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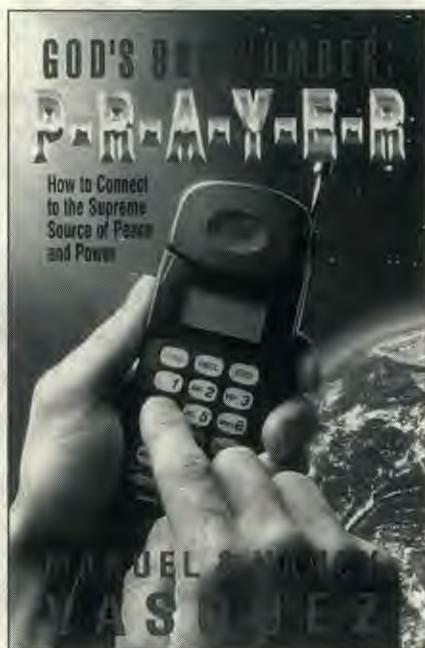
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Let's Begin: How to Study Your Bible

Jesus Christ explained why it is so important for everyone to study the Bible: So that they may have "eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV). As we present various methods of Bible study this quarter, we first wish to emphasize that the Bible, the infallible Word of God, is its own interpreter. By this we mean that the Holy Spirit enables Christ's true followers to see the relationships between Bible passages, interpreting the message of one passage in the light of all other Bible truth on the same subject.

Never before in the history of the world has the Bible been more available to the general population. Versions of the sacred Scriptures abound, which are targeted at and marketed for children, youth, and adults. But at the same time, there seems to be a famine of God's Word. We have Bibles everywhere—in motels, doctors' offices, libraries, and most homes in some countries. Yet research indicates that many are ignorant of what the Bible has to say, and still others seldom apply Bible truths to the practice of their religion.

The Bible teaches us that being a disciple of Jesus Christ involves becoming acquainted with His Word. Ellen G. White suggests: "Through the study of the Bible, converse is held with patriarchs and prophets. The truth is clothed in elevated language, which exerts a fascinating power over the mind; the thought is lifted up from the things of earth, and brought to contemplate the glory of the future immortal life. What wisdom of man can compare with the grandeur of the revelation of God?"—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 130.

On a typical evening, the average Christian may watch television for two hours or more but only spend minutes reading his or her Bible before bedtime. The *Valuegenesis* research in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists hints that less than one-third of families practice a regular worship, using the Bible as their source and textbook. How can one know the will of God if there is only a brief encounter with His words? Thus this quarter's lessons direct us to a new understanding and application of skills in Bible study.

The goals of this quarter's lesson study are: (1) to underline the reason we study the Bible and (2) to put into practice various study methods. We want you to try new approaches in order to understand and apply significant Bible truth. Special attention will be given to the topic of Christian worship. But some study methods lend themselves better to other topics.

Jesus said: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32, NKJV).

The Centrality of the Bible



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Tim. 3:14-17; John 8:31, 32; Prov. 2:1-15.

MEMORY TEXT: "If you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:4, 5, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history."—*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1994*, p. 5.

THE BIBLE IS CENTRAL. Often we avoid deep, detailed, and thorough study. Unless something captures our imagination or we sense its deep importance, we can have a difficult time learning it.

There seem to be three stages of attitudes toward Bible study: (1) *the "Medicine Stage,"* in which we study because we suspect it should be good for us to do so; (2) *the "Nurture Stage,"* in which we recognize that the Bible is important and can help us, but it is often seen as dry and difficult to understand; (3) *the "Garden Stage,"* in which we discover the central importance of the message for our personal spiritual growth. Study becomes exciting and more focused.

THE BIBLE AS TEACHER (2 Tim. 3:14-17; John 8:31, 32).

How does the study of the Word of God help us to grow? How can the Bible provide the basis for our beliefs and practices? 2 Tim. 3:14-17.

The apostle Paul gives us a number of reasons why we should spend time studying the Scriptures. The first reason is that, as we search the Scriptures, we come to know Jesus Christ and experience His salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

The second purpose of Bible study is that it assists us in growing spiritually so that we might be "equipped" for the service of God (2 Tim. 3:17, NIV). Too often we find that we have knowledge but are not equipped to cope with our problems. The Bible provides the *means* by which we can be ready for problems and provides the *answers* when those problems arise.

Third, verse 16 suggests that the Scriptures are to *teach* us. Here is the basis for doctrinal, truth-filled study. We cannot make useful applications of truth without knowledge. The means of spiritual growth are teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is our "guidebook" for living.

What kinds of information in the Bible help us in our Christian walk? John 8:31, 32. Reflect on when the Bible has been most influential in your personal life.

"In order to exercise intelligent faith, we should study the Word of God. The Bible, and the Bible alone, communicates a correct knowledge of the character of God, and of his will concerning us. The duty and the destiny of man are defined in its pages. The conditions on which we may hope for eternal life are explicitly stated."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 22, 1910.

"The Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine. And there is nothing more calculated to energize the mind, and strengthen the intellect, than the study of the word of God. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God's word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose, that is rarely seen in these times."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1888.

Can Christians be disciples of Jesus if they do not regularly study the Word of God? Explain.

MADE FREE BY THE WORD OF GOD (John 8:31-47; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18).

What is the freedom in Christ that is explored in John 8:31-47? How does one become free from sin?

In the New Testament the Greek adjective meaning “free” (*eleutheros*) occurs 23 times. It is not used in the sense of political freedom, for Jesus was not a political messiah. The New Testament does not associate itself with the idea of freedom as some kind of power to do whatever one wants. Freedom is always seen as what occurs when we are involved in the “glorious freedom [*eleutheria*] of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21, NIV). The believer enjoys freedom whenever the Spirit of the Lord is present (2 Cor. 3:17, 18).

According to John 8:31-47, what is the relationship between freedom and Bible study? Explain, “He who belongs to God hears what God says” (verse 47, NIV).

“Let everyone study the Bible, knowing that the word of God is as enduring as the eternal throne. If you come to the study of the Scriptures in humility, with earnest prayer for guidance, angels of God will open to you its living realities; and if you cherish the precepts of truth, they will be to you as a wall of fire against the temptations, delusions, and enchantments of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, Sept. 18, 1893.

What experiences can you share illustrating the freedom in Christ that has come through your study of the Word?

“Through the study of the Scriptures we obtain a correct knowledge of how to live so as to enjoy the greatest amount of unalloyed happiness. The Bible student is also furnished with Scripture arguments so that he can meet the doubts of unbelievers and remove them by the clear light of truth. Those who have searched the Scriptures may ever be fortified against the temptations of Satan; they may be thoroughly furnished to all good works and prepared to give to every man that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 374.

What practical suggestions about reading and studying the Bible can you give to struggling Christians?

THE NATURE OF THE SCRIPTURES (Prov. 2:1-15).

What attitude should we have when looking to Scripture for answers? According to Proverbs 2:1-15, what are the rewards of searching God's Word? (Compare 2 Tim. 3:16, 17.)

Throughout the history of the Christian church most have understood the Bible in much the same way as they have understood the person of Christ. The incarnation principle that is applied to the person of Jesus applies to our Bible, as well. The Bible is at the same time both human and divine. On the one hand, it is the infallible Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, this inspired Word was put into imperfect human language by fallen human beings. This blending of humanity and divinity is sometimes difficult to understand. Because the Word of God is inspired, it has deep, eternal relevance and speaks to everyone at any time in the history of the world.

"The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible."

"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."

"The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

"It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 416, 20, 21.

Why can we have complete confidence in the Word of God, even though human instruments were involved in its production?

THE BIBLE AS GOD'S REVELATION (2 Peter 1:16-21; Eph. 3:1-6).

Are there concerns and problems we face that are different from those of the first-century Christians? What does 2 Peter 1:16-21 tell us about how God reveals Himself to us today?

God speaks to us through the Bible in a number of ways: *First, it is God's revelation, a collection of accounts of God's revealing Himself to us and to His people through the centuries.* And it records in detail the greatest revelation of all, Jesus.

Second, the Bible is a present-day revelation. The Bible says that "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (verse 21, NASB). The source of the revelation is God. This fact makes the writings of Bible authors vitally relevant for every era, including our day.

Third, the Bible brings truth and conviction to us personally. Sometimes this is most direct, through the prompting of our thoughts as we read. The same Spirit of God who inspired the writers often reveals living messages from God to us.

Fourth, the Bible's messages have universal application. The Word of God is for everyone. "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV), Paul says, and through it we all can hear what God hopes for the world and for each individual.

What does Ephesians 3:1-6 suggest is the relationship between the written Word and the person of Jesus?

"When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4, RSV). God has revealed Himself to us in at least four unique ways—nature, Jesus, His Spirit, His Word (including the prophetic Word; see 2 Peter 1:19). Jesus comes directly to us through the Holy Spirit.

"The Holy Spirit has been given us as an aid in the study of the Bible. . . . When the Bible is made the study book, with earnest supplication for the Spirit's guidance, and with a full surrender of the heart to be sanctified through the truth, all that Christ has promised will be accomplished."—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 357.

What does the Bible teach us about the character of God? What do we learn about God and His will through the lives of Bible characters?

THE RICHNESS OF GOD'S WORD (James 1:22-25; Ps. 119:96-105).

What attitudes toward God's Word are we instructed to adopt? James 1:22-25.

The Bible provides a rich texture of comments that are to guide our lives and help us in the choices we make each day. In Bible times hearing and doing were closely related. In fact, hearing implied doing. That is why Jesus often said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Luke 14:35, NIV). He meant that since everyone has ears, all are expected to comply and do what He suggested or commanded.

Obedience is always implied if the revelation of God in the Scriptures is our authority. James suggests that doers of the Word are the true believers and are blessed for their response to the revelation of God.

What keeps us from becoming a doer of God's Word? Gal. 5:17. What makes the Bible alive in our lives? James 1:25.

David poetically described his love for the Word of God in Psalm 119. Three qualities are evident in David's experience that helped him appreciate the wisdom of God in the laws and commandments. First, he had a deep love for God's will. Second, David knew how to contemplate the words of God. Through meditation on God's directions, David claimed that he grew in wisdom. Third, the shepherd-king found that through obedience to the words of God, he could live victoriously.

"If all would make the Bible their study, we should see a people who were better developed, who were capable of thinking more deeply, who would manifest greater intelligence than those who have earnestly studied the sciences and histories of the world, apart from the Bible. The Bible gives the true seeker for truth an advanced mental discipline, and he comes from contemplation of divine things with his faculties enriched; self is humbled, while God and his revealed truth are exalted."—*Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, October 1, 1892.

What benefits does Psalm 119:96-105 suggest are in store for the diligent Bible student? Why does contemplation of God's law have a positive influence on one's spiritual life? When is this contemplation legalism, and when is it not? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 172.)

FURTHER STUDY: Read Genesis 32:22-26. Jacob provides a unique model for those who wish to grow in their appreciation for God's Word. For example, when he met God that night, he wrestled with Him until morning. God said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking" (RSV). But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (RSV). Jacob provides us with a significant principle for both our Christian living and our study of the sacred Text. There is no limit to the number of questions you can ask of your Bible. And with consistent application and careful understanding of the text itself, a number of personal applications can be drawn. Perseverance is important for us, just as it was for Jacob when he met God that dark night.

Read the introduction to *The Great Controversy* to explore how the Bible was written. Read also *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 450, 451, to discover the relationship of Bible study to the education of youth.

In our Bible study, we must first find out what the text actually says; next, we want to learn what it meant to those who lived in Bible times; and finally, we want to make personal application for our own spiritual growth.

Ellen White says that the Bible "is the bread of life and the water of salvation to all who make it their study. What it means to be a Christian can be understood only by a careful and prayerful study of the Word of God."—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18, p. 145.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What goals do you have for personal Bible study?
2. What are the purposes of Bible study for the members of your family or for your own devotions? How do you establish regular Bible study in your setting?
3. What must happen in your spiritual search in order for you to find Bible study as fascinating and important as noted in Proverbs 2:4, 5 and Psalm 119:96?

SUMMARY: The divine-human encounter that resulted in the Word of God provides a specific revelation of God's will for humanity. Without it, we would find it difficult to interpret the purposes of God in this world. Because we have God's revelation in written form, we have a Word to follow that is "more sure" than the witness of our own senses. With the written revelation, we have an objective text to explore.



The Church's Challenge in Rwanda

J. J. Nortey

The Adventist church in Rwanda is picking itself up and starting to rebuild. But it must build far more than structures; it must rebuild its faith—faith in God and in one another.

Rwanda claims that 95 percent of its population is Christian. Adventists are the second-largest Protestant denomination, with some 300,000 members. During the massive slaughter that convulsed the country for several months in 1994, an estimated 10,000 Adventists lost their lives. Thousands more fled the ravaged country for refugee camps in neighboring Zaire.

Most Adventist believers in Rwanda are Hutus, the majority tribe. But pockets of Tutsi members were virtually wiped out. In one predominantly Tutsi area, where we had a hospital and mission, virtually every church worker was killed—100 pastors, hospital workers, mission employees, all killed in one spot. One report indicates that some 3,000 people were killed on the Mugerero hospital grounds. Mass graves cover the ground. Some 2,500 likely were killed in one church building where they had come for refuge. This was the largest massacre in the entire country.

But now Rwandans are beginning to return home, to rebuild their faith and their lives. On one Sabbath following the fighting I visited four churches in Kigali and found them filled to overflowing, with people standing outside. Two of these churches hold 500 to 600 people. At least 2,000 people were worshiping in the largest church in Kigali.

Stories of heartbreak and heroism continue to surface. Two of our pastors, who were away from home when the violence began, lost their entire families. One man lost his wife and nine children; the other pastor lost his wife, three children, and seven grandchildren. The pastors were saved only because members of the other tribe sheltered them at the risk of their own lives.



I pray that our believers will put aside tribal animosities and unite under the banner of Christ. We are not Hutu or Tutsi; we are Christians, followers of the Man who told us to "love one another."

J. J. Nortey is president of the Africa-Indian Ocean Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

The Purpose of Bible Study



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ps. 119:1-18; Matt. 4:1-11; 7:24-27; 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 8.

MEMORY TEXT: "The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand" (Matthew 7:25, 26, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Among other things, the Bible challenges us to discover God's will for our lives and to learn how to grow in grace as we prepare for His soon-coming kingdom.

PREPARATION FOR BIBLE STUDY. When people gather to study the Word of God, they bring their personal problems, definite spiritual challenges, and deep emotional needs to the task. Too often we leave the exploration of Scripture to scholars. But should Bible study be left only to those with special knowledge? The answer to this question is found in the purpose of Bible study.

In order to be a careful interpreter of Scripture, there is one primary challenge. We must seek to understand what God is saying to us. This involves asking the right questions of the Bible text—questions that the Holy Spirit brings to our minds as we study and meditate upon particular passages. Thus we can find specific answers for our individual needs.

Prayer for divine enlightenment is the first step. (See *The Great Controversy*, p. 521.) As we speak and listen to God, our hearts are prepared to understand His written Word.

BUILDING OF STRONG FOOTINGS (Matt. 7:24-27; Rom. 2:13).

What are the results in people's lives of the learning that involves both hearing and doing? Matt. 7:25-27. What does obedience have to do with hearing God's Word? Rom. 2:13.

The story of the two builders who chose different building sites provides the context for us to look at the types of hearers of God's Word. There is a contrast here between those who hear and do nothing and those who both hear and do. The people who practice what they hear are called "wise." These people are not satisfied with listening passively. They not only hear the call of God to repent and to believe in Jesus; they both hear and do. They *actually* believe and *actually* repent. Those who do so find that their religion does not fail them. When "storms" attack, there is safety and shelter. The Bible challenges us to apply learning to every situation of life.

What causes people to feel that they cannot follow the instruction and counsel from God in Scripture? What other types of hearers are there in the Bible? Matt. 13:1-13, 18-23. How many of the hearers of Matthew 13 are active hearers, open to learn about God's truth? What reasons are given for this commendable attitude?

The Bible suggests that people hear the Word of God in different ways. The story of the soils presents us with a rural illustration. Farmers regularly had to face the problem of making sure that the seed planted fell on rich soil containing proper nutrients to make growth possible. Too often we are impressed with the truth of God's Word but fail to grow spiritually. Most of the hearers in Matthew 13 found all kinds of reasons not to respond to the teachings concerning Jesus' kingdom. They allowed present problems, personal lethargy, lack of individual commitment, and secular influences to choke the gospel seed.

The challenge for Christians today is to understand that Bible truths are designed to move us closer to the kingdom in our attitudes, beliefs, and actions. The power of Bible seed lies in the power of the Sower. Christ Himself is the Sower of the seed that is found in the Bible.

What do the types of soil referred to in the parable of the sower represent in your world? Give a practical application to the attitudes depicted in the parable.

STUDY SYSTEMATICALLY (Acts 17:10-14).

"The Bible presents a perfect standard of character. This sacred book, inspired by God, and written by holy men, is a perfect guide under all circumstances of life. It sets forth distinctly the duties of both young and old. If made the guide of life, its teachings will lead the soul upward. It will elevate the mind, improve the character, and give peace and joy to the heart."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 444.

The book of Acts gives special praise to the Bereans. Using the chart below, identify what made these people unique. As you explore Acts 17:10-14, write down their actions or attitudes and their results.

Description:	Action or Attitude:	Result:
1. The people of Berea.		
2. Jewish leaders.		

Haphazard study of the Word of God may very well be an insult to the sanctity of the Bible. If we use the Bible as a means of occasionally receiving a few inspirational morsels, eventually we will be disappointed in the results. People who benefit most are those who study the Bible diligently and eagerly seek God's will.

What methods would enrich your study of the Bible? How is studying the Bible like being a good detective? Compare John 5:39 with Luke 24:27, 44.

Listed below are the steps in basic Bible study:

1. **Observing**—seeing the basic facts contained in the passage we are studying.
2. **Asking**—learning the kind of questions to ask of the text we wish to examine and thereby discovering more information.
3. **Interpreting**—finding out what the text actually means.
4. **Cross-referencing**—comparing scripture with scripture, allowing the Bible to be its own expositor.
5. **Applying**—making life applications.

What other processes have you found to be helpful in understanding Scripture? Read your favorite passage in the Bible, and apply the above five simple steps.

HEARING TO UNDERSTAND (Matt. 22:23-33).

What skills used in mastery of one's profession can come to bear in learning to explore the Bible? What are the two reasons stated in Matthew 22:23-33 that cause people to believe false doctrine?

If we are to be disciples of Jesus, a certain commitment is necessary. Men and women must learn to follow God in the deepest sense. When we ask how people grow, we recognize that various nutrients are necessary if any of us are to thrive. If we are to grow in any secular sense, we must understand what nurtures us. For example, perhaps someone in your congregation is a real-estate salesperson. In order to represent correctly the client who wishes to purchase a home, competence demands that the agent master the vocabulary, process, laws, and formulas with which all must work in order to buy or sell property. One would expect the "expert" in sales to be an authority in all that constitutes competence.

Why not expect that same type of expertise in the Christian? The source of power, information, values, and knowledge of the future is revealed in Scripture. In order to explore this rich resource, Bible study must take priority.

Jesus taught that study of the Scriptures provides a resource to combat error in our lives. Matthew 22 shows that near the end of Jesus' ministry, the Jewish leaders tried to trick Him with complicated questions about their law. Answering one question, which the Sadducees had designed to entrap Him, Jesus emphasized the importance of Scripture as the model of truth.

"The Old and the New Testament Scriptures need to be studied daily. The knowledge of God and the wisdom of God come to the student who is a constant learner of His ways and works."

"Bible reading, the critical examination of Bible subjects, essays written upon topics which would improve the mind and impart knowledge, the study of the prophecies or the precious lessons of Christ—these will have an influence to strengthen the mental powers and increase spirituality. A familiar acquaintance with the Scriptures sharpens the discerning powers, and fortifies the soul against the attacks of Satan."—*Messages to Young People*, pp. 189, 397.

How many times have you determined that you should study the Bible but have found that your busy schedule interferes with your best intentions? What must you do with your priorities to focus anew on personal Bible study? What is the best time of day for you to spend with God's Word?

STUDY FOR LIFE APPLICATION (Matt. 28:18-20).

Even though understanding the meaning of the text is important, another goal of personal Bible study is *application*. Our final purpose of study must be the practical application of biblical principles to our daily living.

Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, asserted that the Bible was given, not to increase our knowledge, "but to change our lives." The Bible's purpose is to make us *very* different people. It can mold our characters, enabling us to conform in lifestyle to the ultimate model of love and grace, Jesus Christ. When we recognize this purpose, we are better equipped to fulfill Jesus' great commission to win others for His kingdom.

Often we study to find proof for our own positions. Our motivation in this may not be deeply Christian. The Bible is not a club to be used to correct others, even though through our study we may come to know Bible truth and stand corrected. Nor should the Bible be used solely as a means of formulating theological propositions, even though it contains many gems of truth that can be categorized. We do not study the Bible to impress others with our knowledge. We study to find direction and purpose from God, as well as to learn God's plans for the world. This means that Bible study must involve not only deep, accurate scholarship, but it must move us to live balanced, practical Christian lives.

Ask yourself, Which of my attitudes should be changed by Bible study? What do I need to begin to do or to stop doing if my Bible study is to be practical? In what ministry for others should my study of Scripture motivate me to engage?

Look at the gospel commission found in Matthew 28:19, 20, and complete the following exercise:

1. List all the action words found in the passage.
2. How do you do the things implied by the action words in the passage?

There are multiple purposes for the study of Scripture: to understand what the text actually says; to see how it informed the early church or the people of the Old Testament; to understand how it informs the life of the church; to grasp how it instructs and empowers the individual who is struggling with life's problems. "We must search the Scriptures . . . which will enrich the mind, and fortify the soul against the wiles and temptations of the archdeceiver."—*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 19.

DEFENSE AGAINST FALSEHOOD (Matt. 25:1-13).

In these last days of earth's history, the Bible provides insight into correct thinking and living. "There are practical lessons in the Word of God. . . . That Word teaches living, holy principles, which prompt men to do unto others as they would have others do unto them." —*The Upward Look*, p. 215.

The parable of the 10 virgins focuses on faithfulness and wisdom by contrast with carelessness and foolishness. The emphasis is on preparation. At the end of earth's history, we will meet God with or without the Holy Spirit in charge of our lives—we will be either wise or foolish.

What preparation can the Christian make in order to be ready for Christ's return? Matt. 25:1-13.

All the bridesmaids had lamps containing oil. But the wise bridesmaids had thought to bring flasks containing extra oil. The foolish ones had no reserves. In making a practical, personal application of this passage, one might ask the following questions:

1. What is the major issue in the story?
2. Contrast the wise with the foolish bridesmaids. Why are they different?
3. Is the moral of this story perseverance in the faith, or is it the accumulation of spiritual reserves?

"Satan is well aware that the weakest soul who abides in Christ is more than a match for the hosts of darkness, and that, should he reveal himself openly, he would be met and resisted. Therefore he seeks to draw away the soldiers of the cross from their strong fortification, while he lies in ambush with his forces, ready to destroy all who venture upon his ground. No man is safe for a day or an hour without prayer. Especially should we entreat the Lord for wisdom to understand his word. Satan is an expert in quoting Scripture, placing his own interpretation upon passages by which he hopes to cause us to stumble. We should study the Bible with humility of heart, never losing sight of our dependence upon God. While we must constantly guard against the devices of Satan, we should pray in faith continually, 'Lead us not into temptation.' "—*Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, p. 350.

How does Bible study qualify us to distinguish between truth and error? What makes us sure that we have a correct understanding of Scripture? What is the Holy Spirit's part in this?

FURTHER STUDY: The many parables and stories of Christ's life teach us that when we trust God, we can withstand the attacks of the devil. Christ relied on the study of the Scriptures (Old Testament) in order to gain spiritual victory. How many instances can you remember in which Jesus allowed God's Word to direct His actions? Read Matthew 4:1-11. What model of overcoming does this story suggest?

Study these passages to see the importance of Bible study for your spiritual growth: *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, pp. 166, 167; *My Life Today*, p. 62.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Do you agree with the following assessment? Explain your answer. "It's quite clear from the Bible itself that God is not concerned merely with our knowing about his people, or even, about him. In fact, we might go so far as to say that the Bible writers were not interested in knowledge for the sake of knowledge . . . they were much more concerned about living."—John F. Balchin, David H. Field, Tremper Longmann III, eds., *The Complete Bible Study Tool Kit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991), p. 73.**
- 2. What is the result when the people of God fail to understand the Bible for themselves?**
- 3. What do you believe is the root cause of failure to study the Bible on a regular basis?**
- 4. How would you summarize the practical lessons we can learn from Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness?**
- 5. What is the purpose of your Bible study? What is the purpose of Bible study for your family? Do these purposes differ? If so, how?**
- 6. What are some of the challenges we face in developing a systematic plan for Bible study?**

SUMMARY: The purpose of Bible study includes both systematic discovery of God's will and application of biblical principles for our spiritual growth and development. This twofold process of understanding and application provides the basis for Christian living. God needs individuals who are committed to personal study, discovery, and application to life.



Chung, Hyun Hee

J. H. Zachary

"I cannot stop talking about Jesus!" says Chung Hyun Hee.

Mrs. Chung wanted to follow God's will, but was confused by so many denominations. One day as she prayed for guidance, a knock at the door interrupted her prayer. Opening the door, she found several people standing there—Adventists who had come to invite her to church. Mrs. Chung attended their church, but hesitated to join the Adventist Church.

However, she felt no peace; her life seemed empty and meaningless. One night, feeling she had reached a new low point, she confessed her sins and promised to follow the Lord wherever He led. At dawn she went to the Adventist church to pray. There she found assurance that God had accepted her. She began attending the Adventist church regularly, and was baptized in May 1993.

Her one goal became to share Jesus with others. She started giving Bible studies to a neighbor couple. What a joy she felt when these friends were baptized!

But her greatest burdens were for her husband and her mother. Her husband never attended church and had some unhealthy habits. She prayed for him, and God answered her prayers. Her husband is now a faithful Christian.

Her mother, a Jehovah's Witness, resisted her daughter's invitations to study the Bible. Finally she joined a Revelation Seminar, but she seemed cold and distant. Mrs. Chung begged God to touch her heart. Her joy knew no bounds when her mother accepted God's call and was baptized last year—along with two of her friends.

Mrs. Chung's mother is now an active soulwinner. Because her husband owns several businesses, she has friends among the affluent people in her community. She conducts several Bible studies, cooking classes in her home, and regular Revelation Seminars. Her motto is "To work for souls until Jesus comes."

She has won 17 persons to the Lord in the first year since her baptism.



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Learning to Interpret the Bible Text



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: 2 Tim. 2:14, 15; Luke 18:18-27; 1 Sam. 8:1-9.

MEMORY TEXT: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

KEY THOUGHT: To know the will of God for their lives and to be equipped for service, Christians must spend time studying their Bibles. The challenge is to interpret correctly a text that was written so long ago in the "then and there" and to see its relevance to the "here and now."

WHY DO I NEED TO KNOW HOW TO STUDY? When you open your Bible, you are immediately struck with the varied styles in which God's written revelation is presented. There are history lessons and poetry, laws and psalms, Gospels and epistles (letters), direct teaching and hundreds of illustrations. The Bible comes to us through the various forms (genres) chosen by the inspired writers to frame God's message to us. To understand Scripture, we must spend time sorting out the styles in which God's counsel to us is presented. For example, we need to know how *we can understand* a piece of poetry, a psalm, or a message of praise directed *to God* by a writer in antiquity. We need to understand how the cultural circumstances in which the Bible authors wrote are reflected in the language and images they used to express God's thoughts. We will be rewarded as we recognize the relevance for us of truth written so long ago.

LEARNING WHAT THE TEXT SAYS (Luke 18:18-27).

When we want to discover what a text says, we use a process called “exegesis.” This is carefully organized study of a Bible passage to find out what the text meant in the original setting and what it means to us. We first seek to discover what the text meant to those who originally heard it.

Read Luke 18:18-27, and answer the following logical questions:

- 1. What question does the ruler ask?**
- 2. What answers does Jesus give?**
- 3. What does Jesus mean when He says, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:24, 25, NIV)?**

We begin interpreting *after* reading the whole text. Next, we ask what the text says. For example, in our passage under study today, we note that Jesus presents an impossibility for us to consider. “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” He concludes that a camel can enter the eye of a needle easier than a rich person can enter heaven. It is said that there was a gate in Jerusalem called the “Needle’s Eye,” which animals could enter only by crouching down and sliding through. The earliest evidence for this idea comes from an eleventh-century commentary by a Greek churchman named Theophylact, who had trouble understanding the text as it read. But the text *does* state the impossible. Jesus’ point is that it is *impossible* for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. It is impossible for those who give priority to riches to have access to the kingdom of heaven (Mark 10:24). It is impossible, except for God, who can change the human heart. A materialistic worldview is incompatible with a Spirit-filled life.

Learning to read and to think about the text is the first step in understanding it. The next step is to ask good questions about the text. There are two kinds of questions we can ask: (1) Those that relate to the *context* (the setting of a passage in the biblical account) and (2) those that relate to the *content*. We should also discover the “occasion” or purpose for the text.

List three other questions you would like to ask the text for today’s study (Luke 18:18-27). Make sure you ask questions about the *context* and the *content* of the passage.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF A PASSAGE (1 Sam. 8:1-9).

Let's begin by asking the first kind of question that we discovered in the previous daily lesson topic. What is the context of 1 Samuel 8:1-9?

There are various contexts out of which Bible writers inform us of God's will. First, there is the actual *historical setting* in which the Bible passage was written.

To understand this setting of a text, we must first try to discover the time when the text was written and the culture and society out of which the story arose. For example, 1 Samuel 8:1-9 is set at the time when Israel wanted a king. The surrounding countries all had monarchs who ruled them. The children of Israel pressed Samuel to appoint for them a ruler who would give them standing with other nations and fight their battles for them.

"A great deal of research into the nature of kingship has been carried out in recent years. It is now recognized that in the ancient world generally, kingship was sacral—a sacred, cultic office as well as a political position. The king was, in fact, universally acknowledged as a mediator between god(s) and people. This inevitably led to his being considered at least a semidivine person. In Egypt, indeed, the king was accorded full divine honors; he was a god in human form. In Babylonia, on the other hand, the king was recognized as a human being, elevated to near-divine status. . . . Despite the differences, in both areas the king was pivotal in the cultic beliefs and practices. No doubt the Canaanites followed a similar pattern; in the Ras Shamrah tablets the Canaanite king Keret (Kirta, Kirtu) is styled both the 'servant of [the deity] El' and the 'son of El.' . . . It is specifically stated in 1 S. 8:5 that when the Israelites felt they should have a king, they were influenced by the practices of neighboring peoples."—D. F. Payne, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), vol. 3, p. 21.

Historical information helps us to understand what the text said to those who read it. What do you think it would have been like living without a king in the time of the prophets?

Books that assist us in determining the historical setting of a passage include: Bible commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, concordances, and introductions to the Old and New Testaments. Some Bibles have introductions to each book that give helpful background information.

LEARNING HOW TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS (1 Cor. 2:14-3:4).

Learning to ask the right questions is crucial. A learned professor of theology grew up with his mother and father asking him each evening before mealtime what he had learned in school that day. When the professor became an adult and had his own family, he decided this question was inappropriate because it encouraged children to respond simply, "Oh, nothing." Instead, he decided to ask his children, "What good questions did you ask today?" This allowed them to develop analytical thinking skills that would help them understand their world. There is a high correlation between spiritual maturity and the ability to think logically about one's faith.

Adventist youth are sometimes critical of the church because they sense a lack of openness to question and to analytical thinking. But we know that a strong thinking climate is correlated positively with a warm church climate. Most members want to be challenged to think about religious issues and ideas, and they want to examine their faith carefully in order to learn and to grow in understanding. Learning to ask deep, thoughtful questions helps in this process.

After reading 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4, write out two questions, the answers to which would help you understand the passage.

Question 1: _____

Question 2: _____

Here are some suggested questions about the passage that, when answered, will help you to understand it:

1. To what four types of people does Paul introduce us in this passage?
2. What kind of understanding is "spiritual" understanding?
3. Can infants in Christ instantly become spiritual by asking the Spirit to fill them? What of the "solid" food that is required of mature Christians?
4. Can we be spiritually disabled? If so, how?

LEARNING TO USE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT (John 3:1-21).

Another step in understanding Scripture is to become sensitive to the immediate context, the setting of the passage in the scriptural material. This concern may not appear to be much of a problem for some texts. For example, passages like the following seem quite clear: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NIV); "Live by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16, NIV). But even simple passages can be understood more clearly if we become sensitive to immediate context. Here the tools for Bible study can become important.

Read several times the verses in front of and after the passage being studied to grasp the immediate setting or context.

Using John 3 as the basis for your study today, ask the following contextual questions about the passage. If you don't know the answers, use one of your reference tools to help you understand:

1. What was the occasion of the story?
2. Who was the man coming to Jesus at night? What did he think of Jesus? What questions did he ask, and why did he want to know the answers? What were his concerns? What was he failing to recognize?
3. What attitude did Jesus show toward the questioner?
4. What are the logical sections in the story?
5. What is the main point of the story? (John 3:16). Why is this an answer to the question of new birth?

Some principles that help us to understand the "context" of a Bible passage are as follows:

1. Always try to discover what the historical and cultural setting of the text was.
2. Learn to think in paragraphs. These are natural units of thought. You need to understand the content of the paragraph and why this particular thing is said at this particular time and place.
3. See whether the context supports your understanding of the passage.
4. Notice the literary style of the passage—poetry, history, psalm, parable, prophecy, etc. How does this help your understanding of the passage?

Exercise in context: read Romans 10:4 in various translations. How does the context (Rom. 9:30–10:10) help us to understand this passage?

TOOLS FOR BIBLE STUDY (1 Sam. 8:16; 1 Cor. 11:29).

The Bible was originally written in three different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. While most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and a small portion in Aramaic, all of the New Testament was written in Greek. Most of us do not know these languages, and so we must rely upon someone else's translation of the original. To some extent, reading a translation is like reading an interpretation, and that is not all bad in itself.

Using only one translation has the disadvantage that one's understanding of God's Word is limited to the meanings in that one translation. The version you are using may translate some passages well but others less well. That is why using more than one translation may be a great help in understanding the Bible. Of course, you must select *quality* translations.

If you have them available, use a number of translations to compare important Bible passages, such as Genesis 1:1-10, John 3:16, and Revelation 14:1-5, and the two texts listed above, 1 Samuel 8:16 and 1 Corinthians 11:29. We suggest that English readers use the New International Version (NIV), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the King James Version (KJV), and the New King James Version (NKJV) as examples. Note that the message is clearer in some translations than in others.

Discuss the relative benefits of using a newer translation. Note that scholarship often has improved over the years and that more modern Bibles contain more accurate information based on historical and archaeological research.

Some rules for selecting a good translation:

- 1. Pick a translation rather than a paraphrase.** Translations reflect the original text and are more accurate representations of the actual language.
- 2. Avoid translations that present a prejudiced viewpoint.** Some translations present a denominational bias rather than reliance on original manuscripts.
- 3. Try to use a version prepared by a committee.** Such versions are usually less biased and more faithful to the original. A more literal translation is useful for serious study.
- 4. Try to use a Bible that involves the latest scholarship.** This will give you information that older versions do not have. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls material was discovered in the late 1940s, and only versions that were published after that date make use of this early biblical material.
- 5. Use a Bible that nurtures your spiritual life.** For devotional purposes, one can use a modern translation that is easy to read.

FURTHER STUDY: There are many New Testament stories that provide spiritual insight concerning the nature of God's kingdom but are best understood when they are seen in their Middle Eastern context. For example, the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector in Luke 19:1-9. To understand this passage, it is useful to learn about the tax collector's profession in New Testament times. In addition, to understand the story itself, it is necessary to see the double meaning in verse 9. Salvation refers both to Jesus in person and to the experience Zacchaeus was to have that would change his behavior.

It is also important to note that this story occurred near the end of Jesus' ministry. What stories precede and follow it? The next part in the story is Jesus' ascent to Jerusalem, where His ministry ended when He provided for the salvation of the whole world by dying on the cross.

If you have a Bible commentary and dictionary, look up the following terms: *tax collector*, *Jericho*, *salvation*. Try to understand Zacchaeus better after learning about these terms.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can the cultural issues of the first century (i.e., political groups, Sabbath laws, rabbinical practices, etc.) influence one's understanding of a text?
2. How does understanding the geography of the Bible times improve our understanding of a text?
3. What was going on in Corinth that caused Paul to write to the church in this city? What was going on in Rome that led Paul to write the Epistle to the Romans? How does knowing these things enhance our understanding of Paul's letters to Corinth and Rome?
4. Why do God's messages to first-century Christians have definite relevance to you?

SUMMARY: A contextual approach to Bible passages we are endeavoring to understand involves: (1) seeking an understanding of the cultural setting in which the passage was written; (2) considering the larger context of the passage within the book in which it occurs; (3) determining the true meaning of a passage in its immediate context; (4) learning something of the mood of a passage or a book. By thinking about the context of a passage under study, we catch a glimpse of the feelings and motivations of the biblical authors or characters.



Breakthrough in Pakistan

Reinder Bruinsma and Andrea Steele

More than 100 new Adventists were baptized in Karachi, Pakistan, on a single Sabbath last year. Most of the new believers traced their new faith to evangelistic meetings held in several towns and villages near Karachi. Local pastors followed up the interests of the evangelistic meetings and prepared the candidates for baptism. The group gathered at the open-air baptistry behind Karachi Adventist Hospital to witness their faith.

In a country in which 98 percent of the population is Muslim, the 100 baptisms represent a significant increase in membership. Since 1985 the church in Pakistan has doubled in size, from 5,000 to 10,000 members.

Public evangelism in Pakistan is restricted to the "Christian" community, which comprises only two to three percent of the total population. Many of these nominal Christians live in the poorest areas of Pakistan. Plans are being laid to reach as many of these areas as possible through evangelism.

One pastor who joined in the baptismal celebration was Dr. Borge Schantz, director of the Islamic Institute, located on the campus of Newbold College. He had held an evangelistic series in Thatta, a town a few hours' drive from Karachi, and several of the new believers had come from that effort. Dr. Schantz was in Pakistan to prepare for another evangelistic series.

Recently Adventist World Radio has begun broadcasting one hour a day in Urdu, the official language of Pakistan. Programs are produced in the Pakistan Union offices in Lahore.

Studies by the British Broadcasting Company indicate that nearly half of all households in Pakistan have a radio, and most of these have short-wave capabilities. The study also indicates that radio owners in villages tend to share their radios with neighbors and friends. This, coupled with a low literacy rate in the country, makes radio the communication medium of choice for evangelism.

Reinder Bruinsma is communication director for the Trans-European Division. Andrea Steele is public relations director for Adventist World Radio.

Discovery Through Study, Prayer, and Meditation



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Psalms 1; 86; 119:1-24; 2 Tim. 2:7.

MEMORY TEXT: "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Often as we work to learn the original situation and meaning of a text, we forget that the deepest understanding comes as a gift from God. We are not finished with our study until we have received a blessing from God and personal direction for our lives. Therefore, we must immerse ourselves not only in the text of the Bible but in meditation and prayer. Only then can we receive the insights needed to apply Scripture to specific areas of our lives.

WHY WE NEED PRAYER AND MEDITATION. "Those who will put on the whole armor of God and devote some time every day to meditation and prayer and to the study of the Scriptures will be connected with heaven and will have a saving, transforming influence upon those around them. Great thoughts, noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth and duty to God, will be theirs. They will be yearning for purity, for light, for love, for all the graces of heavenly birth. . . .

"Abstract meditation is not enough; busy action is not enough; both are essential to the formation of Christian character."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 112, 113.

"Let the student keep his Bible always with him and, as he has opportunity, read a text and meditate upon it."—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 463.

PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY (Psalms 1; 119:1-24).

The Bible writers seem to have thrived on deep meditation on the words of the Bible. For David the shepherd-king, meditation was a regular practice (Ps. 1:1, 2). "Oh, how I love your law! I *meditate* on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I *meditate* on your statutes" (Ps. 119:97-99, NIV).

The text implies significant time commitment to the process of prayer and meditation ("all day long"). If we are to receive the biblical blessing of wisdom and insight as the psalm suggests, we must begin to make considerable changes in our commitment to prayer and meditation.

What does 2 Timothy 2:7 suggest about the process of receiving insight into God's will? How does thinking over what God says help us to understand His will for our lives?

What happens when we think about what we read in the Bible? First, as we begin to examine our lives, the problems and challenges become clearer. This process allows the Word of God to make sense for us. We can find answers to those areas of our lives that need special help. Next, we can ask how the particular Bible truth we are examining affects our relationship with God. How does the Bible information make a difference in our lives?

Here is a personal meditation exercise:

1. Read Psalm 119:1-24 a few times. Ask yourself what direction the text suggests for your life.
2. What information about God does this text suggest?
3. Think how following the counsel in this passage might change your life or behavior.
4. What insights did you receive into your life's needs? Finish the sentence "This text shows me that . . ."
5. Memorize passages that are helpful to your spiritual life. (See *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 42.)

"God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 60.

Is meditation only one-way communication? How does God communicate with us through this process?

PRAYER AND INSIGHT (Ps. 119:18).

Understanding the meaning of a Bible passage requires prayer. "Take the Bible as a study book, and see if you are not filled with the love of God. Your heart may be barren, your intellect feeble; but if you will prayerfully study the word of God, light will flash into your mind."—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, pp. 455, 456.

Without fellowship with God, our thinking may make us worldly-minded secularists, skeptics, or atheists. We must learn to study the Bible prayerfully. One purpose of prayer is to open us up to God's direction. Prayer prepares our hearts for further dialogue with, and insight from, God.

What does Psalm 119:18 suggest will happen when we begin to include God in our study?

It is said, "Application begins on our knees." Prayer, in relation to Bible study, enables us to see a natural connection between God's Word and our quest for direction and growth in Christ:

1. As we pray, we come to recognize the distance we are from God. Our prayers begin to focus on those things we must learn and do. Thus our appreciation of God's gift of grace is enhanced. (See Ps. 34:4-7.)
2. As we look at our problems, God helps us to see alternatives and provides strength to overcome in those areas of our lives in which His gifts are indispensable. (See Isa. 46:4; Jer. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:9, 10.)
3. We ask God to show us our hardness and rebellion and to change us. (See Ps. 139:23, 24.)

Another function of prayer is to return to God praise for His goodness and love to us (Ps. 106:1, 2). Prayer is an act of worship. Thoughtful prayer is the beginning of the meditation that leads to spiritual growth.

"The Bible should never be studied without prayer. The Holy Spirit alone can cause us to feel the importance of those things easy to be understood, or prevent us from wresting truths difficult of comprehension. It is the office of heavenly angels to prepare the heart so to comprehend God's word that we shall be charmed with its beauty, admonished by its warnings, or animated and strengthened by its promises."—*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, pp. 38, 39.

Deep meditation helps our faith development. God invites us all to experience trust and fellowship and to meet Him at special moments during the day. Meditation helps us to meet God in a personal way.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF MEDITATION (Dan. 9:1-23).

Scripture speaks of many people who found insight into God's will through proper meditation. Christian meditation prepares the believer to participate in Christ's ministry of saving souls. Unchristian meditation evacuates the mind of God-inspired thought and makes it a slave to the destroyer of souls.

Looking at the context of Daniel 9, we discover four major insights: (1) Daniel had repeated visions of the rise and fall of nations and of the sufferings of God's people (Daniel 7, 8); (2) Daniel had been told of delay in God's action against evil in the world (2300 days or years; Dan. 8:14); (3) Daniel was concerned about this delay. He attempted to understand God's will for His people as outlined in the prophecy (Dan. 8:27); (4) the 70 years of Israel's exile were nearly over (Dan. 9:1, 2). Now Daniel turned to prayer, meditation, information, insight, and relief.

Read Daniel 9:1-19, and note how many times he talks about understanding, insight, and prayer. What answers did God give in response to Daniel's persistence? Dan. 9:20-24.

The history of the church provides numerous case studies of the power of prayer and meditation. One example is John Woolman, an eighteenth-century Quaker, who through the study of the Bible became convinced of the evils of slavery. His prayer and meditation on the Word of God convinced him never to own slaves. Through his devotion to Scripture, he became convicted of many biblical truths.

Another deeply spiritual person is John Stott, the rector emeritus of All Souls Church in London. Along with such spiritual giants as H. M. S. Richards, Sr., in our own denomination, Dr. Stott provides a contemporary model. Stott tells of doing as much of his sermon preparation as possible on his knees with his Bible open before him. He prays as he studies. He explains that this is not because he worships the Bible, but because he worships the God of the Bible, and he desires to humble himself before Him and His revelation. While he is studying the text of Scripture, he is praying earnestly that his mind will be enlightened with divine insights. (See John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982], p. 222.)

Can you recall times when thoughtful prayer and meditation on the Word of God have helped your church, your family, or you personally? Identify other Bible characters who thrived spiritually through prayer and meditation.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND GROWTH (Psalms 66:18, 19; 90).

One of the Holy Spirit's functions in our lives is to guide us. God wishes us to know His will and promises us wisdom when we ask (James 1:5, 6). An additional function of the Holy Spirit is to convict us to do right and to avoid wrong (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit prepares and enlightens us and makes us open to what God is saying to us through the Bible.

As we begin to open our minds to God's messages in the Bible, our manner of thinking is changed. Now that the Spirit is directing us, we begin to see the world and others in an entirely different light. Perhaps you have observed someone who has been struggling with life's problems become changed through the power of the Holy Spirit. A critical person is now gentle and sensitive; a rude person is now courteous and tactful; a selfish person is now able to place others first. This results from the power of the Spirit fulfilling the promise in John 3: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, NIV). Positive spiritual results indicate the Spirit's presence in our lives.

According to Psalm 66:18, 19, what do we need in order to be prepared to receive God? How do we know that the Spirit of God is present in our lives? Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:24; 4:12, 13; 5:10. List ways in which the church might show evidence of the power of the Spirit of God in its midst.

"The diligent, humble student, seeking by earnest prayer and study for the truth as it is in Jesus, will most assuredly be rewarded. He seeks for help, not from ideas of human writers, but from the Fountain of wisdom and knowledge; and under the guidance of holy intelligences he gains a clear understanding of truth."—*Gospel Workers*, p. 251.

Study Psalm 90, and reflect on the following questions to personalize the passage:

1. What actions of God are found in this passage?
2. What happens to us in God's presence?
3. What qualities can be developed by communion with God?
4. What understanding of God can we develop through fellowship with Him?

DISCOVERING TRUTH (Matt. 11:25, 26; John 7:17).

Not only do Christians need to pray and meditate on the Word of God; they must be actively involved in the pursuit of truth. While prayer and meditation prepare our hearts to receive the blessings from God's treasure store, there must also be a commitment to discover truth. We must make personal decisions about the importance of God's Word in our lives, and we must take the necessary steps toward an understanding of Scripture.

There are some steps that the Bible suggests are important in this process:

1. We must approach the Bible with an open, teachable mind. (See Matt. 11:25, 26.) Jesus says that some things have been hidden from sophisticated learners. He upheld the model of the childlike learner to illustrate the appropriate attitude in Bible study.
2. We must invite the Holy Spirit to actively assist our efforts to gain insights into God's will. (See John 16:13.)
3. We must be willing to live consistently with what we learn in God's Word. This learning involves vital discovery of His will for our lives. (See John 7:17.)

Jesus urged that one way to learn about prayer is to pray without ceasing. (See Matt. 26:41; 1 Thess. 5:17.) Many people would rather discuss the theory or theology of prayer than attempt to engage in it. But Jesus taught that one way to learn about prayer is to immerse oneself in it. The same is true for Bible study. We learn about study only by trying it; we learn about the power of Christ only by living a Christ-filled life.

"How shall we search the Scriptures in order to understand what they teach? We should come to the investigation of God's word with a contrite heart, a teachable and prayerful spirit. We are not to think, as did the Jews, that our own ideas and opinions are infallible. . . . We should not study the Bible for the purpose of sustaining our preconceived opinions, but with the single object of learning what God has said."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 105.

List the attitudes that should accompany the study of God's Word. Being aware of your fallen human nature, think about the hindrances that obscure your seeing and doing what God shows you in Scripture. What are some things that you need to do to discover God's truth for yourself? How willing are you to surrender your own preconceived ideas regarding the teachings of God's Word? (See Prov. 2:3-7; 14:12; John 17:17.)

FURTHER STUDY: A close reliance on God's revelation regarding Himself and conformity to the commands of His Word exemplified by Old and New Testament characters provide us the means of success in our religious lives. Study Hebrews 11. Look closely at the following individuals, and explore the reasons for their spiritual success: Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, and Joseph. How did each of these characters relate to God? What attitudes helped them discover truth and learn God's will for their lives?

Read "The Call of Abraham" and "Joseph in Egypt" in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 125-131; 213-223; "John Wycliffe" in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 79-96.

"The character of Wycliffe is a testimony to the educating, transforming power of the Holy Scriptures. It was the Bible that made him what he was. The effort to grasp the great truths of revelation imparts freshness and vigor to all the faculties. It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment. The study of the Bible will ennoble every thought, feeling, and aspiration as no other study can. It gives stability of purpose, patience, courage, and fortitude; it refines the character and sanctifies the soul."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 94.

"The Bible is like a fountain. The more you look into it, the deeper it appears. The grand truths of sacred history possess amazing strength and beauty, and are as far-reaching as eternity. No science is equal to the science that reveals the character of God."—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 393.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Does all truth lead us closer to Jesus? Explain.
2. What do you believe is involved in changing your viewpoint? How does a deep study of God's Word assist you in this process?
3. What characteristics possessed by the people mentioned in Hebrews 11 do many contemporary Christians lack? Which do you find lacking in your own life?
4. What is more important, being right or being loving? Is either one indispensable?

SUMMARY: The Holy Spirit enables us to discover truth in the Scriptures as we pray, meditate, and study. God wishes us to be committed to these spiritual disciplines as part of living by faith in Him.



A God Stronger Than Idols—1

Sven H. Jensen

Biel and Majiok are Sudanese young men who have a burden to share the Adventist message with the people of their home town, many of whom are idol worshippers. They returned to their village of Waat in southern Sudan and began contacting the few Adventists living there. They organized the group and began building a simple church. Next the group laid plans for sharing the Adventist message with the local population.

One day Biel and Majiok found a sick man resting outside their home. They asked how they could help him and offered to visit him. The man gladly told them where his *toukel* [home] was.

The two young men visited the sick man. As their eyes became accustomed to the darkness, they noticed five idols placed in a corner of the room. The idol gods were made from decorated gourds, and each had a name: Kuoth Kier the river god, Koltok the god in the tree, Biel the stone god, Kolang the god in the gourd, and Garang, the powerful god of the heavens. These gods had been in the man's family for generations; they were venerated with sacrifices and used for fortune telling. The man feared the powerful spirits that inhabited the idols, for he believed they could bring disaster upon the family if their needs were not satisfied. Garang, the god of heaven, demanded the head of a cow on a stake for his sacrifice.

Biel and Majiok smiled, opened their New Testament, and read of another God—the God who knew their names and who wanted only their love, not animal sacrifices. The sick man and his family listened attentively. Gatwich, the sick man's brother-in-law, was grateful that these two men had come to visit his sister's husband and bring the family hope.

Biel and Majiok returned often and soon began studying the Bible with this family. Nyatuach, the man's wife, was especially interested. Slowly she began to give up her traditional beliefs. But before she had surrendered her life to Jesus, her husband died. Her mind was in a turmoil. According to custom, she must call the relatives together and sacrifice a bull. Then her husband's property could be divided, and she would be given to one of her husband's brothers. She hesitated to follow this tradition, but she knew that she would be accused of wrongdoing if she did not follow traditions to honor her late husband. What could she do?

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Understanding Types of Bible Literature



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Mark 4:10-12; Matthew 24.

MEMORY TEXT: "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: God has revealed Himself in the Bible through various kinds of literature. In order to understand and to apply God's messages, we need to know something about these kinds of literature.

LEARNING ABOUT BIBLE LITERATURE. The sacred text contains many kinds of material or types of writing. Sometimes the Bible gives us insight into the history of God's people. At other times it presents commands and laws. Many times, in the inspirational words of the Old Testament poets, God's character comes to us in beautiful words of symbol and praise. At other times the purpose of the Bible words is direct spiritual instruction. Divine counsel may be prophetic in nature and may seem somewhat obscure or hidden. At other times this counsel is in the form of letters to a blossoming young church learning to face the challenges of spiritual growth in the face of cultural pressures, doctrinal divisions, and the need to prepare for the Lord's coming.

This week we will explore four types of literature in God's Word and learn how better to understand and apply the text to our own situations. We will look at parables, poetry, prophecy, and history.

PARABLES—DO YOU GET THE POINT? (Luke 10:25-37).

Why did Jesus teach in parables? Mark 4:10-12; Matt. 13:10-13; Luke 8:9, 10.

The Greek word translated “parable” (*parabole*, Mark 4:10) means “comparison,” “type,” “figure.” A New Testament parable is a short discourse designed to illustrate spiritual truth by comparison with the known world. A parable is something that is placed alongside something else for the purpose of comparison and edification. Jesus taught in parables because spiritual things are “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). God gave genuine seekers for truth an understanding of Jesus’ parables. Others “on the outside” (Mark 4:11, NIV) could not understand, because they did not submit to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Parables enable Spirit-directed Bible students to understand complex issues in a practical, life-related way.

Read the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Determine why Jesus told this story and to whom He addressed it. Discover the story’s major theme. Identify the people in the story, and identify their spiritual problem or attribute. What in this story shows you what the grace of God is like?

The parable of the good Samaritan obviously has double meanings. Throughout history this style of writing was considered important in the teaching ministry of the church. There are differences between true parables, such as the good Samaritan, and allegories, which need some interpretive key in order to understand them. The parable of the good Samaritan is a story, pure and simple, with a beginning and an ending. (See *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 499, 503.) It has a plot just like other story parables, such as the lost sheep, the prodigal son, and the great supper.

Here are some rules for understanding parables:

1. Often understanding the audience helps us to understand the parable. (Here is contextual understanding again.)
2. Read the parable aloud to get the full impact of the story. What catches your attention first?
3. Often parables answer a question or a problem. What is the question Jesus is trying to answer? (Luke 10:25-29).
4. Parables teach a truth to the hearer. What is the truth in the parable of the good Samaritan?
5. Parables often confront us with our sinful self or clarify spiritual truth for us.

POETRY—HEARING GOD'S GRACE (Psalms 19, 86).

The book of Psalms is a collection of inspired prayers, poetry, and hymns. They are best understood when we recognize that they were written by Hebrews in Hebrew. In Bible poetry the words are from God to us or are spoken to God, or about God, by dedicated, inspired people—men and women who burst forth in praise as they thought of God. These inspired words bring hope and joy to our hearts and meet our deepest spiritual needs.

What is your favorite psalm? Why? How does it meet your spiritual needs? Read Psalm 86, and describe the picture of God it portrays. How does knowing God's character of love and grace help us to identify our spiritual and personal needs?

"Every part of the Bible is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable. The Old Testament, no less than the New, should receive attention. As we study the Old Testament, we shall find living springs bubbling up where the careless reader discerns only a desert."—*Lift Him Up*, p. 115.

What to remember when studying the psalms or poetic books of the Bible:

1. Remember that these words are written as Hebrew poetry and addressed to God from the heart, through the mind. See, for example, Psalm 19:1 (NIV). Notice how the NIV has tried to help us see the parallels in this psalm by capitalizing only the first line in each and using a semicolon between the two lines. What is the poet's main point? The second line in Hebrew poetry often parallels the first line in meaning (Prov. 18:15). Sometimes the thought in the second line contrasts with the first (Prov. 10:19; 15:1).
2. Most of the psalms were poetry set to music.
3. The vocabulary of a poem often has double meanings upon which we can meditate. God's work is illustrated when the psalm discussing the Exodus says that the mountains "skipped like rams" (Ps. 114:4, NIV).
4. There are many types of poetry in the Bible. These types may be laments, expressions of thanksgiving, appeals for help, or expressions of joy and praise. When reading a psalm, clarify the type, and your understanding will increase.

Look up the following psalms, and try to identify their types: Psalms 127, 139, 137. What pictures of God and His grace do you see?

PROPHECY—LEARNING GOD'S PLAN (Rev. 3:14-21).

Prophetic literature comprises a large portion of the Bible. Prophecy may be *general* or *apocalyptic*. General prophecy (for example, Joel, Isaiah, Jeremiah) speaks to a local historical situation, often using this situation as a type or analogy of a similar situation that will arise toward the end of time. (Note, for example, the dual application of Jeremiah 4.) Apocalyptic prophecy (for example, Daniel and Revelation) has three major characteristics: (1) It is based on visions and dreams. (2) It makes a large use of symbolism. (3) It focuses on the end time.

Prophecy is often prediction. But it often involves understanding the past, for many of the prophecies have been fulfilled already. So the study of prophetic books often involves a study of world history.

How do we know we have interpreted a prophecy correctly? Consider the implication of these verses for our interpretation of prophecy: Isa. 8:20; Jer. 28:9; 2 Peter 1:19-21; John 16:13.

The books of Daniel and Revelation often present predictions of the future in symbolic language. These prophetic messages have undoubtedly been an encouragement to God's people throughout history, but, because of their focus on the end-time, they contain a special message for us. They have deep spiritual overtones, designed to influence our spiritual preparation for Christ's second advent. Note that each of the messages to the churches contained in Revelation 2 and 3 applies, in a special sense, to God's last-day people.

Some principles to remember when interpreting prophetic passages of the Bible:

1. Ask three questions of the passage: (1) Why was the prophecy given? (2) What did it mean to those who heard it at the time it was written? (3) What does it mean to us today? (What principles arise from the text that apply to our situation? See Rev. 3:14-21.)
2. See whether the text explains itself. Often if we would just read farther in the passage, we would find the interpretation to be self-evident. (See Dan. 7:23-25.)
3. Consider whether there were historical events at the time the prophecy was written that explain its meaning. If not, look beyond that period of history for clues. (See Rev. 14:6-12.)
4. Study the use of symbols elsewhere in Scripture, and apply your findings to the prophecy.

THE PROPHECY OF MATTHEW 24 (Matt. 24:1-31).

Now let us apply the principles stated in Tuesday's lesson to Jesus' prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world (Matthew 24).

Why was the prophecy given? What two questions was Jesus addressing? Matt. 24:1-3.

A correct interpretation of the prophecy depends on our understanding that Jesus was using the events leading up to and including the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as a type or analogy of the events leading up to and including His second advent. Consequently, Jesus' description of the fall of Jerusalem is also a description of His second coming. History will be repeated. The historical events prior to and including the events of A.D. 70 illustrate what will happen at the end of time.

"Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves. When He referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, His prophetic words reached beyond that event to the final conflagration in that day when the Lord shall rise out of His place to punish the world for their iniquity, when the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. The entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth's history."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 628.

Applying this principle of interpretation, what did the following predictions mean to the disciples? How were they fulfilled before and during A.D. 70? How may they apply to the events prior to and during the second coming of Jesus?

1. Matt. 24:4-7. False Christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes.
2. Matt. 24:9-14. Persecution, apostasy and disloyalty, false prophets, the gospel preached in all the world.
3. Matt. 24:15-31. "The abomination that causes desolation" (NIV), fleeing from the enemy, observance of the Sabbath (verse 20), the time of trouble, the dark day, and the falling stars (verse 29; compare Joel 2:30-32).

HISTORY, INFORMATION, AND INSIGHT (2 Chronicles 27; Mark 7).

Much of the Old Testament and some of the New Testament are historical in nature. The challenge is to understand the historical setting of the text and to transfer the Bible principles to our situation today. God is revealed through the history of His people. Historical books include Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, the four Gospels, and Acts.

What other books would you consider to be mainly historical in nature? What are the main points in the historical account in 2 Chronicles 27?

“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.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. vi.

What are the benefits of seeing the truth presented in different ways by different authors in the Bible? (Read the introduction to *The Great Controversy*, and identify Ellen G. White’s position.)

Biblical narratives describe what happened in the lives of God’s people. Does this mean that they suggest what should happen in the church today?

Here are some principles of interpretation that are helpful in understanding Bible history:

1. Ask, What is the general historical situation facing the author and the audience? Seek understanding of the political, economic, and social situations.
2. Identify the customs of the times. (See Mark 7 and the word *corban* [verse 11]. How does an understanding of this expression help us to understand the passage?)
3. Is the passage giving us descriptive and prescriptive truth? Descriptive truth tells us what happened and what God said. Prescriptive truth states divine principles.
4. Always seek God’s guidance in understanding the history and in finding spiritual applications then and now.
5. Remember, God does not approve everything the Bible records. God inspired the record of historical events, but He was not responsible for the bad things people did or the bad results from their actions.

FURTHER STUDY: Study the following historical passages: Judges 7:1-8, Gideon defeats the Midianites; Num. 35:6-33, cities of refuge; Acts 2:1-13, the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost. Make the following observations:

1. Why is each passage in the Bible? What is its purpose?
2. What are the religious characteristics of each person in the stories?
3. What spiritual lessons apply to our lives today?
4. What do you learn about the character of God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can commands given by God to one people in one culture be translated into our culture?
2. Can we make direct application from all the incidents that the Bible directly censures or approves?
3. What do you think of this statement: "Express commands to individuals are not always the will of God for us"? (For example, Abraham was told to offer up his son.)

SUMMARY: The Bible was written in a number of literary forms. Four of these are parables, poetry, prophecy, and history. Parables elucidate truth for believers, poetry expresses eternal principles in beautiful language, prophecy reveals the hand of God in history and at the end of time, and history illustrates God's dealings with His people.

Since more than 40 percent of our Bible is historical, we are able to consider the importance of biblical examples in our walk of faith.



A God Stronger than Idols—2

Sven H. Jensen

Nyatuach is a widow in Sudan. When her husband died, custom demanded that she sacrifice a bull in her husband's honor. Then the family will divide her husband's possessions, and she will be given to one of her husband's brothers.

But recently two young men have told her about the God of heaven, and she has begun to give up traditional beliefs, including faith in the demanding idols her husband kept in their home. But if she does not sacrifice the bull in her husband's honor, his family will blame her if anything bad happens to them. What should she do?

She sought counsel from Biel and Majiok, who had taught her about Jesus. They challenged her to trust in Jesus and not follow the pagan customs of her relatives. They assured her that the idol gods had no power over her if she trusted in Jesus.

Biel's family invited Widow Nyatuach and her children into their own home. When nothing bad happened to her husband's family, they left her alone. Her brother, Gatwich, was impressed by the love and kindness of these Adventist Christians and began regular Bible studies. One day Gatwich brought his family to the tiny church. "We want to follow Jesus," he said. He carried his own gods and the five that had belonged to his sister's husband. In the presence of church members Gatwich destroyed and buried the idols. His sister asked fearfully, "If we bury them, will they come back again and disturb us?"

Biel answered, "If your heart is still with the idols, they will come back to trouble you. But if your heart is with Jesus the idols will never come back."

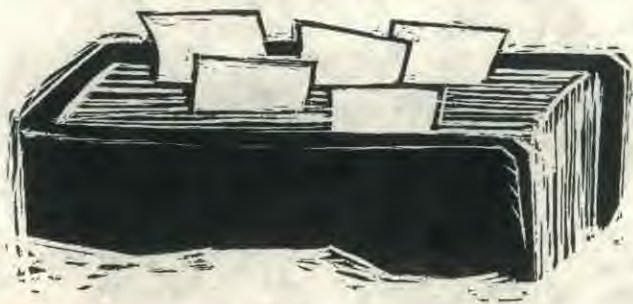
Six months later I flew into Waat on a UN relief flight, the first time ever that a pastor had visited the village. I baptized the three former idol worshippers: Gatwich, his sister Nyatuach, and her 15-year-old son, Mayiar, and several others, in a small pool of water one hour's walk from the town. Mayiar said on the day of his baptism, "I couldn't sleep all night for joy."

Biel and Majiok now have 70 more people ready for baptism, many of them former idol worshippers. Genuine friendship and Christian kindness won their hearts. Pray that the fighting in their area will cease so we can minister to these sincere people.

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How to Study a Bible Theme



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 1:14-16; Rom. 3:24; Gal. 3:18; Eph. 2:8-10.

MEMORY TEXT: "They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The thematic method of Bible study helps us to investigate the great themes of the Bible. We learn about the theme by approaching it with a set of questions, analyzing the passages, summarizing our conclusions, and then writing out a personal application. The purpose of this method of Bible study is to become acquainted with God's will as seen in major Bible passages.

DISCOVERING GOD'S GRACE. To demonstrate the thematic approach to Bible study, this week we will study the theme "grace." The thematic approach is a type of topical study. Focusing on one theme, it explores the Bible's teaching and application of that theme to our lives. We discover what we can about a chosen theme by examining Bible passages that deal with it, allowing specific Bible passages to suggest questions for which we seek answers throughout Scripture. This method requires some tools for study (a concordance, Bible commentaries, and dictionaries), but we will provide all the information you need to understand the theme of grace in the Bible.

One advantage of this method is that it is the easiest type of personal Bible study. It is a simple method that can result in a profound understanding of the Bible.

THEME: THE IMPORTANCE OF GRACE (John 1:14-16; Eph. 2:8-10).

Steps in studying a Bible theme:

1. Choose a theme to study that interests you.
2. List all the biblical passages that you intend to study. Using your tools for Bible study, make a list of the verses that are related to the topical theme. You may wish to look up synonyms and other words and concepts that are related to your theme.
3. Decide on the questions you want to ask. You may wish to use what, why, when, how, where, and who questions.
4. Ask your questions of each passage that deals with the theme. Read the text first. Then ask your questions, and write down the answers you find on your question form.
5. Draw a conclusion from your study. Ask, "What have I discovered about this theme?" Organize your answer into an outline.
6. Ask and answer the question "So what?" Write out personal applications.

Why is the topic of grace such an important topic for Christians to understand? Note how the following passages in context address this question:

John 1:14-17 _____
Rom. 3:24 _____
Rom. 11:5, 6 _____
1 Cor. 1:4-7 _____
Eph. 2:8-10 _____

"We ourselves owe everything to God's free grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the Saviour effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our exaltation to heirship with Christ. Let this grace be revealed to others."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 250.

The importance of grace for Adventists is emphasized by Charles Bradford, former North American Division president, who writes: "It remains for those who drink deeply at grace's fountain to present these living waters to all the people who dwell on earth. Seventh-day Adventists must be in the vanguard, foremost exponents, stewards of His matchless, saving grace. But this can only be as we become the people in whom Yahweh's name dwells, fiercely loyal to Jesus Christ."—Stuart Tyner, ed., *Only by Grace* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1994), p. 24.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS (Eph. 3:7, 8; Gal. 3:18).

In the Greek New Testament, the word for "grace" (*charis*) is used 156 times. The Gospels of Luke and John use the word *grace* in the sense of God's favor (Luke 1:30; 2:52), spiritual power (Luke 2:40; John 1:14), and the gifts He bestows upon undeserving sinners (John 1:16, 17). Paul's Epistles use the word *grace* (*charis*) 99 times. We will study grace only in Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Ephesians. Below is a selection of texts we can use.

Thematic Bible Study Sheet

1. Theme: The apostle Paul's understanding of grace.
2. List of Bible references:

Rom. 1:5, 7	1 Cor. 1:3, 4	2 Cor. 13:14
Rom. 3:24	1 Cor. 3:10	Gal. 1:3, 6, 15
Rom. 4:16	1 Cor. 15:10	Gal. 2:9, 21
Rom. 5:2	1 Cor. 16:23	Gal. 5:4
Rom. 5:15, 17	2 Cor. 1:2, 12	Gal. 6:18
Rom. 6:1, 14, 15	2 Cor. 4:15	Eph. 1:2, 6, 7
Rom. 11:5, 6	2 Cor. 6:1	Eph. 2:5, 7, 8
Rom. 12:3, 6	2 Cor. 8:1, 6, 7, 9	Eph. 3:2, 7, 8
Rom. 15:15	2 Cor. 9:8, 14	Eph. 4:7
Rom. 16:20	2 Cor. 12:9	Eph. 6:24

The next step in thematic Bible study is to learn to ask the right questions. This is a key activity in most personal Bible study. We are admonished to study the Bible for ourselves. (See *Christian Education*, p. 58.)

Read Ephesians 3:7, 8 and Galatians 3:18, and write down two additional questions implied in these texts.

1. What are the benefits of grace that the text suggests?
2. _____
3. _____

Following are examples of questions on grace you may wish to ask the texts. Or you may wish to use the questions you listed above.

1. With what or with whom is grace associated?
2. How are we involved in receiving and maintaining grace?
3. What are the characteristics of grace?

After establishing your questions, the next step in thematic Bible study is to read through your references and ask your set of questions of each verse, trying to be mindful of the context.

GETTING THE RIGHT ANSWERS (Rom. 11:5, 6).

Use the form below to answer the questions about grace that you asked. Ask your selected questions of each reference, and write the answers in the appropriate space. You will need extra sheets of paper to finish the study of grace in the Pauline letters because we have listed only four biblical passages for today's study from the thirty passages in our list in Monday's lesson. As you have time, you should try to research all the texts listed. Answers to the questions for the first passage are given here as an illustration of how you might prepare your thematic study sheet.

Questions we want to ask the text:

- A. With what or with whom is grace associated?
- B. How are we involved in receiving or maintaining grace?
- C. What are the characteristics of grace?

Answers to questions:**Scripture reference: Rom. 11:5, 6.**

- A. Associated with the "remnant" chosen for salvation (verse 5).
- B. Grace given by God (verse 6).
- C. Grace comes by being chosen (verse 5). Grace is not earned by our works (verse 6).

Scripture reference: Eph. 2:5, 7.

- A.
- B.
- C.

Scripture reference: 2 Cor. 4:15.

- A.
- B.
- C.

Scripture reference: 2 Cor. 13:14.

- A.
- B.
- C.

This section is the most critical of all your study. If you fail to study thoroughly, you cannot draw accurate conclusions, and you have the feeling that you will never know exactly what the Scriptures say on a certain theme. You may be tempted to take only a brief time to read the passage, trying to finish the assignment quickly. Take your time! Study only a few texts at any one sitting, and pray about their meaning before you try to answer any questions that you have raised. During your study, you may find that your texts are answering other questions. Take the time to jot down those answers, as well.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS (Rom. 5:17).

The challenge in Bible study is to draw accurate conclusions. It is easy to insert our own preconceived ideas into final evaluations. "In your study of the word, lay at the door of investigation your preconceived opinions and your hereditary and cultivated ideas. You will never reach the truth if you study the Scriptures to vindicate your own ideas. Leave these at the door, and with a contrite heart go in to hear what the Lord has to say to you."—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, July 24, 1902.

After you have read through all the references and tried to answer the questions you have asked of the Bible passages, organize and summarize the responses to each question. You might try to build an outline or a summary paragraph, or you may want to group the answers that seem to be alike into one section of your outline.

In developing your outline summary or in drawing conclusions, you might begin like this: (Insights regarding grace from other texts in the list in Monday's lesson have been added to illustrate the depth of information the Bible provides.)

Summary questions:

- A. With what or with whom is grace associated?
With God, Jesus, and salvation.
Set in contrast to righteousness by works.
A gift that includes the gift of God's righteousness (Rom. 5:17).
Redemption (Rom. 3:24).
Comes through faith (Eph. 2:8).
Peace (Eph. 1:2).
- B. How are we involved in getting and maintaining grace?
From our "birth" and "rebirth" (Gal. 1:15).
Comes by being chosen.
Comes by the power of God.
- C. What are the characteristics of grace?
Free to believers.
Comes from Jesus because of His death.
Empowers servants of Jesus.
Keeps us true to Christ's true gospel (Gal. 1:6).
Makes us alive in Christ and dead to sin (Eph. 2:5).

We have listed only some of the passages from which we have drawn conclusions about grace. See whether you can discover some other texts that are the basis for the preceding conclusions.

APPLYING THE BIBLE TO OUR LIVES (1 Cor. 2:14-3:4).

The Bible talks to us about various kinds of Christians. (See 1 Corinthians 2 and 3.) These types of people include those who are without the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14), those who are called spiritual (1 Cor. 2:15), and those who are worldly, "mere infants in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1, NIV). Could it be that each of us might fall into one of these categories? The text provides a clear understanding of each type of person. Notice that those without the Spirit of God fail to accept the things that come from the Spirit. And infants in Christ need a type of food different from that needed by those considered spiritual. This means that people internalize the Word of God differently. That is why application is so personal.

In order to implement what we have learned and to make it important to our lives, we need to write out a personal application that is practical and workable. In this last section, we will look at the general theme and decide what we are going to do about the Bible message. You may wish to look at each text, and ask it a personal question. But for our purposes in this day's study, we will ask only the general application questions:

- 1. What does all this mean for me?**
- 2. In what way will my actions, attitudes, or decisions change, now that I know more about the grace of God?**

After studying the passages on grace provided with this week's study, we might draw the following conclusion: (Use this as an example of how to write an application response.)

Application:

Based on my study of grace in the Pauline letters, I will . . .

- Learn to accept grace as a gift on a daily basis.
- Be open to the workings of grace and salvation in my life today.
- Recognize that obedience to God's law is a response to grace, not a means of earning salvation.

Use the space below to conclude your own study of grace in the Pauline letters.

Application:

Based on my study of grace in the Pauline letters, I will . . .

FURTHER STUDY: Read *Evangelism*, p. 190; *Gospel Workers*, p. 315.

As you have studied, you have probably seen that the apostle Paul sees grace as a significant gift from God. In fact, it is the essence of God's decisive saving act in Jesus Christ, which took place on the cross. The consequences of this saving grace through Jesus dramatically influence our lives in the here and now and in the future. The term *grace* arises out of God's basic act of pardon for sinners. Paul recognizes the whole Christian life as empowered by grace—guaranteed by it, anchored by it, and governed by it—because of God's wonderful gift of love for us in Jesus' death on the cross.

"The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary, and in connection with the wondrous, central truth of the Saviour's atonement. Those who study the Redeemer's wonderful sacrifice grow in grace and knowledge."—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1137.

You may wish to study such Bible themes as: (1) how to know God's will; (2) praising the Lord in the Psalms; (3) learning to pray—great prayers in the Bible.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT GRACE AND THEMATIC BIBLE STUDY:

1. What other themes in Scripture would you like to understand?
2. What is the value of thematic Bible study? How can thematic Bible study be used in evangelism and personal witnessing? What creative uses can you find for this kind of study?
3. How can one be saved by grace through faith and still be concerned about sinless living?

SUMMARY: Thematic Bible study is one helpful means of learning more about grace. Grace, the love of God manifested in His infinite saving work for humanity, has been available throughout history. The cross was the supreme revelation of God's grace. His grace continually comes to us through the compassionate ministry of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.



Faith Stronger Than Witchcraft

J. H. Joseph and Madan Lall

A layman who lives in North India found Christ and was eager to share God's love with others. As soon as he was baptized he began to give Bible studies to his family. One by one they accepted God's love and became his first jewels for Jesus. Even some of the man's cousins were baptized. In all, the man brought 30 souls to Jesus.

One of the man's neighbors, Satpal, was not a Christian. In fact, the man's father, Sohan, practiced witchcraft. He "helped" the people of the village who had any kind of trouble. Sohan organized large *melas* where people gathered to take part in the rituals of devil worship. People came long distances hoping to be healed. Others wanted to appease an angry god or have a curse removed.

One day old Sohan died. Family members buried him in their own yard and built an altar over the grave on which to conduct worship daily.

About this time the Christian layman met Satpal, old Sohan's son, and told him about the amazing love of Jesus. Satpal listened carefully, and eventually accepted Jesus as his personal Savior.

Satpal's family members began harassing him; some stopped speaking to him. They threatened to cut him off from the family inheritance. But Satpal had found a faith stronger than his father's witchcraft; he did not yield to Satan. Satpal married and moved into a small one-room home. They were crowded, but he was happy in the Lord.

Satpal's mother and brother continued to worship daily at the altar over his father's tomb. One night Satpal dreamed that God commanded him to demolish the altar on his father's grave. The altar was a reminder of Satan's work and power, so Satpal destroyed it. Many thought that Satpal and his family would be harmed or killed, but to everyone's amazement, the family did not seek revenge. In fact, Satpal's mother began to open to the love of God. Although she does not attend church, she sometimes opens her home to Christian meetings. Pray that Satpal's witness will one day unite his family at the altar of Christ.

J. H. Joseph is a pastor, and Madan Lall is a layman in Northern India.

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How to Study Inductively



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Eph. 2:1-22.

MEMORY TEXT: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4, 5, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Inductive Bible study seeks to determine the exact meaning of a passage on the basis of language and context. By exploring a specific chapter or section of Scripture, we can learn inductively more of God's will for our lives and the manner in which He wishes to transform us. We learn about God's grace, the means of reconciliation with Him.

GRACE AND RECONCILIATION. The Bible explains how God saves us. Through Bible study we discover the "how" of salvation, as well as its personal results, the "so what." Inductive Bible study is the process of letting the text speak to us, rather than bringing our own agenda to the text. The primary purpose of this type of study is to find out what the Bible says, and its secondary purpose is to determine what the message means to us. We carefully observe the text, its content, and context. We look at each paragraph, sentence, and word in an intensely detailed and systematic manner. There are at least six steps in this method: (1) Discover what the chapter is about; write a chapter title and summary. (2) Make a list of everything you observe in the passage. (3) Ask questions about the passage. (4) Relate your chapter to other similar passages. (5) List some possible applications. (6) Write down concluding thoughts and observations.

FINDING OUT THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE TEXT (Eph. 2:1-22).

Read Ephesians 2:1-22 in its entirety two or three times, and reflect on its purpose, style, content, and message. What do you think is the main theme of the chapter? Prepare for your study by having a concordance, paper, and pen available.

The first step in the inductive approach is to understand the big picture. An artist, looking at a scene he or she wishes to paint, spends time looking for patterns, colors, shapes, movement, and a point of focus. Similarly, the Bible student carefully surveys the passage under study:

1. **Write the message of the chapter in your own words.** Express it in such a way so that, when you read your version to others, they receive the gist of the passage.
2. **You may want to outline the chapter in detail.** Look at all the paragraph divisions in Ephesians 2. Assign a title to each paragraph, and then place some subpoints under each one. For example:
 - I. "We come alive through grace."
 - A. We were trapped in sin.
 - B. We are alive because of God's love.
 - C. Our salvation proves how rich God's love is.
 - D. We represent to the universe what Christ is like.
3. **Use your creativity to rewrite the passage, using only the subjects, verbs, and objects.** For example, you might rewrite the first paragraph in Ephesians 2 this way: "We were dead when we followed worldly ways. We gratified sinful nature. By grace we are saved through faith. In the coming age, the richness of God's kindness is revealed." This approach highlights the major thrust of the content.

Read the following story, and reflect on how Ephesians 2 provides the answer to the problem:

A 16-year-old young woman named Leslie made three life-changing decisions. She began sleeping with her boyfriend, she took up smoking marijuana, and she stopped going to church. Her parents seemed totally unaware of what was happening to their precious daughter.

Her youth pastor was devastated. He could not understand why Leslie was doing things that would hurt her and rejecting things that could give her strength.

Leslie's problems are not exclusive to teenagers. We need to ask ourselves, if we knew exactly what was required to live a healthier, happier, and more prosperous life, would we do it? (Adapted from Mark Gilroy, *Group Magazine*, September 1992, p. 58.)

MAKING SENSE OUT OF YOUR OBSERVATIONS (Eph. 2:1-22; Mark 4:35-41).

The next part of the inductive method is careful observation. For example, if you study the story of Jesus and the storm on the Sea of Galilee in Mark 4:35-41, what do you notice first? You see Jesus, the terrified disciples, the lake, the storm, and a sinking boat. But if you observe more closely, you notice that some of these men were professional fishermen. The storm was testing them at the point of their greatest ability, but still they were afraid. The parallels in our own lives are clear. We are often tested at the point of our greatest strength. Our strengths often prove to be our chief areas of vulnerability.

Careful observation is crucial if we are to understand the Bible. "It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God."—*The Great Controversy*, p. 598.

Make a list of everything you observe in Ephesians 2. The purpose is to become completely saturated with the content of the passage, something that a cursory reading of the text will not do. We want to answer the question What does the text say?

Here is a list of observations on Ephesians 2:1-6. Compare this list with yours, and complete the assignment by looking at each text in chapter 2:

1. Eph. 2:1. I was dead in sin; now I am alive because of Jesus.
2. Eph. 2:2. The evil one works in people who are disobedient.
3. Eph. 2:3. When we serve ourselves, we are just like those disobedient ones.
4. Eph. 2:4. God has great mercy for us.
5. Eph. 2:5. God's grace brings us alive spiritually.
6. Eph. 2:5, 6. By grace we sit with Jesus in heaven.

List key words in the chapter. Look for repeated words and phrases. Look for questions being asked that need answers. Look for commands, warnings, comparisons, and contrasts. Identify the illustrations. Look for lists of things and explanations. Notice the people, places, and situations involved.

HOW TO GLEAN INFORMATION AS YOU INTERPRET THE PASSAGE (Eph. 2:1-22; Luke 15:11-31).

Now that you have made detailed observations of your passage in Ephesians 2 about grace and reconciliation, it is time to begin to ask other questions of the text. Some call these “interpretative questions,” because they focus on the meaning of the passage. The answers provide the key to understanding the passage. Usually, interpretative questions begin with words like *what* or *why*. For example, we might ask, *Why* did Paul write this about grace? *What* is the context out of which he wrote? *What* are the implications for our lives in the sentence: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (verse 8, NIV).

Write down your questions and answers. That will help later, when you try to draw conclusions about the passage.

Do not forget to investigate difficult passages, things that you simply do not understand. Note these in the section below:

Questions:

Difficulties in the passage:

In order to understand the difficulties you have encountered, you may wish to consult a dictionary, a concordance, the writings of Ellen G. White, or a Bible commentary. Now is a good time to compare other translations of the Bible with the one you are studying. See whether another version helps you in your understanding of the passage. You may also wish to look at related Bible passages. (See Luke 15:11-32; Prov. 3:34.)

MAKING SENSE OF A CHAPTER (Eph. 2:1-22).

Remember, our goal in Bible study is not only information and direction; it is also application that motivates us to be recognizable children of God.

Study the significance of Ephesians 2:8, 9. Here we see a connection of a unique kind. It is almost a contrast of opposites. Paul says that you have been saved "by grace . . . through faith . . . the gift of God." This is in opposition to "not from yourselves . . . not by works, so that no one can boast" (verses 8, 9, NIV).

In verses 11-22, Paul adds a comforting picture of how Christ brings peace. Christ tears down the walls of hostility that separate people, and He restores a unity of love, friendliness, and hospitality among all races and classes. Grace is the basis of all peacemaking.

How could a knowledge of grace and salvation in Christ relieve tensions in the world today in those areas where conflict prevails? What walls of hostility are there in the church that need to be torn down? According to Ephesians 2, how does peacemaking occur?

You may wish to begin an outline of the insights you have gleaned from your study of Ephesians 2. For example, you might list the following as possible insights: (1) Salvation by grace through faith tears down barriers between groups, races, families, and individuals. (2) Grace is the means by which we receive salvation. We cannot work for salvation; we cannot do anything to deserve it. God gives it as a gift. (3) Through Jesus' death we now have direct access to God. (4) Grace from Jesus is the most empowering gift for our victorious Christian walk.

"No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan's circle the poor souls who have been deluded by his deceptions. It places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 386.

What insight has the text given you about the role of works in the Christian life?

APPLYING THE PASSAGE TO OUR LIVES (Eph. 2:1-22).

We have asked what the text says and what the text means. We have learned inductively what the Lord wants us to learn about grace and hostility. Now we need to bring our study of the passage to a conclusion.

Review the main points we have learned about Ephesians 2, and consider the implications of this textual study. Ask, "What am I going to do about this now?"

What is the relationship between works and Christ's gift of salvation through grace? Eph. 2:8-10 (compare Rom. 2:13; 3:31; Rev. 22:12).

Certainly, works are important in Christian living, and God expects obedience of His children. But Ephesians 2:8, 9 clearly says that grace is the means of salvation, and we receive it through our faith (commitment to what Jesus does for and in us), not by any activity of our own. One conclusion we might draw is that we should endeavor, through the power of Christ's grace, to reflect in our behavior the wonderful message and gift given us through Christ's death on the cross. (See Rom. 8:3, 4.) Our behavior may change in relation to our experience of grace, rather than by our efforts to earn salvation.

List three practical applications to your life of Ephesians 2:1-22. Notice especially the implied action found in verses 19 and 20.

Our study sheet for the inductive approach to Bible study has the following divisions, plus enough room to answer the questions thoroughly:

Inductive Study Guide

Chapter: Ephesians 2:1-22.

Chapter Title: "Grace and Reconciliation."

1. Chapter Summary.
2. Observation. (What does the chapter say?)
3. Interpretation. (What does the chapter mean?)
4. Comparison. (What do other texts say on the topic?)
5. Application. (What will I do about what I have learned?)
6. Conclusion. (What did I learn?)

Do not forget that the questions you ask the text should arise out of the passage itself. We want to learn what the text says, not what we think the text says.

FURTHER STUDY: Select another chapter in your Bible, and begin an inductive study. Try Ephesians 1, which is about finding God's purpose in our lives; or Psalm 86, which deals with openness to God's leading. These are excellent chapters with which to begin using the inductive method of Bible study. The key to inductive Bible study is to explore the text by using questions that arise out of our understanding of the text itself. Look at style, people, places, themes, theology, actions, interactions, counsel, commands, and anything else the text provides. Go to the text with significant questions, and watch the text come alive with meaning and personal application.

In studying the parables of Jesus, if possible, use a version of the New Testament that has the Gospel accounts in parallel columns. Compare the stories in each Gospel account, and see how each writer emphasizes a different purpose for the story or provides different information. Notice how this enhances your understanding of the passages. See Mark 12:1-12, the parable of the tenants. Compare the parallel passages, Matthew 21:33-46 and Luke 20:9-19. Explore the meaning of this parable for your life, using the inductive method.

For further study about grace, see *Christ's Object Lessons*, "Like Unto Leaven," pp. 95-102. Learn from this chapter about the power of sin in our lives and about God's love for us. Read *The Great Controversy*, "God's People Delivered," pp. 635-652. Note the place of faith and grace in the lives of God's end-time people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you determine what questions to ask of a Bible passage so as to determine its meaning? How do you decide whether or not your questions are valid?
2. What physical and spiritual preparations are needed for deep, thoughtful Bible study?
3. What have you learned from this study of Ephesians 2? What difference will it make in your life?

SUMMARY: Using the inductive method (detailed study of content and context), we can determine the meaning of Ephesians 2:1-22. Christians who understand the depth of love revealed in Jesus' death on our behalf are aware of the true motivation for abiding in Christ—His infinite sacrifice for us. God's love in His gift of grace enables us to live, learn, and serve according to His will.

The Children Shall Lead

Charlotte Ishkanian

How do 14 people make an impact for God in a city in the former Soviet Union? Everyone has a part to play.

Nearly 100 children crowd into a plain hall in downtown Rezina, Moldova, a city of 30,000. As the children enter, they give the greeter their answer sheets for yesterday's Bible study quiz, then take their seats. They wear their coats in the unheated room.

A woman tells a Bible story, using felts donated by a church overseas, to hold the children's attention. The children take turns placing felts on the board as she tells the story. They wiggle in anticipation of a turn holding the felts or answering a question.

Only four of the children here are Adventists. The others come from Orthodox homes or homes where religion is not a part of their lives. So the familiar Bible stories are new to these children.

Two young Adventist girls, 10-year-olds Lilia Maftai [MAWF-tay] and Alona Yakovienko, sing a simple, unaccompanied duet for the children, then help teach them a song that the children will sing for their parents on Sunday night.

After the meeting the children receive their next Bible study quiz. I ask how so many children learned about the meetings. Lilia Maftai, the pastor's daughter, smiles and says the whole church—all 14 members—gave out invitations. "I went with two women," Lilia explained. "I did not know what to say, but the women said they would do the talking. At the door, they forgot what to say, so I invited the people to our meetings. The people came! Now I am not afraid to invite people to hear about God."

Lilia has helped her father in his ministry for most of her life. She and Alona will sing for the adults' meeting tonight. The girls are eager to help win others to God.

In a country that has few Adventists, everyone shares in the work. Pastor Maftai has two churches and 14 small groups meeting in homes throughout the area. He tries to visit each church once every month. Even then, he often gets home only one night a week. In a minister's family in the Euro-Asia Division, everyone has a part in the church's ministry, even the children.



Lilia Maftai (left). Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of the *Mission* quarterlies.

The Text Speaks About Worship (Part 1)



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Exod. 4:29-31; 5; Isaiah 6; John 4:1-38.

MEMORY TEXT: “ ‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work’ ” (John 4:34, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: Worship is a heart response to God's presence. Worship expresses our adoration, reverence, praise for God, and commitment to Him. Like faith, it is a product of grace. Worship extends beyond the formal service of the church each weekend. It defines how we are to live in a world entrapped by evil and shaped by a secular culture that has as its goal selfish exploitation and self-aggrandizement. Worship enriches our personal spiritual lives and provides motivation for corporate action.

WORSHIP AND PRAISE. We will use the inductive method to explore this theological and practical topic. We will review the method and seek insight into the meaning and purpose of worship.

Throughout the Bible the restoration of worship is presented as the first step in returning to God. While the Israelites were still in Egypt, God restored their sense of national identity through the reestablishment of worship practices. In a meeting between Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel, Moses outlined the process whereby God would help His people leave Egypt. In that first meeting, worship was reinstated. (See Exod. 4:29-31.)

THE PURPOSE OF WORSHIP (Isaiah 6).

As you read and reread the sixth chapter of Isaiah, focus on the purpose of the chapter. What is the writer saying? Who are the characters involved?

Notice this comment on Isaiah 6 from a Bible dictionary: "That God was the Holy One was inscribed indelibly on Isaiah's heart as a result of his inaugural vision (vi. 3). As Amos has been called the prophet of righteousness and Hosea the prophet of lovingkindness, so Isaiah has been called the prophet of holiness. . . . God is the Holy One; that means He is so highly exalted above His creatures as to be totally different from them, not only in His moral perfection (cf. vi. 5) but also in His power, His wrath, His love, His faithfulness, and all His virtues (cf. also xxix. 16, xxxi. 3). Yahweh's holiness is the very essence of His divine being, which causes men to tremble before Him as they worship Him."—J. D. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 574.

Ellen White suggests, "The long reign of Uzziah [also known as Azariah] in the land of Judah and Benjamin was characterized by a prosperity greater than that of any other ruler since the death of Solomon, nearly two centuries before. . . . This outward prosperity, however, was not accompanied by a corresponding revival of spiritual power."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 303.

Too often, we look for some "experience" of worship that will grip us in such a way that we will follow God because we can do no other. We leave the presence of God, wondering why our expectations have not been fulfilled. We believe incorrectly that there is a specific type of worship format, type, or style that God expects.

Write a paraphrase of Isaiah 6:1-13, or outline it in detail as you explore Isaiah's experience with God. What is the context of Isaiah's experience of worship? Why did he have his unique worship experience? What was Isaiah's response to the vision of God that he received?

Using our study sheets, we might fill them out as follows:

Inductive Study Guide

Chapter: Isaiah 6.

Chapter Title: "The Experience of the Holiness of God."

Chapter Summary:

OBSERVING THE TEXT (Isa. 6:1-13).

Today we want to examine in detail what the chapter says. To do this we must ask clear questions that arise from our reading of the passage under study. Here are some observations to make of the passage regarding the vision. You may wish to write them in the observation section of your own study guide, using the form in last week's lesson.

Observation: (What does the chapter say?)

1. What was the attitude of the prophet to the vision of God? (verse 5).
2. What does God's throne room look like? (verses 1, 4).
3. How are the angels described? (verses 2, 6).
4. What was the angel's message to Isaiah? (verses 3, 7).
5. How did Isaiah respond? (verse 8).
6. What was the essence of God's message for Isaiah? (verses 7, 8, 10).
7. What was the message Isaiah was to share with God's people? (verses 9, 10).
8. What were God's stipulations for Isaiah about the message of warning? (verses 11-13).

What other questions arise from this passage? Look up King Uzziah and the prophet Isaiah in a Bible dictionary, and read about the cultural setting. See Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, "The Call of Isaiah," pp. 303-310.

"This assurance of the final fulfillment of God's purpose brought courage to the heart of Isaiah. What though earthly powers array themselves against Judah? What though the Lord's messenger meet with opposition and resistance? Isaiah had seen the King, the Lord of hosts; he had heard the song of the seraphim, 'The whole earth is full of His glory;' he had the promise that the messages of Jehovah to backsliding Judah would be accompanied by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit; and the prophet was nerved for the work before him. . . . Throughout his long and arduous mission he carried with him the memory of this vision. For sixty years or more he stood before the children of Judah as a prophet of hope, waxing bolder and still bolder in his predictions of the future triumph of the church." —*Prophets and Kings*, p. 310.

What are the results of meeting God in worship? What happens to our lives when we are confronted by the living God?

INFORMATION ABOUT WORSHIP (Isaiah 6).

Notice the following about Isaiah 6 and the prophet's worship experience. Fill in your own study sheet, based on the inductive method of Bible study.

Interpretation: (What does the chapter mean?)

1. It was an encounter with the Holy God (verse 1). In personal and corporate worship, do we sense the presence of God? We may expect a God of our own making to grace our worship. Too often we expect a feeling to be present, some emotional or sensory experience to validate our need for God or to prove that we have been saved. "Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, 'I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.'"—*Steps to Christ*, p. 51.

Needing some emotional experience to validate God's actions in Jesus is a subtle form of works-righteousness. Our need to prove that God is at work puts us in control of the experience, rather than allowing God to be the only source of the blessing.

2. Isaiah's worship experience was designed to meet his needs and to direct him to greater challenges (verses 1, 7, 8). In this worship experience, Isaiah was called and inducted into the prophetic office. Worship at its best is a chance to meet God and to find direction for our lives. Most of the worship experiences recorded in sacred Scripture move the person beyond his or her petty concerns into the realm of God's concerns for the world. For example, as Daniel prayed for his people, he was moved to focus not only on the destroyed temple complex in Jerusalem but on the danger that the "chosen" people of God might reject the Messiah Himself. Worship stretches us beyond our present concerns to eternal priorities.

What were the priorities God had in mind for Isaiah? How can those priorities be translated into our day and time?

3. Worship for Isaiah included a command to act. We sometimes forget that worship is not a passive activity. We are not only to watch and wait, but we are to be inspired to act in God's behalf. Passive worship may be too introspective to be helpful.

Are your responses to God as positive and spontaneous as were Isaiah's? Can you describe your past responses?

APPLICATIONS OF WORSHIP (Isaiah 6; John 4:1-38).

John 4:1-38 provides a look at worship from Jesus' perspective as He sat at the foot of Mount Gerizim speaking with a Samaritan woman. As Isaiah does, Jesus gives a model for worship that moves to direct action and thereby explains the nature of true spiritual worship.

At Sychar Jesus visited Jacob's well. From that spot you can view the famous Old Testament mountains of blessing and cursing. On Mount Gerizim the Samaritans had erected an alternative worship site from that of the temple in Jerusalem. After giving "living" water to the woman, a discussion ensued about the proper "place" for worship. Jesus suggested that the place is not as crucial as the spiritual nature of worship itself. He wants us all to have God's living water, the proper refreshment for our lives. "Worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24, NIV) is crucial, Jesus declares. This raises the question of Spirit-filled worship and truth-filled worship practice.

What does it mean to worship in Spirit and in truth? Did Isaiah worship in this way? What is spiritual worship? What is truth-filled worship? Explain what Jesus meant by spiritual worship.

Our passages in Isaiah and John provide ample opportunity to draw applications that can influence our lives. Study Isaiah 6:8-13; then draw some applications for your life from each verse. Below we have tried to identify some obvious applications of Isaiah 6:1-8.

Application: (What does the chapter mean?)

Verse 1. We need to see God in His glory and holiness.

Verse 3. We need to understand that God rules over everything, even our whole lives.

Verse 5. We recognize our sinfulness in the presence of God and our utter helplessness.

Verse 7. God forgives our sins when we meet with Him in worship.

Verse 8. We need to be ready to be used by God because He needs our service.

Draw a one-sentence conclusion about worship from Isaiah 6 and from Jesus' discussion in John 4. What elements of worship do these texts illustrate? How can our worship in public and private be enriched as a result of our study of these passages?

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT WORSHIP (2 Sam. 6:5, 14; Isaiah 6; Matt. 6:5-18).

Worship has two aspects: private and public. As we read in the Bible about private worship, we are directed to Jesus' counsel on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:5-18). Here Jesus indicates that private worship is very personal. It is not to bolster private egos or to separate people who are more spiritual from those who are less spiritual. Prayer is to be uniquely individualistic.

The Old Testament pictures public worship using many Middle Eastern forms. We see David singing before the Lord when He delivered him from the hand of all his enemies. He sang, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation" (2 Sam. 22:2, 3, NIV). Again, we see David bringing the ark back to Jerusalem with great celebration, involving singing, instruments, and dancing. "David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord. . . . David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Samuel 6:5, 14, NIV). From this example, we learn that worship forms are sometimes influenced by circumstances, cultures, and needs.

How do these biblical examples of worship enhance our own worship practices? What conclusions can you draw from Isaiah about the type of worship that is Spirit-filled and truth-directed? What makes us comfortable in our worship style and method? What are some of the cultural and generational differences in worship practices that fall within the Spirit and truth model?

The words used in the Bible in connection with worship point to the qualities of worship that God desires for His people. For example, the words *to serve* and *deacon* imply either voluntary or compulsory work done for another person. In other places in the Bible, worship is an "inner attitude." We should come from any worship experience inspired to serve others.

Use the last section of the inductive-study sheet to write conclusions to your study of Isaiah 6:

Conclusion: (What did I learn?)

Be as practical as possible, and identify one thing that you want to see happen in your own public and/or private worship experience.

FURTHER STUDY: Read *Steps to Christ*, "Faith and Acceptance," pp. 49-55; *Prophets and Kings*, "'Behold Your God,'" pp. 311-321; *The Desire of Ages*, "At Jacob's Well," pp. 188-190. Study also the following Bible references about worship: Psalm 89 about praise; Psalm 66 about joy; Psalm 102 about prayer.

When Jesus was visiting with the woman at the well outside Sychar, He endeavored to have her focus on true worship of God, not on controversial issues. "He desired to lift the thoughts of His hearer above matters of form and ceremony, and questions of controversy. 'The hour cometh,' He said, 'and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.'"—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 189.

How does this story help us to understand aspects of our worship service and how to identify those elements that benefit individuals in our congregations?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Is religion confined to external forms and ceremonies? Explain.
2. If you could plan the "ideal" worship service for your church, what would you include? Why?
3. How would you change your private worship practices, in light of what you have studied in Isaiah and John?
4. What do you think of this quotation? "Wherever a soul reaches out after God, there the Spirit's working is manifest, and God will reveal Himself to that soul. For such worshipers He is seeking. He waits to receive them, and to make them His sons and daughters."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 189.

SUMMARY: Through the inductive method of Bible study, we learned this week that Isaiah's experience (Isaiah 6) provides a wonderful example of the worship experiences that God's people might have. The condition is that they come to Him with open hearts and a willingness to listen to His voice. By beholding the glory of the Holy One, Isaiah found purpose for his life and motivation to respond to God's call. True worship provides the basis of understanding our relationship with God and our mission in the world.



My Testimony

Sandy Birdsong

I never knew about Jesus until in my late teens. In my young adult life I attended a church and sang in their choir, but I never understood phrases like "Washed in the blood." I did not know what it meant to be a Christian. For all these years I was nothing more than a secular humanist. But during the last few months a whole new joyous life has opened to me.

My dear friend Brenda suffered from a terminal illness, and I spent a lot of time with her. For almost four months a group of kind people who didn't even know Brenda brought meals to her home every day. I noticed something different about these people. They lived like real Christians. Brenda's husband, Nick, services computers, and one of his clients is the General Conference offices. As Nick became acquainted with some workers at the church's headquarters, he told them about Brenda's illness, and those people began praying with him. Some of them began bringing food by for the family. Nick started studying the Bible with them, searching for answers to his deepest questions.

After Brenda's death I continued to visit Nick and his daughter Doreen to help them through their grief. Sometimes we had strong discussions about religion. One day Nick challenged me, "Have you ever read the Bible?" I accepted Nick's challenge and started reading the Bible. Then Nick loaned me a book on Daniel. The Bible became real to me. I read the Christian literature hungrily.

Nick invited me to one of the Bible studies at his house. I went, but I resisted some ideas and had lots of questions about what we were studying. Through it all Dr. Erwin Gane, the teacher, was so patient and accepting. I kept coming. For most of my life I seemed to be looking into a mirror of self reliance; now I seemed to be climbing a ladder, reaching out to Jesus.

Finally I surrendered my life to Jesus and was baptized. It was the most joyful day of my life. I have met wonderful new friends in Christ. Now I want to share Jesus with my two sons and my friends.

I thank God that He reached out to me, and I pray that every Christian will find ways to reach out to others. It changed my life and it will change many others.

Sandy Birdsong is a nurse for National Institutes of Health and lives in Columbia, Maryland.

The Text Speaks About Worship (Part 2)



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Acts 2:1-21; 9:1-18; Titus 2.

MEMORY TEXT: “He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. Declare these things” (Titus 2:14, 15, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: The New Testament describes corporate and personal worship experiences that are rich in meaning. This week we will study inductively three worship passages recorded in the New Testament.

THINKING ABOUT WORSHIP: Read over the three passages listed for this week's study, and give each a title that relates to worship or personal religious experience. Use the form below:

Inductive Study Guide

Text: Acts 2: 1, 2.

Section title:

Text: Acts 9:1-18.

Section title:

Text: Titus 2.

Section title:

How was corporate worship in the early church different from ours today? What determines worship practices in local congregations? Using biblical models, what would you change in your worship service to conform to the early-church service?

PENTECOST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 2:1-21).

The next step in our inductive-study plan is to summarize the content of the Scripture passage. Either write a paraphrase or outline the passage in detail. You may wish to use the space below as you summarize the story of the unique worship experience on the Day of Pentecost.

Chapter Summary:

Below is a list of questions about the Pentecost experience in the early church (Acts 2).

Observation: (What does the text say?)

1. What purpose brought the believers together in the room?
2. Name three audiovisual signs of the Spirit's coming.
3. What caused the crowd to gather?
4. How did the people respond to the signs they witnessed?
5. What does the passage tell us about how God worked in that worship situation?
6. How many language groups heard the gospel?
7. What was the result of this worship experience?

What other questions would you like to ask of Acts 2? Can you draw any conclusions from this passage about how the Holy Spirit works in congregational life? Should the Pentecost experience become a norm for our church worship?

Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks (Exod. 34:22), of First Fruits (Num. 28:26), or of Harvest (Exod. 23:16), was established fifteen centuries before Christ and became one of the three pilgrim festivals of the Jews (Exod. 23:14-17). The New Testament name was derived from the fact that it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the Passover.

"The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship. They drew nearer and nearer to God, and as they did this they realized what a privilege had been theirs in being permitted to associate so closely with Christ."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

THE CONVERSION OF PAUL AND PERSONAL WORSHIP
(Acts 9:1-18; 22:1-16; 26:4-19).

Compare and contrast the three accounts of Paul's conversion. Review the personal struggles involved in his initial worship experiences as a Christian.

Personal religious experience is a type of worship. Throughout the Bible are descriptions of people whose devotion to God was manifest in their encounters with Him. The Greek verb translated "to convert" (*epistrepho*) means "to turn," "to turn around," "to turn back." Other terms in the New Testament reinforce the concept of return and regeneration for responding sinners. These terms include such phrases as *born again*, *born from above*, *newness of life*, *made alive in Christ*, *a new creation*. The New Testament records instances of change from one way of life to another.

The apostles were called to follow Jesus. Those who accepted Jesus, either before or after His death, were healed in spirit and were called to follow a new way of life. In these Bible stories, worship produced a change of heart and life. Paul's conversion was a highly personal worship experience involving a crisis of faith.

Ask the following questions of Acts 9:1-18:**Observation: (What does the text say?)**

1. After reading this passage, describe Paul's character.
2. What did Paul call the early Christians?
3. What signs accompanied his worship experience?
4. What was the reason for Christ's appearance?
5. What was the result of the roadside encounter?
6. What role did others perform in Paul's character change?
7. What was the result of Paul's encounter with God?

There are other questions that you can ask of the passage. Since we are emphasizing personal worship experience, frame questions that relate to the personal nature of this experience. What conclusions can you draw about your own encounters with God in the light of Paul's experience?

WORSHIP AND TEACHING (Titus 2).

The early church had a number of functions. It saw as one of its major purposes the continued upbuilding of the believers' faith. Worship for the early church was both personal and corporate. It included an outward teaching ministry, the purpose of which was to win new converts and to establish firmly the faith of all believers in Christ as the church's one foundation. The truth that Christ is the cornerstone of God's spiritual temple is essential for us to remember (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:11).

Paul addressed the teaching ministry of the church. "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1, NIV). Correct teaching was central to the worship experience of early Christians. (See Gal. 1:6, 7.)

Use the study guide below to answer the questions about Titus 2:

Observation: (What does the text say?)

1. What topics were to be taught in the early church?
2. What specific counsel was to be given to men and women?
3. What were youth in the church to be taught?
4. According to Titus, what does grace teach?
5. What is the motivation for teaching truth?
6. How can the church know it is teaching correctly?
7. How should people feel about you as a church member?

What activities in your worship service fulfill this teaching ministry? How could the teaching aspect of your worship services be improved? How do you know whether doctrine is "sound"?

"It is the privilege of the watchmen on the walls of Zion to live so near to God, and to be so susceptible to the impressions of His Spirit, that He can work through them to tell men and women of their peril and point them to the place of safety."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 361.

How can we adapt Paul's curriculum for our church? What information does Titus 2 give for the content and practice of your worship services?

MAKING SENSE OUT OF WORSHIP (Isa. 1:10-20).

We have studied three passages that relate to worship. The Pentecost experience was a dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples for preaching the gospel to unbelievers. This was a corporate worship experience that empowered the disciples for their mission.

Paul's conversion was dramatically individual. Though sometimes presented as a normative conversion experience, Paul's conversion was unique. God called an unbeliever for a specific task by giving him a direct revelation of Himself. The experience left Paul both physically and spiritually shaken. His calling was secured and his life changed.

Titus 2 provides a basis for the teaching ministry of God's people. Complete the inductive study of these passages:

Interpretation: (What does the text mean?)**1. Pentecost: Acts 2.**

Should we expect the same kind of experiences to happen now?

What was the purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit?

2. Paul's conversion: Acts 9.

Can we always expect such a dramatic change in our lives?

How was Paul treated by members of the early church?

3. Titus's teaching: Titus 2.

What should be taught to the church?

What changes should good teaching produce?

A number of other Bible passages improve our understanding of corporate and individual worship. In the writings of the prophets, righteous conduct and obedience are contrasted with empty ritual (Isa. 1:10-20; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Jer. 6:20; 7:21-23). Jeremiah was not opposed to the temple services as such, but he was concerned with the attitudes of those who had made ritual a substitute for obedience and righteousness. (Compare 1 Sam. 15:22, NRSV.)

What is the relevance of Isaiah 1:10-20 to our worship practices today? Do we offer to God "meaningless offerings"? If so, what are they? According to the passages you have studied this week, what should be the focus of genuine worship?

APPLYING BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF WORSHIP (Rom. 12:1).

Regarding Saul's conversion, Ellen G. White writes: "Important principles are given us, which we should ever bear in mind. Saul was brought directly into the presence of Christ. . . . He arrested him in his course and convicted him of sin; but when Saul asked, 'What wilt thou have me to do?' the Saviour placed the inquiring Jew in connection with His church, there to obtain a knowledge of God's will." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 120.

The church had a role to play in Paul's instruction and nurture. Through the worship, study, and prayer of God's people, Paul was to learn the mission, purpose, and power of the Holy Spirit. As the early church fulfilled its role in the experience of Paul, so also we are to nurture new members.

Using the passages you have been studying this week, make two applications for each that give direction for your life and for the life of your church.

Application: (What does the text mean to me?)**1. Pentecost: Acts 2.**

For my spiritual life,

For my congregation.

2. Paul's conversion: Acts 9.

For my spiritual life.

For my congregation.

3. Titus's teaching: Titus 2.

For my spiritual life.

For my congregation.

Paul suggests that even life itself is a type of worship (Rom. 12:1). The word *therefore* implies that the act of total commitment is a response to all that has gone before. Life, not ritual, is part of the true sacrifice of God's people. Christians believe that lifestyle issues are important, but it is in the context of worship that these are best taught.

Could choices about health, entertainment, and other lifestyle issues be regarded as part of our worship? If so, how would understanding worship in this intimate way be helpful in making choices about what is right or wrong?

FURTHER STUDY: See the following chapters in *The Acts of the Apostles*: “Pentecost,” pp. 35-46; “From Persecutor to Disciple,” pp. 112-122; “A Consecrated Ministry,” pp. 359-371. In connection with worship, study also Ephesians 5; Matthew 9:13; 12:7.

In the early church, problems about worship were common. Some of the problems included: (1) the tone of worship and the confusion that ensued when individual worship styles impeded the teaching ministry of the church (1 Corinthians 14); (2) concerns that love was not at the center of the church (1 Corinthians 13); (3) Gentiles bringing their “Gentile” ways into the congregational life (Acts 15:19-21). With each challenge, the early church focused on the true motivation for worship—the death and resurrection of Jesus.

“The apostle’s [Paul’s] earnest words of entreaty were not fruitless. The Holy Spirit wrought with mighty power, and many whose feet had wandered into strange paths, returned to their former faith in the gospel. . . . The name of God was glorified, and many were added to the number of believers throughout that region.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 388.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways would your congregational life be different if the church heeded the biblical counsel about worship that you have discovered this week?
2. What rituals of the Seventh-day Adventist Church need renewal of purpose or practice?
3. What personal aspects of the worship experience do we need in order to understand God’s will for our lives?
4. How should the church react to new ideas and worship practices?

SUMMARY: By using the inductive method of Bible study, we learned that God encounters believers through worship and continues to build up the church by empowering the faithful to learn of His mission and purpose. The Pentecost experience provides a unique model for understanding the power of the Holy Spirit in qualifying the disciples to spread the gospel. Paul’s conversion experience shows us the power of God in the lives of individuals who are willing to be taught God’s ways by church members. The counsel to Titus gives us a model of the types of content the church can share with its membership.



Adventists Win With New Vision

Carole Ferch-Johnson

When someone mentions the Solomon Islands, Adventists often remember exciting stories of the early work and great faith of the islanders. On some islands more than 30% of the population is Seventh-day Adventist, some third and fourth generation. But many no longer attend church.

Recently a training program was run in the islands to encourage the islanders to assume responsibility for leadership in the local church in both worship and outreach. This includes working to reclaim missing members.

To put their new skills into practice, the newly-trained leaders decided to begin visiting ex-Adventists. They usually know us and are friendly and easy to talk with. The group wrote the names of the former members on a black board—a total of 26 people. The new leaders formed pairs, and a name was delegated to each pair.

Two women recognized the name of one young woman. Four years ago, this girl had left the village as a very happy, young bride. Her husband had a good job, which earned an excellent salary. They both enjoyed the benefits of their high income. When she saw how money benefitted them, she decided to take a job as well. In her absence her husband was attracted to another woman in the town; the bride decided to find a boyfriend also. When she became pregnant her husband chased her away. She turned to her father for support, but he was not prepared to help her. She had to go back to her village and her family.

Disgraced and embarrassed, she would not attend church. Too ashamed to work in the garden, she stayed in her parents' house. In due time, a baby boy was born, but she did not take him to church for fear of criticism.

The two Adventist women from the training group visited this young woman and told her, "We love you, and God loves you. We apologize for not being here to support you when you needed us. Please come to church with us on Sabbath. We will sit with you." The young mother responded and has never missed Sabbath School or church since. Her little boy loves Sabbath School and is learning that Jesus loves him too.

Love and acceptance has helped this woman to renew her connection with the church.

Carole Ferch-Johnson is women's-ministries director for the South Pacific Division.

Biographical Bible Study: Peter



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matt. 14:22-36; 16:13-28; 26:33-58, 69-75; Acts 2:14-47.

MEMORY TEXT: " 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ' " (Acts 2:36, NIV).

KEY THOUGHT: The Bible contains numerous stories of men and women who struggled to learn about God in the midst of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. They were learning to live together in community. They had some of the same problems we have. The biographical method of Bible study helps us to identify the successes of Bible characters and allows us to apply to our lives what they learned from God.

LEARNING ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF THE BIBLE. Using the biographical method of Bible study, we look closely at the character and trials of a person's life. We try to become so acquainted with the characters that we feel we are their friends. We learn something of their problems and victories.

Peter will be the focus of our study as we explore the biographical method of Bible study. This method can provide years of enriched Bible exploration. By studying Peter we get a chance to look into our own lives through the eyes of this fisherman of Galilee.

Review the calling of Peter in Matthew 4:16-21. In what order did Jesus call the disciples? What do you think the personality of a fisherman was like? Can we draw a picture of Peter's attitudes and style from this brief description of his calling?

COLLECTING INFORMATION ABOUT PETER (Matt. 14:22-32).

The basic steps in a biographical study of a personality in the Bible are as follows:

1. **Learn all you can about the person you wish to study:** Select someone in whom you are interested. Start with a person who can be studied in a few hours. The attempt is to understand that individual in a personal way. Try to live in his or her shoes for a time. Investigate how that person thought and made decisions, and see what the Bible says motivated and directed his or her life.
2. **Make a list of your first impressions of the Bible character:** Using the reference tools available to you, list all the references you can about the person. Discover as much as possible about his or her life. Note social background, parents, decisions, reactions, biases, personal gifts, and accomplishments. Note the events associated with the person's life.
3. **Examine the personality and character qualities that influenced the individual's relationship with God:** Review the references you have found, making notes on each passage. Then draw conclusions about the person's character.
4. **Identify biblical truths exemplified by the life you are studying:** For example, does the person live by the Bible truth that by "beholding" we are "changed" (2 Cor. 3:18)?
5. **Make a personal application of the information you have learned about the Bible character:** The final step is discovering what you can learn from the person's life that can help you in your life of faith. You can ask, "Do I see myself in the life of the person I have selected?"

Using a Bible concordance, look up all the references about Peter's life as a disciple of Jesus. Some of the passages you will find are: Matt. 14:22-36; 16:13-28; 17:1-8, 24-27; 18:21-35; 26:33-58, 69-75; Acts 2:14-41. Begin to gather any other texts in the New Testament that throw light on Peter's character development.

"The Bible gives the true seeker an advanced mental discipline, and he comes from contemplation of divine things with his faculties enriched; self is humbled, while God and His revealed truth are exalted."—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 108.

What experiences in Peter's life provide a rich resource for understanding our own problems and victories?

LISTING FIRST IMPRESSIONS (John 1:37-44).

Peter's original name came from the Hebrew name translated "Symeon" (Acts 15:14; 2 Peter 1:1), the Greek version of which translates as "Simon." We know little about Peter's home life except for the fact that he was married (Mark 1:30) and that his wife accompanied him on some of his missionary travels (1 Cor. 9:5). The Gospel of John reveals that his hometown was Bethsaida Julias (John 1:44), situated on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. During Jesus' ministry, Peter's place of residence was Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29). This is where Jesus encountered him and called him to the ministry. At both locations Peter had abundant opportunity to meet with Gentiles. Simon spoke Aramaic with a strong north-country accent (Mark 14:70).

How did Peter first hear about Jesus, and what were the circumstances of his call to be an apostle? John 1:37-42.

It was at his call that Simon received from Jesus his new name *Cephas* (Aramaic *Kepha*), meaning "rock" or "stone" (John 1:42; compare 1 Cor. 1:12; Gal. 2:9). The Greek translation of the name is "Petros," Peter. Little did Peter know how significant his symbolic name would be later on in his ministry.

In the New Testament, forty-four chapters refer to the disciple Peter. We will select certain major events in his life and explore their meaning, using the biographical method of Bible study. We will look at Peter mainly in the book of Matthew. You may wish to compare the stories about Peter with those in the other Gospels.

Review the following passages in Matthew that refer to Peter: Matt. 4:18; 14:22-33; 16:13-23; 17:1-13, 24-27; 18:21-22; 26:33-58, 69-75. Begin to make some notes about Peter. Write out the first impression you have of him. Then write down some basic observations and important information you discover about him. Are there any problems, questions, or difficulties you wonder about as you read these references? Be sure to note the events that were important to Peter's faith development. Notice the discussion with Jesus at Caesarea Philippi about Jesus' identity. Answer the following questions:

1. During Jesus' ministry, what questions did He ask Peter?
2. What difficulties did Peter have, learning to believe?
3. What was the effect on Peter's faith of his experience of walking on the water?

GAINING INSIGHT AND MAKING A TIME LINE (Matt. 16:13-23).

Referring to passages mentioned in Monday's lesson, identify the major events in Peter's life, and mark them on the time line below:

After identifying the major events in Peter's life, make a list of any personality traits or character qualities that helped or hurt Peter's relationship with God.

Peter was one of the first disciples called by Jesus to work in the new kingdom of God that Jesus was announcing. He also belonged to the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. He was close to Jesus and to the other disciples—especially James and John (Mark 5:37). One of Peter's most prominent characteristics was his quick, impulsive nature. This produced the best and worst in his life as he learned about Jesus' mission and future.

"The eye of Christ rested upon him, reading his character and his life history. His impulsive nature, his loving, sympathetic heart, his ambition and self-confidence, the history of his fall, his repentance, his labors, and his martyr death, the Saviour read it all."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 139.

Which of Peter's character qualities were helpful in building a sense of community in a congregation? What qualities have you discovered in Peter that might hinder the work of God in a community?

Use the study guide below to list what you see as Peter's identifying characteristics. Your responses may be both positive and negative. Often negative characteristics turn out to be positive when given to God to develop.

Peter's personal characteristics:

Text:	Quality	Positive	Negative
Matt. 4:18			
Matt. 14:22-36			
Matt. 16:13-20			
Matt. 17:1-13			
Matt. 26:33-58			
Matt. 26:69-75			
Acts 2:14-45			

LEARNING BIBLE TRUTHS THROUGH PETER'S LIFE (Matt. 26:31-35, 69-75).

Next we will see how Bible truths are illustrated in Peter's life. We will look at four of Peter's experiences and identify Bible truths that seemed to guide him.

1. **Peter walks on water (Matt. 14:22-36).** It seems inconceivable that Jesus would give the title *rock* to someone with the problems Peter exhibited. Jesus saw far beneath the surface and detected an inherent strength hidden by the inconsistent mannerisms that appeared externally. Peter's experience helps us to understand our own insecurities. We should learn to be secure in God's love, for in it we can be delivered from our fears. (See Prov. 3:23-26; 1 John 4:18, 19.)
2. **Peter identifies Jesus (Matt. 16:13-23).** Peter's confession of Jesus' messiahship was followed immediately by a declaration revealing misunderstanding of His mission. Jesus said that the confession was a gift from God, "for this was not revealed to you by man" (verse 17, NIV). "The truth which Peter had confessed is the foundation of the believer's faith. It is that which Christ Himself has declared to be eternal life." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 412. Later, when Peter thought to control Jesus' ministry according to his own understanding, he revealed his limited insight.
3. **Peter denies Jesus (Matt. 26:31-35, 69-75).** Matthew 16 records Peter's certainty that Jesus was the Son of God. But during Jesus' trial, another spirit manifested itself. Jesus knew who He was. When questioned whether He was the Christ, Jesus replied, "I am" (Mark 14:62). But not only did Peter deny Christ's identity, he made strenuous efforts to hide his own. Faith without works was truly dead in this instance! The crowing of the rooster awakened his faith.
4. **Peter preaches about Jesus (Acts 2:14-45).** After the resurrection, Peter's focus was singular, his faith secure. On the Day of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit motivated him to present a carefully crafted review of Jesus' Lordship. Early church teaching was centered on this truth. Earlier in his ministry, Peter had difficulty focusing on Jesus' real mission and identity.

What observations can you make, based on Peter's life, that will benefit church members in their search for faith? How can the community of believers find the same determination that Peter eventually manifested? What role does the Holy Spirit play in this?

MAKING A PERSONAL APPLICATION (Acts 2:14-41).

Frequently, Bible authors do not state whether an example is good or bad. Certainly, there are many excellent examples of faithful living (Enoch, Abel, and many others). But sometimes we are left in uncertainty about what lessons we are to learn from the people about whom we read. God allowed both positive and negative characteristics to be recorded in the Bible in order to provide us realistic examples of life.

For example, the story of Jonah depicts a prophet running away from God, rather than facing possible failure in a foreign country. What are we to learn from this brief, unusual, and often pathetic story of God's prophet? The author of the story does not tell us very clearly. We are left to interpret the information in the story—but always with the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Likewise, we look at Peter and try to draw conclusions that will assist our personal and our community's faith. Where he failed, we can learn about overcoming; where he was successful, we can learn to look to Jesus as the helper and motivator of our faith. Studying Bible characters gives us a realistic view of people struggling to live as God's children.

Of the following passages about Peter, ask the questions listed below in order to make a personal and community application of their content: Matt. 4:18; 14:22-36; 16:13-23; 17:1-8, 24-27; 26:33-58, 69-75; Acts 2:14-41.

1. Did you see anything of yourself in Peter's life and actions? Did Peter reveal any of your weaknesses? Did he reveal any of your strengths? If so, which ones?
2. Did you see anything that could help members of your congregation in their lives of faith?
3. Did you see any of the church's strengths in Peter's life?
4. What do you intend to do about what you have learned concerning Peter's life, struggles, and victory?
5. What happened in Peter's life that might happen in your life to make you a witness for Jesus? What must happen in the church for this to take place?

"Peter was naturally forward and impulsive, and Satan had taken advantage of these characteristics to overthrow him. Just before the fall of Peter, Jesus had said to him, 'Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.' Luke 22:31, 32."
—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 812.

FURTHER STUDY: Read *The Desire of Ages*, “We Have Found the Messiah,” pp. 132-143 and “By the Sea Once More,” pp. 809-817. For more Bible references to Peter, see John 13:6-9, 24; 18:10-27; 20:2-7; 21:15-22.

During Peter’s lifetime the church grew rapidly. Gentiles were incorporated into the life of the Christian community. The Jewish community began to be isolated because of its rejection of the Messiah. Peter’s powerful witness broadened the arms of the church to enfold more than the early Jewish congregations. His vision, recorded in Acts 10:9-23, is a classic model of how God reveals His message for the church. Peter’s preaching had focused on the Jewish community. God recognized that something dramatic must happen to convince Peter that he should open his heart to other believers. After all, the missionary work of the apostle Paul was beginning in Asia Minor, and soon the church would become more Gentile than Jewish. God revealed to Peter that the good news is for everyone, of whatever race, background, culture, or profession.

Study Peter’s vision and subsequent visit to the home of Cornelius (Acts 10, 11). Note the baptism of the first Gentile converts to the Christian church. Ask the following questions of the passage:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. Why was this such a dramatic vision for Peter?**
- 2. What did the church need to learn from this vision that it had not yet accepted?**
- 3. How does this vision help us to build a sense of community and openness to others within our church?**
- 4. What commands in this passage should all Christians heed? What have you learned about your openness to others? What will you do differently?**

SUMMARY: A biographical study of Peter reveals the struggles of a person growing in faith. Through his early life of trial, we catch glimpses of an emerging, trusting relationship with Jesus. Peter’s life gained specific focus and direction *after* he was empowered and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Finally, he understood God’s message and purpose for the world. Peter’s life provides insight into our struggles to grow in understanding of, and fellowship with, Jesus. The church will be blessed as more Peters enter into their final commitment to Christ.



The Falling Idols

Emmeline Liu

Chia-yi is a large city in southern Taiwan known for its temples. Temples devoted to Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and many others dot the city. Nearly every family has at least one idol niche in its home. It is hard to find a Christian church in Chia-yi, and missionaries who have gone there have often left, disappointed.

In 1993 a Global Mission team entered Chia-yi. We bought a four-story building to use as a church. Two big temples stand in front and back of our new church. A few Adventists moved to Chia-yi to strengthen the work there. And God blessed us. As a means to get acquainted with people, we held a health screening. Many people came, and some signed up for the Bible courses.

Amy Chang was one who signed up. Amy, an elementary school teacher, studied the Bible course carefully. Soon she agreed to study the lessons with me. She fell in love with God and accepted Jesus as her Saviour. She accepted the Bible truths we presented and joined our small group worshiping on Sabbath.

After studying several months, Amy decided to be baptized. But she worried about the ancestors' niche in her living room. Before she came to our church, she and her husband had worshiped at the niche every day. Now her husband worshiped at the ancestors' niche alone. Amy's husband loved her very much, but he made it clear that her Christian friends were not welcome to visit in their home. He refused to attend our programs, and would not attend Amy's baptism. But we all joined Amy in praying for her husband.

Following her baptism, Amy went home from the church, and found that some sacred papers, which were kept in the wooden ancestors' niche, had fallen to the ground. When Amy's husband saw the papers, he picked them up and put in a drawer, not back into the niche. Amy wondered what her husband's action meant. Then not long ago, Amy discovered that her husband had taken the ancestors' niche off the wall. Her husband is giving up his ancestor worship!

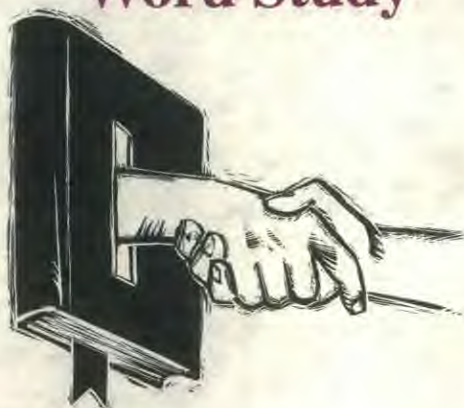
After two years in Chia-yi, we have 15 to 24 people worshiping in the little church every Sabbath. Some are new interests and students of the English Language School, pleasant, searching young people who are longing for the truth.

Pray for the work in Chia-yi, for its new converts, and for those who are still searching.

Emmeline Liu works in the Taiwan Mission office.

For Current Newsbreak, Call 1-800-648-5824.

How to Do a Bible Word Study



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Lev. 19:11-16; Psalm 12; Prov. 30:5, 6; Matt. 5:13-16; 20:26; Luke 10:29-42; Rom. 6:15-23.

MEMORY TEXT: "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me'" (Matthew 25:40, NKJV).

KEY THOUGHT: This lesson seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of Bible word studies. The word we will study is *service*. One way the gospel becomes real to others is by acts of kindness, compassion, and unselfishness performed by those who value the gift of salvation and fulfill their responsibility to the world.

WHAT IS SERVICE ALL ABOUT? Service can take many forms. It may be practical service to those in need, service of various kinds for the church, witnessing to the centrality of Jesus in our lives, or teaching others God's special message for the last days. Whatever it is, we place ourselves at God's disposal to be His instruments. Service is part of our sanctification; we are set apart to be used by God. Service can bring peace to families, communities, churches, and to our own lives through presenting Jesus as the answer to human need. Service implements mercy and justice in our relationships with others.

HOW TO DO A STUDY ON THE WORD SERVICE (Psalm 12; Prov. 30:5, 6).

This week we will explore the word-study method of Bible study. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, languages that most Christians do not know. But we can still do word studies using the various resources available today, which can clarify the meanings of words and their use in the Bible.

The word-study approach involves a close look at the meaning, origin, and occurrences of a single word in the Bible. We try to find out how a word is used, to learn what the word means in the particular Bible contexts in which it is found. The same word may have different meanings in different contexts. Hence, it is important to find out what the Bible writers meant when they used the word so that we can accurately interpret each passage in which the word occurs. Only then can we be correct in the application of each passage to our lives, to the church, and to the world.

What does Psalm 12 tell us about the importance of God's words for our lives? Proverbs 30:5, 6 uses a metaphor about the effectiveness of God's words. Interpret the meaning of this passage as it relates to the topic under consideration.

The steps in this method of Bible study include:

1. **Choosing a word to study.** You should choose words you have questions about, ones in which you are interested.
2. **Identifying its English meaning and then comparing Bible translations of passages in which the word is used.** Write down the different meanings of the word to see whether there are any patterns of meaning that develop.
3. **Identifying the exact meaning of the word in each Bible passage in which it is used.** How does the meaning of the word influence the meaning of the passage? You may wish to use other tools in your study at this point. For English readers, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* is an invaluable aid in doing word studies. Bible dictionaries and commentaries may also be helpful. With the help of such tools, determine how many times the word occurs in the Bible. What is its origin and its original meaning? In what books does it occur? Sort out the various meanings of the word throughout Scripture.
4. **Determining how the word has changed in meaning with the passing of time.** What does it mean in different contexts or situations?
5. **Applying its meaning to your life.**

DEFINITIONS AND COMPARISONS (Lev. 19:11-16).

The word we are focusing on this week is *service*. Our task is to understand this term in the Bible and to make an application of its meaning to the church and to our personal spiritual lives. According to *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*, the word *service* has various meanings: "the occupation or function of serving," "employment as a servant," "the work performed by one who serves," "contribution to the welfare of others," "a form followed in worship or in a religious ceremony," etc.

When we think of serving or service, we usually think of voluntary or compulsory work done for another person. Various kinds of service were expected of servants and slaves in Bible times. In religious terms, we often think that service should be "faithful" and "humble." Usually we do not think of the reward we might receive after the work is performed. People who serve are in a position of dependence. Their freedom is limited because of commitment to the one being served.

We think of service as having various categories or types, such as voluntary service for the community, service as a just response to God's calling for one's life, or simply personal help to someone else. Service is often a part of our mission statements as we attempt to make practical our understanding of God's actions in our lives.

What are the usually accepted understandings of the term *service* in your congregation? What are the ways that service is seen in your family?

"None need wait until called to some distant field before beginning to help others. Doors of service are open everywhere. All around us are those who need our help. The widow, the orphan, the sick and the dying, the heartsick, the discouraged, the ignorant, and the outcast are on every hand.

"We should feel it our special duty to work for those living in our neighborhood. Study how you can best help those who take no interest in religious things. . . . This is just as essential as to save the benighted souls in foreign countries."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 152.

Using Leviticus 19, identify what it means to serve. In the laws of Moses, identify the concern for others the Lord wishes us to have. Using a concordance and other Bible translations, identify other meanings of the term *service*. What is the relationship between service and love?

THE BIBLE MEANING OF SERVICE (Luke 10:29-42).

Sometimes in the Old Testament the term for "service" refers to the work of servants in the court, as seen in the book of Esther (Esther 1:10-12; 2:2; 6:1-5). Sometimes it refers to service rendered by one person for another (Gen. 29:18-20). Often the word for "service" implies sacred service, work related to the worship of the Lord, but not confined to the priesthood (Exod. 31:10; 2 Chron. 35:15, 16).

In the New Testament, the English verb *to serve* translates three different Greek words, which have the following meanings: (1) To serve in the sense of carrying out religious duties (Greek *latreuo*: Matt. 4:10; Luke 1:74; Heb. 9:14); (2) to serve in the sense of being subjected to, or in bondage to someone; to obey; to be enslaved, whether willingly or by force (Greek *douleuo*: Matt. 6:24; Rom. 6:6; 7:6, 25); (3) to serve in the sense of waiting on someone, to care for someone, to help or support someone, to serve as a deacon or deaconess (Greek *diakoneo*: Luke 10:40; 12:37; Acts 6:2).

What conclusions do you reach about the biblical usage of the concept of service in the following texts? Matt. 20:27; 25:44, 45; Luke 4:39; 10:29-42; John 12:2; Rom. 15:30-33; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; 2 Cor. 8:3, 4; Phil. 2:5-11. How is the concept of slavery used in the Bible?

The Old Testament refers to the service of slaves. Freedom was provided after six years of service. (See Exod. 21:2 and Deut. 15:12.) God enacted laws to control the conduct of slave masters and to render the lot of the slaves bearable. God was not responsible for slavery, and His Word condemns the terrible cruelties of the modern slave trade.

In Bible times, God acted to bring a human institution in line with His law of love. In the New Testament, slavery takes on a uniquely Christian connotation. Slaves were given more status. In some of His parables, Jesus put slaves in positions of responsibility and command (Matt. 24:45). Paul's counsel to the slave owner Philemon provides a new basis of relationship between servant and master.

Jesus Himself took the form of a servant (Phil. 2; compare Gal. 3:13). Thus, Jesus taught that in order to be first in His kingdom, one must be a servant to others (Matt. 20:27). By becoming one in Christ, we learn how to serve as He did. (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 21.)

How can you apply Jesus' concept of service in the setting in which you find yourself?

THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF SERVICE (Matt. 20:26; Rom. 6:15-23; Gal. 5:13; 6:10).

The Bible suggests that one way to define the church would be as a servant. Jesus said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, NKJV). Much of the church has failed to come to terms with the basic principle behind those words. Even when the words have become familiar, even when they are often cited, they are often applied only to relationships between Christians. We miss the truth that the church is to fill a servant role in the world, as Jesus did. We are to serve, not only the brotherhood and sisterhood, but everyone. (See Gal. 6:10, NKJV.)

To say that the church is in the world as a servant is also to say that we are here to give, not to get. We are here to give, with no strings attached; to help people because they have a need and we have the resources, not because we hope to gain something.

What can your church do to serve the community? How are you a part of this service model of ministry?

"Again and again Jesus had tried to establish this principle among His disciples. When James and John made their request for pre-eminence, He had said, 'Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.' Matthew 20:26. In My kingdom the principle of preference and supremacy has no place. The only greatness is the greatness of humility. The only distinction is found in devotion to the service of others."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 650.

Service is the most profound definition of the mission of Jesus' kingdom in the Bible. Service is the primary function of the church. This includes teaching others the truth, leading them to submit their lives to Christ, and providing a place where hurting people can be healed.

Jesus did not extract a doctrinal statement from people *before* He healed them. Nor did He go to them afterward and say, "Now you owe Me one." He healed them because they were sick; He did so knowing that some of them would never follow Him all the way. The body of Jesus, His church, will continue the work He began.

After reading in your Bible about service and servants, what can you conclude about your special God-given responsibilities in life? What steps can you now take to fulfill these responsibilities?

APPLICATIONS FOR OUR LIVES (Matt. 5:13-16; 6:1-4; 1 John 3:11-19).

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14, NIV). To understand service, we must understand love. The words that point us to compassion for others also point to the motivation for that concern—the love of Jesus in our lives.

Apply your understanding of service to your own life. Finish the following sentence: "I think that I should . . ." What ideas do you have to begin service activities and positive ministry for members of your home? How can you begin to serve in your church? Your community?

According to 1 John 3, the evidence that we are children of God is our love for others. This passage says that if love is lacking, we "remain in death." Then we are not sons and daughters of God, no matter what experiences we may have had in the past. We must put love into action. Talking about the truth of love will not do; action is needed. Service is evidenced by compassionate servanthood.

Today the church needs to make a bold commitment to love people and then dedicate itself to fulfilling that promise. The lifestyle of the church should tell people that they are loved. All levels of the church family need to experience it. God's love for us does not merely amount to good feelings about us. He gave Himself for us in a death in which we do not have to participate. This willing commitment motivates us to act on His behalf.

This kind of giving cannot be compensated. Christ's kind of love is foreign to our culture. Most of the time we give to others only to have our love reciprocated. In God's kingdom others are loved first, in the spirit of Jesus.

"To those who receive the spirit of this service, it can never become a mere ceremonial. Its constant lesson will be, 'By love serve one another.' Gal. 5:13."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 651.

It is the duty of church members, who have been set free from the slavery of sin by Jesus' death and have experienced the freedom of salvation, to assume the role of servants (Matt. 20:27). Sacrifice for others becomes a pleasure, giving for their salvation not merely a duty but a genuine joy.

Conclude this word study of service by writing applications of a practical nature for your life. What are you going to do about this concept of love and service?

FURTHER STUDY: Read Eph. 6:5-9; *The Desire of Ages*, “‘The Least of These My Brethren,’ ” pp. 637-641; “A Servant of Servants,” pp. 642-651; *The Acts of the Apostles*, “The Gospel in Samaria,” pp. 110, 111.

“Hundreds, yea, thousands, who have heard the message of salvation are still idlers in the marketplace, when they might be engaged in some line of active service. To these Christ is saying, ‘Why stand ye here all the day idle?’ and He adds, ‘Go ye also into the vineyard.’ Matthew 20:6, 7. Why is it that many more do not respond to the call? Is it because they think themselves excused in that they do not stand in the pulpit? Let them understand that there is a large work to be done outside the pulpit by thousands of consecrated lay members.

“Long has God waited for the spirit of service to take possession of the whole church so that everyone shall be working for Him according to his ability. When the members of the church of God do their appointed work in the needy fields at home and abroad, in fulfillment of the gospel commission, the whole world will soon be warned, and the Lord Jesus will return to this earth with power and great glory.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 110, 111.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think of this saying: “To be a Christian is to have your heart broken by the things that break the heart of God”?
2. Describe a person you know who exemplifies the biblical model of compassion.
3. What ideas can you suggest that could be used in your own church to create a “servant” model of leadership and mission?
4. What kind of personal preparation do you need before you can be a witness in the world through acts of compassion and concern?

SUMMARY: This week, through the word-study method, we learned that we can be so concerned about our own personal religious experience that, in the process, we forget about others. We become so self-absorbed that we forget the biblical concept of servanthood. Jesus died for us, not only to give us a way to heaven. He lived and died in order to model how we might make a difference in the world. He wants us to illustrate the nature of His kingdom by our attitudes and actions.

A Ministry of Love

Charlotte Ishkanian

Maria Drach is a woman with a mission—to reach out to others in the city of Sochi, Russia. She is constantly looking for ways to draw people to the love of Jesus and into the arms of the church.

Since her husband died three years ago, Maria works as an accountant to provide for her three sons. “The Lord provides everything I need, so I gladly do what He wants me to do,” she smiles.

Today 20 people came to Maria’s tiny apartment for dinner after church. They sat on the floor to sing and tell stories. One woman had never been to an Adventist church before. Maria invited her home for lunch, then to the afternoon evangelistic meeting in a rented movie house where the church meets.

Maria often leads out in the afternoon evangelistic meetings. She presents flowers to those who are celebrating birthdays, their baptism, or other significant milestones. Today Maria invited people who would like to follow Jesus to come forward. The woman Maria had invited to the meeting joined the group at the front. “I have never had such a wonderful day in my life,” she testified. Maria wondered if the woman felt pressured to come forward, but the woman said, “No, you did not pressure me to come. You invited me. I came because I wanted to.”

Maria looks for people with needs that she can supply. During recent evangelistic meetings, Maria felt a burden for handicapped people. She wanted to invite them to the meetings but did not know where to find them. When she met a woman in a wheelchair, Maria asked her for names of other people confined to wheelchairs. She made friends with them and invited them to the meetings. Many wanted to go, but they had no way to get there.

Maria rented a bus and brought the people to the meetings. About 30 handicapped people came, and eight wheelchair-bound people were baptized. The relatives were amazed that someone would do this for their loved one; no one had ever cared for their spiritual needs before.



Maria Drach is an active laywoman in Sochi, Russia. Charlotte Ishkanian is editor of the *Mission* quarterlies.

Study of Bible Teachings



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11; Mark 2:28; Matt. 24:20; Isa. 58:13, 14; Rom. 15:4.

MEMORY TEXT: "Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath" (Matt. 24:20, NRSV).

KEY THOUGHT: This week we discover the overall teaching of the Bible on a particular doctrine (teaching). We will investigate the Bible doctrine of the Sabbath.

REPEAT JESUS' TEACHING AND PRACTICE. Jesus outlined the work of His followers until His second coming: "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20, NRSV). Jesus' teaching includes the entire Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore, when we seek to discover Jesus' teaching on a particular Bible doctrine, we investigate that doctrine throughout the entire Bible.

For example, on the doctrine of the Sabbath, the first step is to look up every text in the Bible that mentions the Sabbath. With the help of a concordance, study all the Sabbath passages. This is a time-consuming but very rewarding process. Having listed and examined all these passages, the next step is to organize them under subheadings suggested by the Bible discussion of the Sabbath.

In this lesson, we will assume that all Bible texts dealing with the Sabbath have been examined. The subheadings that we will consider are: (1) What is a Sabbath? (2) Which day is the Sabbath? (3) Should we still keep the Sabbath? (4) How should we keep the Sabbath? (5) How do we apply the Bible Sabbath doctrine to our situation today?

WHAT IS A SABBATH? (Gen. 2:1-3).

The theological method of Bible study is the process of discovering what the Bible says about a topic or doctrine and then explaining it in a systematic, well-organized way.

Using this method, we will develop a "theology," or a doctrine, of the Sabbath. This kind of theology is called "systematic" because you systematically search for all the texts in the entire Bible that deal with a topic and then group them into natural units of thought.

There are five steps in theological study: (1) deciding on a doctrine or subject to study; (2) collecting the Bible information; (3) organizing the material in a systematic way; (4) writing a theological statement based on the Bible information; (5) drawing conclusions, including applications to your personal and spiritual life.

Note how the following passages answer the question What is a Sabbath?

Gen. 2:1-3: God rested on and "sanctified" (KJV) or "hallowed" (NRSV) the seventh day of Creation week. Thus God set the Sabbath apart for a holy use.

Exod. 16:4, 5, 22-26: The seventh day was observed before Sinai as "a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord" (verse 23, NRSV).

Exod. 20:8-11: Sabbath keeping is commanded as a memorial of the six days of Creation.

Deut. 5:12-15: The Sabbath is a memorial of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Luke 4:16; Acts 16:12-15: A day of worship and witnessing.

God gave us the weekly Sabbath as a day of rest and worship for the specific purpose of reminding humanity that He is the Creator and the Redeemer. As He delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, so, through Christ, He delivers us from the slavery of sin (Col. 1:13, 14). The Sabbath is a perpetual memorial of both Creation and redemption, and these two purposes of the Sabbath will continue until the end of time and throughout eternity. In describing Jesus' Sabbath observance and that of the apostles, the Bible writers never suggest that the seventh-day Sabbath has now been abolished or replaced.

Does your Sabbath observance reflect the two purposes for which God instituted the Sabbath?

WHICH DAY IS THE SABBATH? (MARK 2:28).

Is God particular about which day we should keep? Why can't we observe one day in seven, irrespective of which day it is? How do we know that the seventh day of the week in our era is the same seventh day that Jesus and the apostles kept? How do we know that it is the day on which God rested at the end of Creation week?

Note how the Bible addresses these questions:

Rev. 1:10: The Lord has a day. This was the day on which John was in vision on the island of Patmos (compare Isa. 58:13; God calls it "my holy day").

Mark 2:28: The Lord's day is the Sabbath day that was observed by the Jews.

Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11: The Sabbath day is the seventh day, the day on which God rested and the day that the fourth commandment stipulates as "holy."

Luke 23:54-24:3, 7 (compare Mark 16:9): The seventh day is the day after crucifixion Friday and before resurrection Sunday.

The seventh-day Sabbath, observed by Jesus' disciples after His death, was the day after the "preparation" day on which Jesus was crucified. We know that Jesus was crucified on Friday because He "rose again the third day" (1 Cor. 15:4; compare Luke 24:7), and He rose on Sunday. The word *preparation* used in Luke 23:54 is a translation of the word that in modern Greek means the sixth day or Friday. Arndt and Gingrich's Greek lexicon comments that the word for "preparation" means "Friday, on which day everything had to be prepared for the Sabbath, when no work was permitted."—p. 627. (Note: The Passover preparation day and the preparation day for the weekly Sabbath were the same day in the year on which Jesus was crucified.)

The next day after crucifixion Friday, Jesus' followers "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). Following that, Jesus rose early on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1-3; compare Mark 16:9).

So the Sabbath is the day after Friday and the day before Sunday. No calendar changes have ever modified the weekly cycle. From the beginning of time, the same seventh day has been observed by those loyal to God's law. The seventh-day Sabbath in the twentieth century is the same day of the week as the seventh-day Sabbath in Jesus' day and throughout the Old Testament period.

SHOULD WE STILL KEEP THE SABBATH? (MATT. 24:20).

Does the fourth commandment apply to Christian believers after the cross? Did Jesus' apostles keep the Sabbath after His resurrection? Did Jesus command His followers to observe the Sabbath until His second advent? Does God's last-day message to the world include instruction regarding Sabbath observance?

The following Bible passages we have discovered dealing with the Sabbath enable us to answer these questions:

Compare Exodus 20:8-11 with New Testament passages that speak of the continuing obligation of Christians to obey the Ten Commandments: Rom. 3:31; 7:7, 12, 14; 8:3, 4; James 2:10-12; 1 John 2:4; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.

Acts 13:14, 15, 42-44. Paul and Barnabas met with the people and preached on two Sabbath days.

Acts 16:12-15. Paul held a religious service by the riverside on the Sabbath day.

Acts 17:1, 2. According to his custom, Paul went to the synagogue on three Sabbaths of which we have record.

Acts 18:1, 4, 11. Paul preached every Sabbath for eighteen months; he observed 78 Sabbaths.

Matt. 24:20. Jesus instructed His disciples to observe the Sabbath through the great tribulation involved in the destruction of Jerusalem, approximately 40 years after His resurrection. The same instruction applies to God's people at the end of time, who will be pursued by their enemies. This text is part of Jesus' interpretation of Daniel's prophecy regarding the "little horn" power (Matt. 24:15; Dan. 8:13, 14, 25; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). The little horn functions until the end of time. As the Christians fled from pagan Rome in A.D. 70 and observed the Sabbath, so God's last-day people will flee from their enemies and observe the Sabbath.

Rev. 14:6, 7. The first angel's message is the "everlasting" (KJV), or "eternal" (NRSV), gospel. It includes the instruction that we "worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water" (verse 7, NRSV, last part). This is an obvious allusion to the fourth commandment: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day" (Exod. 20:11, NRSV).

HOW SHOULD WE KEEP THE SABBATH? (Isa. 58:13, 14).**The following scriptures answer the question:**

Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15: Neither believers, their relatives, their servants, their visitors, nor their cattle are to work on the Sabbath day. All are to rest and remember the Creator and Redeemer.

Exod. 31:12-17: The Sabbath is to be observed as a memorial of God's work of creation and sanctification (making His people holy). Such observance of the Sabbath involves worship. Since Israel was a theocracy (ruled directly by God), God's direct command for the punishment of Sabbath breakers could then be applied. In modern times, living under secular governments, we leave the punishment of Sabbath violators to God. (See Heb. 10:26-31.)

Lev. 23:32: "From even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath."
"Even" is sunset. (See Mark 1:21, 32; Neh. 13:19.)

Isaiah 58:13, 14: We are to regard the Sabbath as a "delight"; we are to honor the Lord's holy day; "not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words" (verse 13). The Sabbath is to be a day of communion with God and with other believers. It is not a day for secular work, selfish pleasure, or conversation about everyday matters.

Jer. 17:19-27: Writing shortly before the Babylonian invasions, Jeremiah warned that Sabbath breaking, conducting secular business on the Sabbath, would result in the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity. Sabbath violation was one of the main reasons that the Lord allowed His people to be taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar's armies (605, 597, 586 B.C.).

Ezek. 20:10-24: Ezekiel warned that failure to observe the Sabbath would lead to rejection by God.

Neh. 13:15-22: Nehemiah refused to allow any secular business on the Sabbath day.

Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 9: Jesus taught and demonstrated that it is God's will for believers to supply human need and relieve suffering on the Sabbath day. But Jesus in no way contradicted the instruction regarding the Sabbath given by Old Testament prophets. (See Matt. 5:17-19.)

APPLYING THE BIBLE SABBATH DOCTRINE TO OURSELVES (Rom. 15:4).

Every method of Bible study concludes with a summary of the teaching discovered in the Word of God and direct application of that teaching to our lives.

How does this week's study of the Bible Sabbath doctrine apply to the situations in which Seventh-day Adventist believers around the world are living?

Each believer must study the Bible instruction and apply it to his or her own heart and life. We offer the following suggestions that grow out of the Bible counsel:

1. Our Sabbath worship services should exalt our Creator and Redeemer as the Lord of our lives (Exod. 31:13).
2. All our activities on the Sabbath day should contribute to our fellowship with God and with one another (Mark 2:27, 28).
3. The Sabbath is an excellent time for evangelistic outreach (Acts 16:13-15).
4. Relief of human need and suffering is appropriate activity for the Sabbath day (Matt. 12:1-14).
5. No secular business (buying or selling) or work is to be performed on the Sabbath day. Working to make a living is to be done on the six other days of the week (Neh. 13:15-22).
6. The Sabbath is not a time for the pursuit of personal pleasure and secular conversation, unrelated to spiritual fellowship with God (Isa. 58:13, 14).
7. Secular studies should not be engaged in on Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11; Isa. 58:13, 14).

"God has given us His commandments, not only to be believed in, but to be obeyed. . . . The Sabbath was made for man, and God would have him put by his labor on that day, as He Himself rested after His six days' work of creation. Those who reverence the commandments of Jehovah will, after light has been given them in reference to the fourth precept of the Decalogue, obey it without questioning the feasibility or convenience of such obedience. God made man in His own image and then gave him an example of observing the seventh day, which He sanctified and made holy. He designed that upon that day man should worship Him and engage in no secular pursuits. No one who disregards the fourth commandment, after becoming enlightened concerning the claims of the Sabbath, can be held guiltless in the sight of God."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 247.

FURTHER STUDY: On the question of Sabbath observance after the second coming of Jesus, study Isaiah 66:22, 23. On the relationship between Sabbath observance and reception of God's end-time seal, compare: Exod. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Rom. 4:11; Rev. 7:1-3; 14:1-5.

"Those who would have the seal of God in their foreheads must keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. This is what distinguishes them from the disloyal, who have accepted a man-made institution in the place of the true Sabbath. The observance of God's rest day is the mark of distinction between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not."—Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 970.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In the light of the Bible teaching regarding the Sabbath, if the state demands that we engage in activities that violate God's holy day, how should we respond?
2. There are many borderline activities that some church members regard as Sabbath breaking and some regard as appropriate Sabbath activities. What are the Bible principles that should guide our decisions on such matters?
3. A friend with whom you are studying the Bible complains that accepting and practicing the Sabbath truth would involve his losing his job. What counsel would you give him?
4. In the light of your study this week, how would you explain the relationship between Sabbath observance and righteousness by faith?

SUMMARY: Following the Bible-study method that seeks understanding of a Bible doctrine or teaching, we have discovered important truth regarding the Sabbath. The Sabbath day is God's memorial of His creative and redemptive work. The seventh-day Sabbath is to be observed by God's faithful people until the end of time. We are to observe the Sabbath as the Scriptures instruct; it is a day of worship and fellowship, from which secular work and pleasure is excluded. Sabbath observance is a crucial aspect of our righteousness-by-faith/grace relationship with God, and it is an inseparable part of the lifestyle of those who will receive the end-time seal of God.

New Life From Death—1

Mirta Vigna

Sundar, a tall, dark-haired boy of 13, picked flowers from his mother's garden in Kathmandu, Nepal. Tears ran down his cheeks. Inside the house Sundar's mother cried with loud, sorrowful wails. Nearby lay the still body of a small girl.

It was time to prepare the funeral pyre. The family carried the body to the funeral site. Sundar placed the flowers around his sister's body. Then a torch touched the dry wood on the pyre, and the body was burned.

When Sundar's sister became ill, Father had called the witch doctors to offer animal sacrifices to appease the gods and assure that Little Sister would get well. But Little Sister died.

Three weeks later Sundar's brother was dead. The family's grief seemed endless. The gods in whom they had believed had not answered their prayers. Desperate, Father and Mother began searching for a god who would hear their prayers.

Sundar's uncle had given Father a New Testament. It lay forgotten in a corner. But now, with their gods no longer listening to their prayers, Father began to read the Bible. Suddenly he called his wife to listen. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-30, NIV). As father read these words his heart was comforted.

Eagerly he searched for other words from the great God of the Bible. One day he found this promise: "'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin. . . But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57, NIV).

People asked Sundar's father why he read the Bible when he had many other gods to worship. He answered, "When my children were sick we prayed and sacrificed to the gods. They did not hear our prayers. They cannot heal the sick or bring peace. But the God of the Bible can heal the sick. He even raised the dead. His book helps me to know Him." (continued)



Sundar Thapa is chaplain, and Mirta Vigna is a doctor at Scheer Memorial Hospital in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Study of Bible Prophecy



Sabbath Afternoon

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Rev. 3:14-22.

MEMORY TEXT: "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).

KEY THOUGHT: Bible prophecy strengthens our faith and enlightens us in regard to our Christian duty in the light of events predicted to occur in the future.

BIBLE PROPHECY IS OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE that God exists and that the Bible is His inspired revelation. (See 1 Peter 1:16-19.) It is often pointed out that it is not possible to *prove* the existence of God or the inspiration of the Bible. The Christian faith is precisely that, a religion of faith. Even so, the Lord has not left us without strong supporting evidence to strengthen our faith. Fulfilled Bible prophecy is one of the greatest evidences that our faith in God, our confidence in the saving power of Jesus Christ, and our belief in the messages of His Word are based on objective realities. (See Isa. 46:9, 10.)

Study of Bible prophecy involves first identifying the kind of prophecy being studied: prophecy with a local application only (Ezek. 26:7), prophecy with dual applications (Jeremiah 4), or apocalyptic prophecy that focuses on the end-time (Daniel 2). In the study of apocalyptic prophecy, it is important to interpret the symbolism by the use of similar symbolism used elsewhere in Scripture. As in all kinds of Bible study, the Bible is its own interpreter.

THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE CHURCH (Rev. 3:14-17).

Daniel and Revelation are the Bible's two prime examples of apocalyptic prophecy. This kind of prophecy focuses on the end of human history, is based on visions and dreams, and makes a large use of symbolism. Sometimes the symbols used in any one prophecy are interpreted for us (Daniel 2, 7, 8). But the symbols in many prophecies are not interpreted. For example, we are left to interpret the symbolism in the prophecy of the trumpets (Revelation 8 and 9) on the basis of Scripture and history.

Seventh-day Adventists have consistently interpreted apocalyptic prophecy by identifying, wherever possible, fulfillments in history. Daniel gives the sweep of history, covering Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the papacy, culminating in end-time events (Daniel 2-9). Because the futurist school of prophetic interpretation fails to recognize historical fulfillments, it fails to identify accurately end-time applications.

Our purpose in this lesson is to study the prophecy regarding Laodicea, the last-day church (Rev. 3:14-22). The seven churches represent seven periods of church history. (Compare Rev. 1:1, 3, 19.) The symbolism used within each church applies dramatically to a particular period of history. Yet the message to each church is relevant to every stage of history.

The name *Laodicea* may mean "a people judged." It is a combination of two Greek words: *laos*, meaning "people," and *dikaios*, meaning "righteous." Hence, *Laodicea* may also mean "a righteous people." The name prefigures the pre-advent judgment and the righteous condition of responsive believers, who are justified and vindicated by Jesus Christ.

Compare other Bible passages that parallel John's description of the last-day church: "Neither cold nor hot. . . . You are lukewarm. . . . You are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:15-17, NRSV). Compare Lev. 18:24-30; Jer. 3:1-10; Hosea 10:1, 2; Amos 6:1; Matt. 22:11-13.

"The Lord has shown me in vision some things concerning the church in its present lukewarm state, which I will relate to you. . . . Said the angel to the church: 'Jesus speaks to thee, "Be zealous and repent.'" This work, I saw, should be taken hold of in earnest. There is something to repent of. Worldly-mindedness, selfishness, and covetousness have been eating out the spirituality and life of God's people."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 141.

“GOLD REFINED BY FIRE” (Rev. 3:18, NRSV).

**Why does the Lord counsel us “to buy” from Him (Rev. 3:18)?
Isa. 55:1-4; Matt. 13:44; 25:8, 9.**

“Christ is represented in the Scriptures as a gift. He is a gift, but only to those who give themselves, soul, body, and spirit, to Him without reserve. We are to give ourselves to Christ, to live a life of willing obedience to all His requirements. All that we are, all the talents and capabilities we possess, are the Lord’s, to be consecrated to His service. When we thus give ourselves wholly to Him, Christ, with all the treasures of heaven, gives Himself to us. We obtain the pearl of great price.

“Salvation is a free gift, and yet it is to be bought and sold. In the market of which divine mercy has the management, the precious pearl is represented as being bought without money and without price.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 116.

How do the following passages interpret the phrase “gold refined by fire so that you may be rich” (Rev. 3:18, NRSV)?

1 Peter 1:7-9 _____

James 2:5, 14-17 _____

Gal. 5:6 _____

Laodiceans think they are rich because they are “increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17). They do not realize that material possessions or even advanced knowledge are inadequate to supply the soul’s need and qualify them for eternal life with Christ. Jesus dramatized the pitiful Laodicean condition in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21). His fields produced so abundantly that he built larger barns to contain the grain. Then he regaled himself with relaxation, drink, and merriment. But the Lord pronounced sentence upon him. His life was about to end. “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21, NRSV).

“The gold tried in the fire is faith that works by love. Only this can bring us into harmony with God. We may be active, we may do much work; but without love, such love as dwelt in the heart of Christ, we can never be numbered with the family in heaven.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 158.

"WHITE ROBES TO CLOTHE YOU" (Rev. 3:18, NRSV).

What do white robes represent in the book of Revelation?

Rev. 3:4, 5 _____

Rev. 6:11 _____

Rev. 7:9, 13, 14 _____

Rev. 12:1 _____

Rev. 19:7, 8 _____

Rev. 22:14 (RSV) _____

The symbol of white robes is common in Scripture. The earthly high priest and his sons wore "holy garments" (Exod. 28:2), including a linen robe (Lev. 16:4; Exod. 28:39, 40). Isaiah spoke of God's gift of "the garments of salvation," "the robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10). Jesus explained that the individual not wearing a "wedding garment" will be cast out of the kingdom of grace (Matt. 22:11-13). He alluded to the pre-advent judgment, during which the final decisions are made regarding who is clothed in His righteousness and who is not. (See Dan. 7:9-14; 12:1.)

The apostle Paul referred to believers in Christ as having "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). The "new man" is "put on" (Eph. 4:24). We must "put on the whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:11). Thus Paul gives the unmistakable impression that the character of Christ is to be worn by believers, in the sense that Christ's indwelling is their righteousness. (See Rom. 8:9, 10; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:27.)

In the book of Revelation, the white robes represent both vindication in the pre-advent judgment (Rev. 6:11) and Christ's character bestowed upon His people and manifested in their good works (Rev. 3:5; 19:7, 8).

"The white raiment is purity of character, the righteousness of Christ imparted to the sinner. This is indeed a garment of heavenly texture, that can be bought only of Christ for a life of willing obedience."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 88.

"By the wedding garment in the parable [Matt. 22:1-14] is represented the pure, spotless character which Christ's true followers will possess. . . . Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 310-312.

“SALVE TO ANOINT YOUR EYES” (Rev. 3:18, NRSV).

What light do the following passages throw on the meaning of the “eyesalve” (KJV)?

Ps. 119:18, 105 _____

John 14:26; 16:8-15 _____

Eph. 1:18 _____

Eph. 3:16-19 _____

1 John 2:20, 27 _____

When our spiritual eyes are opened, we can discern between truth and error, purity and impurity. But all our unaided efforts to increase our spiritual discernment are doomed to failure. Spiritual eyesight does not result from human knowledge, intellectual enlightenment, or emotional excitement. Jesus taught that only as we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit can we see as God would have us see. Knowledge of the Word is indispensable to the Christian, but that knowledge is spiritually impotent unless fashioned and activated by the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

“Therefore we need to be exceedingly careful, and walk humbly before God, that we may have spiritual eyesalve that we may distinguish the working of the Holy Spirit of God from the working of that spirit that would bring in wild license and fanaticism. ‘By their fruits ye shall know them’ (Matt. 7:20). Those who are really beholding Christ will be changed into His image, even by the Spirit of the Lord, and will grow up to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit of God will inspire men with love and purity; and refinement will be manifest in their characters.”—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 142.

“The eyesalve is that wisdom and grace which enables us to discern between the evil and the good, and to detect sin under any guise. God has given His church eyes which He requires them to anoint with wisdom, that they may see clearly; but many would put out the eyes of the church if they could; for they would not have their deeds come to the light, lest they should be reproved. The divine eyesalve will impart clearness to the understanding. Christ is the depository of all graces.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 88, 89.

How can you be sure to receive daily the gold, the white raiment, and the eyesalve of which Jesus spoke?

CHRIST IS KNOCKING AT YOUR HEART'S DOOR (Rev.3:19-22).

Study Bible passages that enable you to understand more fully the following sentences:

"I reprove and discipline those whom I love" (Rev. 3:19, NRSV): Heb. 12:3-11.

"Be earnest, therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19, NRSV): Acts 5:31; Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25.

"I am standing at the door, knocking" (Rev. 3:20, NRSV): Song of Sol. 5:2; Luke 12:36; 13:25.

"I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev. 3:20, NRSV): John 14:18, 23; 15:26; 16:13.

"To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev. 3:21, NRSV): Rev. 2:7, 17, 26; 1 Peter 2:21, 22; 1 John 3:3.

The latter part of the message to Laodicea is one of the most inspiring passages in the Bible. Here is hope for the hopeless, encouragement for the desponding, life for the dying. Jesus' love is demonstrated by His rebuke and discipline (verse 19). He does not discipline us in anger, as human parents sometimes do, but in tender love and forgiveness for our human frailties. He pleads with us to repent (verse 19), something we can do only through the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit. He alone can give us genuine sorrow for sin and the power to turn away from it. Jesus' promise of the Spirit (John 14-16) rings in our ears and engenders a grateful response.

Jesus' standing without, knocking at our heart's door (verse 20), arouses the most tender mental images of our caring Lord. Our sin bars the door to His healing presence. But, through the power of His imparted grace, we can remove the pile of rubbish that prevents us from opening to Him. Then He enters and nourishes our fainting souls. He communes with us through the gentle ministrations of the Holy Spirit and empowers us to rise above the demands of our fallen humanity. By this means we can conquer as He conquered (verse 21). His presence in our hearts by the Holy Spirit enables us to live above sin, to overcome as He did, and to reflect His goodness.

Have you received the Saviour into your heart? Have you responded to His knocking?

FURTHER STUDY: In connection with the promise to the overcomer in Laodicea, study the following passages: Matt. 19:28; 25:31; Luke 1:32, 33; 1 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 8:1, 2; Rev. 5:10; 20:4. Read *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 141-146.

"The mansions in glory are His, and the joy of that heavenly abode; yet He humbles Himself to seek an entrance at the door of your heart, that He may bless you with His light and make you to rejoice in His glory. His work is to seek and to save that which is lost and ready to perish. He wishes to redeem as many as He can from sin and death, that He may elevate them to His throne and give them everlasting life."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 224.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can we determine whether the rebuke to Laodicea regarding spiritual lukewarmness applies to us individually?
2. What relationship do you see between this quarter's lessons on Bible study and the message to Laodicea?
3. What connection do you see between the counsel of Revelation 3:18 and the teaching of the Epistle to the Romans?
4. A member of your church is often ready to point the finger of criticism at others, but apparently unaware of his own weaknesses. How can you help him without giving the impression that you are judgmental and self-righteous? How does the message to Laodicea suggest a tactful approach to this man?

SUMMARY: Study of symbolic Bible prophecy involves careful interpretation of each symbol by comparing other passages that employ the same symbolism. Using this method, we have discovered the meaning of the symbols used in the message to the church of Laodicea. The heart of the message is Christ's willingness to impart to us faith that works by love, the gift of His indwelling righteousness, and the spiritual enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, who clarifies the Word for us. As we daily open our heart's door, Jesus comes in to dwell with us and to empower us for vibrant Christian living.



New Life From Death—2

Mirta Vigna

After his brother and sister died, Sundar's family quit offering sacrifices to their idol gods. They realized that gods made by hands could not answer prayers. Father began searching for a god to believe in. He found a dusty New Testament and started reading it. There he discovered promises of a God who cares for humanity, who hears and answers prayers.

One day Sundar saw his father go into the family temple behind the house and throw away the idols. Sundar knew his father had found hope in the God of heaven.

A year passed, and as the family read the New Testament and learned more of the God of the Christians, they found joy and happiness that they had never known before.

There was no Christian church or place to worship in the village, so Sundar's uncle and his parents started a fellowship group in their home. A few neighbors and relatives began to attend the group also. Even though they had no one to teach and guide them in their new faith, they read the Bible and prayed together. Then the group began praying for someone to teach them more about Christianity and God.

In answer to their prayers they met an Adventist pastor. The little group invited the pastor to teach them the Bible. The pastor gladly studied with the group, and soon both Sundar and his father accepted Jesus Christ as their only God and personal Saviour. Now they understood the love of God for humanity. This wonderful God let His own Son die so that they could be free from the bondage of sin.

The pastor suggested that Sundar attend Spicer Memorial College in Pune, India. Sundar was hesitant because of the language barrier, but finally he decided to go. When he completed his studies, he returned to Nepal and began working as health educator and chaplain at Scheer Memorial Hospital outside Kathmandu. He is happy to teach people about good health principles and about the Christian God who hears their prayers.



Sundar Thapa (left) is chaplain at Scheer Memorial Hospital outside Kathmandu, Nepal. Mirta Vigna is a doctor at the same hospital.

Lessons for Second Quarter, 1996

The second quarter Sabbath School lessons on the book of Judges recount the up-and-down experiences of the Israelites during the centuries between Joshua and Samuel (about 1400-1050 B.C.).

Lesson 1: Unfinished Business.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Judges 1:1-2:5.

MEMORY TEXT: Judges 2:1.

KEY THOUGHT: The success of the Israelites in conquering their enemies and occupying the Promised Land depended upon their reliance on and faith in God.

OUTLINE:

- Success Through Following God (Judges 1:1-10, 16-18, 22-26).
- Promises Kept (Judges 1:11-15, 20).
- Failure to Keep Promises (Judges 1:19, 21, 27-36).
- Promises Broken (Judges 2:1, 2).
- Lost Opportunity (Judges 2:3-5).

Lesson 2: Ups and Downs.

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Judges 2:6-3:6.

MEMORY TEXT: Judges 2:18.

KEY THOUGHT: During the period of the "judges," the experience of God's people was characterized by a repeated pattern of apostasy.

OUTLINE:

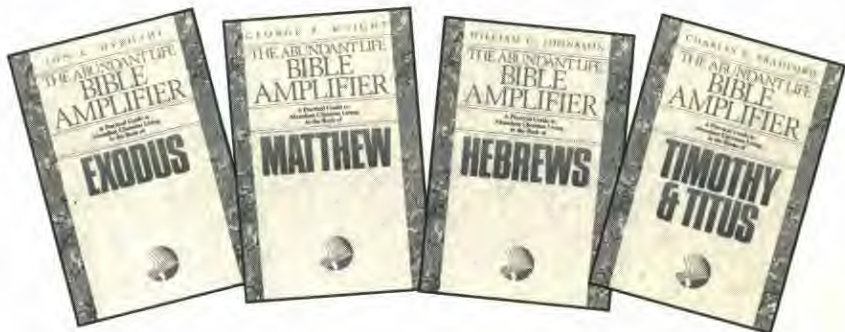
- The Faithful Generation (Judges 2:6-9).
- The Unfaithful Generation (Judges 2:10-13).
- From Disobedience to Distress (Judges 2:14, 15).
- Not Learning From Mistakes (Judges 2:16, 17).
- Failing God's Test (Judges 2:20-3:6).

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3. Construct an evangelistic center in Manado City, Indonesia; Construct 35 chapels in territories opened by task force workers.
4. Construct a training center on the compound of the 1000 Missionary Movement in Manila, Philippines, to train young people to plant churches in unentered areas.



Unions	Churches	Membership	Population
Bangladesh	68	9,088	116,600,000
Central Philippine	752	144,793	13,952,970
East Indonesia	490	71,920	21,148,225
Japan	109	13,694	124,930,000
Korea	583	123,968	67,600,000
Myanmar	159	16,622	45,400,000
North Philippine	1,177	186,644	35,552,245
South China Island	61	10,718	27,367,896
South Philippine	1,307	296,158	19,194,775
Southeast Asia	270	56,860	170,900,000
Sri Lanka	28	2,724	17,900,000
West Indonesia	495	75,457	179,301,765
Guam-Micronesia	16	2,705	300,000
Totals June 30, 1994	5,515	1,011,351	840,147,876