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INTERNATIONAL  
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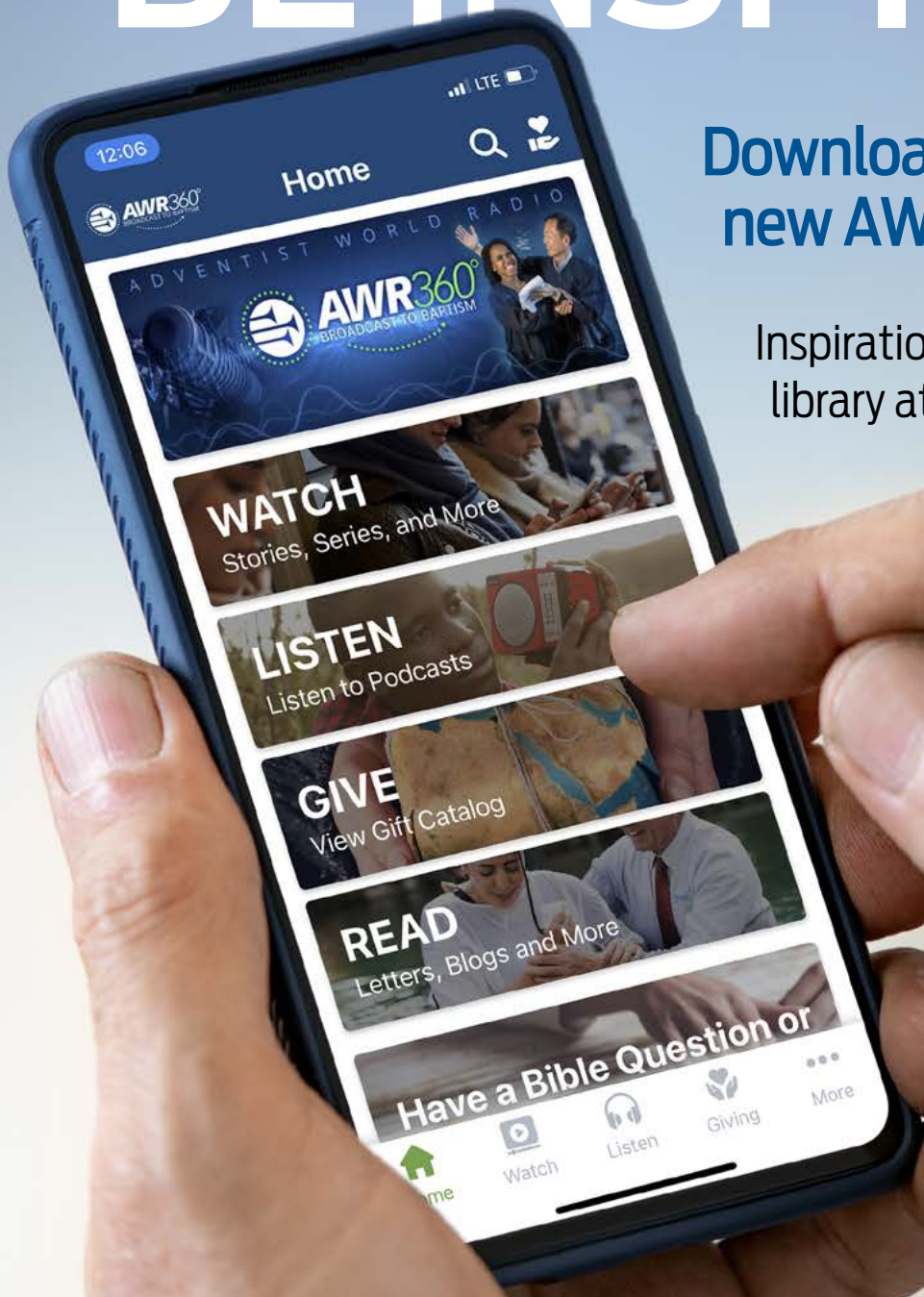
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## You cannot give what you do not have

One Sabbath evening long ago, after preaching at two different churches, I hit traffic while driving to a third church to begin an evangelistic series. At the interstate toll plaza, I chose the line with only two cars ahead of me, hoping to rush through. The driver of the first car threw coins in the funnel basket to pay the toll and then drove off. *Good, one car left*, I thought.

The next car pulled up to the funnel, stopped, then—nothing. I waited. *What was the driver doing, making the coins?* Finally, a woman threw coins toward the funnel—they did not make it. She tried to open her door, but the funnel blocked her. She started backing her car up. I, and the cars behind me, now had to back up.

She got out and retrieved all the coins. But, instead of throwing them in the funnel, she went to the toll booth window and struck up an animated conversation with the attendant. I could not hold in my impatience any longer. I honked the horn, threw up my hands, and cried out in the car, “Lady, please move; we are all waiting!” She waved—very nicely—got into her car, and left.

When I got to the funnel to pay my toll, the attendant called to me, “No need to pay; the lady

before you paid for you. Her son has been in an accident, and she’s rushing to the emergency hospital. Her hands were shaking, so it took some time with the coins. She was so impressed with how calm you were. You even waved at her. So she paid for you.”

### A new heart

I was so embarrassed by my behavior. *I am a pastor! How could I only see things my way and judge her; how could I be so impatient?* I had been impatient when young in life and had worked hard to overcome my temper, yet my nature was the same. *If I do not know how to experience growth myself, how can I help others?*

As pastors, we know and even preach that there is nothing good in any of us and we cannot do anything about it (Rom. 7:18, 19; Jer. 13:23). Only God can change hearts, and it is only by a continual walk with God that He can change us. Yet do we practice what we preach?

Author Ellen White says, “‘Except a man is born from above,’ unless he shall receive a new heart, new desires, purposes, and motives, leading to a new life, ‘he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ John 3:3.”<sup>1</sup> The paragraph does not say that you *achieve*



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a new heart; no, you *receive* it! It is not what you do in your own power. It is God who gives us a new heart. “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them” (Ezek. 11:19, NIV).

What are a couple of ways that you can grow into God’s image?

### **Growing by faith**

“Abraham *believed* God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3, NIV; emphasis added). You must have faith in God’s power and love to change your heart—faith that He is able to finish what He started (Phil. 1:6), that He is able to grow and save you (Heb. 7:25). “Through this simple act of *believing God*, the Holy Spirit has begotten a new life in your heart. You are as a child born into the family of God, and *He loves you as He loves His Son*.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Growing by relationship**

Jesus promises that if you stay connected with Him, He will grow you, and there will be fruit: “*Abide in Me, and I in you*. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you *abide in Me*” (John 15:4, NKJV; emphasis added).

But how? Remember, we are transformed by beholding (2 Cor. 3:18). “You are a sinner. You cannot atone for your past sins; you cannot change your heart and make yourself holy. But God promises to do all this for you through Christ. . . . *If you believe the promise, . . . God supplies the fact; you are made whole. . . .*

*“Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, ‘I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.’ . . .*

*“ . . . Through this simple act of *believing God*, the Holy Spirit has begotten a new life in your heart. You are as a child born into the family of God, and He loves you as He loves His Son.”<sup>3</sup>*

We ministers must keep in mind that we cannot preach the assurance of salvation and growth in Christ unless we personally experience it. God is calling us to talk with Him, walk with Him, and then lead our flock to the same experience.



1 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), 18; emphasis added.

2 White, 52; emphasis added.

3 White, 51 52; emphasis added.



# What is **new** in the new covenant?

**A** biblical covenant is the legal establishment of a relationship between God and His people. God takes the initiative, institutes this relationship, and secures it. His covenants are based on His love, grace, and faithfulness, and they are rooted in His eternal covenant—established within the Trinity before the foundation of the world—which was to save humankind in case they would fall into sin (Eph. 1:3, 4; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8).<sup>1</sup>

The author of Hebrews, commonly thought to be the apostle Paul, distinguishes between the “first” and the “new” covenants; he states that if nothing had been “deficient” or “inadequate” with the first one, the “second” or “new” would not have been needed. Paul discusses the new covenant in the setting of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest, in comparison to sanctuary services in the earthly tabernacle with the animal sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood. He speaks about the “better covenant” (Heb. 7:22; 8:6) and says this better covenant is the “new covenant” (Heb. 8:8; 9:15; 12:24; [see also Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6], or the “second” one [Heb. 8:7]). The key adjective “better” is a comparative of “good”; thus, Paul compares the first covenant, which was “good,” to the new covenant, which is “better.”

## What was the first covenant?

What does Paul mean by the “first covenant”? (The full phrase is used only in Hebrews 9:15, but see also 8:7, 13; 9:1, 18.) In Hebrews, Paul never uses the term *old covenant* to describe the first covenant (he uses the expression *old covenant* only in 2 Corinthians 3:14). The Lord explains that the new covenant will not be “like the covenant / I made with their ancestors / when I took them by the hand / to lead them out of Egypt” (Heb. 8:9, NIV). The reference is to the Sinaitic or Mosaic covenant, which God made with Israel after the Exodus (Exod. 19–24). This covenant was established at Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:3–8; Heb. 12:18–21), ratified by the blood of animal sacrifices (Exod. 24:4–8), and renewed by the merciful Lord after the golden-calf apostasy (Exod. 34:6, 7, 10, 11). Paul speaks about this Sinai experience in



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Hebrews 9:18–20, and Jeremiah, too, contrasts the new covenant with the Sinaitic covenant (Jer. 31:32). So, the first covenant referred to by Paul was not a covenant with Adam, Noah, or Abraham but with Israel at Mount Sinai. Paul also clearly declared: “The first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary” (Heb. 9:1, NIV).

Thus, in the context of Paul’s discussion of the covenants in Hebrews, the first covenant had two inseparable parts: (a) the ceremonial or cultic—the sacrificial system with its regulations, and (b) the moral or spiritual with God’s four timeless promises. These four elements God had already given to Israel at Sinai (and even earlier as they are key principles or promises of harmonious spiritual life) and were reemphasized by prophets: (1) the presence and cultivation of God’s law in heart and mind (Exod. 20:2, 6; Deut. 6:5–8; 30:11–14; Josh. 1:6–9; Pss. 1; 37:30, 31; Prov. 3:4–7; Isa. 51:7); (2) the close covenantal relationship with the Lord (Exod. 6:6, 7; Lev. 26:12); (3) the existential knowledge of the Lord (Exod. 16:6; 29:46; 33:13); and (4) the forgiveness of sins (Exod. 20:6; 34:6, 7; Pss. 32:1, 2; 51:1–4, 10–12; Isa. 1:18, 19). This content of the new covenant was nothing new; it was only the renewed appeal to internalize God’s law, thus underscoring the continuity of this covenant. This is exactly what Jesus was doing in the Sermon on the Mount when He explained the true meaning of the Old Testament’s teachings (Matt. 5:17–48).

### What was going wrong?

Paul states that “if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another” (Heb. 8:7, NIV). When reflecting on the first, or old, covenant, many Christians automatically assume that the Sinaitic covenant was bad. However, the adjective “wrong” is an incorrect translation of the Greek *amemptos*, which means “faultless,” “blameless,” or “without defect.” It is not “wrong” like the New International Version translators put it.

Paul argues something in the first covenant was insufficient, lacking, deficient, and faulty (vv. 7, 8)—but not wrong. The first covenant was good but older and aging (v. 13) and with “weak and useless” regulations (Heb. 7:18, NIV). It was characterized as “obsolete” (Heb. 8:13; the Greek verb *palaioein* means to “declare as obsolete,” “make or become old”), signifying that the first covenant was vanishing, disappearing, and aging; thus, it was no more relevant. Why?

The Sinaitic covenant, with all its specific ceremonies and sacrifices, was an illustration

(Heb. 9:9; cf. 8:5), an object lesson, of how God saves repentant people, how He deals with sin, and how He destroys evil. This presentation of God’s plan of redemption included teaching tools that pointed to Christ Jesus. It required (1) offering sacrifices and the blood of animals, which could not forgive sins (Heb. 9:23; 10:4), nor bring perfection, cleanse the consciences of people, and assure salvation (Heb. 7:11; 9:9, 10); (2) the services of the priests who were sinful and mortal and, consequently, repeatedly needed to sacrifice for themselves as well as for people (Heb. 5:3; 7:23, 27; 9:7); (3) the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:5, 9, 11) in contrast to the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:20; 7:24, 26–28); and (4) regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary (Heb. 9:1). Thus, a better sanctuary than the earthly one was envisioned (Heb. 8:1, 2; 9:11, 12), a better sacrifice and blood were offered (Heb. 9:12–15, 23, 25), a better foundation of promises was needed (Heb. 8:6), and a better hope was projected (Heb. 7:19).


In other words, nothing was wrong with the Sinaitic covenant itself. The new covenant was part of the *eternal* covenant of God with His people (Heb. 13:20; cf. Isa. 55:3; Jer. 50:4, 5; Ezek. 37:26). It was the Lord Himself who initiated and entered into a covenantal relationship with them. Neither was the fault with God.

The problem, instead, was with the people’s reception of the covenant: “God found fault [*memphomai*, finding fault or blame] with the people” (Heb. 8:8, NIV). People transgressed the first covenant, which is one reason God gave the new covenant (see Exod. 20:18–20; 32:4–6, 19, 20; Lev. 17:7). They took God’s law merely as a command, something to do in order to be righteous and holy, instead of keeping God’s precepts out of gratitude for His kindness toward them. The Decalogue became the performance of work and hard obedience to God’s stipulations, and it was not received as His promise. The law became a burden, an external duty to keep as opposed to an expression of thankfulness for God’s goodness.

### What is new in the new covenant?

First, the new thing in the new covenant is the historical ratification of the new covenant by Jesus Christ’s death. He is the guarantor of this covenant (Heb. 7:22) because He secured and sealed forgiveness and salvation for His followers, as well as for believers who lived during Old Testament times in anticipation of the Cross (Heb. 9:15). Second, Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice on the cross





## The newness of the new covenant is not connected to the content but to Christ's efficacy and achievements on the cross.

fulfilled the sacrificial system (Dan. 9:27a; Matt. 27:51; John 1:29; 1 John 2:2), so animal sacrifices and their blood, the Levitical priesthood, and the earthly sanctuary were no longer needed or relevant. Third, it means that *only* the ceremonial or cultic elements of the first covenant ceased to exist: the animal sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood, and the earthly sanctuary services. Offered sacrifices “were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper” (Heb. 9:9, NIV), but the blood of Christ was able to cleanse “our consciences from acts that lead to death” (v. 14, NIV; cf. 10:22). The imperfection of the Levitical priests is contrasted with the perfect life and obedience of Jesus (Heb. 2:10; 4:15; 5:8, 9; 7:26). The cycle of perpetual animal sacrifices for people and priests has been broken. Jesus’ sacrifice “once for all” is all-sufficient and brings salvation to those who believe in Him (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10).

Thus, one must observe a difference between the external rituals and the inner content related to the Mosaic covenant. The cultic and ceremonial part of the first covenant was temporary: the regulations, sacrifices, priests, and earthly sanctuary were fulfilled by Christ’s death because He fulfilled the sacrificial system on the cross (Dan. 9:27). In this sense, “He takes away the first that He may establish the second” (Heb. 10:9, NKJV; cf. 8:13). From this angle, discontinuity is stressed in the book of Hebrews, and the covenant is characterized as “new.”

However, as for the content, nothing is new in the new covenant because the same four principles or promises are present in both covenants. The law in the new covenant is not abrogated but, instead, internalized (Matt. 5:17–48), even as it was in the hearts of the Old Testament believers (e.g., Deut. 30:14; Pss. 37:30, 31; 40:8; Isa. 51:7). God’s law is put into the heart with loving, knowledgeable consent. Perfect obedience is only through Christ (Heb. 2:10, 17; 4:15; 5:9; 10:5, 6), and in Him, it is given to believers (Heb. 2:10, 11, 18). This perspective underlines the continuity of the four foundational aspects of the Sinaitic covenant. The term “new” (Hebrew *khadash*; Greek *kainos*) should be translated as “renew” in the given biblical context; it points to the *renewal* of the original intent of the covenant God made with His people as well as to its *continuity*.

### Historical reality

The newness of the new covenant is not connected to the content but to Christ’s efficacy and achievements on the cross, where He ratified the covenant by sacrificing His life as a ransom for

us (Heb. 9:15), thus becoming the guarantor of the new covenant (Heb. 7:22). He is “the mediator of the new covenant” that believers in every historical era can receive “the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15, NIV; 12:24). He offered His life once for all as a better sacrifice that secured forgiveness of our sins. What was done in anticipation in the Old Testament is now historically secured (Heb. 9:15; cf. Rom. 3:22–26; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8). Christ died “once for all” (Heb. 7:27), not repeatedly as it was with the death of the animals that could not secure forgiveness. They were only pointing to the forgiveness available through Jesus Christ.

Although we are no longer under the obligations of the earthly sanctuary, God’s promises are the same in both covenants: knowing God personally, experiencing forgiveness of our sins, and receiving eternal life. Before the reality came through Christ Jesus, by the Sinaitic covenant, God gave the Israelites the illustration of the plan of redemption as an object lesson so they could understand the terrible nature of sin and how God saves repentant sinners (Heb. 9:9; cf. 8:5). The new covenant is built on a better sanctuary, a better sacrifice, a better priesthood, and better promises.

At the core of the new covenant occurs the special statement, “I will be their God, and they will be my people” (see Rev. 21:3). This covenant formula describes God’s intimate relationship with His people and invites you to enter into this close covenantal fellowship with Him, which will continue for eternity.



1 For a more detailed analysis, see my article “The Newness of the New Covenant” in *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 32, nos. 1–2 (2021): 1–14, containing references and additional material.

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# On what basis does God declare me *righteous*?

**B**efore one of my sermons, the congregation received a handout with a number of theological propositions arranged in two columns. Without knowing the origin of the statements, they had to indicate which ones they agreed with. On the left, I had the five *solas* of the Protestant Reformation, while the right column contained theological assertions patterned after the Catholic doctrine formulated at the Council of Trent. It turned out that the majority sided with the Catholic mindset. I thought to myself, *At some point in our doctrinal journey, we will have to make up our minds if we are Protestant Adventists or Catholic Adventists.* Am I declared righteous by grace alone or by grace plus some level of moral refinement? Am I saved by faith alone or by faith plus works of faith? Am I declared right with God because of a righteousness *outside* of myself or by Christ's righteousness working *within me*?

Unfortunately, many church members are sitting on the fence or are even confused by such questions. Human nature desires at least some merit, something that we add or do, especially in being declared righteous, so we become creative. In our minds, even our faith can mistakenly become meritorious.

## The Reformation

During the Reformation, the defining doctrinal line between Protestant and Catholic positions regarding being declared "right with God" was very clear: Protestants claimed that it happened through Christ alone, grace alone, and faith alone, while Catholics maintained that moral renovation and transformation also played a meritorious role in salvation.

The doctrine of righteousness by faith, which we can more accurately describe as the doctrine of "righteousness by grace through faith" (see Eph. 2:8, 9), deals with the foundational question, On what basis does God

declare me *righteous* in His sight given the fact that I have a sinful nature? *We have been saved* (see the Greek tense) by His grace, and we grasp this grace through faith. And even the faith to clasp and accept His grace is a gift from God.

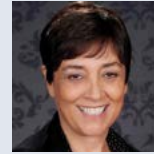
## A definition

After studying this topic for many years, I would like to offer a definition of "righteousness by grace through faith": *to be declared "right with God" not by our*





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*works but by grace through faith in the One who did all the work. We are not declared righteous because of the good works we perform or those that the Holy Spirit accomplishes in and through us. As important as the Holy Spirit's transformational activity in us is (for the advancement of God's kingdom and to reveal His love to the world through us), it still does not confer in the least any merit to our salvation nor are we declared righteous because of it. The primary role of the Holy Spirit is to reveal to us who Christ is, what He has done for us, and how, by believing in His gracious accomplishments on our behalf, we are declared righteous in God's sight. The good works that the Spirit creates in and through us have a heavenly purpose, but that purpose is not to deserve or merit salvation.*

Many claim that they believe in Christ's righteousness but then add such statements as, "I don't see myself as very righteous, so I'm not sure I am good enough to be saved." But none of us are good enough to be saved. The declaration "right with God" has nothing to do with my "goodness." It is what the Reformers called *alien righteousness*—Christ's righteousness (His perfect life of obedience on my behalf, His perfect laying down of His life for my sins, and His perfect resurrection as a confirmation that His sacrifice on my behalf has been accepted and victory over death accomplished).

### Old Testament witness

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus gave a great example from the history of Israel about this *alien righteousness* to explain why His death was necessary: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be

lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14–16, NASB). The *antidote* for the snakebites was not found in the people. God did not give them something to swallow, inject, or somehow put inside themselves as an antidote. They were not expected to do something to deserve or help with the healing process. Instead, they were to direct their sight outside of themselves, look at the bronze serpent, and believe in God's antidote (Num. 21:6–9). Just like the bronze serpent, Jesus would also be lifted up on a standard (*nissi*; Num. 21:8; see also Isa. 11:10) in the likeness of sin so that we could receive the gift of forgiveness and be declared righteous through His merits, not ours. As Paul later explained: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become *the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Cor. 5:21, NASB; emphasis added).

### New Testament affirmation

Many of us learned about the concept of righteousness by grace through faith from the writings of Paul. But the topic runs throughout the Bible. Paul refers to the Law and the Prophets as being *witnesses* of this truth. To explain how we are declared *right with God*, he appeals to the Old Testament. Paul mentions such Old Testament characters as Abraham, David, and Adam (Rom. 4; 5). Furthermore, he proposes that even though Old Testament scriptures testify of it, the Righteousness of God has been manifested not in, but apart from the law. "But now *apart* from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being *witnessed* by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, *being justified as a gift by His grace through the*

redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:21–24, NASB; emphasis added).

The core theme of the whole Bible is the claim that God offers us a free gift of grace by simply declaring us *right with Him*. We receive that gift by believing in Jesus' perfect life and death on our behalf. Jesus Himself taught His disciples on Resurrection day that the Law, Prophets, and Psalms offer testimony of the necessity of His sacrifice: "Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He *explained* to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." "Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the *Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*.' Then He opened their minds to *understand* the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27, 44, 45, NASB; emphasis added).

To "explain" is translated from the Greek verb *diermēneuō*, from the root word of which we get the term *hermeneutics*, the science of interpreting a biblical text. Here the Lukan Jesus gives the number-one principle of Christ-centered hermeneutics: to interpret the whole Bible in light of the Cross. It turned out that His disciples had not understood the Scriptures, but now they saw that the Scriptures were all about Jesus and the plan of redemption.

Paul uses this interpretive method to demonstrate for us on what basis we are declared right with God and that it is a gift of His grace. He uses several examples from the very beginning of the Jewish Scriptures. Following is a review of one of those examples.

### Abrahamic case study (*logizomai*)

The first verse in the Bible that equates "believing" in God's word as "righteousness" is Genesis 15:6, which Paul quotes in Romans 4: "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God and it was *credited* to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not *credited* as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but *believes* in Him who justifies the ungodly, *his faith is credited as righteousness*" (vv. 3–6, NASB; emphasis added). "Credited" (sometimes also translated as "accounted" or "taken into account") is a verb used in the practice of accounting (Greek *logizomai*). It indicates both credits and debits. Paul uses the word to signify Abraham's belief being credited as righteousness and in the opposite sense when referring to Psalm 32: "Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD will not take into account [also *logizomai*]" (Rom. 4:8, NASB). The

apostle employs the verb many times in Romans 4 when explaining how we end up with "righteousness" on our account not because of the presence of good works (e.g., Abraham's later covenant of circumcision) or bad works (e.g., David's sin). Furthermore, the apostle uses the verb once again in the conclusion of the chapter by applying it to us personally: "Now not for his [Abraham's] sake only was it written that it was *credited* [*logizomai*] to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be *credited* [*logizomai*], as those who *believe* in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (vv. 23, 24, NASB; emphasis added). God credits (*logizomai*) Christ's righteousness to our record simply because we believe in His gracious gift.

The Septuagint (LXX) is a very good source for word study in the New Testament, primarily because most New Testament writers are quoting the Old Testament directly from it. That is why I wanted to check if the verb *logizomai* is the one used in the Greek version of Genesis 15:6, and it was!<sup>1</sup>

Yearning to know more, I wanted to see whether I could find in the Septuagint the gospel principle of the great exchange that Paul emphasizes again and again. It is the concept that we are declared right with God, not simply because He arbitrarily decided so but because Jesus was made sin on our behalf. The fact that I am "accounted" (*logizomai*) righteous because of Christ's righteousness, not mine, must be the counterpart of the fact that Jesus was "accounted" (*logizomai*) transgressor because of my transgressions, not His. And yes, it was in the Septuagint!

Because He poured out Himself to death,  
And was numbered [or accounted (Greek verb:  
*logizomai*)] with the transgressors;  
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,  
And interceded for the transgressors  
(Isa. 53:12, NASB).

He was counted (*logizomai*) as a transgressor on my behalf so that I could be counted (*logizomai*) as righteous because of Him!

Even though there are implied pointers to the gospel substitutionary exchange early on in the Bible (like God clothing Adam and Eve in animal skins after the Fall), it is in the story of Abraham at Moriah that we get to see the very first explicit substitutionary event. In Genesis 22:2, the Lord commands him to do something extraordinary



with the son through whom the promise of Genesis 15 was to be fulfilled. The divine command is expressed in three actions: *take*, *go*, and *offer* him as a burnt offering. When the angel stopped the hand of Abraham from killing his son, “then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham *went* and *took* the ram and *offered* him up for a burnt offering *in the place of his son*” (Gen. 22:13, NASB; emphasis added). The three actions (*go*, *take*, and *offer*) were fulfilled through a substitute *in place of his son*. No wonder Jesus said that Abraham saw His day and rejoiced (John 8:56).

### Our top priority

The core of our preaching as we await Christ's second coming must be that *we are declared* “right with God” *not by our works but by grace through faith in the One who did all the work*. For years past, we have been admonished to make this topic our priority: “One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other,—Christ our Righteousness.”<sup>2</sup> That we are justified or declared

right in God's eyes by faith in His sacrifice is the third angel's message, confirmed author Ellen G. White: “Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel's message in verity.’”<sup>3</sup> Only when we start proclaiming loudly and clearly that we are saved by Christ's righteousness alone on our behalf, as manifested at the cross, will the Holy Spirit fall on us corporately to empower us to preach the true gospel throughout the world. “And then the end will come!”



- 1 Paul also employs it in the case of David when he quotes Psalm 32.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1955), 259.
- 3 Ellen G. White, “Repentance the Gift of God,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 1, 1890, 1.

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# The art of making disciples

I am not the best artist. The right side of my brain just does not seem to kick in as I wish it would when I attempt an illustration. But I learned a simple method early on that helped me draw with perfect proportions and beautiful details: tracing. Just put a thin piece of paper over a photograph or illustration and follow the lines. When finished, voilà! A duplicate of a stunning work of art.

Christian leaders have a lot to say when it comes to making disciples. Yet, for all the pages written and sermons preached about discipleship, we do not really have anything original to say. The best and only true model for making disciples is to trace the lines of the Master Disciple Maker, Jesus Christ. Do not try to put your own stamp on the task. Just copy the Pattern, and you will have a beautiful work of art—a mature disciple of Jesus.

That is what this article will do: trace the three essential steps that Jesus used to make disciples. Only by copying the method of Jesus can we find true success.

## Step 1: Befriend

The first step in Jesus' model of making disciples is to make friends. This involves a few different elements, but the first and most important is that we have to *take the initiative* if we want to win lost people to Christ.

Jesus took the first step toward those He loved. He is the

great Initiator. Rather than wait in heaven, He “came to His own” (John 1:11)<sup>1</sup> in order “to seek” (Luke 19:10) lost people. He is the original Fisher of men (see Mark 1:17), the Shepherd who goes “after the one which is lost until he finds it” (Luke 15:4). Thus, when Jesus commands His church to “go” (Matt. 28:19) and make disciples, He is telling them to copy what He has already done and continues to do for a sin-sick world.

An additional element of befriending can be deduced from the Greek word *matheteuo*, which is translated as “make disciples” in Matthew 28:19. The King James Version translates the word as “teach” rather than “make disciples,” but this falls short of its full meaning. *Matheteuo* means not only that we convey truth to others but also that we persuade them to become followers of Jesus Christ. It involves not merely *telling* but *persuading*. And persuasion requires trust.

For this reason, in addition to taking the initiative to interact with lost people, we must also take an interest in them, sympathize with them, and show them that we care. This is what Jesus did. He “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), winning people’s confidence and opening their hearts to hear what He had to say. Some people we encounter are already open to receiving the truth (John 4:35–38), but in many cases, it requires our friendship and service to prepare the soil of the heart for the gospel seed.

Jesus also paid attention to those whom others ignored. He took notice of their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. He was not so tied up with His own interests that He did not have time for theirs. The insignificant and invisible in this world found their worth in the eyes of Jesus. He was “moved with compassion” (Matt. 9:36) toward them.

The author Ellen G. White stated, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”<sup>2</sup>





Notice that Jesus did not minister to people's needs with no end in view. He did not go to the soup kitchen just to check it off some list of good deeds. When Jesus mingled with people, He invited them to follow Him and experience a lasting relationship. More than merely being friendly, Jesus sought out people who would become His eternal friends.

Digital specialist Jason Alexis affirms, "We know the best way for people to learn more about Jesus is through friendship (a.k.a. friendship evangelism). One figure suggests that as many as 79% came to know Jesus through a friend. Many times an evangelist was involved at some point, but the most powerful reason for that friend showing up at the meeting or church was the friendship."<sup>3</sup>

## Step 2: Proclaim

The second step in Christ's method of making disciples—proclaiming the gospel—is the heart of the mission. When training people to proclaim, you should refer to it in three parts: introducing spiritual truth, studying the full message of truth, and gaining decisions to follow the truth. But for the sake of simplicity, we will here refer to these as one: proclaiming.

Jesus was never fully satisfied with meeting temporal needs because He longed for the salvation of every soul. No matter what entering wedge He used to befriend them—secular interests, physical healing, emotional support, or other help—it always led to sharing the gospel. "From Christ's methods of labor we may learn many valuable lessons. He did not follow merely one method; in various ways He sought to gain the attention of the multitude; and then He proclaimed to them the truths of the gospel."<sup>4</sup>

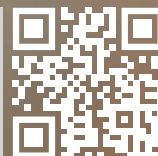
While expressions of love and kindness may soften hearts, only a revelation of Jesus Christ can convert people (see 1 Pet. 1:13). For this reason, Jesus made preaching the gospel central to both His own ministry and the mission He gave His disciples.

Matthew 28 and the command to make disciples is, of course, not the only place where the church's mission is communicated. Consider the predominant focus placed on proclaiming the gospel in each of the other six mission commands in the New Testament:

- Matthew 24:14: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world." "
- Mark 13:10: "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations." "
- Mark 16:15: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." "
- Luke 24:47: "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations." "
- Acts 1:8: "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." "
- Revelation 14:6: "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people."

The early church understood that the core component of making disciples is to preach the gospel and persuade people to follow Jesus (Acts 14:21). After being scattered by persecution, the lay members of the early church—everyone "except the apostles" (Acts 8:1)—"went everywhere preaching the word" (v. 4). In the Bible, "preaching" does not refer

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only to speaking from behind a pulpit. More often, it refers to sharing Bible truth in personal settings.

The growth of the early church was greatly dependent upon this personal “preaching” of its members. “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14).

### Step 3: Train

The final stage of Christ’s method of making disciples is often neglected. Unlike befriending and proclaiming, most of this important step occurs *after* baptism. It was after Jesus’ disciples had been baptized that He called them to follow Him. Jesus was the Master Mentor, teaching His disciples by precept and example how to win souls for the kingdom of God.

“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Jesus made it clear that making disciples is about training people to become like their Teacher—Jesus Christ. Using the same methods that Christ used, His disciples are to labor for the salvation of others.

Jesus also said that “every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matt. 13:52, ESV). The phrase “who has been trained for the kingdom” is translated as “instructed concerning the kingdom” in the New King James Version and “who has become a disciple in the kingdom” in the New International Version. The idea being conveyed in the translations is the same—the one who has been trained “brings out of his treasure” things new and old to share with others. A mature disciple is one who, after being instructed in the truth of God’s Word, is now instructing others.

Perhaps the most well-known verse identifying the importance of training is Mark 1:17: “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” Jesus did not say, “And you will become” but “*I will make you become.*” In making disciples, Jesus took upon Himself the responsibility of training them

to win souls. “In all His work He was training them for individual labor.”<sup>5</sup>

To a great degree, our success depends upon this third step in the disciple-making methodology of Jesus. “When we are successful in the work of soulsaving, those who are added to the faith will, in turn, use their ability in giving the truth to others.”<sup>6</sup>

### Copy the Pattern

Pastors have the sacred responsibility of teaching their members how to follow Christ’s method of ministry: befriending, proclaiming, and training. We should never assume that they will not be willing. The reason many members are not active is that they have never been encouraged or trained. “Many would be willing to work if they were taught how to begin. They need to be instructed and encouraged.

“Every church should be a training school for Christian workers.”<sup>7</sup>

Some members, based on their gifts and personalities, will be better at befriending. But all can make an effort to interact with lost people. Others are gifted at sharing Bible truth in clear and persuasive ways. Yet even those who do not feel proficient at this can still share literature, invite their friends to a Bible study, or share their testimony. Still others are especially effective at nurturing and training new members. But even those with little experience can pray for and encourage those newer to the faith.

Every disciple is called to make other disciples. Not sure how to teach others to make disciples? No need to worry. Just take out a proverbial piece of paper, lay it over the Gospels, trace the three simple steps of Christ’s method, and voilà!



- 1 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), 143.
- 3 Jason Alexis, “Let’s Talk Modern Evangelism in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” *Digital Evangelism* (blog), May 7, 2018, <https://www.sdadata.org/digital-evangelism-blog/lets-talk-modern-evangelism-in-the-seventh-day-adventist-church>.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 123.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 32.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 86.
- 7 White, *Ministry of Healing*, 149.

For a more detailed model of Christ’s method of making disciples, along with helpful training resources, go to the GC Personal Ministries Grow website at [grow.adventist.org](http://grow.adventist.org).

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## Surrendering our ideas

**B**e careful what you pray for.” I heard this saying repeatedly growing up. Yet somewhere along the line, I started praying that God would lead, but not through unreasonable hardship. Paralysis, hurricanes, death—we have all heard stories that so often get imposed on God as if He willed them for a greater good. Somewhere I had absorbed this erosive idea about God’s loving character without realizing it.

It was 18 months into the pandemic, and church members had started returning; care groups, Pathfinder troops, and Sabbath Schools were growing. One day, as I sat reflecting on how well things were going, I realized I was where I had not been in ministry for a long time. Life was becoming comfortable. Do not get me wrong, ministry is never without conflict and new challenges. Still, a shift had occurred compared to having to help run a church on life support at the height of a pandemic.

### Move outside

As I was spending time with God, I decided to ask Him an uncomfortable question: What one thing could I do that would make the most difference right away?

Immediately, the thought hit me. *Move your devotional time with Me outside.* Outside? The thought was a little uncomfortable, but the answer was clear, so I started sitting on our tiny balcony overlooking a dog park for worship. I immediately began feeling a more focused shift in my time with God. Within a week, my wife decided she liked the idea too. Two on this balcony was a bit of a crowd, so it was not long before I found myself back inside each morning as she enjoyed the view. Nevertheless, something had changed for the better for both of us.

### What I needed

That fall, I was invited to teach a class at Southwestern Adventist University three days a week, nearly two hours from home. I immediately sensed this was the challenge I had been seeking. Pastoring, driving, and teaching began consuming my time. As I observed my students growing

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as they learned more about Jesus, I knew I had found my element. The semester ended, and I suddenly realized I was back where I started.

I knew something needed to change, so I surrendered to where God had placed us. While I was teaching, I realized that no loving parent would wish harm upon their child, so I quit praying that God would lead me around hardships. At the same time, I resolved to find new areas to grow the effectiveness of my church. I decided to resume brief doorstep visits with members, despite opposition. All our elders, deacons, and deaconesses were invited to join. We were blessed as we were able to pray for and be a blessing to many. With just two hours a week, we visited about 50 percent of our 500-plus members in 10 weeks.

I was planning for the rest of the year when I got a call. For over a year, I had been working on a project to produce and share free courses on Seventh-day Adventism’s rich contributions to understanding the Bible. From that, I learned about a possible sponsorship opportunity to study and complete a doctorate. I knew this would represent the challenge my wife and I had been praying for. These things usually take a year to process; however, within weeks and over 20 miracles later, my wife and I both found ourselves continuing our education with God’s provision.

### Prayers that challenge you

Sometimes when we are most comfortable, it is because we have stopped seeking growth and the discomfort that comes with it. In that position of complacency, we are most vulnerable to just living our lives, pruning our potential, and neutering our ministry effectiveness. If you have stopped praying challenging prayers—that is, prayers that challenge *you*—maybe it is time to surrender your ideas about who God is and where He wants to take you next.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> I produced a series by Dr. David Shin on surrendering our ideas as we engage Scripture and God. It is available through the *Revival and Reformation* YouTube channel or by visiting <https://bit.ly/3vWWGLL>.

# The eschatological man:

## The gospel according to the metanarrative of Scripture

**W**hen Paul calls Jesus “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45),<sup>1</sup> it is not incidental language that the apostle casually employs. “The last Adam” is, in fact, a corporate title for Christ that alerts us to the fact that a macroscopic and prototypical remake of human identity has been achieved in Him. By reaching all the way back to Adam for his framing of the gospel, Paul has informed us that it is the retelling of the human story in the person of Christ.

The Greek word translated as “last” is *eschatos*. According to Paul, Christ is the Eschatological Man. As “the last Adam,” He is the new corporate head of humanity, having stepped into the position vacated by “the first man Adam” (v. 45). Thus, He is the *last* man because He is the *first* man of a new order that turns out to be the ancient pre-Fall one forfeited by Adam.

Christ is the quintessential human in the sense that He is the perfect attainment of human potential as God originally intended. In Him, we see the fully

realized state of redeemed humanity as it will be in its final and eternal form. Finally, He is man as human beings were meant to be and ultimately will be at the glorious teleological end to which the salvific gospel maneuvers our fatally wounded race.

### The backstory

The New Testament generally and Paul’s theology in particular most robustly present a seamless continuum that completes the narrative of the Old Testament.

God “created” Adam and Eve in “His own image” and gave them the dignifying vocation of “dominion over” the “earth” (Gen. 1:27, 28).

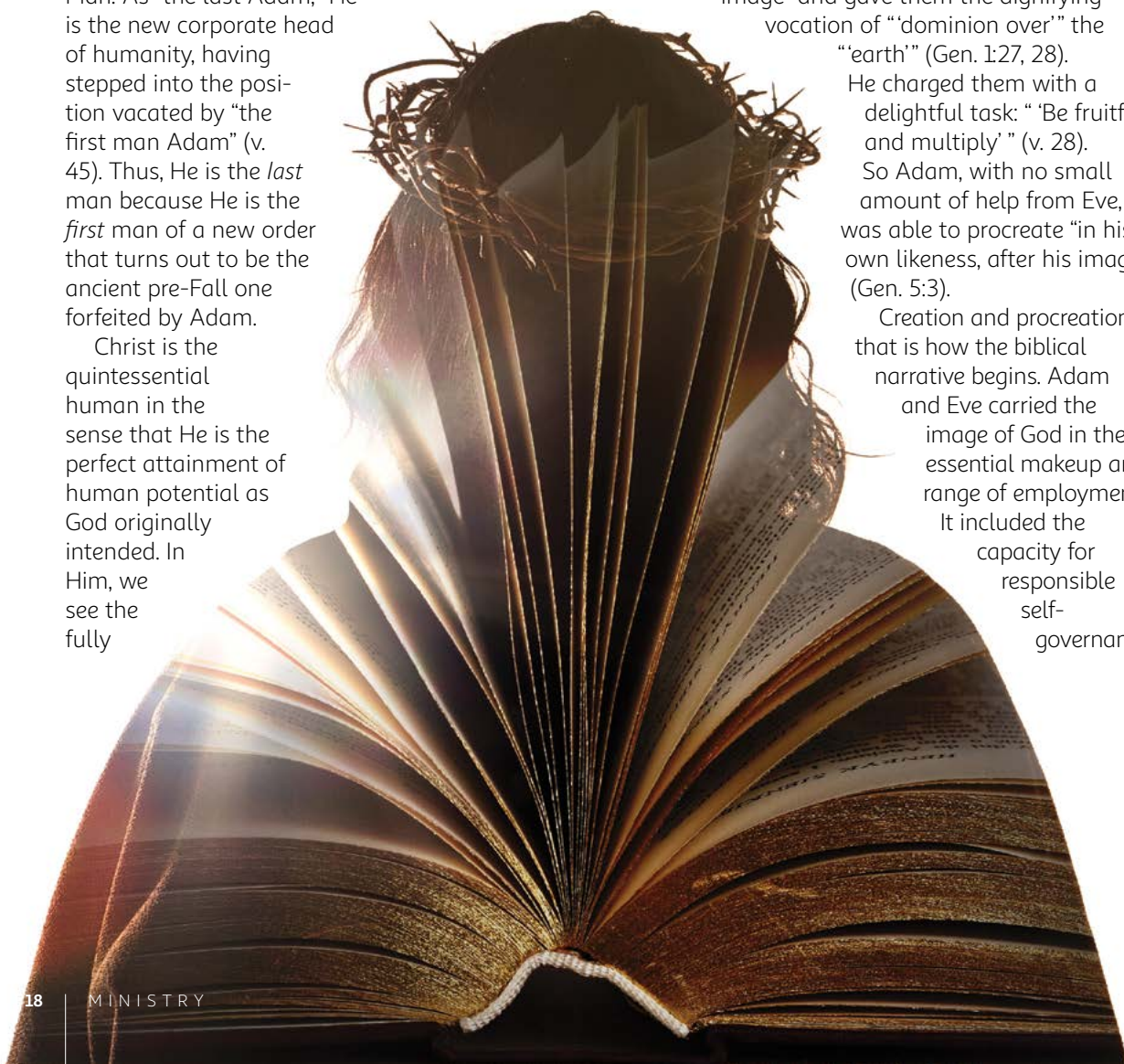
He charged them with a delightful task: “Be fruitful and multiply” (v. 28).

So Adam, with no small amount of help from Eve, was able to procreate “in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen. 5:3).

Creation and procreation—that is how the biblical narrative begins. Adam

and Eve carried the image of God in their essential makeup and range of employment.

It included the capacity for responsible self-governance.





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They would be stewards of their own domain. Biologically engineered as complementary counterparts, male and female, Adam and Eve possessed the godlike capacity of procreation. The couple was to reproduce in their own image as the means by which the image of God would be replicated in one procreative family unit after another until the whole earth would be populated with men and women bearing the image of God. They were to govern from the relational premise of other centeredness, transmitting the image of God from generation to generation, thus perpetuating a benevolent lordship of the world.

## The Fall

Unfortunately, a subtle yet hostile foreign force invaded Earth. The fallen angel, formerly known as Lucifer, commandeered the serpent as his medium. Through it, he told a threefold falsehood (Gen. 3:1–5):

God is a liar.

God is restrictive.

God is self-serving.

By a volitional mental act of belief, a distorted picture of God became assimilated into the psychology of the first humans, corrupting the procreation enterprise at its source. Having been created in the image of God and intended to love as God loves, they now chose the principle of selfishness, thereby inaugurating a new governing system. Since the couple possessed “dominion” over the earth, the fall of humanity was both moral and governmental. When Adam and Eve yielded to Satan’s self-as-center philosophy of existence, they handed him the world. A nonhuman adversary became “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), the chief influencer of the world system (Eph. 2:2). Satan is the spiritual force that feeds the selfish impulses of humanity, which led to the formation of the various social, economic, political, and ideological systems of selfishness and hate. “We know,” John says, “that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).

## The promise

But that was not the end of the story. Immediately after Satan took control of the world, God issued a prophetic warning to him in the presence of Adam and Eve:

“I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15, NIV).

The first gospel promise is also a declaration of war. Through the womb of a woman, God would send forth a Warrior who was to crush the head of Satan under His heel and be wounded in the process. All of Scripture from this point forward takes the shape of an expanding body of expository commentary on this single prophetic promise. To work out the gospel plan, God had to establish a lineage through which the Promised One would enter the world to face the adversary in battle.

First came the call of Abraham, to whom God promised,

“I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:2, 3, NIV).

With Abraham, there began a lineage through which the promised Warrior would be born. Abraham and Sarah bore Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah bore Jacob, whose 12 sons became the nation of Israel. Then came David, the Messianic king (Ps. 2).

## Promise kept

The entire Hebrew story, recorded in the Old Testament, exists for the purpose of mapping out

the covenant lineage through which the promised Savior would emerge. It is unsurprising, then, that the New Testament would open with these words: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1).

While Matthew’s Gospel reaches back to Abraham for its narrative rooting, Luke’s Gospel traces it all the way to Adam: “Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli . . . the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:23, 38).

As the first and only directly created man, Adam was the “son of God” in a primary sense and, therefore, the one individual through whom all procreated humans would be born. With this narrative context in view, Luke presents Christ’s encounter with Satan as a repeat of the original human clash with the adversary: “Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, ‘All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours’ ” (Luke 4:5–7).

As a direct reference to the fall of Adam and Eve, Satan claims that the world was “delivered” to him. The first couple abdicated their dominion of Earth and gave it to the usurper. Now, as the ruler of our world, Satan offers all the kingdoms of Earth to Christ if He is willing to occupy a secondary position below himself. Jesus refuses it for one very simple and monumentally profound reason: as the Second Adam, He fully intends to take the world back from Satan’s dominion and reestablish, in Himself, human rulership of Earth.

Christ later tells a story that summarizes His Messianic mission: “ ‘When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. He who is not with Me is against Me’ ” (Luke 11:21–23).

Echoing Genesis 3:15, Jesus declares war on the kingdom of evil. He depicts Satan as “a strong man, fully armed,” guarding Earth as “his own palace.” Then Jesus introduces Himself as the one who is “stronger than he.” He is here to disarm and defeat Satan, He explains, and then He draws sharp battle lines by announcing, “He who is not with Me is against Me.” It is a zero-sum game in which He will completely overcome Satan, and

the Earth, as the spoils of war, will be returned to human rule.

## Good news, not good advice

As the primary theological practitioner of the gospel, Paul worked out the implication of the Adamic mission of Christ. The gospel, he says, consists of a single historical event that operates as the new genesis of a new humanity. The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ constitute an embodied narrative that embraces all of humanity. This is “the gospel,” the apostle declares, “by which also you are saved” (1 Cor. 15:1, 2). As a self-contained historical occurrence, the Christ event constitutes the gospel because He fully *achieved* the redemption of humanity in Himself. Hence, Paul speaks in the past tense of “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). “For if by the one man’s offense many died,” the apostle reasons, “much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many” (Rom. 5:15).

Jesus lived a perfect life of love, died for our sins, rose from the dead, and ascended to the victory position at the right hand of God, all as a human being, as “the last Adam,” who, in effect, replaces “the first man Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). In the person of Christ, a fully realized human being now occupies the throne of the universe, where He awaits our arrival to “reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12). Thus, Jesus is the one human in whom all humans are now *represented* and into whom all are now *invited*.

The redemption achieved in Christ must not be confused with the doctrine of universalism, which postulates that all human beings will eventually possess the salvation achieved for them in Christ. Rather, Paul’s thinking is grounded in the biblical narrative of Adam as the representative head of the human race. So, then, while it can be said with biblical accuracy that humanity, as a kind, is redeemed in an objective and represented sense in Christ, it does not mean that every human being will be saved in a subjective and experiential sense.

Paul’s point is not that every person will be eternally saved but that no new salvational data can be added to what Christ has already achieved for humanity. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:8–10). Notice that the apostle says that



all the “good works” manifested in our lives were “prepared beforehand” in Christ. We manufacture nothing additional, but rather, we live both from and into the moral realities already actualized in Christ—humanity’s eschatological ideal.

Perhaps we can better grasp the point of it all by pondering the following hypothetical outcome: even if every human being were to say no to the salvation achieved for them in Christ, an actual specimen of the human race already occupies the throne of the universe. One of us, a member of the human race, is there, right now, with the Father. That is why salvation is by faith alone and not by works. We apprehend the facts of the gospel—we do not make those facts. By faith, we appropriate the already-existing data of salvation while generating no new data. Therefore, the gospel is good *news*, not good *advice*. It proclaims salvation as an already accomplished historical reality in the new Adam rather than prescribing self-help instructions for our own self-actualization.

By His life of perfect love for God and humanity, Jesus reintroduced into the world the governing principle of self-giving love by which God intended the world to operate all along. By His death on the cross, He defeated Satan by loving all others above and before Himself, even to the point of complete self-sacrifice. Explaining the significance of His upcoming death on the cross, Jesus said to His disciples, “ ‘Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out’ ” (John 12:31). Paul expounded further: “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:15, NIV). While it may have looked as if Christ was defeated at the cross, He was actually triumphant by virtue of the fact that He died with God’s love fully intact within His human nature. Therefore, “by his death,” He broke “the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14, NIV). “ ‘God raised up’ ” Christ from death, “ ‘because it was not possible that He should be held by it’ ” (Acts 2:24). His resurrection was the triumph of the principle of love over selfishness.

## The proclamation

“Then comes the end”—the *telos*—“when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). Once the gospel plays out to its ultimate teleological end, the Eschatological Man, Christ Jesus, will have vanquished the entire world system as we know it. The total psycho-edifice of abusive power structures will be

# By His life of perfect love for God and humanity, Jesus reintroduced into the world the governing principle of self-giving love by which God intended the world to operate all along.

reduced, along with “the rulers of this age,” to an absolute and irrevocable “nothing” (1 Cor. 2:6).

In the light of His victory, Jesus explained that there is only one thing left to do: Go and tell the good news; go and make disciples. He says: “ ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ ” (Matt. 28:18–20).

We carry to the world the best news imaginable:

Jesus is Lord!

Love is triumphant!

Human identity is re-created and thus redeemed in Christ!

He has defeated the enemy and brought the world back under human dominion. The victory is not ours to achieve but, rather, ours to enjoy and proclaim. As we believe the gospel, we are deployed as nonviolent warriors of love to reclaim the territory won by Christ, the territory of human hearts and minds and lives, and, eventually, the whole earth as the eternal domain of the redeemed.



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

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# Serving God across the divide:

## A lesson from Jeremiah

**W**hile my family and I were driving home from church one Sabbath, my daughter asked, “Daddy, was the pastor not preaching a conspiracy theory?”

“It’s very good that you listen so carefully,” I answered. “You may be correct.”

“Why go to this church if the pastor preaches conspiracy theories?” she responded.

### Conflict exhaustion

In my conversations with colleagues and friends, one thing becomes clear again and again. COVID-19, politics, racism, sexual orientation debates, and the conflict in Ukraine have taken a toll on all of us. We are exhausted by the conflict, ideological warfare, and radicalization we are experiencing in society. We constantly are asked to state our views or to associate with positions we do not identify with. I am tired. Such exhaustion can lead to withdrawing, becoming silent about everything, and watching the world around us apathetically. As Adventist educators and pastors, how can we educate across the many divides we find in our schools and congregations? Perhaps Jeremiah, the great prophet and educator, could provide a biblical perspective on the challenging question before us.

### A biblical perspective

Few have found themselves in such vast and varied conflict as the prophet who lived through the fall of Jerusalem. He saw at least three types of conflict:

- *Conflict of social hierarchies* in which the elite of the aristocracy economically and legally exploited the mass of the socially disadvantaged (Jer. 7, etc.). In several passages, Jeremiah presents prophetic oracles that could make him sound like a Marxist today (Jer. 2:34, 35; 5:4, 5a; 10 [religious critique]; 22:13–19). But

then, he appears again with oracles that condemn the proletariat and its morals, equating them with the corruption of the power elites (e.g., Jer. 5:4, 5; 40–43<sup>1</sup>).

- *Ethnic conflicts* in which envy, jealousy, and xenophobia were palpable daily. The masses of refugees that had come decades earlier from the fallen northern empire to Jerusalem and the south were not well integrated. The “natives,” who themselves had long ago arrived as strangers, regarded the refugees as a threat to the job market.<sup>2</sup>
- *Geopolitical conflicts* between the pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian politicians. While King Josiah was pro-Babylonian, King Jehoiakim was pro-Egyptian. Although Jehoiachin surrenders to the Babylonians, his uncle Zedekiah fights until the end. Such conflicts echo those we encounter daily in the media. Jeremiah, however, always positioned himself clearly: Babylon would win the struggle between the great powers.

Did Jeremiah’s position make him a liberal who questioned the eternal covenant of God with the Davidic throne? The religious elite and leading politicians thought so and wanted the death penalty for him because of treason and being a religious heretic.

But is Jeremiah a supporter of the pro-Babylonian party? When Nebuchadnezzar conquers the city and seeks to honor the prophet, he declines. He



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

wants to stay with the left-behind Judeans despite all the suffering, hatred, and misunderstanding he has received from them (Jer. 39:11–14; 40:4–6). Clearly, Jeremiah is not a party member of the pro-Babylonians!

The prophet takes clear positions while not fitting into any political pigeonhole or into any social-critical theory. Jeremiah waves none of the popular banners but criticizes each flag or keeps quiet about them to avoid further damage.

But while the prophet deconstructs, he also has a clear ethical compass.

He both disappoints all expectations and exceeds them at the same time. No religious-political alliances can be forged with him. His language reveals that he is a Deuteronomist and under Deuteronomy's influence like no other prophet.

### **Personal versus professional**

Jeremiah's friend King Josiah was known for his major religious reform in the kingdom of Judah. The king and the prophet advocate the same theology, and both strive for spiritual reformation among the people. But despite such similarities, nowhere does the book of Jeremiah mention that the prophet ever collaborated with Josiah. For all the similarities, the book knows nothing of the prophet's political or religious support of the king.<sup>3</sup> Why?

Josiah combines his religious reformation with political reformation. He accompanied his call to return to God with a desire to reestablish the old borders of the Davidic kingdom. His spiritual reformation was also part of his political ambition: restoring, through prayer and the sword, God's everlasting covenant with David. That is precisely why Jeremiah will never be found on a political campaign bus with Josiah. He carries out his prophetic office as if the king did not exist. Privately, however, he remains a friend. On a personal level, he

values the king, even if he cannot in any way support him in his mingling of faith and power. At Josiah's tomb, Jeremiah weeps for the loss of his good friend (2 Chron. 35:25).

To learn at the feet of Jeremiah is to discover that social-critical theory, popular categories, political parties, and social media culture often only lead to polarization and violence.

## Overcoming

What is needed is an overcoming of antithetical tensions. But where does the spirit that makes such overcoming possible derive from? It originates in the ethos of prophecy. Only in the radical love for God first and then for the individual human being, whether it is the church, nation, or fellow human, can arise the possibility—beyond any theory and political attitude—of seeing the fear, longing, and life situations of others and then connecting with them. Precisely here is the essence of the school of the prophets. Jeremiah lives it. The prophet is never just only on the side of God (e.g., Jer. 12:1–3), and he is never only committed to the truth (Jer. 17:16).

In the end, a true prophet stands up for his people. Like Moses, he continues to intercede for them even after God declares that there is no hope for them anymore. He remains the advocate of his people despite their unruliness, being corrupt, fragmented, narrow-minded, and self-absorbed. Like God Himself, he seeks to intercede, save, and bring together.

## Dogged determination

And so, Jeremiah finds himself threatened with death by the godless rulers of religious categories and political positions (e.g., Jer. 37ff.). And on the other side, God, recognizing the futility of Jeremiah's intercessory prayer, requests him three times to finally stop interceding for his people (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). But Jeremiah will not. According to tradition, Jeremiah is the author of Lamentations, in which he will continue to weep and plead for his people even after they have been sent into the divine judgment of exile.

Such prophetic ethos is, on its most foundational level, free from any loyalty to human political parties, religious institutions, or national myths. The prophetic ministry is driven by an almost impossible sympathy for God and people.

You will probably think to yourself, *Did Jeremiah ever manage to achieve national unity, social justice, and religious-ideological peace?* Unfortunately, we find no record of it in Scripture. Tradition tells us

that he was stoned to death in Egypt by his own countrymen.<sup>4</sup> He may not have belonged to any party, but all parties certainly hated him!

## Positive teachings

Jeremiah's life also had its positive fruits. As a prophet and good educator, he not only was a master of deconstruction but also had a clear vision of what God sought to do by his presentation of the "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31). Yet, sadly, only with Jesus did Jeremiah's nonpartisan outlook become discussable, thinkable, and experienceable (cf. 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24).

When Jeremiah teaches how to find national healing and restore Judah's unity, he emphasizes that such healing can occur only when we do not focus on rebuilding the Davidic throne or Solomonic temple. In fact, he claims that such political and religious institutions contributed to Judah's fragmentation and led to toxic myths of national and religious identity (cf. the temple sermon in Jer. 7 [v. 4]). Consequently, the prophet shows how attempts at religious reforms sadly coincided with moral decline (e.g., Jer. 34:8–11).

In his vision of educating across the divide, he sees a fascinating, enormous building project that we can all become part of. In his book of consolation (Jer. 30–33), in which we find the "new covenant" text (Jer. 31:31), he uses the word "to build" (בנה) more than any other prophet. But nowhere will we find physical buildings, palaces, temples, city walls, or streets being rebuilt by God. Instead, Jeremiah's vision only knows of the rebuilding of people, the rebuilding of families, and the rebuilding of men and women (Jer. 31:4, 28; 33:7).<sup>5</sup> People are in focus, not institutions. Of course, organized communities have their justification, but that is secondary to the purpose of Jeremiah's education across the divide.

## Application

Although Adventist educators and pastors might see their mission as a possible deathtrap, it is really a summons to service and sacrifice, a call to be just like Jesus. Our loyalty belongs to Jesus and the individuals we teach and engage in our sanctuaries and classrooms. When our passion and sympathy are not ultimately driven by loyalties toward hierarchies of powers, paychecks, and church politics but by loyalty only to God and the individuals we are to serve as teachers and pastors, we will find ourselves nearly torn apart—our life dangerously stretched thin between heaven and Earth. But it is only by such thin threads



that the fabric of restoration is woven. Jeremiah's education across the divide was ultimately not a deathtrap but the seed by which the healing of fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, peoples and nations found their beginnings.

Returning to my daughter's question, I told her, "You observed well. Always be discerning

regarding what your teachers, your pastors, and even your parents say."

"So why do we stay?" she asked. "Isn't it dangerous?"

"It's our family. And because we decided that this is our family, let us hope they will be kind to us when we are wrong."



- 1 In these chapters, we see that the Judean remnant, consisting mostly of the "poor" (cf. Jer. 40:7; 52:16), were as unfaithful, immoral, and unjust as the aristocracy that was exiled. A low social status does not make one less immoral than someone from a strong socioeconomic status. The only difference is that immorality gets realized according to the conditions in which one finds oneself. After the fall of Jerusalem and the murder of Gedaliah, the narrator regularly mentions specific social classes that were involved in the rejection of Jeremiah's prophecy ("princes and all the people," Jer. 42:1, 8; 43:4). Both the "princes/leaders" (שָׂרֵי), composing the aristocracy, and "all the people" (כָּל-הָעָם), representing the poor and uneducated, are accused of being rebellious (Jer. 43:4–7).
- 2 Several scholars have argued that the theology of *ger* (Hebrew for "foreigner") was particularly highlighted and developed in the aftermath of the fall of Samaria, when multitudes of refugees entered Judah and Jerusalem. A good overview of the discussion on the topic of the OT "foreigner" (*ger*) appears in Hans-Georg Wuench, "The Stranger in God's Land—Foreigner, Stranger, Guest: What Can We Learn From Israel's Attitude Towards Strangers?" *Old Testament Essays* 27, no. 3 (2014): 1129–1154. See also Georg Steins, "Fremde

sind wir ...' Zur Wahrnehmung des Fremdseins und zur Sorge für die Fremden in alttestamentlicher Perspektive," *Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 35 (1994): 133–150.

- 3 For a good summary of the scholarly debate about Jeremiah's silence on Josiah's reform, see Siegfried Herrmann, *Jeremia: Der Prophet und das Buch*, *Erträge der Forschung* 271 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990).
- 4 In the traditions that informed the work of Tertullian (*Adversus Gnosticos*, chap. 8, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 2, col. 137) and Jerome (*Adversus Jovinianum*, 2:37, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 23, col. 335), Jeremiah was stoned. Pseudo-Epiphanius (*De vitis Prophetarium*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 43, col. 400) and Isidorus Hispalensis (*De Ortu et Obitu Patrum*, chap. 38, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 83, col. 142) go as far as to locate the stoning at Egypt's Tahpanhes.
- 5 While the word "to build" (בָּנָה) also appears in Jeremiah 30:18 and Jeremiah 31:38 with the city as the object of building, the verbal forms appear in passive (nifal) and do not have YHWH as logical subject. Where YHWH appears as subject of בָּנָה He always and only builds people—not buildings.

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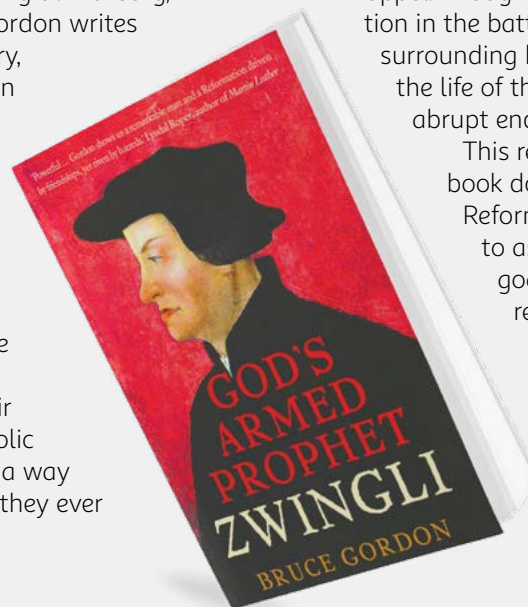
## Zwingli: God's Armed Prophet

by Bruce Gordon, New Haven, CT:  
Yale University Press, 2021.

**H**uldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) was a sixteenth century Reformer, contemporaneous with better-known Reformers, such as Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Jean Calvin (1509–1564). Bruce Gordon's well-researched biography helps the reader realize that Zwingli needs to be viewed as an individual who, in spite of some major flaws, made significant contributions to the Reformation.

Zwingli was a Catholic priest serving in the Swiss villages of Glarus and then Einsiedeln until 1519, when he was appointed the priest at the Grossmünster in Zürich. There, he became very involved in city government affairs. He was also part of a group that deliberately flaunted the Roman Catholic prohibition of eating meat during Lent. While he did not eat the forbidden meat, he was part of a "well-staged provocation" (63). Church officials were appalled that Zwingli associated with such a group of lawbreakers, earning him the label of troublemaker by Roman Catholics and Reformer by others.

Zwingli had a complex and strained relationship with Martin Luther. While they agreed on many points, their 1529 meeting at Marburg, Germany, did not end well. Gordon writes that reconciliation was illusory, though Zwingli "broke down in tears when expressing a fervent desire for friendship" (179). Luther had no hope for cooperation and wrote to his wife, "We do not want them as brothers and members [of Christ], although we wish them peace and good things" (179). The two Reformers continued their disagreements with the Catholic Church, but they did not find a way to work together. Neither did they ever



come to a common understanding of the Lord's Supper, with Zwingli emphasizing symbolism and Luther focusing on the real presence.

According to Gordon, "[Desiderius] Erasmus electrified a young generation of scholars with his call for a return to the sources of the Christian faith" (35). In 1516, Zwingli's desire to meet Erasmus was fulfilled in Basel, in the same year and the same city where Erasmus's Greek New Testament was published. This monumental publication (and subsequent editions) by Erasmus made it possible for Luther to translate the New Testament into German in 1522. Even though Zwingli considered Erasmus to be "the pre-eminent interpreter of the Holy Scripture" (36), that relationship came to an end by 1524 because Zwingli's desire "to employ humanist learning to tear down the [Catholic] Church and create a new order horrified the Dutchman" (114).

While Zwingli's breaks with Luther and Erasmus may be considered unfortunate, his attitude toward those who advocated adult baptism is indeed troubling. Zwingli, a Reformer, did not give any room for advocates of adult baptism to promote their views and practice adult baptism. He supported death for the Anabaptists, writing to a friend, "Whoever will be baptized hereafter will be submerged permanently" (191).

Zwingli died in 1531 during the Battle of Kappel. Though the details of his participation in the battle and the circumstances surrounding his death have been debated, the life of this Reformer came to an abrupt end.

This researched and well-written book does not hide the flaws of the Reformer. Readers are challenged to ask, "What about me?" The goal of the contemporary reformer is to be a blessing to God's children without hurting others and ultimately destroying yourself. This biography tells us that is a difficult goal, one that most do not achieve. ❧

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## Empowering leaders for God's call

NEGROS OCCIDENTAL, PHILIPPINES

I am with you ... for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:10). Three hundred Seventh-day Adventist leaders across the central Philippines heeded God's call in the Mission to the Cities trainers' training held at Central Philippine Adventist College in Negros Occidental on January 26–28, 2023.

The event sought to emphasize the importance of understanding God's method, acquiring the necessary tools, and embracing an appropriate attitude to carry out the mission to the cities.

Trainers included **Robin D. Willison**, an Adventist Mission consultant, and his wife, **Zenaida**, an international development consultant. Other speakers included **Abner P. Dizon**, the Southern Asia-Pacific Division director of Interfaith Services for Muslim,

Secular, and Postmodern Ministries, and **Eliezer T. Barlizo Jr.**, Central Philippine Union Conference president.

On Sabbath afternoon, the delegates participated in a group activity to make an action plan on how to carry out the work of the Lord in the cities. A commitment program closed the three-day training, as participants pledged to plead for the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment as they dedicated their lives to reaching as many souls as possible. [Nadeth Quinto, CPUC Communication]



Photo: Elvie Rey L. Tapaya

## Pastoral couple marries ministry with law

KINGSTON, JAMAICA

**Omar Oliphant** was a local church pastor in Jamaica, and his wife, **Sharette** (née Kirby), was the church's youth and young-adult leader. Both nursed a passion for a legal proficiency that would complement their ministry, not replace it. First, God blessed Omar to add law to his graduate theological degree and become the first Adventist pastor in Jamaica called to the bar. Sharette's master's degree in counseling psychology and her law degree were followed by a call to the bar at the Supreme Court in Kingston, Jamaica on December 15, 2022.

Each spouse paid tribute to the other. "I give credit to my husband for being a 'dream-enabler and people empowerment specialist,' as he

is always seeking the best for his people but especially for me and our family," said Sharette.

"The truth is, it really does bring excitement," Omar said. "I think it's wonderful in the context of our relationship, where we share goals together and grow together as a couple, and for me, seeing her reach her goal to become an attorney, I'm over the moon."

Their goals have transcended personal success to public service. While pastoring two churches,



Photo: Yorlaine Walters



Omar also serves as Public Affairs and Religious Liberty director for the East Jamaica Conference.

Sharette is employed by a government agency addressing the training and development of youth and young adults, with plans to practice civil, conveyancing, employment, probate, and family law.

“My dream moves beyond my personal desire to serve, advocate, and give support to issues of justice and equity in the workplace, family, and society.”

They have become the first Adventist pastoral attorney couple in their territory. [Jamaica Union Communication / IAD News Staff]

## Earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria—Seventh-day Adventist Church responds

The death toll has surpassed 50,000 in Türkiye<sup>1</sup> and northern Syria in the aftermath of the 7.8 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes that struck the region in the early hours of Monday, February 6, 2023. The World Health Organization estimates that more than 26 million people in Türkiye and Syria have been affected by the disaster.

Within days of the disaster, Seventh-day Adventists quickly combined their resources to purchase water for those in the stricken area. Adventist members in more than two dozen sites in Türkiye met online the day after the quake to wrestle with what they could do in the middle of such a catastrophe. One member observed, “We cannot just stand by and watch. We are here to offer whatever we have.”

Within days, they raised money among themselves to buy food, blankets, and warm clothes, even bringing some from their own shelves and closets, and delivered them to government distribution centers. “Everything is broken. Death is everywhere. We can do so little,” one member said as he drove a load of food boxes toward one of the devastated areas. “But certainly, we can pray,” he added.

Middle East and North African Union Mission president **Rick McEdward** appealed to the world church to pray and help. “Pray that God will work beyond anything we do to bring His presence and help near. Pray for our members in Türkiye as they help wherever they can. Pray for the ADRA



Photo courtesy of ADRA

[Adventist Development and Relief Agency] Syria team who were engaged within hours, reaching out to a region where we have no Adventist members.”

ADRA established operations in Syria in 2013, and its staff has been deployed to the affected areas and is serving thousands. The greatest needs have been identified as shelter, health care, and food. People also need access to water and to sanitation and hygiene services to avoid the spread of illnesses such as cholera. It is also a priority to support affected families through the harsh below-zero temperatures during winter weeks and help decongest overcrowding at collective shelters.

Visit [Adra.org](http://Adra.org) both to donate and to see firsthand the living, breathing examples of the worthy work being done. [Middle East and North Africa Union and *Adventist Review*]



<sup>1</sup> Türkiye—since 2021, the country has begun a push for the wider world to adopt the same spelling and pronunciation worldwide.



## Doing our “Job”

**A**fter my presentation preaching about love on an FM radio station in my pastoral district, people phoned in to say they saw my relationship with the community reflected in what I presented. I try to model integrity, from how I treat my wife (publicly and privately) to faithfulness in tithes and offerings; from visiting members to how I present the gospel in my sermons. I do not want to preach virtue and practice vice. Yet how far short I fall from the example of Job!

### Practice what you preach

Job is one man commended by God Himself as a person of integrity (Job 1:8). Theologian Lael Caesar comments, “Behind the theodicy of the quality of divine justice—the contribution most often attributed to the story of Job—is actually the question of divine integrity. And the book of Job shows its concern with integrity. But though divine integrity is the primary focus, it is not unfair to see Job as an individual who offers the most powerful representation of this virtue.”<sup>1</sup>

I believe God needs pastors of sterling integrity to present His unadulterated love to the world, as in this stirring quote: “The greatest want of the world is the want of those men and women who will not be bought or sold, those who in their inmost souls are true and honest, those who do not fear to call sin by its right name, those whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, those who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.

“But such a character is not the result of accident. It is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and humanity.”<sup>2</sup>

### Hypocrisy

One area where integrity becomes exposed is hypocrisy. Though the Pharisees were meticulous about the law, Jesus condemned their hypocrisy and warned people of its snare (Mark 12:38–40). How shameful on the part of ministers or anybody entrusted with sacred duty to be condemned by Jesus because of double standards. (See also Romans 2:20–24.)

**Gabriel Adu-Acheampong** serves as a district pastor in the South Central Ghana Conference, Kumasi, Ghana.



Ministerial leader Jonas Arrais states, “As pastors, we possess knowledge and understanding of the scriptures the average person does not. We’ve attended schools and seminaries, spent years studying the Word of God. Yet hypocrisy runs rampant throughout our profession. Why is that? We, of all people, should know better.”<sup>3</sup>

### Basic practices

As opposed to blaspheming God, we can glorify His name if we will follow seven basic principles. Ministers who preach

1. the Sabbath will not desecrate the Sabbath;
2. faithfulness will return faithful tithes—and offerings (especially when receiving extra money);
3. faithfulness in finance will be faithful with church funds;
4. faithfulness will be very careful around the opposite sex;
5. love will show love to their spouse, children, and parents;
6. forgiveness and unity will be on good terms with colleagues (unhealthy competition among ministers is a disgrace to the ministry);
7. humility will be humble.

One major consequence of a lack of integrity is an erosion of trust. It has been said, “Breaking someone’s trust is like crumpling up a perfect piece of paper. You can smooth it over but it’s never going to be the same again.”<sup>4</sup> Arrais concludes, “When someone preaches with sincerity, people will see it—not only in the way he preaches, but also in the way he lives.”<sup>5</sup>

Pastors, let us do our “Job.”



- 1 Lael Caesar, “Integrity on Trial: A Case Study of Job,” *Ministry*, April 2000, 11.
- 2 Ellen G White, *True Education* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2000), 38, 39.
- 3 Jonas Arrais, *Wanted: A Good Pastor* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association, 2011), 14.
- 4 Anonymous, Quotepedia, accessed March 5, 2023.
- 5 Arrais, *Wanted: A Good Pastor*, 28.





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