and continuous is the relationship of Jesus**
CHRIST'S BODY **Christ and His church?**

"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22, 23).

It is a tragedy that the enemy has succeeded in leading many to suppose that they can maintain a sweet, personal relationship with Christ and yet at the same time despise and ignore His church. This would be comparable to communicating with a person's head in a gracious and positive manner while despising the rest of his body.

THINK IT THROUGH **How much independence of spirit is legitimate in the church?**

"God has made His church on earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ's body—is left in darkness. In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others whom He is leading out to advance His work.

"There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people. God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 163, 164.

At the same time there are and have been occasions when persons in high office in the church have abused position and power. Since all leaders are human, the temptation to use power selfishly is ever present, and the church at large has a responsibility to note, to counsel, to curb and even remove from power those who abuse it. (See *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 76, 77.)

It calls for a close walk with God on the part of every leader, every member, if the oneness which alone can clear the way for ultimate Holy Ghost power in the church is to become a reality.

FURTHER STUDY *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 160-162.

Part 4
THE
BROTHERHOOD

By what counsel did Christ endeavor to teach His disciples humility in their leadership of the church?

"But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matt. 23:8).

History teaches us awareness of the ever-present human tendency to abuse a position of leadership and power—in any sphere of life, including the church. The titles, the privileges, the vestments, the exemptions, the adulation, the deference—all these and a host of other attachments to leadership are a potential snare to any human soul.

Christ was wholly aware of these snares when He gave the warning against seeking titles, and stressed that all—He was addressing the multitude and His disciples—"all ye are brethren."

"The church is built upon Christ as its foundation; it is to obey Christ as its head. It is not to depend upon man, or be controlled by man. Many claim that a position of trust in the church gives them authority to dictate what other men shall believe and what they shall do. This claim God does not sanction. The Saviour declares, 'All ye are brethren.'"—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 414.

What did Jesus indicate was the path to true greatness? Matt. 20:25-28.

"Not by their wealth, their education, or their position does God estimate men. He estimates them by their purity of motive and their beauty of character. He looks to see how much of His Spirit they possess, and how much of His likeness their life reveals. To be great in God's kingdom is to be as a little child in humility, in simplicity of faith, and in purity of love."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 477, 478.

THINK IT THROUGH

Why is it important for the church to be united in brotherhood? Does unity mean sameness?

There is no reason to think that unity demands uniformity or blind conformity. The apostles of the church demonstrated unity in diversity repeatedly. (See Acts 15:37-41; Gal. 2:11-14 for examples.) But the rugged individuality was not to be an excuse for rupturing the unity of the church for which Jesus prayed. And it is significant to remember *always* that the Pentecostal power came when Pentecostal unity had been achieved by prayer, confession, restitution, and fellowship. (See Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4.)

FURTHER STUDY

Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 347-349.

Part 5
THE KINGDOM
INCOMPARABLE

What parable did Jesus tell to illustrate the external growth of the kingdom of heaven?

“And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it” (Mark 4:30-32).

The world is full of groups and organizations, some great, others small, and some in between. But there is none that gives a valid illustration of the “kingdom of God.”

THINK IT THROUGH

From the experience of the disciples recorded in Mark 10:35-45, what would you say is the difference between the kingdom of heaven and the world in regard to the prerequisites for a position of honor?

It is for this reason, among others, that the kingdom of God is unique. God's principles are opposite to those of the world. The leaders in the church are to be the humblest servants of all! Unfortunately, not all members of the church are maturing. And appointment to high office in a local church or a conference does not change a person's character.

“Let us all remember that we are not dealing with ideal men, but with real men of God's appointment, men precisely like ourselves, men who fall into the same errors that we do, men of like ambitions and infirmities. No man has been made a master, to rule the mind and conscience of a fellow being. Let us be very careful how we deal with God's blood-bought heritage.”—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 495.

Perhaps as the church increases in numbers and in the development of its institutions there may be a greater danger that individuals—workers or laymen—may be tempted to “exercise lordship” over others. Such a tendency must be resisted, and quiet but effective conviction be expressed through channels of church communication to discourage any such tendency. Particularly in view of the independent spirit that marks our day, we must work together to remove all “lordship” tendencies from the midst of the church.

FURTHER STUDY

Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 502-505.

**Part 6
PREPARATION
FOR TRIUMPH**

When the incomparable church enters the kingdom of God's glory, having already entered fully into His kingdom of grace, what will be her condition?

"And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:5).

"Without fault"! No guile in their mouths! Will there be any exercise of lordship on the part of those triumphant 144,000? On the other hand, will there be among them any who has despised the authority of God or His messengers, whoever they may be? It is a solemn thought to contemplate whether anyone with either fault will be "safe to save" in the church-become-the-kingdom. For is there not a tendency for the exerciser of "lordship" to indulge in "guile" to achieve his ends and to mask his true intentions?

When a confrontation arose in the apostolic church, a council was called and the Holy Spirit's will was sought most earnestly until the church could announce a decision: "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us" (Acts 15:28). Can the church today follow a better pattern?

With what impatience all heaven awaits that condition in the church that will free the channels for God's unrestrained communication of Himself to the world!

THINK IT THROUGH

Could I be guilty of both a desire to be independent of the authority of the united church and also of exercising a masterly spirit in my relationships with those who work near (and perhaps "under") me?

"Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent. The stars of heaven are all under law, each influencing the other to do the will of God, yielding their common obedience to the law that controls their action. And in order that the Lord's work may advance healthfully and solidly, His people must draw together."—*Testimonies, to Ministers*, p. 489.

"The Lord has not placed any one of His human agencies under the dictation and control of those who are themselves but erring mortals. He has not placed upon men the power to say, You shall do this, and you shall not do that. . . .

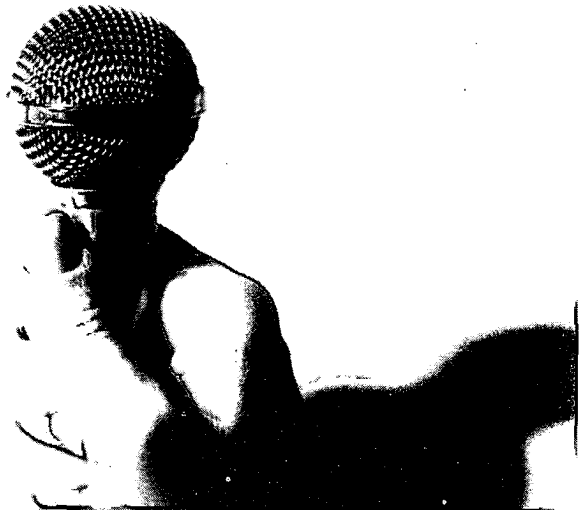
"No man is a proper judge of another man's duty. Man is responsible to God; and as finite, erring men take into their hands the jurisdiction of their fellowmen, as if the Lord commissioned them to lift up and cast down, all heaven is filled with indignation."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 493, 494.

FURTHER STUDY

Gospel Workers, pp. 73-80.

He Speaks Through the Spirit of Prophecy

**“Wherefore he saith, When he
ascended up on high, he led
captivity captive, and gave gifts
unto men”
(Eph. 4:8).**



“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph. 4:8).

No study of God’s self-revelation can pretend to be adequate that ignores the means by which He has most specifically and directly spoken to the remnant church.

The church in the last days has been described as keeping “the commandments of God” and having “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17). Furthermore, the testimony of Jesus has been defined as the “spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). Seventh-day Adventists believe that the testimony of Jesus, manifested as the spirit of prophecy, has its fulfillment in the life and work of Ellen G. White.

Mrs. White began to speak to the church authoritatively at the time of the third angel’s message, just after the great disappointment of October 1844. Her messages reminded men and women who had risked all for Christ of the words of life in the Scriptures. The struggling, emerging “little flock” of believers gained a gleam of light which swiftly illuminated the entire way to the city of God.

Ever since that time believers have had to consider, to assess, to relate to, and to interpret this modern phenomenon. We must admit that the church is not yet perfected, has not yet come to “the unity of the faith,” has not grown “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Then should we not make use of the “gifts” which Christ gave “unto men” (Eph. 4:8-13)? “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Verse 11). This girl, Ellen Harmon, a sickly but deeply consecrated girl of seventeen, was called to tell of God’s tender, loving care for this torn and bleeding “little flock” in the hour of its greatest need.

Where is she now? She sleeps. On July 16, 1915, at the age of 87 years she went to her rest. But her writings

live on and continue to speak in a manner similar to the writings of Moses, Daniel, and Paul. She left 100,000 pages of written materials. About what? About the heights and the depths of the love of God, of His plans for His church—from the beginning of time to the end—and about the smallest details of life-style that will mark those who constitute the final demonstration of God’s grace and power in this age.

This week let us take another careful, prayerful look at one of “the best gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31) of Jesus Christ to His church.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Prophetic Lineage (2 Chron. 20:20)**
2. **Perpetuity of Gifts (Eph. 4:12, 13)**
3. **Prophets Lay Foundations (Eph. 2:20)**
4. **A Needed Gift**
5. **Use and Misuse**
6. **Time and Place (Eccl. 3:1)**

Part 1 **What good counsel comes to us from the Old Testament**
PROPHETIC **regarding prophets?**
LINEAGE

"And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper" (2 Chron. 20:20).

The above text tells us; (1) that God speaks to His people through prophets; (2) that prosperity comes to all those who believe the messages given and live according to them.

The question arises: Does God always, and in every age, provide a prophet that will speak for Him? The answer is that there have been times when God has sent no messengers. The intertestament period is one of those times—the period between the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, dated about 400 BC, and the opening of the New Testament era with the Gospels.

God in His wisdom knows when it is necessary to send a mouthpiece for Him. The New Testament era was a time when there were many prophets. (See Luke 1:67, 76; 24:19; Acts 21:8, 9.)

It is reasonable to suppose that at the end of time, when the church is being described as "lukewarm" (Rev. 3:16) and Satan goes about "as a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8), a messenger would be needed. This prophet would represent the gift of prophecy promised to the church (Eph. 4:8, 11).

THINK IT THROUGH **But now with the close of the Biblical Canon, is that the end of God's formal self-revelation?**

Our introduction to this lesson has already suggested that the spiritual gifts or gifts of the Spirit are to be seen in the church until her work on earth and her restoration to the divine likeness are completed.

So, in one sense, there can be seen a prophetic lineage, encompassed in the gift of "prophesying" from the days of Moses to the twentieth century. The descriptions of the personal experiences and the physical phenomena associated with the reception of God's revelation to the Biblical prophets and apostles is paralleled closely by the experience of Ellen G. White. We shall notice however, that she herself drew a distinction between her writings and the Scriptures which cannot be overlooked if one would be true to the claims of Ellen White.

FURTHER STUDY *SDA Encyclopedia*, article "Spirit of Prophecy," pp. 1253, 1254.

Part 2
PERPETUITY
OF GIFTS

Why will the gifts of the Spirit be manifested within and through the church until the close of human probation?

“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12, 13).

So long as the saints are not perfect, and the work of the ministry is not completed, so long as we are divided among ourselves over doctrinal teachings and have not reached the standard of perfection in Christ Jesus, so long will the gifts of the Spirit be necessary, and among them the gift of prophecy.

“In harmony with the word of God, His Spirit was to continue its work throughout the period of the gospel dispensation. During the ages while the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament were being given, the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon. The Bible itself relates how, through the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction, in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work, to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God.”—*The Great Controversy*, Introduction, p. viii.

THINK IT THROUGH **What phase of Christ’s church of the ages could be in greater need of inspired guidance than the remnant which finally champions the character and government of God? (See Rev. 12:17.)**

We should perhaps not be surprised that a particular gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1-11 and 27-30) should be more conspicuously bestowed upon the church at a given time. For example, at the Pentecostal bestowal of the Spirit the gift of tongues was the conspicuous gift—very possibly because the circumstances and need of the infant church at that time were for the power to give the gospel swiftly to an ever-widening circle. (See Acts 1:8.) In the remnant phase of the church’s history the gift of prophecy seems dominant. This does not preclude the bestowal of other of the New Testament gifts or possibly some gifts never before manifested. Furthermore, to every servant of the Master some gift is promised.

FURTHER STUDY

Christ’s Object Lessons, “Gifts of the Holy Spirit,” and “Other Talents,” pp. 327-333.

Part 3
PROPHETS LAY
FOUNDATIONS

Who besides apostles are mentioned as being part of the foundation of the church?

"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20).

The prophet, like the apostle, serves as a mouthpiece for God, and hence his work is important in passing on God's messages. It does not matter when the prophet lives, to whom he is sent, and the particular message he gives. The main thing is that he is inspired to speak for God.

Thus there can be no question of degrees of prophetic inspiration. All are equally inspired, all give messages that the church cannot neglect with impunity.

One of the greatest evidences that the spirit of prophecy as manifested through Ellen White is a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit to the remnant church lies in the consistent manner in which the writer herself maintained both the infallibility and the supremacy of the Scriptures.

"The word of God is sufficient to enlighten the most beclouded mind and may be understood by those who have any desire to understand it. But notwithstanding all this, some who profess to make the word of God their study are found living in direct opposition to its plainest teachings. Then, to leave men and women without excuse, God gives plain and pointed testimonies, bringing them back to the word that they have neglected to follow.' The word of God abounds in general principles for the formation of correct habits of living, and the testimonies, general and personal, have been calculated to call their attention more especially to these principles.'"—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 663, 664.

The declarations of the spirit of prophecy are clear and unequivocal. Ellen White referred to her writings as a "lesser light" to call attention to the "greater light"—the Bible. Her writings, like any other prophetic writings, are to be tested by the Bible and its teachings. Had the church more thoroughly dug into the mine of Bible truth, these modern writings would not have been necessary. Having them, let us make use of them to learn more of the Bible.

Part 4
A NEEDED GIFT

Were one to assert that there were no inspired writings (in the sense of 2 Tim. 3:16, 17) between John the revelator (about AD 100) and Ellen White (1844-1915), one is pressed to explain why the church was left without inspired counsel for over 1700 years.

In the first place, one might be assuming more than is warranted. Significant dreams at least were reported which found fulfillment as divine guidance to individuals or to groups in the church. Being guided into truth (as the Reformers were, following the night of papal apostasy) is also very closely allied to inspiration of the Spirit, though not equivalent to it.

But in the second place, it may not be within our present power and knowledge to account for God's givings and withholdings. One cannot overlook the "silent centuries" of some 400 years before Christ came to the earth when there was no recorded inspired guidance for God's people.

We do not have the complete picture of the history of the church down through the centuries. There are reasons for this; Satan has caused many records to be destroyed. (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 61.) It is possible that the church precluded the gift of prophecy on a large scale because of apostasy. But in the time of the end God sent a messenger to play a significant role in the growth and development of the remnant church.

How grateful and how humble we should be! Why are we so favored? What would thousands of other Christians give for such counsel as has been extended to Seventh-day Adventists—so that we are without excuse for knowing what God would make us by the grace of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

THINK IT THROUGH How am I relating to this up-dating of God's revelation to man? What authority do I give it in my personal life and experience? (See "Selected Messages," bk. 1, pp. 26-29.)

"The Lord designs to warn you, to reprove, to counsel, through the testimonies given, and to impress your minds with the importance of the truth of His word. The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed. Man's duty to God and to his fellow man has been distinctly specified in God's word; yet but few of you are obedient to the light given. Additional truth is not brought out; but God has through the *Testimonies* simplified the great truths already given and in His own chosen way brought them before the people to awaken and impress the mind with them, that all may be left without excuse."—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 605.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 33, 34.

Part 5
USE AND
MISUSE

It is legitimate to ask why the church should need 100,000 pages of manuscript writings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries if the Bible itself is to be the "rule of faith and duty."
—*The Great Controversy*, p. 205.

A number of legitimate factors give answer to the question:

1. The church facing Satan's final attempt to win the great controversy between righteousness and evil needs every spiritual reinforcement that a loving God can offer her.

2. The growing gap between Bible times and modern times increases the need and value of sound interpretation of the Scripture in the light of the modern context.

3. Those believers who are to reflect the image of Jesus perfectly to a hostile and over-populated world are to be given the most detailed insight into God's will ever entrusted to men.

But while the spirit of prophecy meets these needs in the church today, certain disconcerting trends among some of its members, in using the writings, warrant a word of caution.

1. Avoid using the spirit of prophecy piecemeal, that is, where a person sees only what he wants to see as it applies to him, but he uses other parts as hammers of condemnation over the heads of his brothers and sisters.

2. One must not carry the piecemeal tendency to such an extreme that he extracts phrases or sentences from their context. Thus he distorts the writer's intention, even to making her say the opposite of what she really says when the context is read.

3. One must not have "hobby horses" in the spirit of prophecy which he "rides" repeatedly while ignoring "weightier matters" such as the saving relationship to Jesus Christ and obedience to the law of God.

4. Instead of using the spirit of prophecy in tandem with the Scriptures, to illuminate them, one must not use it in place of the Word of God. To do so thwarts Heaven's intention in placing the gift in the church today.

5. One must not rob the spirit of prophecy of its authority by arguing about different degrees of inspiration when he cannot really explain the process of inspiration as it applies to the Bible. There is a mystery within inspiration that parallels the mystery within the incarnation. The issue is, Are we willing to do God's will? (See John 7:16, 17.)

THINK IT THROUGH While the Bible is ever to be the norm, and the "greater light," what use am I, as a part of the remnant church, making of the detailed inspired counsel in the "lesser light"?

FURTHER STUDY *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 40-48.

Part 6
TIME AND PLACE

What does the "Preacher" say about the importance of timing in every phase of life?

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Eccl. 3:1).

There is a principle here that is applicable to inspired writings, and it is a principle that appeals to reason. To ignore it brings inevitable distortion and misinterpretation and robs the believer of the very help which God designed that he should receive.

There are backgrounds to all writings. They were made in a particular time frame, in a particular setting, to meet a particular need (present or even future, in predictive messages), using the language of the times and of the author.

As time passes from the days of the writer to the days of the reader, there is increasing need for the reader to go back and consider the "time and place" factors within which and concerning which the writing was done if he is to interpret it safely.

Jesus Himself interpreted to the men walking to Emmaus "in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). So today the necessity of "rightly dividing [handling accurately—NASB] the word of truth" is clear, whether the Bible or the spirit of prophecy is the object of study (2 Tim. 2:15).

Many things which Paul wrote, for example, concerning the church must be seen in the light of the "time and place" in which he wrote. Taken at their face meaning, as we would understand the words today without thinking of the background, we could only misunderstand and misapply. So with the spirit of prophecy writings.

How does Ellen White express the fact that her writings must be studied in the light of time and circumstance?

"Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 57.

THINK IT THROUGH

How would you interpret the spirit of prophecy condemnation of spending too much money on bicycles? (See "Testimonies to Ministers," p. 398, and "Testimonies," vol. 8, pp. 51, 52.) Do you think Paul's prohibition of a woman to teach is a ruling that applies today? (See 1 Tim. 2:12.) What principles of interpretation do you use?

Time and place considerations are absolutely essential to sound understanding of any inspired message.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 51-53, 57.

He Speaks; I Understand



“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded [interpreted, RSV] unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

The Jews had often read the Scriptures. They looked upon them as the source of eternal life. (See John 5:39.) Yet they had never really understood them. They certainly failed to appreciate all that had been revealed regarding the Messiah. They expected a conquering king who would rid them of the Roman yoke, but forgot that the Messiah would be a suffering servant. (See Isaiah 53.)

The disciples of Jesus were in little better condition. Although they had been with Jesus for three and a half years, they really did not understand His mission. The crucifixion and its related events took them by surprise. Their hope of a restoration to power and dominion through Jesus of Nazareth was shattered to bits; and they huddled in fear in an upper room, wondering what the next event would do to them. What Jesus was unable to do for His disciples because they had closed their minds before the crucifixion had to be done after Jesus rose from the dead.

It was on the way to Emmaus, on the Sunday afternoon of the resurrection, that Jesus walked with two of His disciples and expounded to them the Scriptures. (The Greek word, **diermeneusen**, used to explain what Jesus did, means “expound,” “interpret,” “explain,” or even “translate.” It is the root word for the English term “hermeneutics” used in theological circles.) Jesus quoted and explained the texts of Scripture that referred to the Messiah and showed how the events that had taken place in Jerusalem had been foretold. They applied perfectly to Jesus. In fact, every event had its place in the plan of salvation.

Jesus rebuked the disciples for being foolish and slow of heart to

believe all that the prophets had written. As Jesus opened up their understanding, their hearts were warmed and they saw as never before the glorious purpose that had been fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Before this they had walked in the darkness of misinterpretation; now they were walking in the light of a fuller understanding.

God has been communicating with man all through the centuries. Unfortunately man has not always understood Him. You and I must be sure that we understand God when He speaks.

How can we be sure that we are interpreting Scripture correctly, that we are understanding revelation as we ought? It is to answer these questions that we study our lesson this week.

We must remember that much of God’s revelation is so simple that the unlearned can understand. (See Matt. 11:25.) The wise are sometimes too wise to understand. But whether simple or wise, we all need the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

There is also an unrelenting enemy of God and man who constantly seeks to jam or distort God’s message of love to mankind. How essential, then, that we follow the soundest principles of interpretation when studying God’s inspired messages. Thus we can avoid being deceived by distortions or diversions which may be directed our way. Let us explore some of the most vital of these principles of interpretation in our study this week.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Unity of Scripture (Heb. 1:1, 2)**
2. **Sound Words (2 Tim. 1:13)**
3. **Words of Life (John 6:63, last part)**
4. **Inspired Interpretations—I (Dan. 9:2)**
5. **Inspired Interpretations—II (Heb. 4:12)**
6. **Wrested Scriptures (2 Peter 3:15, 16)**

Part 1
UNITY OF
SCRIPTURE

What does Hebrews 1:1, 2 state as to the internal unity of the Scriptures?

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb. 1:1, 2, RSV).

Here the inspired writer of Hebrews asserts the basic unity of the messages of God through the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament testimony by (and concerning) His Son.

How does the Bible reveal varying characteristics and yet display an underlying harmony?

"Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony."—*The Great Controversy*, Introduction, p. vi.

Unity is not only a characteristic of the Bible. Jesus prayed that His disciples might be one. (See John 17:21.) Paul wrote to the members of the Corinthian church and said that they should "all speak the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10). Unity is god-like, just as division is satanic.

THINK IT THROUGH

What do you do when you find what seem to be contradictory statements in Scripture?

Failure to recognize the unity of the Scriptures has led some scholars to attribute authorship of a book like Isaiah or Acts to several different writers. They then judge the trustworthiness of the several supposed writers and discard the portions they view as untrustworthy.

What inspired counsel do we have on this question of judging inspiration?

"When men, in their finite judgment, find it necessary to go into an examination of scriptures to define that which is inspired and that which is not, they have stepped before Jesus to show Him a better way than He has led us."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 17.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 20, 21.

Part 2
SOUND WORDS

What counsel from the veteran apostle Paul to the young minister Timothy suggests the value of sound principles of interpretation of the Word?

"Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (2 Tim. 1:13, 14, RSV).

While Paul might have been using the expression "words" here in the sense of teachings or doctrines (a major theme of his letters to Timothy), it remains a fact that words are the basic unit of human thought and communication, and thus any sound pattern of doctrine is dependent upon a sound pattern of words and their interpretation.

What evidence is there in Galatians 3:16 to show that Paul is concerned about the exact wording of a passage?

What warning in Revelation 22:18, 19 points out the importance of inspired words?

It is useful to remind ourselves of some basic facts about words (especially Biblical words) so that we may avoid the danger of placing undue emphasis on any one word:

1. Most persons studying this lesson are reading the Bible in a translated form rather than in the original languages. So don't make a big case of an English word—it is a translated word and may not be 100 percent true to the original.

2. Words change in meaning. This is true of many words in the King James Version which is more than 350 years old. Be sure you understand the original intent of the word. For example, "prevent" in 1 Thess. 4:15 means "precede," not "hinder."

3. Different Bible writers may not have exactly the same meaning for any one word, and they may even use the same word differently in different contexts. We all know that the same word can have different meanings. For example, think of all the meanings you know for the word "table."

"The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 20.

THINK IT THROUGH

How can I maintain balance in Bible study so that I do not use excessive study time on unimportant details? See 2 Tim. 2:14-16.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 242-245.

Part 3 How does the Bible differ materially from all secular books?
WORDS OF LIFE

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Jesus made no empty claim for His words when He said they were spirit and life. They were not always easy to understand. (See John 6:59, 60.) But they were the only words worth clinging to, so that when some people left Jesus (verse 66), the question was asked of the Twelve: "Will ye also go away?" Then Peter, with his usual forthrightness and honesty, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (verse 68).

How important are God's words to every Christian? Matt. 4:4.

Man can live by bread alone if he lives on the level of an animal, but man has been called to a higher way of life; he is called to communion with God. Only as he communes with God can he have that kind of a life that is exhilarating and full, satisfying and eternal.

Fortunately for man, God's Word has not only been spoken; it has been written. It is thus available at any time, in any place, and can be used as armor against false understanding of life and a wrong way of living.

How did Jesus use the words of Scripture? Matt. 4:4, 7, 10.

"The study of God's word should take the place of the study of those books that have led minds into mysticism and away from the truth. Its living principles, woven into our lives, will be our safeguard in trials and temptations; its divine instruction is the only way to success."—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 132.

Understanding God's Word involves understanding the whole context of the Word. It is important to note that individual words take on special significance because of the context. God speaks to us in a language that is relevant to our environment. This is why the Old Testament is different from the New, different in language used, different in its background of history. We live today in a new world. Yet the Word of God is always relevant—that is, if we are prepared to study the Word in its particular setting.

THINK IT THROUGH In what sense are the Old and New Testaments different and yet the same?

"The Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 128.

FURTHER STUDY *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 392, 393.

Part 4
INSPIRED INTER-
PRETATIONS—1

What do we find Daniel doing as he tries to understand the revelations made to him?

"I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:2).

Daniel often had the interpretations of his dreams and visions given to him at the time they occurred. (See Dan. 7:16; 8:15-17.) But he did not always understand fully what he saw. (See Dan. 8:27; 12:8.) In his search for truth and understanding he read the inspired books available to him, and thus he was able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

This principle of comparing scripture with scripture is an important one. The Word of God is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our pathway (Ps. 119:105), so that when we are not sure what one passage of Scripture means we look at another passage of contributory light. The unity of Scripture means that every part of the Bible contributes to a logical understanding of the whole, and we must guard against any interpretation that leads to contradiction in teaching.

What does the apostle Peter tell us about singular interpretations of Scripture? Why are they not valid? 2 Peter 1:20, 21.

The apostle Peter seems to be warning the church not to treat the Scriptures as they might any other piece of writing, whether literary, historical, legal, or scientific. "No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (RSV). Why not? Because the Bible is not on the same level with any other writing. Why not? Because it was written by men "moved by the Holy Ghost."

How did Jesus demonstrate this method of interpreting by drawing from various scriptures to explain an issue? (See Luke 24:27.)

The Bible then becomes the "unerring standard" by which the ideas of men are to be tested, rather than that the Scriptures should be measured by philosophy, science, human tradition, or the religions of people outside the Bible. See *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 462.

THINK IT THROUGH **Why is it an advantage to have different Bible writers discussing the same subject, for example, the four Gospels? See Selected Messages, bk. 1, "Unity in Diversity," pp. 21, 22.**

FURTHER STUDY

1 Cor. 2:12-16.

Part 5
INSPIRED INTER-
PRETATION—II

What are some of the characteristics of the Word of God?

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12, RSV).

"In the Bible we have the unerring counsel of God. Its teachings, practically carried out, will fit men for any position of duty. It is the voice of God speaking every day to the soul. How carefully should the young study the word of God and treasure up its sentiments in the heart, that its precepts may be made to govern the whole conduct."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 441.

What prophecy indicates that God will communicate in a special sense with young and old in the last days? Joel 2:28-32.

"In immediate connection with the scenes of the great day of God, the Lord by the prophet Joel has promised a special manifestation of His Spirit (Joel 2:28). This prophecy received a partial fulfillment in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; but it will reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel."—*The Great Controversy*, Introduction, p. ix.

"Lead the minds of the youth from truth to truth, up higher and higher, showing them how scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages."—*Evangelism*, p. 581.

"The Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word."—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 187.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, how was Peter led to interpret the prophecy of Joel? Acts 2:16-21.

How advantaged the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to have a modern inspired interpreter of both the Old and New Testaments! Surely there is every logical reason to give the inspired interpretation top priority in arriving at our understanding of the Word today.

THINK IT THROUGH What sources of information would you consult in the study of a particular passage of Scripture if it was not explained elsewhere in Scripture?

FURTHER STUDY

Christ's Object Lessons, "Things New and Old," pp. 133, 134.

**Part 6
WRESTED
SCRIPTURES**

When people misunderstand and misinterpret the Scriptures, what is the result to themselves? Why do they misinterpret the Scriptures in the first instance?

"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience with us is our salvation, as Paul, our friend and brother, said when he wrote to you with his inspired wisdom. And so he does in all his other letters, wherever he speaks of this subject, though they contain some obscure passages, which the ignorant and unstable misinterpret to their own ruin, as they do the other scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15, 16, NEB).

It is interesting to see how early in the history of the Christian church the interpretation or misinterpretation of the Scriptures was a problem. Peter admits that some of the messages written by his colleague, Paul, were not easy to understand. But he goes on to say that the problem may have been more with the interpreters than with the author. These same people, and others like them, had a tendency to misinterpret not only what Paul had written, but "other scriptures" also. They were not strong members of the church in the first place, and perversion of the Scriptures was one symptom of their instability.

Ignorance of the Word of God will leave us open to the sophistries of Satan. Instability of character will cause us to flit from one concept to another without rhyme or reason. It is only God's grace that keeps us from error. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

What was Paul's counsel regarding the Christian and the Word? Col. 3:16, first part.

THINK IT THROUGH **Are sincerity and honesty sufficient safeguards against false interpretations?**

Can the wresting of the Scriptures by unsound principles of interpretation involve the spirit of prophecy writings also?

"There are those who pick out from the Word of God, and also from the Testimonies, detached paragraphs or sentences that may be interpreted to suit their ideas, and they dwell upon these, and build themselves up in their own positions, when God is not leading them."—*Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 179.

FURTHER STUDY

Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 180, 181.

He Speaks; I Respond

**“Therefore Eli said unto Samuel,
Go, lie down: and it shall be,
if he call thee, that thou shalt say,
Speak, Lord; for thy servant
heareth”
(1 Sam. 3:9).**



“Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth”
(1 Sam. 3:9).

The story which we have loved from childhood, of the child Samuel, is poignant for us as we move toward the close of this quarter's lessons.

We have been concerned all quarter to assure ourselves that God is not silent, that He's the God who is there, and that He is the God who speaks. But really, in the end, what is the purpose of His speaking—to man? Surely it is the same as with any other speaking. It is above all else to gain a response. Without response, communication is incomplete, it is broken—it is really no communication at all.

God has spoken. God is speaking. The big question is: Who's listening?

Samuel was not accustomed to hearing God's audible, personal voice. And perhaps Eli was not either. But when God persisted in calling the lad, and Samuel repeatedly reported to the aged priest, the priest "perceived that the Lord had called the child" (verse 8).

Then came the beautiful words which Eli placed in the mouth of the child, if once more the Lord should

call him by name: "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

The Lord had spoken to Eli by His prophets, warning him of the consequences of his indulgence toward his wayward sons. Because he indulged them even in high office, they had brought shame upon Eli, Israel, the tabernacle, the priesthood, and upon Jehovah. God had spoken. Eli had not responded. He heard with his ear, but no response from his heart nerved his will to do his duty to God and to Israel.

"Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." The child Samuel heard with his heart and his ear. He responded to the Lord in obedience.

During this week, shall we not search the halls of memory, of conscience, asking the Holy Spirit to give us Samuel's ear—the hearing, responding ear and heart? If we are too busy, too burdened, too preoccupied, too happy, too absorbed—we shall not hear God's voice. Communication will cease. God, for us, will not be there. He will cease to speak. He will be silent.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Hearing and Believing (John 5:24)**
2. **Hearing and Following (John 10:27, 28)**
3. **Hearing and Doing (Matt. 21:28-30)**
4. **Hearing and Giving All (Matt. 19:22)**
5. **Hearing and Abiding (John 15:7)**
6. **Hearing and Inviting (Rev. 22:17)**

Part 1
HEARING AND
BELIEVING

When Jesus was here in person, within one of His many confrontations with the religious leaders of His time and people, what assurance of eternal life did He offer?

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

Many who heard Jesus' word, both on this occasion and many others, received no benefit from His words. To others, the same words brought the beginning of eternal life—heaven began for them then and there. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 331.) The difference? Some heard *and believed*. Some only heard.

The way in which I hear God, the quality of my hearing, will be indicated in my response. The believing that is indicated in the New Testament as the deciding factor in salvation must be more than an intellectual belief, more than an unwilling acknowledgment—for the devils believe, but they tremble with fear (James 2:19). It is a belief of implicit trust, of unrestrained acceptance, of a commitment without reservation.

THINK IT THROUGH

What is the context of James' observation of the belief of the devils? (See James 2:14-26.) What application does this have to my faith? (Verse 24.)

It could be appropriate to contrast the faith of Abraham (the chief exhibit in James 2) with that of Eli (referred to in the introduction to this lesson). Could there be any connection between the quality of the belief of the two fathers and the contrasting obedience of Isaac on the one hand, and of Hophni and Phinehas on the other? Our reverence for the words that God has spoken in His Word, and by the spirit of prophecy (and by His Spirit today in support of both) has such a bearing upon the quality of our response, in belief and obedience.

"Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good. Thus, instead of our own, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership and accepts its blessing. Truth, uprightness, purity, have been pointed out as secrets of life's success. It is faith that puts us in possession of these principles."—*Education*, p. 253.

FURTHER STUDY

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 575-580.

Part 2
HEARING AND
FOLLOWING

Though a carpenter Himself, what vivid pastoral illustration did Jesus use to explain the response of His "sheep" to His words?

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:27, 28).

We have all heard of the man who assured the Lord he would go anywhere in the world that the Lord would lead, as long as it was not— (and he named a certain continent). Was that man a true hearer of Christ's word?

How close and intimate and involved is the relationship between the Good Shepherd and His sheep! Jesus parallels that closeness with the closeness between Himself and His Father. (See John 10:14, 15.)

"God is love. Whoso dwelleth in God, dwelleth in love. All who have indeed become acquainted, by experimental knowledge, with the love and tender compassion of our Heavenly Father will impart light and joy wherever they may be. Their presence and influence will be to their associates as the fragrance of sweet flowers, because they are linked to God and heaven, and the purity and exalted loveliness of heaven are communicated through them to all that are brought within their influence."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 363.

THINK IT THROUGH

Even if I have been disowned and denounced by my own family, have I reason to feel unknown and unwanted in this world? (See John 10:3, 4.)

Note that the Eastern shepherd moved out ahead of his few sheep. They followed *him*. What a contrast to the dog-assisted herdsmen who drive large flocks of sheep ahead of themselves today. The life of the shepherd was governed by the needs of his sheep. He lived their life. Their every need was his to fulfill.

Is our response to God's Word so childlike (so sheeplike) that we are prepared to follow His leading no matter how narrow or how steep the path He chooses for us? What consolation is there in the Word for the lonely, the sorrowing, the sick, the discouraged, whether they be young or old?

"It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour's matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 480.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 480-484.

Part 3
HEARING
AND DOING

What two common human characteristics are described in the parable of the two sons?

"But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not" (Matt. 21:28-30).

These two sons are so human, so much like us—especially the one who said, "I go, sir: and went not."

Apparently it is not what we say but what we do that counts. It has been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Thank God we can always change our minds and do what is right. But we must not leave it until too late. It may be better late than never, but it is always better never late.

What counsel does James give regarding hearing and doing? James 1:22-25.

"The most eloquent sermon that can be preached upon the law of Ten Commandments is to *do them*. . . .

"In order to gain a proper knowledge of ourselves, it is necessary look into the mirror, and there discovering our own defects, avail ourselves of the blood of Christ, the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, in which we may wash our robes of character and remove the stains of sin. But many refuse to see their errors and correct them; they do not want a true knowledge of themselves."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 58, 59.

THINK IT THROUGH

Would you say that doers of the word are inside the church, and non-doers are outside? In what sense may members also be non-doers?

"There are only two classes in the world today, and only two classes will be recognized in the judgment—those who violate God's law and those who obey it."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 283.

"God requires that all of us should be self-sacrificing workers. Every part of the truth has a practical application to our daily lives. Blessed are they that hear the word of the Lord and keep it. *Hearing* is not enough; we must *act*, we must *do*. It is in the doing of the commandments that there is great reward. Those who give practical demonstrations of their benevolence by their sympathy and compassionate acts toward the poor, the suffering, and the unfortunate, not only relieve the sufferers, but contribute largely to their own happiness and are in the way of securing health of soul and body."—*Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 59, 60.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 595, 596.

Part 4
HEARING AND
GIVING ALL

A rich young man heard the words of Jesus and watched Him in His ministry. His heart was touched. He had heard, he had believed (in a measure). Now he wanted to follow. He felt that he had been doing right—but this was not enough.

What are among the saddest words in the Bible describing a man's decision?

"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions" (Matt. 19:22).

Under the questioning of Jesus, this rich young ruler felt sure that he was doing all that could legitimately be required of him: "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" (verse 20).

It is perhaps commendable that the young man felt some kind of lack which Jesus could fill, and yet he could hardly admit any defect in himself. Jesus put His finger on the plague spot in this man's character in asking him to put what he had heard God say above every other consideration. In the person of the poor, he was asked to make God supreme, to do *all* that God asked—without reservation.

What is the basis of all giving? Matt. 10:8, last part.

"The lesson is no less needed in the world today than when it fell from the lips of Jesus. Selfishness and cold formality have well-nigh extinguished the fire of love, and dispelled the graces that should make fragrant the character. Many who profess His name have lost sight of the fact that Christians are to represent Christ. Unless there is practical self-sacrifice for the good of others, in the family circle, in the neighborhood, in the church, and wherever we may be, then whatever our profession, we are not Christians."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 504.

THINK IT THROUGH

Why do many people hold on to their wealth? Is wealth a blessing or a curse?

"To those who, like the young ruler, are in high positions of trust and have great possessions, it may seem too great a sacrifice to give up all in order to follow Christ. But this is the rule of conduct for all who would become His disciples. Nothing short of obedience can be accepted. Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ. Often it is presented and enjoined in language that seems authoritative, because there is no other way to save man than to cut away those things which, if entertained, will demoralize the whole being."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 523.

FURTHER STUDY

Christ's Object Lessons, "The Reward of Grace," pp. 390-393.

Part 5
HEARING AND
ABIDING

Where must Christ's words be if we are to have all our material and spiritual needs supplied?

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

Perhaps no more simple yet adequate illustration of the quality of hearing which Christ and the Father require of the believing, converted sinner can be found than that in the allegory of the vine and its branches. The hearing results in an abiding relationship between the branches, who are the believers, and the True Vine, which is Christ.

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day.. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 70.

THINK IT THROUGH

What promise is made to those who abide in Christ? How is God glorified in the Christian?

Note that the branches are not commanded to *bear fruit*. They are urged to "*abide*." The Vine and the Father-Husbandman (John 15:1, 2) will provide the life and care for the fruitfulness.

"This spiritual relation [of abiding in Christ] can be established only by the exercise of personal faith. This faith must express on our part supreme preference, perfect reliance, entire consecration. Our will must be wholly yielded to the divine will, our feelings, desires, interests, and honor identified with the prosperity of Christ's kingdom and the honor of His cause, we constantly receiving grace from Him, and Christ accepting gratitude from us."—*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 229.

"It is through the word that Christ abides in His followers. This is the same vital union that is represented by eating His flesh and drinking His blood. The words of Christ are spirit and life. Receiving them, you receive the life of the Vine. You live 'by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' Matt. 4:4. The life of Christ in you produces the same fruits as in Him. Living in Christ, adhering of Christ, supported by Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ, you bear fruit after the similitude of Christ."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 677.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 674-680.

Part 6
HEARING AND
INVITING

One of the greatest evidences of having heard and responded to the God who speaks is in the hearer's urge to pass on to others the gracious invitation he has received from heaven, to participate with the Holy Spirit and the church in the vital work of witnessing:

" 'Come!' say the Spirit and the bride.

" 'Come!' let each hearer reply" (Rev. 22:17, NEB).

It is impossible to separate the acceptance of salvation from a paralleling sense of mission. The heart and mind that have heard God's loving message are constrained to share the "good news." (See 2 Cor. 5:13, 14.) To put it another way, he who has no sense of constraint or urgency upon him to share the gospel message and experience may need to take stock, to see whether he is still "abiding" in the Vine—whether the words of Christ are abiding in him.

If the old adage, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating" is still true, then the manner in which the believer responds to God's speaking is indicative of the manner in which he is hearing. It is not just a casual invitation to others that comes from the one who is truly hearing. He is so intertwined with the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church that he makes his appeals in the power of the Holy Spirit—he appeals as Christ would appeal in person.

**What is an essential prerequisite for effective witnessing?
Acts 1:8.**

"The gospel commission is the great missionary charter of Christ's kingdom. The disciples were to work earnestly for souls, giving to all the invitation of mercy. They were not to wait for the people to come to them; they were to go to the people with their message."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28.

THINK IT THROUGH

What is involved in witnessing besides distributing literature and ringing doorbells?

"The Saviour knew that no argument, however logical, would melt hard hearts or break through the crust of worldliness and selfishness. He knew that His disciples must receive the heavenly endowment; that the gospel would be effective only as it was proclaimed by hearts made warm and lips made eloquent by a living knowledge of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 31.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 818-821.

He Will Speak to Me Face-to-Face



“Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face. My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God’s knowledge of me” (1 Cor. 13:12, NEB).

No matter how broad or deep any person’s knowledge of God is here and now, it is but a dim and sometimes even a “puzzling reflection” of all that can be known of God in that day when the barrier which the curtain of sin dropped between God and man will finally and permanently be removed.

When the day of face-to-face revelation comes, the “partial” quality of our present knowledge of God will begin to dawn upon us. The growth in the knowledge of God which had been intended for Adam and Eve from the beginning will begin again. All the arrested processes of the original face-to-face revelation will be restored.

This is not said to discourage us from our present efforts to receive as fully as possible God’s self-revelation to sinful man. For one thing, Gethsemane and Calvary have opened up to us aspects of God’s love which might have taken un-fallen man a long time to discover—if ever he would have discovered it. Certain it is that God is anxious to give us as full a revelation of

Himself as our human nature can receive, and also to give us all that is needful to our eternal salvation.

The brief glimpses into Edenic conditions afforded us by the Bible and the spirit of prophecy writings are limited enough at best. To attempt to enlarge upon them could lead only into speculation and perhaps daydreaming. But the great issue of the moment is to know that if we do not receive the revelation of God which has been offered us here and now, we shall never have the present dimness removed. To him who rejects the flickering, sputtering glow of a candle, or even a match, God will offer no heaven-probing searchlight.

This week let us consider how completely we now trust Him who will one day soon speak to us face-to-face.

LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. Man Hides From God (Gen. 3:8)**
- 2. No Man Has Seen God (John 1:18)**
- 3. Show Us the Father (John 14:8-10)**
- 4. I Shall See God (Job 19:25-27)**
- 5. They Shall See His Face (Rev. 22:4)**
- 6. Come, Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20)**

Part 1
MAN HIDES
FROM GOD

At the heart of man's tragic rebellion against God, what sad picture does Genesis give of man's broken relationship with God?

"The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze and hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8, NEB).

Man running away from God! What more tragic picture could be painted. Man fleeing from his Maker, pathetically trying to hide among the trees from Him who made them both, man and tree. As we have studied the revelation of God, we have repeatedly looked at the beginning and then at the day of restoration. In this week's lesson on seeing God face-to-face we go back to the beginning again, and forward to the end of sin and the restoration of Eden.

How are the wicked going to react in the day of God's wrath? Rev. 6:15-17.

"The sinner could not be happy in God's presence; he would shrink from the companionship of holy beings. Could he be permitted to enter heaven, it would have no joy for him. The spirit of unselfish love that reigns there—every heart responding to the heart of Infinite Love—would touch no answering chord in his soul. . . . It is no arbitrary decree on the part of God that excludes the wicked from heaven: they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship. The glory of God would be to them a consuming fire. They would welcome destruction, that they might be hidden from the face of Him who died to redeem them."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 17, 18.

THINK IT THROUGH

What is the motivating force behind the desire to see God face-to-face?

But there is more to the restoration of the face-to-face relationship than the desire of the redeemed to worship God in person. The apostle Paul draws an illustration from the mirrors used before the modern invention of glass. The ancients used polished metal surfaces for mirrors and at times these would be bent or their surfaces marred. Then the image would be distorted, indistinct, blurred. Right now, because of the veil and separation of sin, our understanding of God's self-revelation is only partial, the reflections of Him are as those in an ancient mirror—sometimes even puzzling. But in the face-to-face restoration, there will be no more distortion. Praise the Lord!

FURTHER STUDY

Early Writings, pp. 288, 289.

Part 2
NO MAN HAS
SEEN GOD

How complete has been the veiling of God the Father from man as a consequence of sin?

"No one has ever seen God; but God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart, he has made him known" (John 1:18, NEB).

John is saying that no one has seen God the Father. "Sinners cannot see God face-to-face and live. Not even Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, was permitted to behold Him (Ex. 33:20; Deut. 4:12). . . . Christ came to reveal the Father, and, for all practical purposes, those who saw Him saw the Father (John 14:7-11)."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, on John 1:18.

"In all these revelations of the divine presence the glory of God was manifested through Christ. Not alone at the Saviour's advent, but through all the ages after the Fall and the promise of redemption, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.' 2 Corinthians 5:19. . . . Since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man. The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man and vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 366.

"God sent His Son into the world, His divinity clothed with humanity, that man might bear the image of the invisible God. He made known in His words, His character, His power and majesty, the nature and attributes of God. Divinity flashed through humanity in softening subduing light. He was the embodiment of the law of God, which is the transcript of His character."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1131.

THINK IT THROUGH

What do we miss, if anything, by seeing the Father through the Son?

Perhaps we have not considered as we ought the sadness which man's sin has brought to God. Made "in the image of God" and designed to reflect back to God His own glory, man has placed an anguished interval, a sad delay, in the fulfillment of this divine purpose. We think and talk a great deal of the sufferings of Christ and the constant ministry of the Holy Spirit. Do we ever think of the loneliness of God the Father—loneliness for His children?

"The knowledge of God as revealed in Christ is the knowledge that all who are saved must have. It is the knowledge that works transformation of character. This knowledge, received, will re-create the soul in the image of God. It will impart to the whole being a spiritual power that is divine."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 425.

FURTHER STUDY

Testimonies, vol. 8, pp. 263-266.

Part 3
SHOW US THE
FATHER

Was Philip aware of the veil between man and the Father? What response did he receive to his request?

"Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (John 14:8-10).

The reply of Jesus to Philip suggests that Philip should not have needed to make the request to see the Father. Why did Philip make the response he did to Jesus' statement of verse 7? Was it mere curiosity? Did it reveal a misunderstanding of the mission of Jesus? Apparently Philip was thinking, as so many others do, that there was a difference of some kind between the Father and the Son. Philip and the other disciples had seen Jesus; now they thought it would be enlightening to see the Father. They had failed to recognize, in spite of years of close association, that in seeing Jesus they were seeing God in action.

It is Satan who has succeeded in blinding so many people about God the Father. "The enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice,—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men."—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 10, 11.

THINK IT THROUGH

When in heaven we see God face-to-face, what attributes of His do we expect to see that we cannot see now through Christ?

In reality, the entire ministry of Jesus, as the "sent of God" was a continual face-to-face revelation of God to men, only His glory being laid aside, that man might endure the revelation. In character and purpose men had seen God the Father in His Son.

FURTHER STUDY

The Desire of Ages, pp. 292, 293.

Part 4
I SHALL
SEE GOD

From the Old Testament poem on the experiences of Job, what ringing assurance comes to us of the face-to-face confrontation with God at the end of the age?

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27).

Job gives us one of the most positive assurances of the resurrection to be found in Scripture. He also declares in positive terms that God is his redeemer (verse 25). In spite of some difficulties in the Hebrew text, so that English versions vary somewhat, the hope of the resurrection is clearly declared, and in the fulfillment of that hope Job expects to "see God."

"One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming to complete the great work of redemption. To God's pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in 'the region and shadow of death,' a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is 'the resurrection and the life,' to 'bring home again His banished.' The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 299.

THINK IT THROUGH

What experience must the Christian pass through in order to appreciate the hope of the resurrection?

"The Cross Lifts.—We are to lift the cross, and follow the steps of Christ. Those who lift the cross will find that as they do this, the cross lifts them, giving them fortitude and courage, and pointing them to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. . . .

"Up From the Lowlands.—The cross lifts you up from the lowlands of earth, and brings you into sweetest communion with God. Through bearing the cross your experience may be such that you can say, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' and because He lives, I shall live also.' What an assurance is this!'—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1095.

As the glitter of this world's attractions yield to the tarnishing of "last day" conditions, the redeemed need more frequently and more earnestly to remind themselves of the awaited reality of the bodily resurrection and of the reunion of man and his God. The most effective of the senses will be prominently involved; with our eyes we shall see God.

FURTHER STUDY

The Great Controversy, pp. 644, 645.

Part 5
THEY SHALL
SEE HIS FACE

The Lord has given some descriptions of heaven and the new earth that sound realistic and appealing, even to men of means. But surely as the daily walk and talk with God grows and deepens, does not the supreme objective of the redeemed become the coveted opportunity to see God?

The triumphal assurance of the last chapter of the Bible is:

"And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4).

The expression suggests closeness of contact, a highly personal and intimate relationship. And that is what is planned for the redeemed.

Some may now think of a list of questions they would wish to present to the Lord at their earliest face-to-face meeting. For those who perhaps have walked most closely with the Lord here, however, just to see His face, just to be in His presence will be the supreme joy—the source of perfect contentment. They can think of nothing better, nothing more desirable.

THINK IT THROUGH **Why will it be my supreme joy and interest to see God face-to-face?**

"Then much will be revealed in explanation of matters upon which God now keeps silence because we have not gathered up and appreciated that which has been made known of the eternal mysteries. . . . We shall see order in that which has seemed unexplainable; wisdom in everything withheld; goodness and gracious mercy in everything imparted. . . . Controversies will be forever ended, and all difficulties will be solved." —Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1091.

"All the perplexities of life's experience will then be made plain. Where to us have appeared only confusion and disappointment, broken purposes and thwarted plans, will be seen a grand, overruling, victorious purpose, a divine harmony.

"There all who have wrought with unselfish spirit will behold the fruit of their labors. The outworking of every right principle and noble deed will be seen. Something of this we see here. But how little of the result of the world's noblest work is in this life manifest to the doer!"—*Education*, p. 305.

"The life on earth is the beginning of the life in heaven; education on earth is an initiation into the principles of heaven; the lifework here is a training for the lifework there. What we now are, in character and holy service, is the sure foreshadowing of what we shall be."—*Education*, p. 307.

FURTHER STUDY

Christ's Object Lessons, "Shall Not Avenge His Own?" pp. 179, 180.

Part 6
"COME, LORD JESUS!"

The ills we see,
The mysteries of sorrow deep and long.
The dark enigmas of permitted wrong,
Have all one key;
This strange, sad world is but our Father's school;
All chance and change His love shall overrule.

What though today
Thou canst not trace at all the hidden reason
For His strange dealings through the trial season?

Trust and obey;
In after life and light all shall be plain and clear.

—Author unknown.

What prayer of John's may also be ours as we contrast what we have in this world with what we can have in the earth made new?

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20, NEB).

This was John the Beloved's response to the promise of the loving Lord, "Surely I am coming soon" (RSV).

God is there. He is not silent. He is the God who speaks. He has spoken in all His mighty works of the creation and sustaining of the universe. He has spoken through prophets and apostles. He spoke supremely in His Son who leaned so completely upon the Spirit and the Father. He speaks to us by His Spirit through the Word and the spirit of prophecy.

THINK IT THROUGH

In what ways can I listen, hear, interpret, and respond so that my constant heartfelt plea shall be: Come, Lord Jesus?

When the day dawns—that other long, long day,
When night beyond our ken has passed,
When home and rest are reached at last—
I think, perchance, that we shall say,
The toil but makes more sweet the rest.
And sorrow was not spent in vain,
If patient strength be learned through pain;
And we shall see His way was best.

Then hush! oh, hush! for the Father,
Whose ways are true and just,
Knoweth and careth and loveth,
And waits for thy perfect trust;
The cup He is slowly filling, shall soon be filled to the brim,
And infinite compensations forever be found in Him.

—Author unknown.

"Come, Lord Jesus!"

FURTHER STUDY

The Great Controversy, pp. 676-678.

Lessons for 3rd Quarter / 1976

Sabbath School members who have not received a copy of the Adult Lessons for the third quarter of 1976 will be helped by the following outline in studying the first two lessons. The title of the series is "Nurturing Faith in Jesus."

First Lesson

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST. Memory verse, Heb. 1:1, 2.

1. *Over the Prophets (Heb. 1:1, 2).*
2. *His Nature and Work—I (Heb. 1:2, 3).*
3. *His Nature and Work—II (Heb. 1:3).*
4. *Over the Angels—I (Heb. 1:4).*
5. *Over the Angels—II (Heb. 1:6).*
6. *Over the Angels—III (Heb. 1:7, 8).*

Second Lesson

THE PIONEER OF OUR SALVATION. Memory verse, Heb. 2:14, 15.

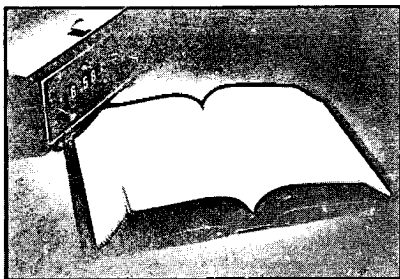
1. *Peril of Drifting (Heb. 2:1-3).*
2. *Destiny of Man (Heb. 2:5).*
3. *Jesus, the Ideal Man (Heb. 2:8, 9).*
4. *The Son and the Sons (Heb. 2:10).*
5. *The Incarnation of Christ (Heb. 2:14).*
6. *Our Sympathetic High Priest (Heb. 2:17, 18).*

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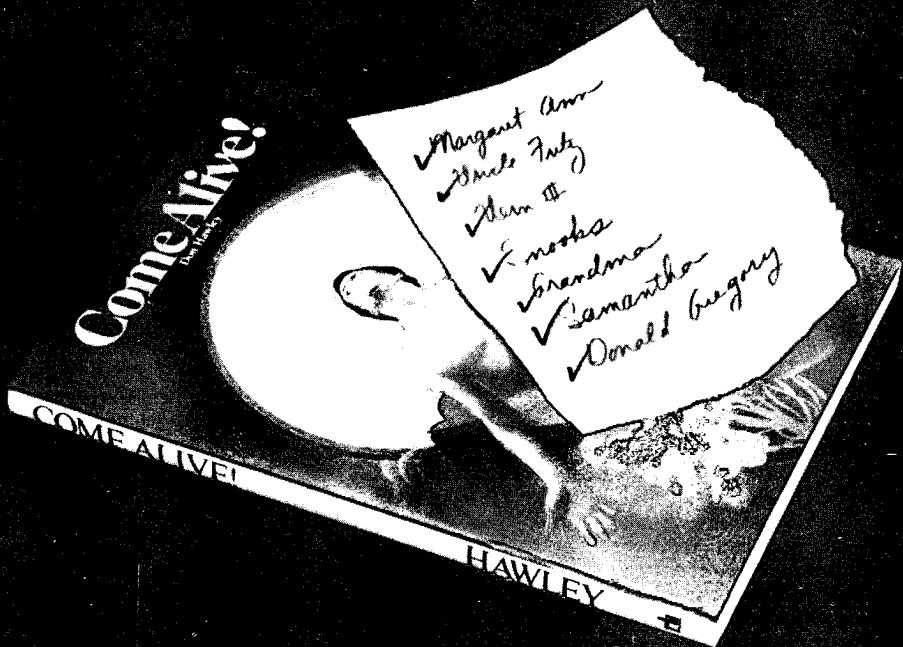
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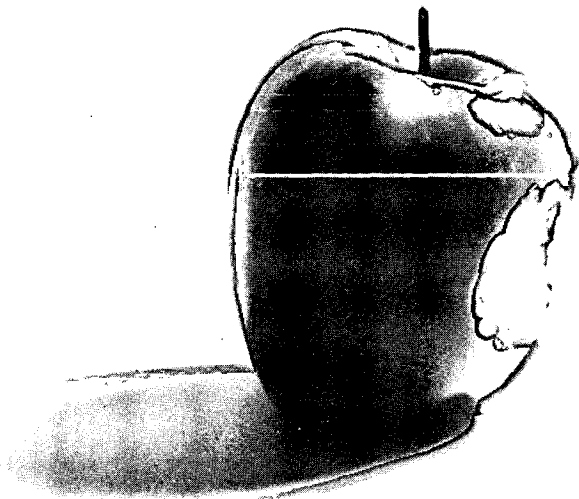
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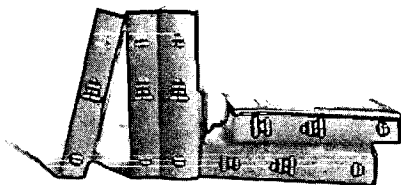
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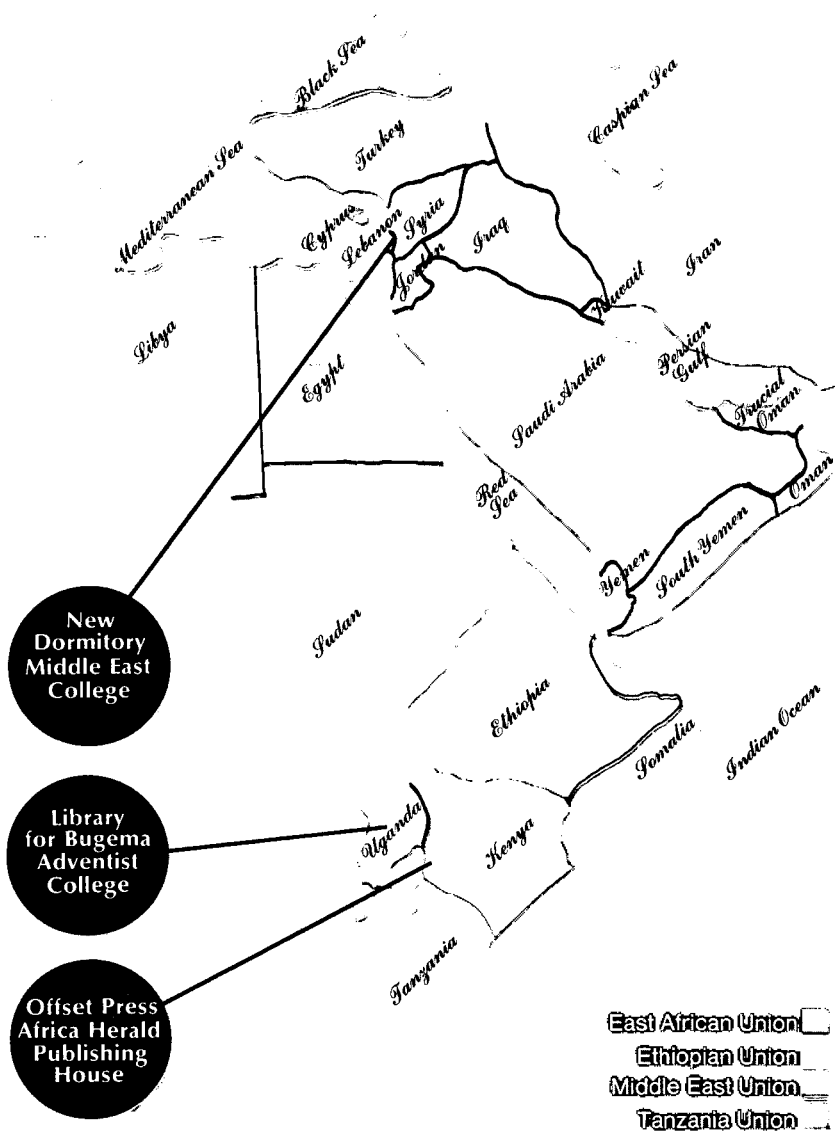
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Unions	Population	Churches	Church Members	S.S. Members
East African	20,521,884	543	101,959	205,262
Ethiopian	24,000,000	39	24,853	58,777
Middle East	155,603,900	38	3,982	1,485
Tanzania	12,800,000	206	33,053	52,716
Division Totals	212,925,784	826	163,852	318,240

(Figures as of 4th quarter, 1974)



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