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Ministry®

Published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Read by clergy of all faiths.

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MINISTRY®

International Journal for Pastors
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COVER

316 Creative (based on a painting by
Vilhelm Melbye)

LAYOUT

316 Creative

SUBSCRIPTIONS

12 issues: United States US\$32.99; Canada and overseas US\$47.00. To order: send name, address, and payment to Ministry® Subscriptions, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 USA. www.ministrymagazine.org/subscribe.

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Ministry® has been published monthly since 1928 by the Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®

Ministry is a peer-reviewed journal.

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PRINTER Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1350 N. Kings Rd., Nampa, ID 83687
Standard mail postage paid at Nampa, Idaho. (ISSN 0026-5314)

Member of Associated Church Press.

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Vol. 91, No. 2 © 2019

PRINTED IN THE USA.

www.ministrymagazine.org



*“He speaks not as a victor who
has emerged a conqueror, but as a
struggling combatant in the trenches
of doubt and temptation. I feel
that this approach can help me in
my pastoral ministry as I seek to
encourage my parishioners to cope
with their suffering and loss.”*

Thoughtful and helpful

I very much appreciate Frank Hasel’s December 2018 article “Dealing With Suffering and Loss.” It was authentically candid yet very thoughtful and edifying. He speaks not as a victor who has emerged a conqueror, but as a struggling combatant in the trenches of doubt and temptation. I feel that this approach can help me in my pastoral ministry as I seek to encourage my parishioners to cope with their suffering and loss.

—Jonathan Chitwood, pastor, Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Helpful and respectful

I always appreciate Sven Östring’s articles on Creation, not least of all “Our Miraculous Planet Earth”

(December 2018). Comments on Genesis and Creation inevitably seem colored by the preconceptions we bring to the study. Theistic Evolutionists bring their view that science carries a higher authority than Scripture. On the other hand, Young Earth Creationists also bring their preconceptions to the study on creation. Sven points out some of these issues and also brings his own lens through which he is looking at the Creation passage.

Much of what he says is very helpful. He rejects the creation of the whole universe necessarily being the subject of Genesis 1 but assumes our planet’s creation ex nihilo is the subject of the weekly Creation account. The problem is that Sven understands the earth to mean planet Earth, but that ignores

Genesis 1’s own interpretation of the expression *the earth and the heavens*. Verses 8–10 explain the terms: “the earth” is the dry land and “the heavens” is the sky above or what we see when we look up (the expanse [æyqār:h]). Let us be respectful, allowing God to describe what He wants to and what He views as being most important and not impose our agenda on Him. If that leaves a doubt that God did not create the universe ex nihilo some time before Genesis 1, then that is our problem and not His.

A number of commentators (Frank Marsh among them) have noted that Genesis 1 appears to be describing the events of Creation from the point of view of an observer on the surface of the earth. If that is so, then planet Earth was created with the rest of the sun and solar system and perhaps the whole universe, sometime back in the past prior to the Creation account in Genesis. If the criticism is made that this view of Creation only involves a “bit of gardening and landscaping” over the seven days on the part of God, then it could be that what God wished us to draw out of the Creation narrative, and His priorities for us, could be different from our intents and demands.

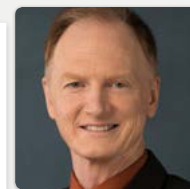
—Kerry Hortop, DMin, retired pastor, New South Wales, Australia (Edited letter)

Possible but not plausible

The arguments used in the article to support a young earth and universe (see Sven Östring, “Our Miraculous Planet Earth,” December 2018) are logical and perhaps even possible. However, a good argument also needs to be plausible, and that is where the article comes up a little short.

Continued on page 12

John Bradshaw is speaker/director for It Is Written, Chattanooga, Tennessee, United States.



A pulling horse doesn't kick

A sh dropped from the man's cigarette and landed on the shoulder of a young woman in a market in the Montmartre district of Paris. Apparently embarrassed by what had happened he wiped the ash away, apologizing again and again. As he disappeared into the crowd the young woman realized what had *really* taken place. Her wallet with her credit cards and cash had been stolen out of her handbag.

The clever thief understood something about the art of misdirection. He knew that if he could divert my friend's attention he could use the situation to his own dishonest advantage. It's not only pickpockets who know the value of diverting attention. Illusionists are masters of the art. So, too, is the devil.

When Jesus left the world to return to heaven, His instructions for the early church were clear. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20).¹ Earlier He had said to His closest followers, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2).

Jesus made it obvious that inherent in His call to follow Him is a call to mission. "Follow Me," he said to Peter and Andrew, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19, KJV). Discipleship is a call to disciple making. Christianity doesn't involve mission. Christianity is mission. And Jesus left no doubt as to what the mission of the church is. The church has been commissioned to reach the lost with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

When the church becomes distracted from mission, churches find other things to focus on. Find a church that is wracked by disagreements or infighting and you have found a church that has lost sight of its mission. Churches easily descend into disarray when they're not focused on what's truly important. As a wise pastor once told me, "A pulling horse doesn't kick."

There's no question that even churches that are focused on mission will have to confront contentious questions. But churches that are focused on mission will take challenges in stride.

As one writer commented, "When the churches are left to inactivity Satan sees to it that they are employed. He occupies the field and engages the members in lines of work that absorb their energies, destroy spirituality, and cause them to fall as dead weights upon the church."² The same author noted, "Strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service."³ If church members aren't serving—if they aren't involved in mission—they're on spiritual thin ice.

When a person internalizes his or her faith and looks for opportunities to share it with others, the Spirit of God works powerfully in that life. A major reason so few people experience the power of the Holy Spirit is that they do so little that requires the power of the Holy Spirit. And as denominations wrestle with the question of how to keep young people engaged at church, they repeatedly fall into the trap of believing that "better" music or programs prevent the youth from leaving. As good as "better" may be, it isn't music or programs that keep young people connected with Jesus.


A college student from a "good" family recently shared his experience

*Christianity
doesn't involve
mission.
Christianity is
mission.*

with me. "I had been struggling in my faith," he said. "I was so discouraged I was ready to give up. It seemed that every sermon I heard talked about everything except the things that really matter. But then I got involved in learning and sharing my faith."⁴ That changed everything. I'm back. God has me now."

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always been a mission-driven church. And God long ago saw a day when all His people were engaged in mission. Revelation 18:1 speaks about a time when the earth is lit up with a manifestation of the character of Christ in His people. Our collective attention will be focused on the mission given to us by God.

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations" (Matt. 24:14).

"And then the end will come." 

1 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the New King James Version.

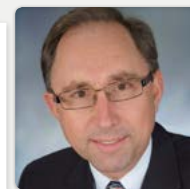
2 Ellen White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 425.

3 Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 105.

4 As a student at SALT, It Is Written's soul winning and discipleship training program.

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Jesus and the 28 fundamental beliefs:

Are they compatible?

Propositional truth has become one of the most devalued currencies in the market of Christian life today. Many pulpits have been taken over, complained one evangelical, by “therapists” more concerned with stimulating good feelings than with brokering biblical truth.¹ Meanwhile, an increasing number of Christians seem to prefer a “sweeter, closer walk with Jesus” rather than wrestling with the doctrinal teachings of Scripture. Experience, feelings, and individual perceptions of truth have become some of the hallmarks of postmodernity, which contributed to the rise of what is called “post-truth.”² This religious and social backdrop may explain in part why, for an increasing number of church members, the cognitive dimension of the Seventh-day Adventist faith, especially as expressed in the church’s Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, may seem less relevant to the Christian experience than in the past. Jesus is often pitted against doctrine, and the doctrinal content of Scripture is made to appear as more of a hindrance than a guide to a genuine relationship with the Lord. Although fashionable, such a misperception contradicts Scripture as well as many of Jesus’ most explicit

statements on the cognitive content of the faith (Matt. 21:42; 22:29; Mark 12:24; Luke 24:45; John 8:32; 14:6; 17:17).

Jesus and the Word

Scripture portrays Jesus as the incarnate “Word” of God (John 1:1). The Greek term *logos*, though often translated as “word,” does not usually refer to a single word but, rather, to a set of words composed of a subject and predicate that make a proposition or even a discourse.³ As the Word, Jesus’ Person and teachings are God’s salvific propositions, or discourse, to humanity.

Jesus spent His life on the earth performing works of love; and, through “words”/“propositions,” He explained the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in the kingdom of God. Jesus also reaffirmed the relevance of Scripture as a witness to Him, and He made it clear that God’s Word remains in force (John 5:39; Luke 16:17). Therefore, truth as understood and taught by Jesus is not only personal but also propositional. It makes no sense to claim Jesus as one’s personal Savior and then reject the propositional truths related to His Person and work. As Ellen G. White said: “Those who think that it matters not what they believe in doctrine, so long as they

believe in Jesus Christ, are on dangerous ground.”⁴ A genuine relationship with Jesus includes acceptance of His Person and conformity to His teachings (Matt. 7:21–27).

The Scriptures

The idea, therefore, of receiving Jesus and disregarding the Scriptures is an oxymoron because it is only through the Scriptures that Jesus can be identified and known as Savior and Lord. Without the primacy of Scripture as the propositional revelation of God, there would be no way to identify the true Messiah among the several claimants to messiahship who have arisen from Second Temple Judaism even to this day. In addition, only through Scripture can we tell the difference between the Word made flesh—who died for us on the cross—and the fictional portraits of Jesus offered by the gnostic gospels. And without the testimony of Scripture, our understanding of Jesus would be dependent on subjective reconstructions, such as those proposed by the various quests for the historical Jesus.

Different cultural and intellectual environments have produced portraits of Jesus according to their respective political agendas and cultural interests. Jesus has been portrayed as a cynic-like

philosopher, a Spirit-endowed holy man, a social revolutionary, an eschatological prophet, or the Messiah.⁵ It seems evident, therefore, that a true picture of Jesus can emerge only from the careful study of the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

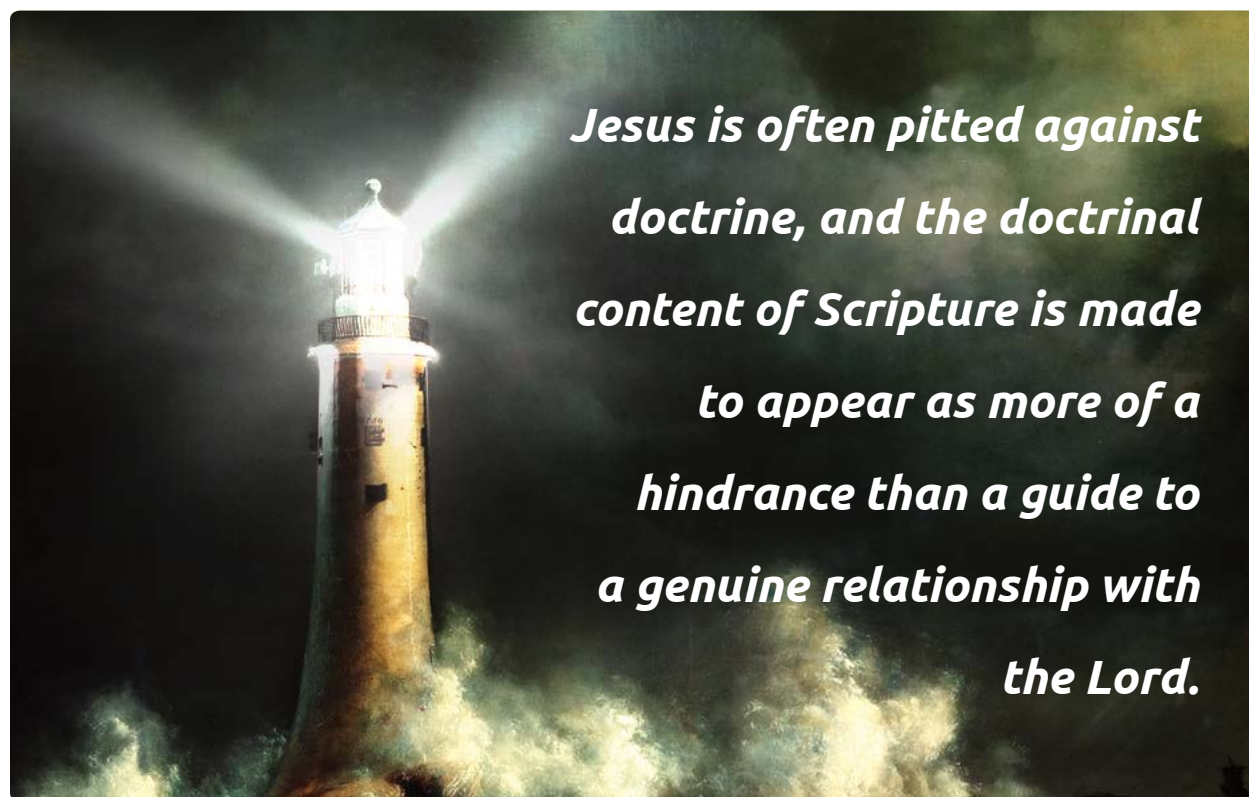
The 28 fundamentals

What, then, are the nature and role of our 28 fundamental beliefs

summarized—or clarified as the church grows in its understanding of Scripture.

But, as they stand, they express our best current biblical understanding of God's love and His work of salvation through Jesus Christ, the nature and condition of humanity, the church, the Christian life, and the eschatological hope in the Second Coming. Clear statements about knowing Jesus and His will for us are of utmost importance “in

denigration of these statements actually indicates a more troubling attitude toward the Bible itself. Therefore, since the fundamental beliefs are not a creed—and rightly so—disagreement with them must always be treated in light of their corresponding biblical foundation. In other words, the ultimate criterion to assess anyone's commitment to the fundamental beliefs remains the Bible and the Bible alone.



Jesus is often pitted against doctrine, and the doctrinal content of Scripture is made to appear as more of a hindrance than a guide to a genuine relationship with the Lord.

as expressed in the short summary statements voted by the world church in their General Conference sessions? First, these statements are not meant to function as creeds. Our only creed is the Bible.⁶ Creeds, as manufactured by religious traditions, often become unchangeable and fossilized expressions of a given generation's faith and, as such, become barriers to a proper grasp of Scripture. Our belief statements, however, are dynamic expressions of the collective wisdom of the church guided by the Holy Spirit. They may be improved, expanded,

this age of deception, doctrinal pluralism, and apathy. Such a knowledge is the Christian's only safeguard against those who, 'like savage wolves,' will come speaking perverse things in order to subvert the truth and destroy the faith of God's people (see Acts 20:29, 30).⁷ Furthermore, such statements also “assist those who are interested in knowing why we believe what we believe.”⁸

Inasmuch as the fundamental beliefs express our best current understanding of some crucial biblical teachings, disregard for or the

Interestingly enough, the importance of doctrine in general—and our fundamental beliefs in particular—has been succinctly summarized in this way: “Doctrine is an essential part of the glue that holds together the institutions in which most of us acquire the skills needed to engage in the adventure of theology. Neutralize the glue, and the institutions fall apart. And if the institutions disappear, the church will lose a major part of the connectivity between generations. If we discard our doctrine, the church will lack the structure our children will need when


it comes their turn to pass on the faith to their children.”⁹

Conclusion

Although we may disagree on minor points and may not yet have answers for all our questions, as we grow in our understanding and application of Scripture, we must stay united on those propositions that the worldwide church has voted as expressions of our best current understanding of biblical teachings. Far from being a dry list of intellectual

propositions, our fundamental beliefs point to the Jesus of Scripture as the ultimate center that keeps the church united as a worldwide body of believers. As Ellen G. White noted, “Christ is the center of all true doctrine. All true religion is found in His word and in nature.”¹⁰

Thus, for Seventh-day Adventists, Scripture remains the source, and Christ the center, of every doctrine or belief that we have adopted as a world church. Thus we are called to embrace both Christ, the Living Word,

and His written Word, with “head and heart, thinking and feeling, reason and faith, theology and doxology, mental labor and the ministry of love.”¹¹ But in dealing with opposition to or outright rejection of our core beliefs, we should bear in mind Ellen White’s sobering statement: “Truth held in unrighteousness is the greatest curse that can come to our world. But the truth as it is in Jesus is a savor of life unto life. It is worth possessing, worth living, worth defending.”¹² | 

1 David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 65.

2 See Lee C. McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018); Mikael Stenmark, Steve Fuller, and Ulf Zackariasson, eds., *Relativism and Post-Truth in Contemporary Society: Possibilities and Challenges* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Michael A. Peters et al., eds., *Post-Truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education* (New York: Springer, 2018).

3 Robert H. Gundry, *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for*

Contemporary Evangelicalism, Especially Its Elites, in North America (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), xv.

4 Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1999), 235.

5 See Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 380.

6 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 416.

7 Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), viii.

8 Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, viii, ix.

9 John McLarty, “Doctrine and Theology: What’s the Difference?” *Adventist Today* 6, no. 1 (January–February 1998): 21.

10 Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943), 453.

11 John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 15.

12 Ellen G. White, “The Church of God,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 4, 1900, par. 10.

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An interview with Jud Lake:

Ellen White and the Civil War

Editor's note: **Jud Lake, ThD, DMin**, is a professor of preaching and Adventist studies at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee, United States. This interview focuses primarily on his book *A Nation in God's Hands: Ellen White and the Civil War* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2017).

Pavel Goia (PG): What was the significance of the American Civil War?

Jud Lake (JL): The Civil War between the northern and southern states from 1861 to 1865 was a defining event unlike any other in American history. The Revolutionary War, for example, created the United States, but the Civil War preserved and strengthened the nation by securing its unity and terminating the institution of slavery. Even though Americans still struggle with racial issues, slavery as an institution ended, and America is what it is today because of that horrendous struggle.

Jeffrey Brown (JB): How is the study of this war relevant to Seventh-day Adventists around the world?

JL: Adventism is an American-born movement, and its early history unfolded in the context of nineteenth-century America. Leaders within that movement, such as William Miller and Joshua Himes, spoke out against slavery, along with the Abolitionists, while proclaiming the second advent of Jesus. During the 1850s, when the gulf between the American North and the South widened over the politics of

slavery, Sabbatarian Adventists were forming a coherent movement that was antislavery at its core. On the eve of the war in 1860, Sabbatarian Adventists chose the name *Seventh-day Adventists*. Between two great battles of the war, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, in the spring and summer of 1863, the Adventists established the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In addition, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* repeatedly addressed the issue of slavery both before and during the war. The sin of racism denied the basic humanity of the slaves. But while slavery died on the battlefield of the Civil War, the ideology of racism survived and thrived after the war. Our presses were less vocal during this period of great struggle, mistakenly believing that winning the war solved the fundamental problems of blacks. The post-Civil War history of America showed that the struggle for blacks to have their civil rights and full humanity acknowledged had only just begun. It was another eighty years before they were able to achieve some measure of success. Ellen White states, "Those who study the history of the Israelites should also consider the history of the slaves in America, who have suffered."¹ Thus,

to really understand and appreciate Adventist history, one must have some knowledge of the American experience during the mid-nineteenth century that defined itself by the Civil War. Most importantly, Seventh-day Adventist Church cofounder Ellen White experienced several visions related to slavery and the war. Her insights are, I believe, still applicable and relevant in the twenty-first century. Because of this, Adventists today should have a special interest in this period of American history.

PG: How would you summarize Ellen White's contribution to the American Civil War?

JL: First, although the accounts of her war visions take up no more than thirty pages, she essentially addressed every major issue related to the conflict and provided theological commentary for her Adventist audience. Second, the published versions of her visions are important to Civil War literature because they are primary sources of how one contemporary religious leader interpreted the struggle from her own faith perspective. Third, and most importantly, Ellen White provided a

theologically nuanced view of God's providence and care for America that gave hope to her Adventist readers. Within two weeks after the first major battle of the war in Manassas, Virginia, on July 21, 1861, which resulted in a Union disaster and great discouragement for all Northerners, she declared



Jud Lake

twice that God "has the destiny of this nation in his hands." The context of her statement is her witnessing an angel descend and initiate a major retreat of the northern army. The message to her audience was that God would supernaturally intervene in the war to accomplish His will.

In short, Ellen White's statement that God "has the destiny of this nation in his hands" is, I believe, still relevant for today. It reminds us that He is intimately involved not only with America's destiny but with that of all the world's nations. In the midst of today's intense geopolitical environment, this is an encouraging thought for Christians.

JB: Was Ellen White the only one who claimed to experience visions about the Civil War?

JL: No. Prior to the war, Quaker Joseph Hoag reportedly experienced a vision and predicted the start of the Civil War. The Mormon prophet Joseph Smith also claimed to have visions about a conflict between the states. The radical secessionist Edmund Ruffin forecasted southern independence, and several spiritualists had visions of a desolating war.

JB: What made Ellen White's visions different?

JL: In all her writings about the war, she had a theological end in view. She never conceived of herself as a lecturer to the North or a prophetic voice to the nation. In fact, nothing in her career suggested that she sought national publicity. Her focus was on encouraging her

fellow Adventists with biblical perspectives on the war and preparing them for the second coming of Christ.

PG: Is *A Nation in God's Hands* an apologetic work?

JL: *A Nation in God's Hands* goes beyond the apologetic impulse. While parts of the book address controversial issues, such as Ellen White's comments about England, her condemnation of Lincoln's first call for a national fast, and her cryptic vision about some slaves not being resurrected, the majority of the book is more an analysis and affirmation of her profound

contribution to the spiritual issues behind the war.

JB: Would you give *Ministry* readers the takeaway from your book?

JL: Briefly, readers will understand Ellen White's war visions in their historical context and see the conflict through her prophetic lens. In the midst of more than 60,000 books, pamphlets, and internet resources on the American Civil War, this book relates the conflict from the unique perspective of White's visions. On the one hand, it is primarily a religious interpretation of the war and thus best understood and appreciated in that framework. On the other hand, it captures the war's drama through its stories of a church, soldiers, and a president.

Several interesting features characterize the book. First, it summarizes every major battle of the war and puts [each of] them in the context of White's forecast about the nature of the conflict that she made at the beginning of the war. Second, her fascinating vision of the angel intervening in the Battle of First Manassas receives a chapter-length discussion, and third, an entire chapter analyzes the background of spiritualism in relation to her vision about Union officers consulting with supernatural beings.

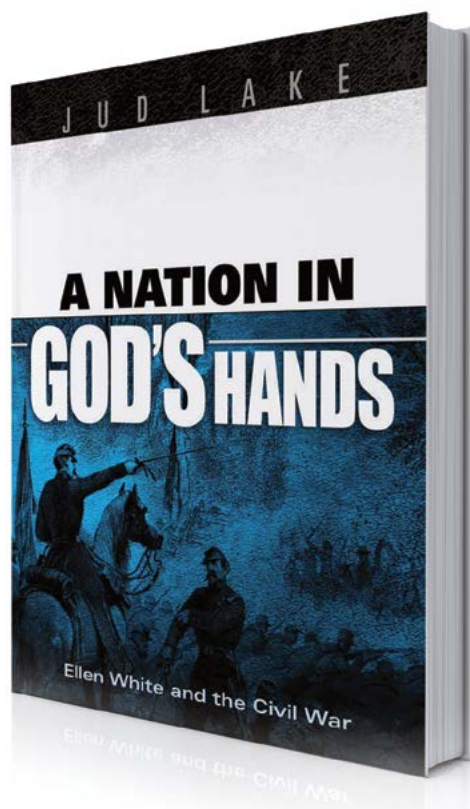
PG: How is the Civil War relevant for pastors?

JL: Pastors are leaders, and the Civil War battles were all about both good and bad leadership. From the hesitancy of General George McClellan in battle to the persistence of General Ulysses S. Grant during the Overland Campaign to the strategy of General Robert E. Lee in invading the North, we find many leadership insights for those who pastor congregations. In addition to this, the courage, valor, and faith of so many figures during the war are an inspiration, whereas the conflicts saturated with sadness, suffering, and absolute tragedy will confirm to the discerning pastor the reality of evil and the great

controversy between Christ and Satan. This is where Ellen White comes in with her religious interpretation of the war and slavery. Her perspective adds a significant theological nuance to a national conflict that makes it relevant for Adventist pastors.

JB: You discuss in the book a connection between Ellen White and President Abraham Lincoln. Would you please explain?

JL: Abraham Lincoln and Ellen White did not know each other personally, of course. Nevertheless, their messages about the nation had many parallels. At the beginning of the war when Lincoln was endeavoring to save the Union only, White declared that the war was God's punishment on the nation for the sin of slavery. As the conflict continued and Lincoln evolved in his theological understanding, he declared in his second inaugural address that the war was God's punishment for slavery. Thus, what White delivered to the Adventist people at the beginning of the war was essentially the same as what Lincoln presented to the entire nation at its end.



Summary of Ellen White's four war visions related in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 253–268, 355–368 and *Ellen G. White: The Early Years: 1827–1862* (vol. 1), 462, 463:

1. Parkville Vision (January 1861): She foresaw the coming “terrible war” and its carnage.
2. Roosevelt Vision (August 1861): She viewed God's condemnation of America for the sin of slavery and His intervention in the war at the Battle of First Manassas.
3. Battle Creek Vision (January 1862): She perceived the problems in the northern war effort and received theological insight on the national fasts and international diplomatic relations with England.
4. Battle Creek Vision (November 1862): She received counsel for the church on the military draft and witnessed Union officers consulting with spirit guides.

Both of their messages were bookends to a war in which God declared His judgment on both the North and South for the sin of slavery.

PG: Besides your book, what are a few Civil War books especially relevant for pastors that you would recommend?

JL: The major biographies of generals on both sides of the war and especially President Lincoln are full of insights that pastors would appreciate, not to mention the many stories and anecdotes that they could find useful as sermon illustrations. In particular, historian Ronald C. White Jr. has done preachers a great favor in his analysis of Lincoln's speeches in *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln Through His Words* (New York: Random House, 2005). They will learn a great deal from his examination of Lincoln's astonishing rhetorical skills and his spiritual growth in the White House. This is a necessary read for any preacher who cares about the power of words in his or her preaching.

Good leadership skills every pastor must have are set forth concisely in Donald T. Phillips's *Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times* (New York: Warner, 1992). Then I suggest two stirring biographical

works on Lincoln that examine his moral convictions, resolute purpose, and willingness to grow and change as leader of a troubled country: *Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America's Most Perilous Year* (New York: Picador, 2012) by David Von Drehle and *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007) by Richard Carwardine. Any pastor who has been through hard times in ministry will find much relevant information in these two books about Lincoln's experience as president.

One other book is worth mentioning: Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 2009). For those who deal with suffering and death on a regular basis, this significant book will not only unveil a forgotten piece of Civil War history; it will give one a rare perspective on death and ministering to grieving families.

JB: Do you have any interesting experiences you can share from your visits to Civil War battlefields?


JL: Fortunately, the battlefields of the American Civil War are state parks and accessible to visitors all year round. I've had wonderful experiences studying the Manassas battlefield where

Ellen White saw the angel descend, walking Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, pondering Bloody Lane at Antietam, wandering through the Wilderness battles, and walking Missionary Ridge in my neck of the woods—Chattanooga.

So far, though, the most significant one has been my visit to the battlefield of Malvern Hill just outside of Richmond, Virginia. The encounter that took place on this well-preserved field was the culmination of the Seven Days Battles between Union General George McClellan and Confederate General Robert E. Lee in the summer of 1862. Lee sent his army charging up the gentle slope of Malvern Hill as McClellan's cannons and gunners mowed them down. It was a Union victory involving great carnage on the Confederate side. One Union officer observed the next day "over five thousand dead and wounded men on the ground, in every attitude of distress. A third of them were dead or dying, but enough were alive and moving to give

the field a singular crawling effect."² I thought about this image on my visit to the battlefield and positioned myself at the approximate location where the officer would have beheld this horrible sight. The late afternoon sun illuminated the peaceful landscape with such beauty, a striking contrast to that bloody day long ago. As I studied the field, about a half mile from my position, I imagined it full of dead bodies and those still alive writhing in agony with no one to help them. The beauty of life, the horrors of war, and the great controversy between Christ and Satan behind it all struck me with great emotional force. That powerful experience still lingers with me. It is no wonder that as Ellen White reflected on the horrors of war she had seen in her visions, she made it a point to remind her readers of the second coming of Christ that will end all wars.

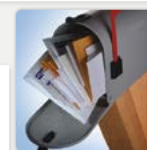
PG: How has your study of the Civil War affected you personally?

JL: Interestingly, it took me four years to research and write this book—the same amount of time as the war itself. (I did not plan it that way!) During those long years, as I immersed myself in the politics, battles, triumphs, defeats, suffering, and death of the struggle, my own perspective on life deepened. I was going through a difficult period during this time, and the incredible personalities and stories of the war and God's hand in it all ministered to me in profound ways. Not only did my respect and appreciation for Ellen White's prophetic ministry increase, but my faith in God's providence in the world's affairs grew as well. Because of this experience, I have a deep love and respect for this war. I am passionate about visiting Civil War battlefields and will do so for the rest of my life. 

1 Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), 42.

2 For the entire quote, see page 120.

LETTERS *continued*



Sure, God could have chosen to create the earth and universe a short time ago and intentionally made them with the appearance of old age, implying that was a period of time in which many of the "geological and astrophysical laws that we currently observe" would have had to be made invalid on a universal scale and then made invalid again around the time of the flood so as to account for the age of the fossil record.

But is that likely? Maybe yes, if one is approaching this from the discipline of apologetics and merely trying to collate evidence that appears to defend their preexisting worldview and discard anything that doesn't; but for anyone else who is open-minded and willing to accept the possibility,

they may need to adjust their worldview based on evidences found. The case made for short time frames is unconvincing.


—Calvin Chan, by website

Response from author

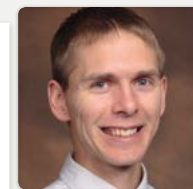
(Edited—for full response, see the article comments at www.MinistryMagazine.org).

Thanks for the thoughtful response to my article. I'm glad that it is logically possible that planet Earth recently came into existence. This logical possibility is also recognized by great thinkers like the logician Bertrand Russell and the analytic Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga as well as the less well-known, non-Christian Australian geologist Justin Payne.

Unfortunately, the notion of plausibility is a decidedly slippery and subjective concept. It depends more on the psychological capacity of a person to grasp various physical possibilities rather than true logical possibility. It also depends significantly on the constraining principles that can be buried deep within their worldview.

There is no objective and universally agreed criterion for what is plausible. What is more rigorous and analytical is the concepts of strict logical possibility and broad logical possibility, but there is no logical contradiction to be found in the proposition that God recently created this world with all of the empirical evidence that it has. 

—Sven Östring



Watchmen on the walls

Since I started pastoring in 2006, I have faced many difficult situations. In my very first district, a young man whose same-sex relationship had recently ended asked me what the Bible says about homosexuality. I have encountered several situations in which heterosexual couples were cohabiting. Once I found myself having to deal with an adulterous situation, in which a married man left his wife and moved in with his girlfriend, who was also married but separated from her husband. What are the pastor and the church to do when confronted by such challenges?

The postmodern person, who also could be a church member, may suggest the pastor and church should do nothing to alert others of the struggles, consequences, or even dangers of our behaviors. Instead, in their opinion, the pastor and church should simply “love” them and let them be. “Live and let live,” some will say. “After all, who are we to judge and cast the first stone?”

But what is a truly loving response in such situations? Before we look to the Bible for the answer, consider a recent tweet posted by someone whose home burned to the ground in the 2018 Camp Fire in California: “To the annoying person who drove through my neighborhood yesterday a.m. honking like a maniac and waking me from a pleasant sleep: Thank you. You saved my life.”¹ The warning sound of that horn, while unsolicited, unwelcomed, and unwanted at the time, saved a life. Likewise, pastors and churches need to lovingly sound the warning so

that people who are spiritually asleep, tangled in the web of sin, can escape the fire that is coming.

What Jesus preached

John the Baptist, Peter, and Jesus Christ Himself all preached the same message: “Repent!”² They called people to turn away from sin and wickedness so that their sins could be forgiven. John, Peter, and Jesus Christ were watchmen on the walls.

What does it mean to be a watchman on the wall? Here is how one Bible dictionary defines the term *watchman*: “A sentinel [protector/lookout] appointed to guard a specified area against predators, thieves, etc., to watch for messengers, and to give the alarm in case enemy forces approach or threaten attack.”³

An Old Testament watchman

The prophet Ezekiel was such a watchman on the wall. God gave him a difficult assignment, that of warning the Israelites, whom He described as a “‘rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me’” (Ezek. 2:3). The Lord even told Ezekiel that the nation would not listen to him, yet still called him to be faithful in giving the message no matter how the people responded (Ezek. 3:7, 11).

What was going on with Israel, and why did God summon Ezekiel to present them with such a solemn warning? Not only had the children of Israel rejected God’s judgments, laws, and divine decrees (Ezek. 5:5–7), they

had even defiled His holy temple with pagan images and practices (Ezek. 5:11). And notice the very emotional terminology God used: “‘I was crushed [other translations say, “broken,” “hurt,” “grieved”] by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols’” (Ezek. 6:9).

Israel’s sin—their adulterous heart—deeply hurt God. The *Andrews Study Bible* comments on this text say that it “expresses God’s grief at being abandoned by His adulterous wife, Israel.”⁴ Unfortunately, it was not the first time Israel had grieved the Lord, as indicated by the psalmist: “How often they provoked Him [“rebelled against Him” NASB] in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert!” (Ps. 78:40).

When Israel sinned, when they rebelled against the Lord, it deeply grieved Him. Today, in the twenty-first century, God still greatly mourns the sins of His people.

Like me, maybe you also know the deep pain that sin inflicts. Perhaps someone sinned against you, causing almost unbearable hurt. Can you relate to God when He says that He was crushed by Israel’s adulterous heart? Sin causes God pain, just as it brings us pain, sorrow, and heartache.

Ezekiel’s message from the Lord, his “Thus says the Lord” proclamation, includes a rebuke for defiling God’s temple with detestable things and practices. Ezekiel 8 describes the “image of jealousy” and other abominations that made God go “far away from [His] sanctuary” (vv. 5, 6). “Various conjectures

*Wanting to save
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watchmen.*

have been made as to the identity of this image, such as, that it represents Baal, Molech, or Astarte. But perhaps ‘image of jealousy’ was not designed as a proper name designating a particular heathen deity, but rather as a descriptive name of an image that provoked the Lord to jealousy. The setting up of a rival god in the place dedicated to the worship of Yahweh would produce such an effect. There may have been heathen idols in the Temple at this time.”⁵

God’s people had desecrated His temple with heathen idols, pushing Him away from His own sanctuary. Previously, He had told Moses to build a sanctuary so that He could dwell among His people.⁶ Hundreds of years later, in Ezekiel’s time, Israel was repulsing Him from His sanctuary. That is what sin does—separates humanity from God.

Then the book of Ezekiel describes the 70 elders as offering incense to the crawling things, abominable beasts, and idols portrayed on the walls all around the sanctuary (Ezek. 8:7–12). The 70 elders were not only offering incense to idols but they had also deceived themselves into thinking that the true God did not even see what they were doing. But they were sadly mistaken, as the Scripture declares: “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

The Lord then told Ezekiel about three “greater abominations” (Ezek. 8:13–17): (1) women weeping for Tammuz (2) men worshiping the sun, and (3) violence filling the land.

Tammuz was a Babylonian vegetation god, whom the ancients believed died every fall and then was resurrected from the dead every spring by another deity. The women of Israel were weeping over the supposed death of Tammuz, a false god. Thus, he was a counterfeit to the Messiah—Jesus—who did die and was really resurrected on the third day.

The book of Ezekiel clearly reveals the great struggle between Christ and Satan. The devil had led Israel away from God and into false worship. God’s people were so deceived and so off course that they were even worshiping the sun. The phrase “they have filled the land with violence” (Ezek. 8:17) is the same as that used in Genesis 6:11 to describe the people who lived before the global Flood destroyed everything on earth.

When God termed Israel as a rebellious nation, He had a good reason for it. Nevertheless, He called Ezekiel to confront the people. To encourage him, three times in Ezekiel 2:6 the Lord instructs him not to be afraid: (1) “‘Do not be afraid of them,’” (2) “‘nor be afraid of their words,’” and (3) “‘do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks.’”

Ezekiel’s challenging task as a watchman was to warn the people for God (Ezek. 3:16–21). “‘Give them warning from Me’” (v. 17). But in doing so, the prophet did not present his own message, but, rather, he presented the one God sent through him. If Ezekiel failed to give the divine warning to the wicked, they would die in their sins, and God would hold him accountable for not delivering it.

On the other hand, if he did present the proper warning message from God and the wicked continued to refuse to repent, they would still die in their sins, but Ezekiel’s hands would be clean—he had obediently given them God’s warning message. That is why the Lord told him to faithfully present the message whether the people listened or not.

Notice that verses 18 and 19 are God’s warning to the *wicked*. Its goal was their salvation. He wanted them to be saved. Then in verses 20 and 21, God directs Ezekiel to warn the *righteous* who might turn away from their righteousness. Verse 21 specifically declares that “the righteous should not sin.”

Watchmen on the walls do not have an easy job. Who likes to be confronted about their sin and told to repent? Yet, it is imperative that we remember that it is a message from the Lord Himself. Ezekiel did not originate it—when he presented the warning, he was obeying God’s specific instruction to do so. Its purpose was to save souls. God’s message to Israel through Ezekiel is one of repentance. “‘Therefore say to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations’ ” ’” (Ezek. 14:6).

John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, Ezekiel, and many others in the Bible preached repentance. God wants people to repent so that their sins can be forgiven and thrown to the bottom of the sea.⁷ He longs for them to repent so that they can live with Him throughout eternity.

Later, God again calls Ezekiel in chapter 33 to be a watchman to warn His people. “‘You [Ezekiel] shall hear a word from My [God’s] mouth and warn them for Me’ ” (v. 7). The Lord makes it clear that He finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked (v. 11). Rather, the whole purpose of the warning messages the watchmen are to give is so that the wicked will turn, turn, turn (that word appears three times in verse 11) away from their sin in genuine repentance. Wanting to save as many people as possible, God commissions the solemn message of warning through His watchmen.

Twenty-first-century watchmen

I have found at least three groups of people whom God calls to be watchmen on the walls today. The first group is ministers—pastors. Ellen White writes, “To every minister the Lord declares: ‘O son of man, I have set thee a watchman

unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at My mouth, and warn them from Me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, . . . thou hast delivered thy soul.’ Ezekiel 33:7–9.”⁸ Pastors are to be watchmen on the walls. Then a few paragraphs later she adds, “It is the privilege of the watchmen on the walls of Zion to live so near to God, and to be 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. Faithfully are they to warn them of the sure result of transgression, and faithfully are they to safeguard the interests of the church. At no time may they relax their vigilance. Theirs is a work requiring the exercise of every faculty of the being. In trumpet tones their voices are to be lifted, and never are they to sound one wavering, uncertain note. Not for wages are they to labor, but because they cannot do otherwise, because they realize that there is a woe upon them if they fail to preach the gospel. Chosen of God, sealed with the blood of consecration, they are to rescue men and women from impending destruction.”⁹

Please do not miss that last line. God calls watchmen to give a warning message in order to “rescue men and women from impending destruction.”

Some might question this biblical teaching, suggesting that it is unloving and judgmental and that we have no right to judge.¹⁰ But the biblical teaching is that God’s watchmen are not presenting their own message. They are delivering His message of warning to people. We must never forget that He wrote the Ten Commandments, and He commissions watchmen to warn those breaking His commandments. And God’s desire through the warning is that people will repent, turn from their evil ways, and let Him rescue them from impending destruction.

Pastors are the first group of watchmen. As a pastor, I desperately need God’s help to be faithful in my duty. It is not easy to present the warning message to people. During the closing scenes of this world’s history, we need faithful watchmen on the walls leading the church—pastors with the courage of John the Baptist, who faithfully warned a powerful king named Herod that it was wrong to have his brother’s wife (Mark 6:18).¹¹

The second group of watchmen are spiritual leaders, including elders, teachers, and school and church administrators. One commentary explains that “in the ancient Orient danger constantly threatened, and it was necessary for watchmen to be ever on the alert. Every spiritual leader is a watchman, whose duty it is to stand guard upon the walls of Zion.”¹² Spiritual leaders in every capacity have the responsibility of being watchmen on the walls.¹³

The third group described as a watchman is the church in general—and fathers and mothers specifically. Ellen White reminds us that “God has appointed the church as a watchman, to have a jealous care over the youth and children, and as a sentinel to see the approach of the enemy and give warning of danger. But the church does not realize the situation. She is sleeping on guard. In this time of peril, fathers and mothers must arouse and work as for life, or many of the youth will be forever lost.”¹⁴

Therefore, Heaven summons the entire church body to be watchmen. The church needs to warn of the danger its members face. With God’s help, the church can wake up—it is no time for sleeping. It has a particular responsibility to care for youth and children. The salvation of many young people depends upon the faithful watchmen of the church, including their own parents. The salvation of close family and friends is especially of concern here. God has commissioned His church to help all to turn from evil and be saved.

As watchmen, let us pray for each other and then work faithfully together to warn people so that they can repent and be saved. As we work together, we can

know that God will work with us because He has given us this assignment. As He said to Ezekiel many times, He also says to us, “Do not be afraid.” God will give us wisdom and strength to do and say what He wants us to—in the right way, at the right time, and with the right spirit. May God enable us all to be faithful watchmen on the walls as we lovingly seek to rescue men, women, and young people from impending destruction. ▮

- 1 Kat Costa, (@wheresthekat), Twitter, November 9, 2018, twitter.com/wheresthekat/status/106106356562553728.
- 2 See Matt. 3:1, 2; 4:17; Acts 2:38. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this article are from the New King James Version (NKJV).
- 3 Siegfried H. Horn, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1979), s.v. “Watchman.”
- 4 Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., comments on Ezekiel 6:9, *Andrews Study Bible*, NKJV (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 1049.
- 5 Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1977), 603.
- 6 See Exod. 25:8.
- 7 See Mic. 7:19.
- 8 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 360, 361.
- 9 White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 361, 362.
- 10 Watchmen are to give the warning message because they truly love people: “True love seeks first the honor of God and the salvation of souls. Those who have this love will not evade the truth to save themselves from the unpleasant results of plain speaking. When souls are in peril, God’s ministers will not consider self, but will speak the word given them to speak, refusing to excuse or palliate evil.” Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), 141, 142.
- 11 “In this fearful time, just before Christ is to come the second time, God’s faithful preachers will have to bear a still more pointed testimony than was borne by John the Baptist. A responsible, important work is before them; and those who speak smooth things, God will not acknowledge as His shepherds. A fearful woe is upon them.” Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 321.
- 12 Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 320, 321.
- 13 “In a special sense presidents of conferences have a decided work to do. Those who stand as sentinels need to be aroused; for they are watchmen, entrusted with the work of sounding the last note of warning to a perishing world. They are to lay hold of the work in earnest, as men entrusted with the giving of the last message of mercy. It is no time now to stand before the people with a tame spiritless message.” Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), 447.
- 14 Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1913), 165.

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Why stand ye gazing?

Picture yourself in the scene in Acts 1:11, approximately 40 days post-Resurrection. Glance at the mist-covered mountains as the sun rises into the blue Jerusalem skies. See the disciples waiting in anticipation. They were expecting something, for with Jesus, there was always something about to happen. But they were not ready for what would take place. It would be the most amazing thing they would ever witness as the Savior would make His way to the splendor of heaven, escorted by attending angels. Acts 1:8 states, “‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ ” (NIV). The Gospel writer Luke, depicting the occasion, indicates that Jesus had given to the disciples both a command and the encouragement of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. The Bible now says that while He spoke to them, suddenly He withdrew from their midst in a cloud.

This astonishing and awe-inspiring occurrence was so stunning that the disciples stood spellbound, “gazing” even after He disappeared from their sight. The word translated “gazing” indicates that it was more than a casual staring. They *intensely fixed their eyes* on the place where they last saw Him. It was then that two men described as wearing white robes appeared and asked the profound and penetrating question, “Why stand ye gazing?” (v. 11, KJV).

Who knows how long these disciples would have continued to stare into the sky if the two beings had not tapped them on their shoulders and asked them the question. How long? We do not know. But what we do know is that this question brings us face-to-face with some compelling realities that challenge us as we seek to share the love of God in these last days. The first reality is *a reminder of our discipleship privilege*.

A reminder

Notice the reference: “Ye men of Galilee” (v. 11, KJV). If we look at this declaration from a geo-sociological standpoint and a genealogical-spiritual perspective, we will recognize why those words warrant our attention.

First, when we analyze the background of the disciples geographically and sociologically, it is very evident that Jesus had really given them a special privilege. He had chosen them from Galilee. Densely populated, the region was one of mixed cultures and races. Because of this, it was sometimes called “Galilee of the nations.”¹

Allen D. Callahan suggests that although Galilee often gets portrayed as a countrified, bucolic territory or a quiet, peaceful backwater, it was actually known for political unrest, banditry, and tax revolts.² Michael White suggests that the term *Galilean* often meant “an outsider, or someone who’s not really an old Jew of the traditional sort. . . . ‘Galilean’ also took on the coloration of being rebellious,

or insurrectionist.”³ So, to be classified by the angels as “ye men of Galilee” in a sense could, as a reminder of their place of origin, help us recognize that the call by Jesus to discipleship was, in fact, an honor. He took them from their simple, unassuming lifestyle and brought them to a place of apostleship. Jesus could have selected individuals from elsewhere, but He picked them. In doing so, He gave them a vision of hope to proclaim to the world. Although Galilee was messed up, Jesus still took them from there. It should remind each of us who have already discovered the way of salvation that it was Jesus who brought us from our own Galilees. We need to be thankful for the privileged commission on our lives.

Second, we find also a genealogical-spiritual identification in the words of the angels. For the disciples, to be called “men of Galilee” was a reminder of a strong and long genealogical and spiritual identification. Historically, Galilee was a part of the territory of Naphtali. The tribe of Naphtali had been allocated territories in the northern part of Canaan.⁴ Known to be skilled with their hands, they were master builders and proud of their heritage.⁵

Somehow this speaks to the particular role of God’s people in the present time with its great spiritual identity crisis. The reminder of their historical identification ought to be a lesson for us. We must keep in focus at all times that our Christian distinctiveness is grounded in a deep theological heritage. This respect for heritage ought not

to lead to worship of tradition. Christian identity and responsibility must never morph into shallow protectionism of traditional liturgical forms or an inflexible, self-preserving interpretation of Scriptures as a way of safeguarding political turf.

With stirring voices, the angels seek to remind us that, as frustrating as it can be at times to function within some church structures; as annoying as it can be to feel confined within outdated models and past-their-prime paradigms, there is still a great work to do in proclaiming a timeless and irreplaceable message. Therefore, “gazing,” as a result of frustration, will not get the job done. We must accept the biblical fact of our identity as part of “a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9, KJV) and get on with our divine mission. “We are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20, KJV).

The second reality is *a refocus on our discipleship mission*.

A refocus

The angels asked the disciples, “Why stand ye gazing?” (Acts 1:11, KJV). The question involves two verbs indicating their negative actions: they were both *standing* and *gazing*. Furthermore, it was not just one person gazing. It is quite obvious that they all were standing there spellbound. The mission, as expressed from the lips of Jesus, was to “Go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). And even if they were to argue that He had instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4), their current posture was not the recommended stance. Their eyes faced the right direction, but their feet were in the wrong position. Now was a time for them to be conscious of themselves as leaders of the “Jesus movement.” No longer to be passive, they must become active. Between the ascending and the descending of the Messiah, between the going and the coming of Jesus, there is a mighty work to do. Said the angels, “Your command was to go to Jerusalem and wait. Your work is witnessing, not watching. So why stand ye gazing?”

In hindsight, we might find logical reasons why gazing would have turned out easier for the disciples. Had they continued to gaze, Matthew would not have suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia. Mark would not have died in Alexandria. Luke would not have been hung in Greece. John would not have faced martyrdom in Ephesus. Peter would not have been crucified upside down. James the Greater would not have been beheaded at Jerusalem. James the Less would not have been thrown from the southeast pinnacle of the temple. Bartholomew would not have been played to death by a whip. Andrew would not have been crucified in Patras. Thomas would not have been stabbed with a spear in India. Jude would not have been killed with arrows. Matthias would not have been stoned and then beheaded. Barnabas would not have been stoned to death at Salonica.⁶ We can avoid much trouble and trial if we only gaze.

But as with the disciples, so it is with us. Their call was not a summons just to gaze. Nor is ours. They gained the eternal victory because they were willing to involve themselves in the earthly fight, in the struggles of God’s children all around us. And because they heeded the words of the angels and went back to Jerusalem and waited for the Spirit, they were empowered. Pentecost came, and three thousand were baptized. The early church formed and took the gospel to the then-known world. And we, too, when we determine to cease gazing and seek the power of the Holy Spirit, will find that there is no limit to the great feats we can accomplish for God.


The final reality is *a reassurance of our discipleship promise*.

A reassurance

This is not a promise made by us, but a promise made to us. Our promises mean little. When a husband says, “I take you to be my lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold till death do us part,” it may make her feel good, but it is not our promises to each other that make the difference, it is God’s promise

to us when He says, “‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Josh. 1:5, NIV). So it is the *angel* who promises, “‘This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:11, NIV).

The fact of His second coming and the manner of it are described unequivocally. Famines, pestilences, and earthquakes will not obliterate Him, political tensions will not overwhelm Him, economic anxieties will not obscure Him, and terroristic threats will not obstruct Him. They simply proclaim the fact, promulgate the inevitable, and publicize the reality that Jesus is coming soon. Trouble won’t last always. Jesus is coming back. He will come personally. He will not send a representative; this same Jesus. He will come literally. He will descend just like He ascended; this same Jesus. He will come definitively. He will so come. He who knew no sin and became sin for us, this same Jesus. He who became flesh and dwelt among us, this same Jesus. He, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, this same Jesus. He is coming. He is coming Himself! He that shall come will come and will not tarry.

So don’t just stand here. Execute the mission. Fulfill your calling. Go and let the world know—Jesus is coming back. 

- 1 Kevin Green, compiler, *Zondervan All-in-One Bible Reference Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 250.
- 2 Allen D. Callahan, “Galilee: The Political Climate of Galilee,” *Frontline: From Jesus to Christ*, April 1998, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/galilee.html.
- 3 L. Michael White, “Galilee: Politics of Galilee,” *Frontline: From Jesus to Christ*, April 1998, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/galilee.html.
- 4 J. D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, and Moisés Silva, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 799, and Richard R. Losch, *All the Places in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Countries, Cities, Villages, and Other Places Mentioned in Scripture* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2013), 385.
- 5 Losch, *All the Places*.
- 6 Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus* (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2015).

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Urban ministry in the book of Daniel: *A Babylonian¹ model*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has long promoted urban ministry in seeking to fulfill God's plan to reach all people for Jesus.² Cliff Jones states, "Contrary to popular belief, the Bible is an urban book that was written in the urban Near East."³ Biblical support for urban ministry may be found even in the unlikely book of Daniel.

Daniel wrote his book in the heart of the great city of Babylon. Babylon was not only a great city but also a powerful dynasty⁴ that was prosperous and secure.⁵ Archaeological finds illustrate how King Nebuchadnezzar had the resources to embellish his kingdom. A German excavation team demonstrated this through its discovery of the Ishtar gate.⁶ In dealing with urban ministry in the book of Daniel, we need to address the following questions: (1) Who will minister to the King Nebuchadnezzar thought leaders of our day? (2) Who will speak for God to the teeming millions of contemporary Babylon city dwellers? (3) How successful can urban ministry in Babylon really be? (4) Can principles from yesterday's Babylonian city apply to urban mission in these last days?

What God needed then

During Nebuchadnezzar's first trip (605 B.C.)⁷ to besiege Jerusalem, Babylon's ruler brought the *best* people he found back to Babylon. Daniel records, "Then the king commanded

Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance [תְּאֵרִם יְבוֹסִין] and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (Daniel 1:3, 4).⁹ Here Nebuchadnezzar instructed Ashpenaz to select the best for his kingdom. He chose young people from among the royal and noble families. They were to be physically without blemish and good looking, excelling mentally, and able to learn for the benefit of the king and his kingdom. In addition, Nebuchadnezzar took into account social status. Those "chosen were the most likely to be natural leaders, *from the royal family and the nobility*, and had already demonstrated intellectual prowess."¹⁰

The king regarded such qualifications as important for the success of his kingdom. "These captives were choice young men both physically and mentally and as such, they could be an asset to the king's palace."¹¹ In the eyes of the king and possibly those surrounding him, the royal court needed people of superior physical and mental abilities. Physical appearance, social status, and mental qualifications mattered; contemporary thought leaders desire no less.

We should note that the king was concerned about more than just the

secular success of his kingdom. He planned to have them reeducated "intellectually and treated royally. Several aims were in view, e.g. religious re-programming (language, literature, and diet all carried religious as well as cultural meanings) and a 'brain-drain,' which would simultaneously weaken the prospect of a capable future leadership among the Israelites and potentially strengthen Babylonian society when the process was completed (5b)."¹² He developed a curriculum to train and equip his recruits. Daniel and his friends went through a special program for three years before the king evaluated them. So in both secular and religious matters, Nebuchadnezzar regarded education as vital.

What God needs now

Daniel and his friends demonstrated what it means to be urban ministers.¹³ They first modeled *integrity*. Through their uncompromising determination to stand for God, even to the point of death, they reached through to the heart of the king and that of his kingdom.

Not only did Nebuchadnezzar change Daniel and his friends' names but he also put them on a royal Babylonian diet. While Scripture does not indicate that they rejected their new Babylonian names,¹⁴ they did resist the imposed diet. "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that

he drank” (Dan. 1:8). Their reasons for avoiding the diet assigned them were motivated by biblical opposition to (1) unclean food, (2) meat offered to idols,¹⁵ and (3) strong drink.¹⁶

Those working in urban areas must always be aware of what they can or cannot do, recognizing the things that they have control over and those that they do not. In the process, they need to “interact with the surrounding culture, yet they must also know when it is time to stand against it.”¹⁷ Daniel and his friends did not compromise their faith but, rather, stood for what they knew was right. Such a stance is crucial to working in urban areas. Never did Daniel and his friends compromise their faith or truth as they sought to reach the people in their particular urban ministry. Urban ministers can either shine or shrink. The city or urban areas need men and women determined to honor God as they proclaim the name of God by their words and deeds.

Second, they modeled *commitment*. The narrative of the golden image and Daniel and his friends’ faithfulness to God is a popular one. Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abed-Nego) stood firm while the “the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces” (Dan. 3:2, 7) fell down and worshiped the golden image. They did not let the presence of influential people sway them. God, who looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7), can work through those who remain true to His name. Daniel would display the same commitment to God in chapter 6.

Thus, both Daniel and his friends suffered persecution because of their faithfulness to God. They would rather die than dishonor him. Lifestyle evangelism characterized the urban ministry of this small group in the huge kingdom of Babylon.

Third, they modeled *faithfulness*. When Daniel and his friends faced a life-threatening situation because of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, one that nobody could interpret, this small

In Babylon, these ancient urban ministers or workers not only committed themselves to live the Word of God but also preached it without hesitation.

group of young urban workers reached out to the Lord in prayer (Dan. 2:17, 18). They sought Him for the solution to their dilemma. He answered their prayers and blessed them.

Urban workers need to depend on God. They need to consult Him first and foremost. God has demonstrated over and over that He is a prayer-hearing God, ready to guide His children as they labor for His cause.

Finally, Daniel, as an urban worker, exemplified *humility*. He did not take the credit due to God when he was brought to the king. Instead, he explained to Nebuchadnezzar, “‘There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. . . . But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind’” (Dan. 2:28–30). When urban workers take the credit belonging to God, pride will replace the humility in their hearts. And pride always leads to a fall. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18).

Uncommon submission, unexpected surrender

What was the outcome of the urban ministry of Daniel and his friends? Daniel 4 records Nebuchadnezzar’s final and thorough conversion.¹⁸ God did His best to reach the king through the second dream, and He was successful. In the end, the king glorified the God of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. He recognized the Lord

as the King of kings. Nebuchadnezzar also came to consider himself as nothing. On the other hand, in Daniel 5, the chiasmic and thematic parallel of Daniel 4, indicates that Belshazzar hardened his heart despite the fact that he knew what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar.

In Babylon, these ancient urban ministers or workers not only committed themselves to live the Word of God but also preached it without hesitation. As a result, the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar can be traced back to the godly lives that they exemplified, the messages they preached, and the strong call of God through dreams. In doing urban evangelism, the physical, mental, social, and spiritual qualifications (including but not limited to humility, love, trust, and integrity) of workers are as needed today as during Daniel’s time.

Conclusion

Daniel and his friends demonstrated how to be successful urban ministers in the great city of Babylon. They (1) promoted mental health, (2) exemplified physical health, (3) modeled spiritual health, (4) promoted integrity, and (5) elevated commitment.

God declared to “the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon”. . . “‘Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare’” (Jer. 29:1–7). This ancient method serves as a contemporary model for urban ministry in these last days. ❏

Seven principles of urban ministry in Daniel 1–7

There are seven principles pastors may embrace as we seek to reach people in cities:

1. *Excellence.* Although God looks on the heart and not on the appearance, in the eyes of the people in the cities, excellence in physical, social, and mental qualifications are just as important for God's leaders today as in the days of Daniel and the king of Babylon.

2. *Spiritual fitness.* Spiritual fitness (including humility, love, trust, and integrity) is crucial in reaching cities for Jesus. Urban workers should be men and women of God and of His Word. Chongo Aum acknowledges that “a different approach is required to reach these people for Christ than to reach those in rural areas.”¹⁹ Craig W. Ellison argues that “urban ministry is usually not comfortable or convenient.

It requires the best of God's people. It demands a sustained, personal walk with Christ, and a willingness to take risks and to live with uncertainty, to confront evil and its destructive influence in the lives of people and to incarnate the good news.”²⁰

3. *Relevance.* Urban ministries must have a message to proclaim. Daniel preached the prophecies of the end time, something still relevant today. People who live in the cities need to know what is ahead and that God is preparing a better world than they have today.

4. *Training.* People who are called to work in the cities need training that involves strong mentors and success models, combined with faith and courage.

5. *Incarnation.* Urban workers need to “interact with the surrounding

culture, yet they must also know when it is time to stand against it.”²¹ Chong Aum states, “Spiritual decay is observed not only in the inner-city areas but also in all aspects of urban life. The city is not necessarily synonymous with evil, drugs, and a culture gone mad with sex; but these are found in an urban setting far more than in rural areas.”²²

6. *Commitment.* To ensure the success of urban ministry, urban workers must commit not only their time and talents but their lives as well. Daniel spent his life in Babylon from his youth to his old age.

7. *Togetherness.* Small groups of committed urban workers have an advantage compared to individuals working alone. Such small groups have been found to be one of the more effective strategies to evangelize cities.

1 I used the word *Babylonian* to refer to the place or context of Daniel 1–7, not to its negative scriptural sense. This article defines Babylon as “the city on the river Euphrates (80 km. S. of modern Baghdad, Iraq) which became the political and religious capital of Babylonia and of the empire and civilization based upon it.” See D. J. Wiseman, “Babylon,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., ed. D. R. W. Wood (Westgrove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 110–112.

2 The concept of “urban” was rare before the nineteenth century. The *Oxford Universal Dictionary*, 1933, regarded it as pertaining to or characteristic of, situated or occurring in, a city or town; exercising authority, control, etc., in or over a city or town (1651). Others defined it as “a geographical area characterized by a high population density and a multiplicity of interconnected social systems such as transportation, food, communications, education, energy production and distribution, commerce, law enforcement, and others.” See Edgar J. Elliston and J. Timothy Kauffman, *Developing Leaders for Urban Ministries* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2000), 4.

3 R. Clifford Jones, “Toward a Theological Basis for Urban Ministry,” *Ministry*, May 2004, 12.

4 David S. Vanderhooft, “Babylonia and the Babylonians,” in *The World Around the Old Testament: The People and Places of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids, MI:

Baker Academic, 2016), 126.

5 Vanderhooft, “Babylonia and the Babylonians,” 127.

6 “The Ishtar Gate itself was likewise gilded with glazed tiles forming images of composite dragons (called *mushussus*) and bulls, numbering at least 575, according to the German excavation team. The technicolor effect of these artistic flourishes, the remarkable azure-blue and bright gold glazed bricks, and their immense scale and number were practically unprecedented and must have a tremendous impression on residents and visitors alike.” See Vanderhooft, “Babylonia and the Babylonians,” 130, 131.

7 Gerhard Pfandl, *Daniel: The Seer of Babylon* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 14.

8 This combination also appeared in Esther 2:7 (הַבִּיטִּי הָאֶרֶץ, although this time, it is in feminine form, referring to Esther. Joseph is described as רֵאִתִּי-הָאֶרֶץ in Genesis 39:6. They were urban workers in Persia and Egypt respectively. See Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.

9 All Scripture quotation are from the English Standard Version.

10 Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Daniel*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., *New Bible Commentary*: 21st century ed., Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 748.

11 J. Dwight Pentecost, *Daniel*, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck,

Accordance electronic ed. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1:1330.

12 Ferguson, *Daniel*, 748.

13 Sung Ik Kim called Daniel “a cross-cultural missionary in a heathen kingdom throughout his whole life.” See Sung Ik Kim, “Proclamation in Cross-Cultural Context: Missiological Implications of the Book of Daniel” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2005), 13. However, in this paper, I will refer to Daniel and his friends as “urban ministers or workers.”

14 Pfandl explains, “Daniel and his three friends could not change what others called them.” See Pfandl, *Daniel*, 16.

15 Pfandl, *Daniel*, 16, 17. See also Proverbs 20:1 and Isaiah 5:11.

16 Pentecost, *Daniel*, 1:1330.

17 Pfandl, *Daniel*, 19.

18 “Nebuchadnezzar Thoroughly Converted” (*Daniel* 4:37), *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. Francis D. Nichol, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1976), 1170.

19 Chongo Aum, “The Cell Church Model as a Viable Approach for Urban Church Planting” (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 15.

20 Craig Ellison, *The Urban Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 15.

21 Pfandl, *Daniel*, 19.

22 Aum, “Cell Church Model,” 19.

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Prophetic appeals

Biblical prophets called. They made appeals. “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:14).¹ There is no less of a need for such persuasive appeals in the last days of the earth’s history than there was in the days of ancient Israel or even before.

Prophetic preaching and the appeal

Prophetic preaching brings a strong persuasive element into the appeal. As pointed out by Charles E. Bradford, quoting Karl E. Braaten, “The future in secular futurology is *reached* by process of the world’s *becoming*. The future in Christian eschatology *arrives* by the *coming* of God’s kingdom. The one is a *becoming*, the other a *coming*.”² Without the church having a belief in the coming of God’s kingdom, preaching appeals would be senseless.

The challenge, that of prophetically preaching and offering persuasive appeals, grasps the promise of authority given by Christ in Matthew 28:18: “‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’” Hyveth Williams shared the definition and the results of prophetic preaching: “Rather than to simply inform, prophetic preaching aims to redeem and transform, to bring people back to a saving relationship with God. . . . That is why prophetic preaching has a sense of urgency.”³ Prophetic preaching must, as Williams states, “shout out with authority and spring into action no matter what the

personal cost might be. . . . The time has come for us to reclaim the gift of prophetic preaching. We need to step forward into the marketplace and declare, ‘Thus saith the Lord’ so that people will once again stop in their tracks and listen to what we have to say. Then they will have no option but to respond to the One who called us to declare righteousness and speak boldly against sin.”⁴

Appeals in Genesis

In Genesis 2 and 4, God Himself gave the first persuasive appeals. These appeals to Adam and Eve present them with a choice between right and wrong. They warned of the consequences of choosing wrongly. The appeal is given as a divine signpost at a critical intersection in human activity. Appeals show the way to avoid the certain disaster of a wrong decision.

The first appeal found in Scripture is recorded in Genesis 2:16, 17: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” The first element of this appeal is truth, directly set forth. Adam and Eve were allowed to eat of all the trees of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The appeal clearly defined the consequences.

God intervened with another appeal, in Genesis 4:6, 7. Initiating a conversation with the recalcitrant Cain,

God gave him a warning to prevent further rebellion. God confronted him with two directions and their corresponding consequences. “So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’”

The promise was given that right decisions would bring acceptance from God and victory over sin.

The next appeal, in Genesis 17 and 18, is set in an extended narrative regarding a promised heir for Abraham and Sarah. This incident includes the patriarch’s own persuasive appeal to God on behalf of Sodom. The narrative includes a conversation between God and man. Questions and answers were part of working through the appeal process. This account helps us understand how God teaches and how He brings people into harmony with His will. In responding to Abraham’s appeal, God taught Abraham how to intercede for Sodom.

Genesis 19 is a direct and anxious appeal from two angels who appeared with the Lord when they came to Abraham’s tents (Gen. 18). This chapter links the role of Abraham’s prayers and appeals to God with the role of the angels who were sent to Lot. It is clear that effective appeals are associated with much prayer.

With full disclosure, the Lord sought to win as many as possible from destruction. The only escape for Lot and his family was to get out. “‘Take

them out of this place' " (Gen. 19:12). " 'Get up, get out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city!' . . . 'Escape for your life! Do not look behind you' " (vv. 14, 17). Biblical precedent gives us appeals as earnest and impassioned as the gravity of the case demands.

The appeal of John the Baptist

All through the New Testament, too, powerful appeals are made. John the Baptist's appeals, for instance, present a straightforward call: " 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' " (Matt. 3:2). A new direction is neces-

floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire' " (v. 12). The Jewish leaders had come to the conclusion that this was said directly concerning them. The appeal was so direct as to startle. God expects His messengers to craft an argument that confronts and disturbs as necessary.

The appeals of Peter

The sermon presented in Acts 2 by the apostle Peter was given in the power of the Spirit of God. That sermon preached on Pentecost was the means the Spirit used to bring conviction. No

came to be about five thousand." Preaching the Word led to belief and then decisions for the growing New Testament church. "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42). The preaching of prophetic appeals was driving the growth of the church.

The appeals of Paul

Though his writings are suffused with appeals, here we will focus on one case: Paul before Governor Festus, King Agrippa, and Queen Bernice in Acts 26, where he employed the persuasion of

Evidence indicates that God counts an appeal as a success if we give His appeal from the heart, not by how many accept the invitation.

sary because a whole new order of government is near. John was direct and bold. His theology was not a choice among several acceptable alternatives. As a student of the prophets, John was convinced that the Messiah would soon appear.

John's "brood of vipers" language in Matthew 3:7 caught people's attention and showed the need for repentance, even among the religious classes. The message was clear: they would be judged according to their works.

The descriptive address continues as the prophet warns, " 'Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire' " (v. 10). John's enemies classified his speech as a threat. Consider his reference to the coming Messiah when he admonished, " 'His winnowing fan is in his hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing

preacher can do this in human power alone.

Note Peter's appeal to the fulfilling of the Joel 2 prophecy. He also cited Psalm 16. The apostle showed himself to be a biblical prophetic preacher. He opened his splendid defense of the gospel biblically. This is true prophetic preaching. The context for all was his central focus on Jesus as the Christ. The Spirit then brought the message home to the heart of the listener.

We see a strong confrontational appeal from Peter in the next chapter (Acts 3:12–26). Two major foci are seen in this presentation: Jesus as Messiah, the central focus, and the Bible, the authority for such a belief. This became the divine template for all the preachers of the New Testament.

The appeals of Peter were biblically based. Acts 4:4 makes this evident: "Many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men

personal testimony. Theological reflection must include a personal appeal. The hearer must understand that what we preach has changed our own lives. This brings the audience to the moment of decision. People are compelled to choose. Real appeals do not offer a middle route as a satisfactory response.

Powerless preaching was not Paul's problem. He was bold. His words bore the impression of personal conviction. He showed that God was calling all, both Jew and Greek, " 'to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God' " (Acts 26:18). Two extreme opposites are cited. No compromise is deemed acceptable. The listeners understood that.

Paul used the strong word *repent* to persuade. The phrase in which he used the word includes "turn to God" (Acts 26:20). It is impossible to persuade without a call to repentance.

Festus concluded that Paul was mad. It is important to remember that even Paul did not always meet with success. This is the most extensive account of a direct appeal given by the apostle. Despite Festus's comment, the audience did respond positively. Evidence indicates that God counts an appeal as a success if we give His appeal from the heart, not by how many accept the invitation.

Not discouraged, Paul called upon the king to make his decision. "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things. . . . King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Agrippa's response indicates that the appeal of Paul reached him: "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:25–28).

Paul was ready with one last argument in favor of Christ and invited all to make a decision that day. You can sense the pathos in the voice of the apostle as he eloquently concluded, "I would to God that not only you, but all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains" (Acts 26:29).

In spite of his bondage, Paul was declaring himself to be the one free. That a prisoner would have anything to offer a king seems unreasonable, but, in the gospel context, it is true. We should not hesitate to give an appeal, fearing that we have nothing to offer. If Paul, while bound in chains, had something of value to offer a king, we have no excuse.

Paul also realized that "today" was the most important day to give his appeal. Writing to the church at Corinth, he said, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). He desires preachers to be the type of ambassador for Christ through whom God Himself can appeal.

The appeals of Jesus

The first appeal given by our Lord was the invitation to become His followers. "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). He went to where Simon and Andrew were "casting a net into the sea" (v. 18) and spoke the language of the fishermen. Jesus was the initiator of the appeal. He created a bigger and more satisfying vision for their future.

As givers of evangelistic appeals, pastors are initiators, but we must know firsthand the experience of what we are calling people to. The appeal is given out of our experience with the Giver. Appeals by their very nature are calls; they are to be given to persuade the hearers to make decisions. They invite a response (Matt. 4:21, 22). The gospel is not truly given if the hearer is not called upon to decide, to change in response to the good news presented.

In His parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23), Jesus emphasized that the good seed is meant to grow in the life of the believer. The good seed is "the word of the kingdom" (v. 18). "The living and speaking God of Scripture has chosen to reveal Himself through the Word. God has seen it fit to commit His spoken word through the biblical authors to the medium of writing, thus generating the Bible, the Written Word of God. It seems that one has to believe Scripture before one can believe the Christ of Scripture. . . . Jesus Himself turned to Scripture to make Himself known. . . ."

"Jesus Himself repeatedly referred to Scripture as the authoritative norm for faith and practice."⁵

It is common in the synoptic Gospels for the appeals of Jesus to be given with a prophetic focus, as seen in the following paragraphs. The goal of meeting the needs of people in the context of prophecy is fulfilled. Following His wilderness experience, Christ went to Nazareth. Luke records His appeal using the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;

He has sent Me to heal the
brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are
oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of
the LORD"
(Luke 4:18, 19, quoted from Isa.
61:1, 2).⁶

Prophetic preaching enhances and empowers the appeal to make things right with God and others. Williams speaks to this: "Prophetic preachers need to speak clearly and powerfully about where we have gone wrong, personally, and then show how to get back on track with God both individually and corporately. . . ."

"The prophetic preacher needs to carefully examine the present cultural, social, or religious situation and then put that situation into a theological and biblical perspective."⁷

The physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are met in the message of prophetic preaching. Prophecy comes into clearer focus, for new life is evident. The persuasive power inherent in the changed life of the speaker has transforming power. This is the power of the Spirit that preachers need in their proclamation and appeals today.

The appeals of Jesus brought conviction. The Spirit of God spoke through His life and words. In the context of prophetic preaching, Jesus demonstrated the complete range of persuasive appeals. He asked people to get ready. "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. . . ."

"Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes" (Luke 12:40, 43).

Christ emphasized that He had come to bring division (v. 51). His ministry could be complete only if it called for a decision—for or against Him. The Savior chastised the multitude when He said, "Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?" (v. 56). When Christ was blunt with His

words, He demonstrated that He was an advocate for the downtrodden. The style of Christ's prophetic preaching must become our own if we are to persuade.

Perhaps the best known of Christ's appeals, found in Matthew 11:28, will help us sense His style: "Come," He said. "'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' " Everyone who labors to do right apart from Jesus fails to achieve the desired results. It is all senseless, wearisome labor. It is a heavy burden. Prophetic preaching invites people to come to Jesus Christ and find rest for their burdens.

The next appeal is to "take": "'Take My yoke upon you,' " He said, to "'learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.' " Here He told the hearer that we have a sympathizing, compassionate, understanding Savior. Again, rest to the soul is guaranteed, " 'for,' " He said,

" 'My yoke is easy and My burden is light' " (vv. 29, 30).

In exchange for hard labor and heavy burdens that we are unable to bear, Christ offers His yoke—a yoke that completely satisfies the soul. Christ is seen here as the Master of the positive appeal. Many appeals miss the mark because they are not winsome. Couching appeals in negative connotations will not likely bring winsome results.

Finish the task

The appeal, in whatever immediate context, should give the hearers an understanding of their true condition before God. It should contain the remedy, too—returning to God alone. The warning against rejection should be given as well.

The gospel is an open sharing of pain, but the gospel is also a plan for its healing and a plea for reconciliation. Without the appeal to come, return, and

repent, no gospel message is complete, whether being preached in the Garden of Eden or in the last days before the return of Christ. ❏

- 1 All scripture references in this article are from the New King James Version (NKJV).
- 2 Charles E. Bradford, *Preaching to the Times: The Preaching Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1975).
- 3 Quoted in Derek Morris, "Prophetic Preaching: An Interview with Hyveth Williams," *Ministry*, July 2011, 7.
- 4 Morris, "Prophetic Preaching," 8, 9. See also C. Raymond Holmes, *The Last Word: An Eschatological Theology of Preaching* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987).
- 5 Frank M. Hasel, "Christ-Centered Hermeneutics: Prospects and Challenges for Adventist Biblical Interpretation" *Ministry*, December 2012, 7.
- 6 See also Paul Z. Gregor, "Practical Spirituality in Isaiah 1:10–20," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, no. 1 (2011): 16–27.
- 7 Morris, "Prophetic Preaching," 7, 8. See also Carlyle B. Haynes, *The Divine Art of Preaching* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1939).

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Fruitful laity: The church's razor's edge

Revival & REFORMATION

Adeola¹ inspires me. Frankly, it is odd for me, a missionary, to say that about a process engineer working for an international chemical firm, but it is true. I have recently realized that fruitful laity is the razor's edge of the church.

We met just once—at the 2015 General Conference session in Texas. I was passing out fliers about GoTential (Adventist Frontier Missions' tentmaker ministry),² and this African woman walked quickly past my booth. I interrupted her flow as I held out a pamphlet, saying, "I am teaching professionals how to witness in their workplace." She stopped, turned, and listened with a sincere curiosity that showed I had struck a nerve. She began to ask questions about exactly what we were offering. She requested our coaching and gave me her contact information.

At that moment, I did not realize that I had found live dynamite. I discovered that she was from Central Africa, was university educated, and spoke several languages. She and a group of other professionals had decided to use their educational specialties to form an evangelism strategy to reach unreached people in their own country. If that is not a big enough goal, their aim is to "change the continent of Africa by instilling a missionary volunteer spirit in every African Seventh-day Adventist young adult, to create missionary movements across Africa."

Adeola lives in France and works at the corporate headquarters of an international chemical firm. Upon clocking out, she returns to her apartment each evening to use her skills as a process strategist to organize and structure the team of lay professionals working as Tentmakers back in Africa.

I set up a time for coaching with Adeola by Skype. Introverted but ambitious, she began trying to witness in Paris by putting tracts under people's

doors. Parisians are, in many ways, an "unreached" people group and seemed nearly unreachable to Adeola.

It was her boss who first opened up and asked whether she would consider being the godmother of his daughter. It was a great honor and one that told much of shy Adeola's spiritual aura. The daughter was being baptized into the Catholic Church, and Adeola didn't know how to capitalize on spiritual opportunities such as these. She had only been trained in giving Bible studies in the traditional sense. What could she say, and how should she say it?

At that moment, I did not realize that I had found live dynamite.

Working with someone so gifted and involved reminded me that we all have blind spots based on the context of our own conversion, gaps in our discipleship mentoring, and limits based on our personality.

Over many sessions, I trained Adeola how to ask questions, how to listen, and how to build spiritual conversations. I coached her through issues related to working in the French context. I counseled her through some of her personal struggles of living in such a spiritually dry place after coming from high-energy, spiritual Africa.

The coach, or mentor, relationship with Adeola has been rewarding for me as I have seen her succeed and heard her say over and over again, "Thank you! You have been a great help to me." I pass on that thanks to those who support our ministry.

I mentored Adeola, but I have also learned from her. I was deeply inspired

by the thousands of prayers being sent up night and day as the movement fasted, asking for "more of the Spirit to arrest their full attention."

Adeola's giftedness in strategic planning has also made me realize how effective our local conferences could be if we were better able to apply the knowledge used by the professionals in our membership in their secular jobs to the advancement of God's work. Finance, marketing, communication,

and business savvy—how can we tap into the gifts and education that these members use on a daily basis?

I wish you could hear the raw enthusiasm pressed through Adeola's French accent! She talks of billboard campaigns and radio work, evangelistic meetings and follow-up teams, strategic prayer schedules, Bible worker coordination, and inner-city mission planning committees. There is a gospel-work universe in her mind that is rapidly unfolding into a reality she has helped to orchestrate. Yes, Adeola—an engineer by day and a global gospel minister by night. That's a real Tentmaker. ▮

— **B. W. Parks** is the Tentmaker director for Adventist Frontier Missions.

¹ Adeola is not her real name.

² For more information on this program, visit the GoTential website at gotential.org.

Introduction to Adventist Mission

by Gorden R. Doss, Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2018.

Gorden Doss's book holds the most extensive, inspiring, and deeply challenging study of Adventist mission—past, present, and future—of which I am aware. Anyone interested in any missionary service should spend time reading and studying it. Most mission publications tend to focus more narrowly on specific aspects of the great missionary movement. In contrast, this presents a holistic picture of the Adventist worldwide missionary movement in which practically every aspect is covered.

The introductory chapter presents a picture of the Adventist denomination, including a brief survey of its beginnings, growth, and two of our greatest contemporary challenges. It commences with a strong sense of the revelation in Scripture and, through the Holy Spirit, of God's mission to save people and the commitment of the Adventist Church to fulfill these responsibilities. It continues with a description of the two greatest strategical challenges facing the world church: "(1) to maintain and enhance a strong sense of mission in the Americas and elsewhere, and (2) to give added priority to people groups who have been less receptive and where Adventist membership is comparatively small" (13).

It continues with four chapters on the biblical/theological basis of missions, in which the Bible is described as a "grand narrative of God's Mission." The next two chapters uphold God as the Source of mission, outline the fundamentals of a Trinitarian theology that glorifies the image of God, and describe the fundamentals of an Adventist theology of mission.

There are two chapters on the history of Adventist missions. The first provides a general overview covering the early stages in the

development of Adventist missiological thought and practice in the context of colonial developments and missions in the wider world. Attention is also paid to the social issues encountered and the religious thought and practice of the receiving communities.

Having provided an overview of Adventist historical missional development, Doss divides it into five successive phases: The shut-door era 1844–1852; a partially open door 1852–1874; the expanding vision eras 1874–1901; mission to all the world 1901–1960s; and postcolonial mission 1960s–1990.

Analytical consideration is given to the difficulties, opportunities, challenges, and mission achievements in each of the five phases culminating in a thought-provoking consideration of possible mission approaches and opportunities in the contemporary least-evangelized societies. Having evoked serious thought on the phases of Adventist mission, which culminates in an extremely thought-provoking consideration of contemporary missiological challenges, the chapter is closed with a case study of Adventist missions in Malawi, where the church is becoming an active missionary agency.

Doss moves on to a series of more directly practical studies. Chapter 9 covers the usefulness of cultural anthropology in providing an understanding of the religion, ways of thinking, and

patterns of life in the community to be served. It provides a very useful introduction to basic, or fundamental, missionary needs to establish an effective relationship with members of local cultures.

This is followed by two chapters, "Worldview and Mission" and "Culture and Contextualization." The Christian worldview lies at the center of the missionary driving force and commission and provides the intellectual and spiritual vision that transforms the lives of new believers. "At the heart of the missiological task is the call to bring the light of the Gospel to bear upon the deepest cultural presuppositions so that they can be transformed" (195).

The author describes worldview as the deep part of religion and culture and provides three definitions followed by about a dozen significant features relating to the functions and significance of worldview: "a worldview provides emotional security in vulnerable times" (203).

The chapter on culture and contextualization concentrates on the great missionary challenge of providing guidance in the transformation of traditional culture to shape lives and personal thought into patterns in harmony with the gospel. Five steps are outlined in the deeply spiritual and social process of "faithful contextualization" to guide missionaries involved in the deeply spiritual and cultural transformation process.

The following chapter, "The Global Context of World Mission," provides considerable information regarding the general shape of world Christianity, world missions, and the great world religions, which is fundamental to planning mission strategies. The section providing information on patterns of increasing





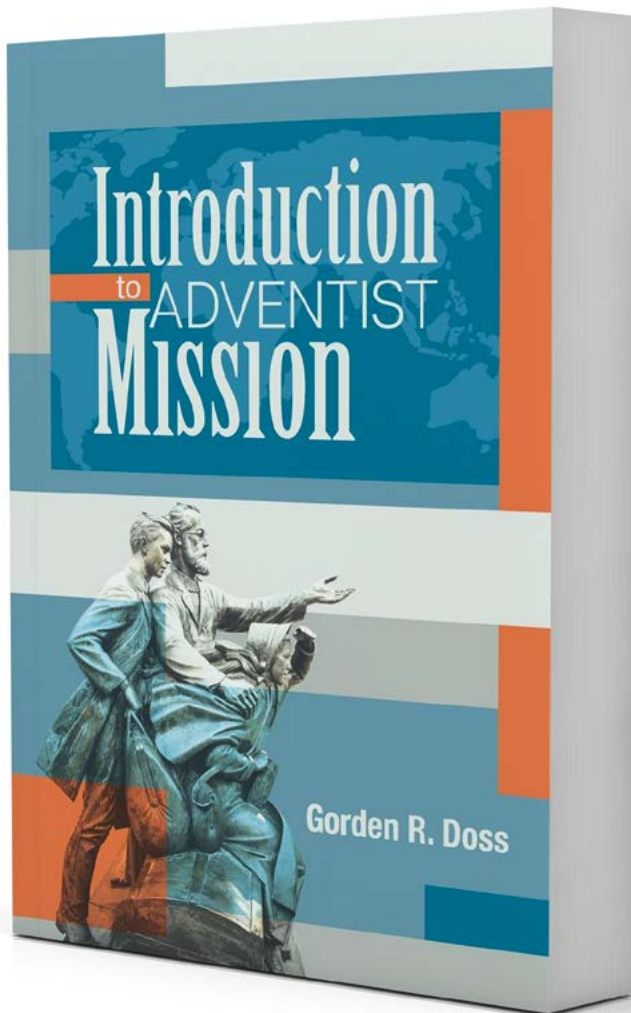
human migration promotes serious thought regarding new opportunities for mission.

Chapters 12 and 13 deal with practical matters relating to mission strategy. Chapter 14, “A Model for Strategic Adventist Mission,” is thoughtful and

given to the possibilities of missionary approaches to the three largest non-Christian religions: Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It concludes with a section on mission to animists.

The study comes to an end with a thought-provoking chapter on the modes of mission service in contemporary Adventist missions. It commences with a consideration of the

understanding of mission is built on the whole biblical narrative. (3) Adventist mission is Trinitarian: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit empower missions. (4) Adventist mission is strongly eschatological. (5) Adventist mission is guided by the process of faithful contextualization. (6) Adventist mission is largely a Christian to Christian endeavor—it adds a finishing truth to fellow Christians. (7) Adventist mission needs to be more



This is a very significant and thought-provoking study. Its 18 chapters, 350 pages, and 56 tables and figures provide rich information and leave little unattended.

challenging. It deals with many issues and challenges in the fulfillment of the great missionary vision. It concludes, “Humanly speaking, the most challenging days of Adventist mission are ahead as it contemplates addressing the most daunting strategic missional challenges” (283). Consideration is then

decline in long-term mission service and moves on to the matter of preparatory missionary education by means of the Institute of World Mission. Finally, six missionary trends and needs are outlined with detailed suggestions regarding the functions, support, and possibilities for short-term missionaries.

A one-page conclusion listing seven particular issues completes the study: (1) God’s mission to lost humanity is the greatest story ever told. (2) Adventists are canonical Christians rather than only New Testament Christians. Our

strategic in directing more resources to the least evangelized world regions.

This is a very significant and thought-provoking study. Its 18 chapters, 350 pages, and 56 tables and figures provide rich information and leave little unattended. All I miss within the book is a general index. It is informative; it is thought-provoking; and it is inspiring. ▣

—Reviewed by Russell Staples, PhD, emeritus professor of world mission, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

The original version of this book review will be published in *College and University Dialogue* 31:1 (2019). Used by permission.

► Floating church baptizes over 200 people in Brazil's Amazon

Amazon River, Brazil—**Raimundo Andrade**, 66, is a farmer who lives in Itapuru, some 143 miles (230 kilometers) from Manaus, Brazil. Andrade was among the people attending a meeting at the “Floating Church” vessel in Itapuru, an Amazon coastal community that can be reached only through the nearby Purús River.

For years, Andrade worked hard and made his best effort to provide for his family, he said. In his heart, however, he felt something was missing—he felt empty and distressed. When the mission boat arrived in Itapuru, leaders invited Andrade and his wife, **Eumarina**, to attend meetings on the vessel. The couple also began to watch an evangelistic series.

After going through Bible studies, Andrade concluded that he had found what he had been missing. But he did not keep his new knowledge to himself—he invited his children to attend the meetings. Soon the whole family began attending.

On December 20, 2018, Adventist leaders in northwest Brazil attended the inauguration of yet another new Adventist church that resulted from the Floating Church outreach. As part of the ceremony, Andrade, his wife, and their family—20 people in total—gave public witness of their commitment to Jesus through baptism.

“Today our lives have changed,” Andrade said after the ceremony. “I feel lighter. I have peace, and I am happy because my family also accepted Christ.”

Also attending the baptismal ceremony were young people taking part in the One Year in Mission program. Throughout 2018, a group of 24 young people provided support and helped serve the communities visited by the Floating Church.

The Floating Church worked in ten riverside communities and planted five churches along the north and mid-west region of the Amazon. The work resulted in more than 200 baptisms.

Pastor Reno Guerra and his wife, **Natália**, the missionary couple at the helm of the project, said they feel very grateful for all that God has done through the vessel. “Despite the significant challenges involved, God has blessed the work very much,” Guerra said. “It is rewarding to see people making decisions for Jesus.”

Guerra shared that in 2018, boat personnel made more than two



Photo: Andrew McCreaney, Adventist Mission

thousand medical visits. With the support of ADRA Brazil, Amazonas Region, and volunteer professionals, they also organized health fairs to teach coastal community residents how to take care of their health.

Throughout the year, Guerra said, they were able to see God’s hand at work. “We have nothing but gratitude for God’s care and mercies,” he said. [Priscila Baracho with Alex Simões, South American Division and *Adventist Review*]

► Year-end meetings focus on discipleship

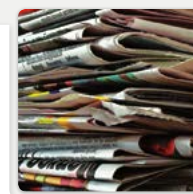
Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia—More than 70 people from nine countries in the South Pacific Division (SPD) gathered at Avondale College, November 14 and 15, 2018. The year-end meetings featured reports from each of the unions and institutions across the Pacific. The meetings also had a focus on mission, discipleship, and respectful discussion.

The SPD’s Discipleship Ministries Team (DMT) reported a keen interest in the past 12 months among church members for disciple-making resources, especially books printed by Signs Publishing: 5,000 copies of *Mission Shift*, 16,000 copies of *Following Jesus*, 7,000 copies of *Following the Spirit*, and 10,000 copies of *If You Can Eat, You Can Make Disciples* have been ordered.

On top of that, 3,000 orders have already been received for the French translation of *Following Jesus*, which has only just been launched.

The DMT team also launched *The Tuis*, an animated children’s DVD series that takes families through the 28 fundamental beliefs.

Dr. Leigh Rice, director of the discipleship cluster, said, “Discipleship



informs all other activities—our strategy is disciple-making, maximizing health and media ministries with a focus on

disciple-making in the cities, aligning finances, and other church activities to make better and more disciples.”

[Jarrod Stackelroth/Maritza Brunt, *Adventist Record*]

Prayer by delegate Lindy Judd



Photo: *Adventist Record*

► Seventh-day Adventist Church adopts new brand promise

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—“We can help you understand the Bible to find freedom, healing and hope in Jesus.” The Adventist Promise sets a clear expectation of what the worldwide public can expect from all Adventist entities and members.

The Adventist Promise aims to deliver a clear message about what the movement stands for and seeks to leave a lasting impression on people in the twenty-first century.

It is framed as a brand promise that is used by organizations worldwide to clearly explain what they offer to customers, constituents, and members of the general public.

The promise is deliberately short and shines a spotlight on people’s needs rather than on a long description of the church, its institutions, and history. It positions members of the public as the focus, with the church serving in a mentor role by helping people understand the Scriptures.

“The Bible is the foundation of our understanding of God. It is His Holy


Word. It is the Written Word that points us to the Living Word, Jesus Christ. If you wish to know God’s will for your life, you must read His Word, understand His Word, and fulfill His Word—all through humble prayer on your part and the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life,” said the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church General Conference, **Ted N. C. Wilson**. “Jesus said in John 17:17, ‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.’ That’s why it is so important that we individually study and understand the Bible for ourselves as we look forward to Christ’s soon return.”

The Adventist Promise is the product of hundreds of conversations with church leaders and members worldwide.

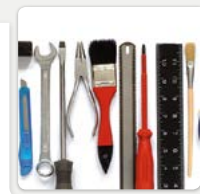
Sam Neves, associate director of Communication for the General Conference, stressed the importance of having a clear message that defines the church: “We only have a few seconds to leave a lasting impression of how we can serve them.”

Church members around the world are being called to help deliver on the Adventist Promise by actively helping people understand the Bible. Adventists can help their friends and neighbors understand the Bible for themselves by going beyond the mere intellectual study of the Bible. This can be achieved by inviting people to join members in their homes and churches to help them experience a sense of Christian community as they study the Bible.

“It is not the role of the church to bring freedom, healing, and hope,” said Neves. He maintained that the Adventist Promise is about helping people understand the Bible so that they get to know Jesus for themselves and, through Him, find the hope they have been craving.

The Adventist Promise was approved by the General Conference Administrative Committee to become the core message of the Adventist .org website. It was presented to delegates from the world church at the 2018 Annual Council. [Adventist News Network] 

Joe A. Webb, DMin, is the senior pastor of the Caboolture Seventh-day Adventist Church, Caboolture, Queensland, Australia.



Pastoral burnout: *As I see it*

For many years I did not recognize it. When my wife suggested that I had experienced it, I refused to talk about it because I saw it as a failure in ministry. After four years of serving three churches and being chaplain at our small church school, I could no longer deny it: I was burned out. There, I have admitted it publicly.

It was my tenth year in ministry. Did I understand what was happening to me as I came to see the church members as the enemy? No. Did I understand why sometimes I could not stop crying? No.

fulfill their calling to minister. Does the congregation hate me or lose confidence in me because I am periodically not there on Sabbath? No. Many times I have been affirmed, even congratulated, for taking the initiative to spend a special Sabbath with my family in rest and relaxation.

After I crashed, I had to admit that I was a workaholic who tended to make churches dependent on me. My better way of doing ministry now is to involve people in the congregation who can do things just as well, if not better, than I. Yes, I am the conference-appointed

let the conference know that they had made a good investment in me. Unreal expectations, whether verbalized or assumed, will drive pastors to overburden themselves. Pastors feel stress when they do not know how conference leaders view their ministry.

One time, while serving in an isolated rural parish, I called the conference president because I had not heard from anyone in leadership for nearly three years. The president said that if I do not hear from the office, I am doing OK. I am not suggesting

It should be clear that burnout happens when pastors do not or cannot cope with the accumulated pressures of ministry when added to all other pressures of daily living.

Did I understand where I got the idea from that the best thing to do is just push on and try and break through the other side? No!

It should be clear that burnout happens when pastors do not or cannot cope with the accumulated pressures of ministry when added to all other pressures of daily living. Early in my ministry, I asked more experienced pastors whether they ever took a Sabbath off. Some said, "Never"; others said, "Yes, once a quarter." I tried this once-a-quarter Sabbath off, but I still burned out. I came up with what I call a biblical model of time off: I preach for six Sabbaths and then take a Sabbath off. I call it my Sabbath Sabbath. On these Sabbaths I do not attend my church or churches; these are family Sabbaths.

Do the churches crumble to pieces that day? No. Gifted members gladly

leader, but I am also part of a local team that God has gifted in more ways than one person ever could be. For me, releasing members into God-given ministries is a major strategy in avoiding pastoral burnout. This is easier to do when we realize that God has not called pastors to be all things to all people all the time. Pastors need to understand the difference between *always being available* and *always being on duty*.

Every week I designate a day as "home office day." This is a time when I try not to schedule meetings or visits, although emergencies are always attended to. On this day I can do some in-depth study, but I can also catch up on little jobs around the house or yard without the stress of preparing for a meeting or visit.

Another thing that drove me early in ministry was my desire to

that every pastor desires or needs a daily email of affirmation from leadership, but when leadership talks with the local pastor, perhaps some more intentional questioning may be helpful. Rather than just asking, "What's happening in your church?" or "How did the evangelism program go?" the questions could also be, "When was the last time you had a special family Sabbath away from your church?" Or "What plans do you have in place to avoid pastoral burnout?"

Having once crashed, I can recognize some personal signs that warn me to slow down, take a day off, choose not to volunteer for a Sabbath, and refer people with particular issues on to those with the appropriate professional training. Be acutely aware of your personal signs, and ask the Lord to show you how to avoid burnout. ▮



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