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• Awaken a passion for sharing the gospel
• Develop tomorrow’s ministry leaders

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2024 trip schedule

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<td>Oct 23–Nov 4</td>
<td>San Juan de la Maguana, D.R.</td>
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“I’m thrilled to see the young adults I brought taking active leadership roles in our church.”
—Pr. Ramon Verduzco, Nevada-Utah Conf.

“Sharing the gospel in Peru inspired one of my young adults to commit to full-time ministry.”
—Pr. James Kwon, Manitoba-Saskatchewan Conf.
Young adults: Their future, our future

FILIP MILOSAVLJEVIC

Find great ideas about how your church can show its love for young adults and dedication to keeping them in the church.

The authority of prophets

GERHARD PFANDL

Do we believe that God has given certain humans the authority to be His mouthpiece? Is everything outside of the canon uninspired?

When Jesus confesses your name

DANIEL K. BEDIako

Someone asked, “If the pre-Advent judgment is as important as we teach it is, why didn’t Jesus say something about it?” Did He, or didn’t He?

Sarah: Matriarch by God’s grace

ELIZABETH OSTRING

God demonstrates His love for all by valuing the weak as He does the strong, including the barren Sarah.

Discerning signs of the times in the context of Matthew 16:2, 3

CHRISTOPHER KABWE MUKUKA

Tragedies are happening all around us, but are they signs of the end times? How can one discern signs of the times?
While looking through family pictures, I noticed pictures when I was two, then in school, in the army, in college, just married to Daniela, with small children, with our sons at their weddings, and then found myself looking at the pictures of Daniela and me with our grandchildren. I have gray hair now! Wow, how did time go so fast?

I remember when my dad would take me on walks through a cemetery across from our apartment building in Romania, especially in the spring when it was full of flowers. One time, while reading the epitaphs, my dad asked me, “What do you think is the most important thing on this stone?” I told him I did not know. He underlined the dash between the birth and death years and said, “Jesus is coming soon. How you use this short dash is all that matters; it decides your eternity.”

**How do you spend it?**

How you spend that dash is who you are. But how do you know who you really are? How do you test whether you really are a child of God? Is it because you work for Him? What stresses you? How much quality time do you spend with God? What do you think of when you go to sleep and wake up?

We spend most of our dash focusing on what makes us happy, satisfied, even comfortable. But is that what God wants us to do? Paul said that he considered all things a loss, even garbage, for the price of knowing Jesus (Phil. 3:8). We must focus on Jesus to the degree that all other things pale; they lose value, they look like garbage, compared to the desire for Jesus. Unless you consider all things a loss, Jesus will say to you: “I don’t know you. You may have tried to serve Me, even preached in My churches, but I don’t know you because you don’t know Me.”

Author Ellen White writes, “Some, I saw, who profess to be the followers of Jesus, are so ambitious to obtain earthly things that they lose their love for heaven, act like the world, and are accounted of God as of the world. They profess to be seeking an immortal crown, a treasure in the heavens; but their interest and principal study is to acquire earthly treasures. Those who have their treasures in this world, and love their riches, cannot love Jesus.” Did you catch that? If you treasure anything of this world, you cannot love Jesus.

**What’s your priority?**

Unless you make your relationship with Him a priority, unless you use this short passing of time to focus on Him, you waste your dash. Do not pray and study as a duty or just to prepare a sermon; do it to know Him personally; do it with a driving thirst and hunger for Him. “If you would have the rich treasures of heaven, you must hold...
secret communion with God. Unless you do this, your soul will be as destitute of the Holy Spirit as were the hills of Gilboa of dew and rain. When you hurry from one thing to another, when you have so much to do that you cannot take time to talk with God, how can you expect power in your work?”2

They don't mix

Do not try to mix God with your interests and plans; they don't mix. You must consider all a loss and focus on Him. If you try to do both your own agenda and God’s agenda, you will lose both. If you try to save something, you will lose it. “‘For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it’” (Matt. 16:25, NKJV). Whatever you surrender, give up, give to Him; that’s what He can preserve, bless, and multiply. Whatever you try to preserve and keep, you lose.

The reason we often have no power, growth, or success is because we try to mix things—have both the things of this life and things eternal, too. We struggle to fully surrender and renounce all things. Seek first God and His kingdom, and God promises all other things will be provided (Matt. 6:33).

How can you lead others to go where you haven't been yourself?

You can never lead others to surrender if you have not experienced that yourself. In my former churches, I called people to full commitment to prayer, Bible study, and service/mission. We all made serious commitments, even though many did not know what would happen to their businesses, jobs, and even their homes if they did so. Among other things, we conducted many seminars and evangelistic series. At the end of the year, many gave powerful testimonies. All testimonies had something in common: people were all blessed spiritually, their families were blessed, and they all experienced blessings in their businesses, too. While they spent more time with God and serving God, they could clearly see God’s hand in their lives. While this is not a promise of prosperity, God’s Word is clear: seek Him first.

God is calling the shepherds—you—to lead by example. And only when you intimately know God can you lead others to Him. Jesus is coming soon! And He is calling you as a leader to make Him a priority today and every day. You must do that first before you call others to do it.

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The prophetic word of Malachi envisions when “the hearts of fathers . . . and the hearts of children” will turn back to each other in a day of reconciliation between generations, a vision I hold dear for the relationship between young people and the church (Mal. 4:5, 6, ESV). However, a significant challenge faces this hopeful future: while many congregations value young adults, sadly, some do not.

This demographic, encompassing ages 18–35, has gained greater attention in the past few decades in both academic circles and church discussions. Ironically, young adults spearheaded the early Adventist movement. This age group played a pivotal role in shaping the Adventist Church into what it is today. Yet, in some congregations, it seems to have become an overlooked category, one falling into a gap between youth and fully recognized adult membership. “Why is this such a big deal?” you may ask. Let me explain.

Recognizing the need

Often, young adults are increasingly absent from church life. In North America, for example, they constitute a mere 18 percent of church members, compared to nearly half globally.1 David Trim, director of the Archives, Statistics, and Research Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, reports a staggering 50–70 percent disengagement rate of post-high school individuals in the Global North.2

As a 36-year-old young adult pastor, I see this problem as critical. While many churches and church members work to reach the young, unfortunately, some members have not yet fully recognized the need. The disconnect between perception and reality is starkly evident in the latest research on Adventist young adults in the Growing Young Adventists study I just completed for my doctorate in ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary. In this study, I reviewed the survey of more than 6,500 Adventist members and found that while older members believe the church is effectively engaging young adults, the young adults themselves, particularly those aged 18–29, strongly disagree.
They feel the church has failed to understand their needs and minister to them effectively.

The Barna Group’s survey of Adventist young adults makes a pivotal point: the church does well in providing opportunities for children and youth but does not always offer a seamless transition into young adulthood. As one college student in the study observed, “If you aren’t a child and don’t have a child, there’s nothing for you.” Many young adults find themselves without a clear role or place within the church, leading to a feeling of alienation.

While it is important to recognize the positives happening in Christian denominations regarding young people, we should be cautious before celebrating. For instance, national studies like Barna’s “The Open Generation” report a high openness among young people to Jesus and Christianity. However, those same studies often focus on teenagers, a group distinct from young adults in terms of autonomy, life experience, and challenges. The enthusiasm seen in high school students often diminishes after graduation, leading to disengagement from church life.

Adventist researcher Roger Dudley’s work with teens came to a similar conclusion, spotting their enthusiasm for Jesus and Adventism while in their first few years of high school. But once they graduated, he found that they were either nonexistent or inactive in their congregations.

How can we do better?

Such a phenomenon poses a crucial question: how do we view and respond to this challenge? One perspective sees it as a total loss, with young adults drifting away in all respects. A more hopeful view, however, suggests that while young adults may often become disengaged, they have not completely abandoned their faith or relationship with God. They are navigating a new spiritual landscape, one marked by autonomy and exploration. It calls for a renewed approach in how we engage with and understand them, aligning with the biblical counsel of Proverbs 22:6: “Train a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not turn from it” (NOG). The journey of faith for such young adults is not over—it is still evolving.

A significant number of young adults who have stepped away from regular worship services have not necessarily lost their faith. Instead, they are defining and experiencing their faith in their own unique ways, a process described as “faith-ing” by scholars Steven Argue and Kara Powell. These individuals carry with them the teachings and experiences from their upbringing but are now exploring faith in a world that is more nuanced than the black-and-white perspectives of their youth, church, and home.

We cannot let such young people slip through our fingers. Scott Cormode,
a professor of church leadership, asserts that innovation in Christian congregations is not just an option but a necessity for survival in the modern world. The church must adapt and innovate, especially at the local congregational level, to engage young adults effectively. Start young, when they are youths, to engage them, and then continue that through to young adulthood while evaluating how best they can use their maturing God-given gifts in the church. The Adventist Church Manual encourages that “youth should be integrated into responsible leadership and in all lines of church work.” Many Adventist congregations have adopted the Growing Young model that focuses on the six commitments of thriving and, as a result, have seen significant revitalization in their engagement with young adults.

What steps are needed?

Responding to the disengagement of young adults requires a threefold approach: understanding who they are today, finding ways to stay connected with them, and revising our ministry methods.

Understanding today’s young adults is crucial as the first step for every leader. "Very much has been lost to the cause of truth by a lack of attention to the spiritual needs of the young. Ministers of the gospel should form a happy acquaintance with the youth of their congregations. Many are reluctant to do this, but their neglect is a sin in the sight of Heaven." We live in a drastically different world than a generation ago. The emergence of young adulthood as a distinct life stage has resulted from changes in Western society during the past 50–70 years. Society has evolved with advancements in technology, shifts in sexual norms, educational opportunities, and the emergence of new careers. The world is more interconnected than ever, presenting young adults with challenges and experiences that inform and expand their understanding of life, God, and themselves.

The path to adulthood has become a complex journey, often extending the process of becoming an adult by almost a decade. Young adults now face a period of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between while also grappling with the possibilities and optimism of their futures. The new landscape of young adulthood often requires a different approach from the church, one that empathizes with their unique experiences and challenges.

Secondly, staying connected to young adults through prayer and ongoing communication is essential. Such spiritual connection is critical in understanding and responding to their life journeys and needs. Praying for young adults, especially those who have drifted or chosen to leave the church, is crucial. It is about asking for God’s guidance and closeness in their lives and reminding ourselves of Jesus’ enduring love and commitment to them. Keeping the lines of communication open, even in small ways, can provide peace and readiness for deeper conversations when they are ready to engage in them.

Lastly, effective ministry to young adults requires a new approach to ministry to directly address their deepest questions and needs. If the church fails to do so, young adults may feel the church is irrelevant to their adulting process, leading to further separation. During a wedding I was performing, I experienced a recent example involving some youth I had lost connection with after high school. We had a wonderful conversation at dinner, but I soon realized that each person at the table had drifted from church. Struggling to find meaning in their minimum-paying jobs, each had lost their vision of possible future careers and lacked a sense of belonging in the world. The church can play a crucial role in filling this gap, as demonstrated by the apostle Paul’s mentorship of young Timothy in Ephesus. Targeted support and ministry can yield significant results (e.g., congregations that send care packages to college students or stay in touch with birthday cards and phone calls or dinners out).

The church must help

Renewing and expanding our approach to ministry with young adults is imperative. Many congregations continue using youth ministry methods or expect young adults to assimilate into adult church life without acknowledging their unique present stage of life. Young adults differ from their younger counterparts in many psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. They have different core needs and life experiences. The church must help them navigate their identity, providing spaces for belonging and discovering life’s purpose.

Recognizing the need to revise our ministry methods is a crucial first step. The church must pivot its approach to effectively engage today’s young adults in a rapidly changing world. The statistics of young people leaving the church, especially in North America and Europe, mandate adaptation, yet some congregations and leaders...
seem reluctant to change their methods. Do not be one of them.

**Where do we go from here?**

Here are practical steps church leaders can take:

1. **Educate** church boards and leaders on young adult ministry using books such as *Growing Young* and *Young Adult Ministry Now*.
2. **Start** or renew your young adult ministries. Begin with listening sessions with any young adults connected to your congregation.11
3. **Collaborate** with church conferences to create training experiences for effective young adult ministry like the *Growing Young* cohort conducted in the North Pacific Union Conference.12
4. **Engage** young adults in church ministries and church leadership, especially by valuing and implementing their ideas. Direct feedback and partnership with young adults are essential for effective ministry.

5. **Include** a significant church budget allocation for young adult ministry. If your church is serious about taking care of young adults, it must be seen in the budget, programs, and their participation in leadership. Show them that you care and are investing not only time and energy but finances in keeping them in the church.

God has so much in store for our Adventist denomination, and I believe He can empower the Adventist community to support young people’s spiritual journeys so that we can see that prophetic reconciliation occur in our lifetime. Further, the Adventist Church has proved through its history that it genuinely loves young people. So, despite these trying times, it is my strong belief that it can once again become a community of innovation and support, as well as a home in which young adults can thrive and be empowered to lead the next generation of believers in faithfulness until Jesus comes again.

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1 Starkly different worldwide, in some countries between 70 and 80 percent are youth and young adult members. In the North American Division (NAD), only 18.54 percent are below age 40. Also, the median age is 51 in the NAD while worldwide, the Adventist median age is 32. “Vitality: Youth” (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, n.d.), https://www.adventist.org/en/vitality/youth/ (newer online edition no longer has this statistic listed). Cf. Robert Holtbrook, ed., *The AY Story: The Story of Youth Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, updated ed. (Silver Spring, MD: The General Conference Youth Ministries Department, 2005), 24.
3 Barna Group, “Seventh-Day Adventist Church: Young Adult Study” (Ventura, CA, 2013).
8 *Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Secretariat, 2022), 111.
9 My upcoming book will highlight more from this study on Adventists and thriving with young adults, but for more on the six commitments that were in the original *Growing Young* study from Fuller Youth Institute, see the following three books: Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffen, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016); Powell and Argue, *Growing With; Steven C. Argue, Young Adult Ministry Now: A Growing Young Guide* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Youth Institute, 2022).
11 For pointers on where to start, watch Adventist pastor Ben Lundquist’s video on YouTube, “How to Launch a Young Adult Ministry,” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrAfYq9uL20. Another resource is the “We Are Listening” guide produced by the NAD Youth and Young Adult Department, which is available from Advent Source at https://www.adventsource.org/store/young-adults/new-leaders/we-are-listening-38974.
12 For more ideas, check out the NPUC Growing Together website and contact their young adult director, Benjamin Lundquist, for more details at http://growingtogethercohort.com.
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The authentic prayer

We regularly refer to “Our Father which art in heaven . . .” as the Lord’s Prayer. The longer Matthew 6:9–13 version is embedded within the Sermon on the Mount, which Jesus spoke to the gathered crowds. Luke 11:2–4 is an abbreviated version of that same prayer. On this occasion, Christ modeled a prayer in response to His disciples’ personal quest for a more intimate communion with heaven, as had their Teacher.

But the real, authentic prayer of Jesus with His Father is recorded in John 17. In this exchange with His Father, Jesus anchors His prayer in ten central points. Let us listen in on His prayer that we, too, might emulate our Savior.

1. Jesus begins the conversation with His Father by stating, “You have assigned Me tasks that were intended to bring You glory, and I now have completed those assignments” (vv. 1–4, my translation). We must live with such intentionality that we, too, can declare that, rather than pursuing our own goals, we are fulfilling and will complete our heaven-designed purpose.

2. Christ continues with, “I want to thank You, Father, for the ones You have given Me to care for, to lead them to eternal life” (v. 6). This claim of gratitude for the ones given, Christ is truly laudable considering the fact that He was shepherding impetuous Peter, doubting Thomas, slow-of-heart Philip, and deceitful Judas. This encourages us to express gentleness, tact, and gratitude for those within our sphere of influence, even those possessing undesirable traits.

3. “Being committed to revealing You to the world, I have spoken only the words that You have given Me” (v. 8). Just imagine the breakthrough that would occur in our lives and ministry if our singular focus were to reveal Christ to the world.

4. Jesus then offers a somewhat surprising statement: “I am not praying for the entire world but rather, specifically for those You have placed in My care” (v. 9). Here, we find that Christ’s energy and focus are on those within His immediate sphere of influence.

5. Christ then reaffirms the claim: “All I have is Yours and all You have is Mine” (v. 10). Peter best captured this concept when pointing out that “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3, ISV).

6. His prayer next takes inventory of how He has expended resources of time, teaching, and tender care of His sheep. He reports to His Father that “I protected those You gave me, kept them safe, did not lose one, well, except Judas” (v. 12). Oh, that such might be spoken by us on that great judgment day when we will give an account of those whom we have been assigned as shepherds.

7. Jesus now adds, “Father, as you sent Me to tell others the good news, so now I send them, that they may have the full measure of joy that comes from bringing others to you” (vv. 13, 14). Indeed, Jesus understood the depth of delight of bringing others into a relationship with heaven.

8. However, being fully aware of the opposition that the disciples would encounter in sharing the good news, Jesus asks of His Father, “My request is not that You remove them from the earth but that You sanctify them, protect them from the evil one” (vv. 15–17).

9. “I in them and You in Me, that We may be one in order that the love You have for Me may be in them” (v. 23). We can safely say that this is the apex of any prayer or life—living in love, living in harmony, living as one.

10. Jesus then concludes His prayer with an uncompromising declaration, “I want those whom You have given Me to be with Me throughout all time and eternity” (v. 24).

Think for a moment of the sharp contrast between this prayer of Jesus and that of ours. When approaching the Father, our prayers so often express a desire to recover from a health concern, avoid a financial crisis, deal with an annoying supervisor, or receive more rewarding employment—something we want God to “fix.”

In sharp contrast, Jesus’ prayer apprises His Father regarding His earthly assignment, reports on the use of His God-given resources to complete His work, and envisions the future and that of His sheep. In brief, this authentic prayer is about a faithful life lived with heaven in view. May our thoughts, our prayers, undergo a revision, a tailoring to be like that of our Savior.
When Jesus confesses your name
Recently someone asked the question, “If the pre-Advent judgment is as important as we teach it is, why didn’t Jesus say something about it?” My answer was simple: “Scripture is the Word of God, so whatever teaching we find in it is from Jesus. Besides, He alluded to this judgment in the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22.” As I further pondered this question that afternoon, I also remembered Jesus’ promises in Matthew 10:32, 33; Luke 12:8, 9; and Revelation 3:4, 5 and 6:9–11. In this brief study, we will suggest that Jesus’ confession of believers’ names is judicial in character and affirms, in Jesus’ own words, the pre-Advent judgment.

Matthew 10:32, 33 and Luke 12:8, 9

In Matthew 10:26–32, Jesus encouraged the disciples to boldly bear witness to Him. They were not to be afraid of human authorities, even if they were persecuted. Jesus will deny those among His professed followers who deny Him (v. 33), but those who acknowledge (homologeō) Him, He will also acknowledge (homologeō) before the Father (v. 32). In the parallel passage in Luke 12, Jesus promises to acknowledge (homologeō) them “before the angels of God” (v. 8, ESV). The verb homologeō has several meanings, including “to make a statement” or “bear witness” in a legal sense,” a present sense here. In these passages, Jesus points to a “juridical scene . . . in the setting of the heavenly court.”

As noted also by some scholars, Daniel 7 seems to present the thematic and contextual background to Matthew 10 and Luke 12. The forensic context, judgment “before” the Ancient of Days and angels, the role of the Son of Man, and judgment being pronounced “in favor” of “the saints” all contribute to making Daniel 7:9–14 the appropriate background to Jesus’ statements. It is interesting to note that the judgment in Matthew 10 and Luke 12, like that of Daniel 7, includes the judgment of professed believers.

Revelation 3:4, 5

In Revelation 3:4, 5, Jesus promises Sardis that the names of the faithful ones will never be blotted out of the book of life and that the faithful will be clothed in white garments for having overcome trials. As in Matthew 10 and Luke 12, the Lord promises to “confess” (homologeō) the names of true believers “before my Father and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5, ESV). Here too, Daniel 7 serves as background. The confession of names in Revelation 3 is connected to the book of life, the same “books” from which the judgment is pronounced in favor of the saints (Dan. 7:9, 10, 22). In Revelation 3:1–3, Jesus says that He knows the works of the believers at Sardis and that their works are not complete before God, yet there are few “names” who have not soiled their garments (v. 4). The promise to confess the names of the faithful in the following verses connects works with judgment.

Revelation 6:9–11

In Revelation 6:9–11, John sees souls under the altar who cry out for judgment against those who killed them for their witness for Christ, but the Lord responds that they need to “rest a little longer” (v. 11, ESV). As in the message to the fifth church (Sardis), the message of the fifth seal refers to “white” garments for those who overcome through faith and perseverance. In Revelation 3:4, 5, the
judgment in which Jesus confesses the names of the faithful precedes the giving or wearing of the white garments of victory.

The verb plēroō (translated in Revelation 6:11 as “should be complete” [ESV]) describes the activity that must take place before the judgment of vengeance. This verb has several meanings, including to fill up a specific measure (Matt. 23:32), come to an end (Acts 7:23; 9:23; Luke 21:24), or complete or bring to completion (cf. Luke 7:1; Acts 13:25). Although some scholars understand this verse in Revelation 6 to mean to be “made complete or perfect in character,” they do not understand plēroō in a specifically forensic sense. Yet there is evidence to suggest such nuance in Revelation 6:11. Even outside of Revelation, the “perfecting” of character depicted by this verb is connected to the law (Rom. 8:4; 13:8; 2 Cor. 10:5, 6).

The use of a passive form of plēroō in Revelation 6:11 allows the observation that believers are recipients of divine action: they will be made (or will become) complete/perfect by Christ. Verses 9 and 10 suggest that this “completing” exercise will be concluded before the executive (the vengeance part of the) judgment. The other time the same verb occurs in Revelation, it is found in the message to the fifth church (Sardis), where Christ says, “I have not found your works perfect [plēroō] before God” (Rev. 3:2, NKJV). To find someone’s works perfect “before God” conveys the idea of a legal trial. And again, the phrase “before God” is imagery of the heavenly court. In Revelation, therefore, the verb plēroō appears in forensic contexts. The executive judgment will come after a juridical process during which believers are made complete. The lexical links between Revelation 3:2–5 and 6:9–11 suggest that Jesus’ “confessing” of the names of faithful followers in the former passage parallels His “completing” of the believers in the latter. It is a divine activity during which believers will be vindicated on the basis of their faith and life in Christ.

The reference to “souls” under the “altar” who call for God’s executive judgment (v. 9) links both the “perfecting” process of the saints and the executive judgment with the heavenly sanctuary. This connection of the judgment of the saints who have suffered tribulations with the heavenly sanctuary in Revelation 6 recalls Daniel 8, where the sanctuary is said to be “cleansed” (v. 14, NKJV) after the 2,300-day period following the tribulations and abominations caused by the little horn power.

**Timing of the judgment**

In Matthew 10 and Luke 12, there are no temporal indicators for the seating of the heavenly court. Although there is no indication of the time the confession will take place, the New Testament is clear that the judgment process involving the saints will have already taken place in heaven before Jesus’ return; the determination is already made as to who will receive eternal life and who will not when Jesus appears with His angels (2 Thess. 1:6–10; 2:8; Rev. 14:13), the righteous are gathered (Matt. 24:31)—the righteous dead are raised (1 Cor. 15:50–54; Rev. 20:5, 6) and “caught up” together with the righteous living—“to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). Nonetheless, since the Old Testament background of Matthew 10:32, 33 and Luke 12:8, 9 is Daniel 7, the temporal indicators in Daniel could also apply to Jesus’ statements. In Daniel 7, the seating of the court with the books open before the Ancient of Days and the angels takes place after the activities of the persecuting power represented by the little horn, destructive activities that halted by the end of the eighteenth century.

Explicit temporal markers concerning Jesus confessing believers’ names appear in the passages of Revelation. First is the use of the noun chronos, “time,” in Revelation 6:11. In Revelation, this noun denotes the “time” when repentance is possible (Rev. 2:21) and the “time” during which Satan will be released before his destruction (Rev. 20:3). In Revelation 10:6, chronos denotes the “time’ when the pre-Advent judgment must begin. There are
significant parallels between Revelation 10:6, 7 and Daniel 12:4, 7 to warrant the conclusion that “what is most decisive for understanding the meaning of chronos in Revelation 10:6 is the recognition . . . that this verse is a virtual citation from Daniel 12, and in Daniel 12 [v. 7] the reference is to a period of prophetic time indicated by the angel.”4 When the angel in Revelation swears that there is no longer “time” (Rev. 10:6), we may understand that the prophetic period “time, times, and half a time” in Daniel 12:7 has drawn to a close.

As in Revelation 10:6, thematic connections between Daniel and Revelation 6:9–11 inform the meaning of chronos in verse 11. The question introduced by “‘how long?’” (v. 10) and the use of chronos “time” (v. 11) recall the “how long?” questions connected with time prophecies in Daniel: 1,260-day (i.e., “time, times, and half a time”) and 2,300-day (i.e., “evening-morning”) prophecies after which the pre-Advent judgment commences (Dan. 7:25, 26; 8:13, 14; 12:6, 7). Thus, in Revelation 6:11, chronos likely points to the period of the pre-Advent judgment.

There is a future perspective in Revelation 3:4, 5 and 6:9–11. This is indicated by expressions such as “‘I will not blot’” and “‘I will confess’” (Rev. 3:5, NKJV), “‘how long,’” “‘rest a little while longer,’” and “‘until . . . completed’” (Rev. 6:9–11, NKJV). In these instances, Jesus indicates that the forensic activity of confessing believers’ names (Rev. 3:4, 5) or completing the believers (Rev. 6:9–11) will take place at a future period. If we have understood Jesus’ statements correctly, these passages suggest that during the historical periods covered by the fifth church (Sardis) and the fifth seal—which historicists place in 1517–17555—the pre-Advent judgment had not yet begun.

Revelation 11:15–19 and 14:6, 7 have been understood to announce the time or activity of the pre-Advent judgment.6 Revelation 14 shows that this phase of the judgment precedes the Second Coming and decides the destiny of everyone (vv. 14–20) and that this judgment is concurrent with the final proclamation of the gospel (vv. 6–12).

Notice the lexical links between Revelation 11:18, 19 and 6:9–11 regarding the time, scope, and location of the judgment. In Revelation 6, the “souls” are told to wait a “little longer” till the believers are “completed,” but in Revelation 11, the divine action has commenced. The links between the two passages suggest what is promised in chapter 6 (i.e., the completing of the believers before the executive judgment) is being fulfilled in chapter 11 (i.e., the activity of the pre-Advent judgment) and that the judgment involves confessed followers of Christ (cf. Rev. 20:4–15).

Both passages also indicate that the pre-Advent judgment takes place in the heavenly sanctuary, and mentioning the “ark of his covenant” connects the judgment with the Most Holy place as well as the role of the law of God placed in the ark. The interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpet mentions the 1,260-day prophecy (Rev. 11:1–3), the same period for the activities of the little horn of Daniel 7:25 and 12:7. The pre-Advent judgment occurs at the time of the end, which commences after the 1,260-day and 2,300-day prophecies (Dan. 8:14; 12:7; Rev. 10:6, 7; 11:1–3, 15–19).

**Conclusion**

We have attempted to demonstrate that Jesus’ statements in Matthew 10:32, 33 and Luke 12:8, 9, Revelation 3:4, 5, and Revelation 6:9–11, with their Old Testament backgrounds from the book of Daniel, point to the pre-Advent phase of the end-time judgment. This judgment is connected to the heavenly sanctuary and occurs after the 1,260-day prophecy.

It is a judgment during which Jesus will confess before the heavenly intelligences the names of His faithful followers, justifying—based on His atoning sacrifice and His robe of righteousness—that their names should remain in the book of life and they be awarded eternal life. How reassuring these words of the Lord are to believers!

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The authority of prophets

Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. And they said to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?”

But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.”

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’”—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. So they answered and said to Jesus, “We do not know.”

And Jesus answered and said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things” (Mark 11:27–33, NKJV).

By what authority are you doing these things?” Jesus replied to that question in good rabbinic fashion with a counter question. In rabbinic debates, the counter question was meant to point the way to the answer to the original question. This is what Jesus was aiming for. When they refused to answer, He refused to give a clear answer. Why? If they refused to acknowledge God’s power in John’s ministry, there was little point in discussing His own authority as also from God.

The authority of canonical prophets

In the life of every Christian, God is the highest authority. No human being can take that place, no parent, teacher, or minister. In Acts 5:29, Peter and the other apostles, facing the high priest and others, said: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (NKJV).

In the Old Testament, God delegated his authority to certain people—prophets were His spokespersons. When God called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses tried to avoid taking on this responsibility. God said to him, “Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? . . . So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God” (Exod. 4:14–16, NKJV). Aaron was Moses’ spokesman, as Moses was God’s spokesman.

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses told the Israelites, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (NKJV). The first fulfillment of this prophecy was Joshua, then the prophets, and finally Jesus Christ. And Jesus delegated His authority to His disciples in Matthew 28: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (v. 19, NKJV).
In Matthew 18:18, Jesus told His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (NKJV). Paul, therefore, could say to the Thessalonians, “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thess. 2:13, NKJV). The prophetic word has authority because God gives it His authority. Moses knew that he was authorized to speak on God’s behalf; the prophets knew they spoke on God’s behalf; Paul certainly knew it, “For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed” (2 Cor. 10:8, NKJV), and the early church accepted the apostles as God’s messengers.

The authority of noncanonical prophets
After David committed adultery with Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet came to him with a message from God, saying, “You are the man!” (2 Sam. 12:7). In David’s time, Scripture was the Torah (the five books of Moses), but not for one moment did David question the authority of Nathan. He knew Nathan was a prophet, and his word was authoritative for David. Nathan also wrote at least one inspired book: “Now the acts of King David, first and last, indeed they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of God the seer” (1 Chron. 29:29), but Nathan’s book is not in the Bible.

Why did God not include all inspired books in the canon? Knowing our weakened human brain, He selected only those books He knew we needed to know to understand His plan of salvation. If He had included all the inspired books, we would be carrying several volumes of Scripture to Sabbath School and church!

What these prophets like Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo said or wrote was just as authoritative and binding for the people of that time as were the books of Moses and Samuel. The authority of prophetic books lies in their inspiration, not in the book’s place in the canon. But since John the Revelator’s time, the canon, God’s yardstick, has been closed, and no other inspired books can be added.

The biblical canon is simply the collection of books that, under God’s guidance, was put together as our rule of life and faith by which everything else must be measured. It contains everything a person needs to know to be saved. To the Colossians, Paul wrote, “Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col. 4:16). If we found Paul’s letter
to the Laodiceans and other inspired letters, they would not become part of the canon. They would remain inspired letters outside of the canon.

**The authority of the end-time prophet**

The question that concerns some is: What authority have the writings of Ellen G. White in the church today? Most Adventists agree that she was an inspired messenger of God. We do not believe in degrees of inspiration. But what authority do her writings have? Adventists, like all Christians, believe that the biblical canon has been closed since John the Revelator; that is, everything people need to know to be saved is found in the canon of the Scripture. Scripture is God’s Word for all time and all people. Now, after the canon has been closed, we discover that there is a modern prophet of God who says, “God showed me” this and that. How shall we evaluate such messages?

Ellen White and Scripture. The relationship between Scripture and Ellen White, as I understand it, is as follows:

a. The Bible is God’s message for all time and all people. The writings of Ellen White are God’s message for a particular time, the end time, for a particular people, the remnant church.

b. Ellen White’s writings are not a new or additional standard of doctrine but a help for the church in the time of the end. Her writings have a different purpose from Scripture; they are the “lesser light to lead . . . to the greater light.”

In 1982, the Biblical Research Institute and the Ellen G. White Estate issued a statement on the relationship between the Bible and the Ellen G. White writings:

**AFFIRMATIONS**

[My comments are in brackets]

1. We believe that Scripture is the divinely revealed Word of God and is inspired by the Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that the canon of Scripture is composed only of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.
3. We believe that Scripture is the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. [Scripture is the standard for all doctrines.]
4. We believe that Scripture is the Word of God in human language.
5. We believe that Scripture teaches that the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the Christian church after New Testament times [Rev. 19:10; 12:17; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28].
6. We believe that the ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy.
7. We believe that Ellen White was inspired by the Holy Spirit and that her writings, the product of that inspiration, are particularly applicable and authoritative to Seventh-day Adventists. [No degrees of inspiration. Authority is in the inspiration.]
8. We believe that the purposes of the Ellen White writings include guidance in understanding the teaching of Scripture and application of these teachings with prophetic urgency to the spiritual and moral life. [Her writings are faith-building and faith-strengthening.]
9. We believe that the acceptance of the prophetic gift of Ellen White, while not a requirement for continuing church membership, is important to the nurture and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. [Generally, we expect that a person who wants to become a Seventh-day Adventist accepts Ellen White as God’s messenger. But nobody can be dropped from membership if he or she loses faith in Ellen White’s writings, just as we do not disfellowship people who stop tithing.]
10. We believe that Ellen White’s use of literary sources and assistants finds parallels in some of the writings of the Bible. [Jeremiah and Baruch; Paul and Tertius; and others]
6. We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White. [Her writings are primarily an inspired homiletic rather than an exegetical commentary.]

7. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.

8. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large. [They are not essential for salvation.]

9. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are merely the product of Christian piety.

10. We do not believe that Ellen White’s use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.

We conclude, therefore, that a correct understanding of the inspiration and authority of the writings of Ellen White will avoid two extremes: (1) regarding these writings as functioning on a canonical level identical with Scripture, or (2) considering them as ordinary Christian literature.

Why read Ellen G. White?

Some Adventists believe that the authority of Ellen White is only pastoral, faith-strengthening but not faith-building. In other words, they think her theological statements can be ignored. This differentiation between pastoral and dogmatic prophets, however, is not scriptural. Scripture makes no distinction between a prophet’s pastoral and teaching function.

“A prophet is God’s spokesperson whatever the content of the message. Any claim that Ellen White’s writings carry no teaching authority must fly in the face of her own statements. As we have seen, she declares unequivocally, ‘My commission embraces that of a prophet, but it does not end there.’ She either told the truth or she didn’t. If she didn’t, what further confidence could we have in her even if she honestly but mistakenly thought so?”

Above all, we should not forget the main theme of all her writings. The first sentence in the book Patriarchs and Prophets is “God is love.” The last sentence in the book The Great Controversy is “God is love.” Her main theme was always Jesus. Constantly, she pointed people to Scripture and Jesus Christ. Her whole life was devoted to making Jesus the center of our faith.

In 1980, a poll was taken among Seventh-day Adventists. Of those who regularly read Ellen White’s writings, 85 percent stated that they had a close personal relationship with Christ. Only 59 percent of those who did not read her regularly said the same. Of those who regularly read her books, 82 percent also stated that they study Scripture daily. Of the nonreaders, only 47 percent said they read Scripture regularly.

I do not believe that much has changed since 1982, except that a more recent church survey by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research has shown that only 74 percent of Seventh-day Adventists accept Ellen White’s prophetic gift wholeheartedly. Another 12 percent accept it because the church teaches it. At any rate, from my personal observation of over 50 years in many countries, I can say that in most churches, the missionary-minded people are frequently avid readers of her books. Now, if reading her books makes people read more Scripture and more missionary-minded, should we not encourage all our members to read her books?

Conclusion

The Pharisees refused to answer Jesus because they were not willing to give up their own preconceived ideas and opinions. I am afraid many today reject the writings of Ellen White for similar reasons. Let us not forget Jehoshaphat’s words to Israel: “ ‘Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper’ ” (2 Chron. 20:20, NKJV).

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Sarah: Matriarch by God’s grace

Abraham looms large in Judeo-Christian theology, but there is less reflection on the lessons to learn from his wife Sarah. Many stories in the Bible demonstrate that God chooses to show mercy to the apparently weak. The demonstration of God’s love and mercy is especially poignant in the plight of childless Sarah.

Isaiah mentions Sarah as he moves toward the epic poem of the Suffering Servant. He pleads, “Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you, for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many” (Isa. 51:2).

The call of God came dramatically to Abraham with a sevenfold promised blessing. But why is Sarah mentioned by Isaiah in the context of a return to true worship, with promised deliverance and comfort? Her inclusion indicates that God’s people need exactly the same miracle that God performed in barren Sarah. This is a profound claim worthy of further study.

Denigrated

Sarah is burdened by seven denigratory situations, the typical experience of any weak person. Sarah’s experience forms a chiasm exquisitely centering on blessing from God (which Sarah struggled to accept).

1. Barren (Gen. 11:30). In stark contrast to the blessing of fruitfulness promised to Abraham and demonstrated by the fruitful generations of Adam (Gen. 5), Noah (Gen. 10), Shem (Gen. 11:10–26), and Terah (vv. 27–30), Sarah is noted, twice, as barren, the first person designated as such in the Bible. She was unproductive, a useless nothing in the context of when she lived. Despite the joy of many promises to her husband, she had nothing.

2. A liability (Gen. 12:11–20). Sarah was physically beautiful, but Abraham was concerned about the possible danger this posed to himself by Egyptian interest in her. This suggests Abraham believed the promised blessings applied primarily to himself, and Sarah’s barrenness meant she could be sacrificed to protect her valuable husband. But God thought otherwise.

3. The weakness of human plans (Gen. 16:2–4). Sarah was resourceful. She desperately planned to utilize cultural norms to achieve a child for her husband. Abraham accepted her strategy and took her servant as a concubine. The plan worked, but the now-pregnant concubine understood the reason for her elevation in the family and looked on her childless mistress with “contempt.” Human efforts for the weak to become strong do not work. Sarah, upset by this turn of events, treated her slave harshly and banished her. Sarah’s bullying behavior is typical of people who see themselves as weak and powerless. Remarkably, God Himself spoke to the now weak and banished Hagar (vv. 7–14).

4. Blessed by God (Gen. 17:15–19). When God inaugurated the rite of circumcision as the sign of the covenant with Abraham, he also remembered Sarah. “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall come from her” (vv. 15, 16; emphasis added). Sarah was blessed twice by God Himself. But Abraham laughed! He was so used to Sarah’s affliction that he saw no remedy for her, not even when God promised! How often do we relegate people to the worthless basket, seeing them as weak and ineffectual, when God plans something very special for them?

5. Nothing works—no self-esteem (Gen. 18:11–15). When Sarah finally heard God declare she would have a child (although she probably did not recognize the visitor as God), she, too, laughed. Her human plans had not worked, and
she could not see beyond them. After years of achieving nothing, she had lost her sense of personal worth. Sarah had lost faith in her own efforts, in God, and in her mission.

6. Expendable liability (Gen. 20:1–18). The situation in Gerar with King Abimelech chiastically matches the incident in Egypt. Despite the promises to Sarah, Abraham still saw himself as the grand recipient of the covenant promises. Did he not realize the covenant was with his wife as well? Once again confronted with undue interest in his wife's beauty by what he, Abraham, considered to be men without fear of God (v. 11), he sacrificed her safety to provide a shield for his own protection—incredibly, the same mistake he had made in Egypt. In this sad situation, God spoke to the heathen king, not to Abraham. As Abraham prayed for the infertility curse on Abimelech's people to be lifted, did he finally pray for his own wife?

7. Pain in the midst of joy (Gen. 21:9–12). When weak, ineffectual Sarah, after 25 years of waiting (perhaps more like 75 years), achieved the unachievable through a miracle of God's
grace and had a son, Isaac (meaning “he laughs”) at the age of 90, she was derided. In the midst of her rejoicing, “Who would have said . . . that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have born him a son in his old age” (v. 7), others did not share her victory. How slow we are to see the power of God's mercy working in the lives of others. At the moment of great joy, the weaning feast of Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael mocked Isaac, so Sarah demanded the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael. Paul, in Galatians, takes up Sarah’s reaction as an appropriate one from an allegorical perspective when grace takes precedence over law (Gal. 4:21–31).

A theology of grace and inclusion
As Paul’s use of the interaction of Sarah and Hagar demonstrates, Sarah’s story is an example of God’s grace to all people, especially those weak and denigrated. Although Sarah is known for her lack of faith and the instigator of the disastrous Hagar episode that sidetracked both Abraham and her from faith and trust in God, God insisted that she be the one he worked through to bring fulfillment of the promised blessings.

This lack of faith in both Abraham and Sarah can be compared with the disastrous molten calf episode at Sinai. Both the Sinai disaster and the Hagar episode occur between two covenant settings. For Abraham, Hagar comes between the covenants of Genesis 15 and 17, suggesting circumcision initiated in chapter 17 was actually a sign of grace. For the Israelites at Sinai, the golden calf incident occurs between the dramatic Sinai covenant and tabernacle declarations (Exod. 19–31) and the covenant of grace and mercy in Exodus chapter 34. Both situations display a tragic human lack of faith and understanding of God’s promises. Although never specifically stated, God clearly forgave Abraham and Sarah their mistake (although they suffered for it), just as God forgave the Israelites at Sinai (who also suffered) and inaugurated for them a new covenant based on grace.4

Sarah is notably the first person in the Bible to be healed from a specific, recognizable disease—infertility. The New Testament use of the Greek term sozo for both the healing of the body and the salvation of the soul thus makes Sarah’s physical healing a profound miracle of grace. Paul’s recognition that her healing should take precedence over the legal requirements of acknowledging Ishmael as the firstborn son is highly significant. Sarah was living proof that God saves, God heals.

Appreciation of Sarah
The Sarah story, however, does not end with the birth of Isaac. Notably, the Isaiah text focuses on Abraham when he was “one” (echad). Three usages help elucidate the meaning of echad in Isaiah 51:2. The first day of creation is echad (Gen 1:5). The generic human, ha-adam, became a male, ish, when he became one, echad, with the woman, ishah, whom God had specially created for him, and thus also “one” with God (Gen 2:24). God Himself is famously “one,” echad, both first and a unity (Deut. 6:4).

When did the “oneness” of Abraham occur? He consisted of a company of people from the moment of his call when he left Ur of the Chaldeans (see Gen. 11:31; 12:4, 5; 13:5–7; 14:14, etc.). His “oneness” could be regarded in the sense of “first,” considering his primary role in God’s plan to call out a people dedicated to God and blessing others. But God’s insistence on including Sarah in the plan to fulfill the promises for Abraham to be the father of a great nation strongly suggests his “oneness” was related to his marriage relationship.

Sarah’s weakness and barrenness meant Abraham struggled to see her as truly “one” with him—on more than one occasion, he mistakenly considered her life dispensable compared with his own. But, as the Genesis narrative portrays in different ways, God values the weak as much as the strong, and Abraham had to learn that lesson. Both Sarah and Abraham were part of God’s covenant.

As pastors, it is imperative to see that God can make all people strong through the power of His mercy and grace.

Men called to lead in some great work are honored as if its success were due to them alone; but that success required the faithful co-operation of humbler workers almost without number—workers of whom the world knows nothing. . . . The little rill that makes its noiseless way through grove and meadow, bearing health and fertility and beauty, is as useful in its way as the broad river. . . .

. . . Talent is too much idolized, and station too much coveted. . . . What we need to learn is faithfulness in making the utmost use of the powers and opportunities we have, and contentment in the lot to which Heaven assigns us.5

Funerals are times when the value of people is recognized. A whole chapter, Genesis 23, is
devoted to the funeral arrangements Abraham made for Sarah, the longest description of a funeral in Genesis. The high price Abraham was willing to pay for the burial plot (Gen. 23:15, 16) and the ardor he expended in achieving this goal (the first piece of the promised land “owned” by God’s chosen people) demonstrate the value Sarah now finally had in his esteem. It is noteworthy that Abraham both “mourned” and “wept” for Sarah (v. 2), a typical Hebrew repetition to emphasize a point.

**Recognize the “oneness”**

When Sarah took the initiative and tried to work things out for herself and Abraham, to achieve her goals, suffering and tragedy resulted. Also, until Abraham could recognize the necessity of “oneness” with Sarah, the promises remained void.

As pastors, we need to recognize the “oneness” of all God’s people. It is not productivity that makes us valuable in God’s sight but the capacity to accept His mercy and grace, the willingness to be available for whatever task or in whatever capacity He chooses to use us. When we look to our father-leader Abraham, as well as to our barren mother Sarah, our “wilderness” will be “like Eden,” the “desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found;” “and the salvation of God “to all generations” (paraphrase of Isa. 51:3, 8). “And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing to Zion; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (v. 11).

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1 All biblical quotes in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.

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**LETTERS**

Clifford Goldstein, in “The Good News of the Pre-Advent Judgment” (August 2023), wrote, “Twice (Lev. 16:29, 31), the Hebrews are told, ‘Afflict your souls’ on that day. Though debate exists over the precise meaning, it surely included fasting (Isa. 58:3; Ezra 8:21), repentance, humility, self-denial, and confession of sin, all of which imply the inherent sinfulness of the people, even on Yom Kippur.”

Although Goldstein wrote, “debate exists;” both Abraham ben Ezra and Nachmanides, cited in the *Soncino Chumash* (1947) at Leviticus 16:29, say, “This phrase, when used in Scripture, denotes fasting.”

Considering that this was a day of atonement (Heb. *kaphar*), rather than it being a day of introspection, remorse, regrets, and concern about forgotten and unconfessed sins, it was to be a day of relief and rest. This was a Shabbat Shabbaton, a rest for both body and soul, or a superlative rest (Abraham ben Ezra cited in the *Chumash*).

Writing in the first century AD, John wrote, “Jesus Christ, the Righteous One is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1, 2). Sounds like a day of atonement! Good news, then. Good news now.

I lay my sins on Jesus, The spotless Lamb of God; He bears them all, and frees us From the accursed load . . .

I bring my guilt to Jesus, To wash my crimson stains White in His blood most precious, Till not a stain remains.¹

—Angus McPhee, pastor, New South Wales, Australia

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¹ “I Lay My Sins on Jesus,” *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1985), #298.
Discerning signs of the times in the context of Matthew 16:2, 3

In today’s world, many people, irrespective of their religious affiliations, are actively seeking answers and searching for signs that may provide them with insights into what the future holds, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. People are curious about upcoming events and how they will unfold. They want to understand what, when, and how things will happen. Some people are even wondering who will bring about changes and shape the new world order. There is much uncertainty surrounding the future, which has led to diverse speculations and conjectures among both believers and nonbelievers.

The context

“‘When it is evening, you say, “it will be fair weather, for the sky is red”; and in the morning, “It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.” Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times’” (Matt. 16:2, 3, NKJV).

In this passage, Jesus was addressing the Pharisees and Sadducees who were demanding a sign from Him to prove His authority. Jesus used the term *hypocrites* to convey His frustration and disappointment with them for their failure to recognize the truth about Him. Jesus condemned their spiritual blindness. The signs of the times that Jesus referred to in this passage were the events and circumstances that pointed to the fulfillment of prophecy and the coming of the Messiah. Despite being well-versed in the Scriptures, the religious leaders of His day failed to recognize the signs and rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Even John the Baptist had some doubts about whether Jesus was the promised Messiah.

The phrase *signs of the times* comes from the Greek words σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν (sēmeia tōn kairōn) and refers to meaningful indications of what God has done, is doing, or is about to do. In Christian eschatology, the “signs of the end” are events or trends that indicate the nearness of the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ. These signs are based on several passages in the Bible, such as Matthew 24:3–8; Mark 13:3–8; and Luke 21:7–11, and are believed to increase in frequency and intensity as the end draws near.

The signs in Matthew 16:2, 3 were meant to point people to the truth of His identity as the Son of God and Savior of the world. The expression *the signs of the times* is also typically used to refer to the events and circumstances that are believed to precede or point to the end of the age and Jesus’ second coming.

While it is important to pay attention to these signs, our reaction should not be an emotional
one of fear or anxiety but, rather, a drawing closer to Jesus Christ. We should be hopeful and expectant of His return and determined to live our lives in a way that honors Him.

Erroneous interpretations

As they seek to discern the signs of the times in light of current events and their potential implications for the future, many people have ended up being consumed with speculation, conspiracy theories, and sensationalism. Various erroneous interpretations can have far-reaching consequences. These interpretations are subjective; depend on individuals’ worldviews, beliefs, and values; and are not supported by mainstream theological views.

Pandemics and natural disasters. One of the significant events of our time is the COVID-19 pandemic. It has affected every aspect of life, from economics and politics to religion and personal relationships. Some religious leaders have questioned whether this pandemic is an ultimate sign of the end times. While we cannot know, Jesus does warn us that the global turmoil and upheaval coming in the last days will be the beginning of the birth pains.

Conspiracy theories. Another common erroneous interpretation of the signs of the times is the belief in conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories often exaggerate the facts or are based on limited or inaccurate information. They can lead to irrational and harmful beliefs and actions. One example is that some religious groups and individuals believe that the COVID-19 pandemic is a conspiracy orchestrated by a secret group or government.

Technology and artificial intelligence. Some people have perceived artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies as harbingers of doom. The Bible speaks of a time when a mark will be required to buy and sell (Rev. 13:16–18), and speculations have been made that the proliferation of technology is meant to facilitate this requirement. Others equate it to the increase in knowledge as a sign of end times and fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 12:4. Ray Kurzweil argues that the exponential growth of technology is a natural result of human innovation and that it will continue to accelerate in the future.

Guidance

Instead of causing speculation and conspiracy theories, the signs of the times should provide hope and encouragement because they point to Jesus’ soon coming. They are also a clear call to preparation and awareness and offer potential...
opportunities for evangelism and outreach. Overall, the emphasis is on the need for vigilance and preparation in the face of these signs.

Discerning the signs of the end times requires serious Bible study that leads to a deep knowledge of the Scriptures, prayer, vigilance, listening to collective church leaders, guidance from the Holy Spirit, and observation of the fulfillment of prophecies.

**Study the Scriptures.** A deep knowledge of the Bible is essential. Ellen White postulates, “Those who would share the benefits of the Saviour’s mediation should permit nothing to interfere with their duty to perfect holiness in the fear of God. The precious hours, instead of being given to pleasure, to display, or to gain seeking, should be devoted to an earnest, prayerful study of the word of truth.” By studying the Scriptures and comparing them to current events, we can discern the signs of the times.

**Watch and pray.** The importance of prayer and vigilance in discerning the end times cannot be overemphasized. Ellen White writes, “God would have his people prepared for the soon-coming crisis.” We must stay awake and alert and seek God’s guidance through prayer and study.

**Listen to church experts.** Moreover, we know that God does not send light, knowledge, and understanding to only secluded individuals but, rather, to many of His servants. Therefore, we must be diligent in studying and listening to what church experts say on discerning the signs of the end times.

**Be guided by the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is the ultimate guide in discerning the signs of the end times. Ellen White writes, “God alone, by the quickening, vivifying influence of His Holy Spirit can enable men to distinguish between the sacred and the common.” By allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us, we can have open ears and eyes to discern the true significance of current events and understand their place in God’s plan for the world.

**Look for the fulfillment of prophecy.** Ellen White also shows that the fulfillment of prophecy is a key indicator of the end times. She writes, “The prophecies which the great I AM has given in His word, uniting link after link in the chain of events, from eternity in the past to eternity in the future, tell us where we are today in the procession of the ages and what may be expected in the time to come.” By looking for the fulfillment of prophecy, we can better understand the signs of the end times and understand how current events fit into God’s plan.

**Trusting and faithful**

In conclusion, just like the Pharisees and religious leaders failed to recognize the signs of Jesus’ birth, contemporary believers may also have difficulties understanding the signs of Christ’s second coming because even though all prophecies will be fulfilled, we do not know exactly how. However, we must study God’s Word diligently and be always filled with God’s Spirit. Moreover, while we may not fully understand all the signs and events around us, we must always be ready, always in a close relationship with God, always awake, praying without ceasing, serving God, and fulfilling the mission God has given us.

Paul says, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. . . . They will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:2–5, NKJV). We cannot know for certain what the future holds, but we can certainly trust in the sovereignty of God, remain faithful in fulfilling His purposes for our lives, and guide our parishioners to do likewise.

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7. Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1883), 252.

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Because of Their Testimony: The Power of Telling Your Story

Chigemezi N. Wogu, Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2023.

Dr. Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu, pastor of the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Adventgemeinde in Spandau, Berlin, has written a faith-building piece on the powerful import of personal testimonies. In this concise book of just five chapters, Wogu documents soul-lifting accounts of answered prayers on the first anniversary of his pastoral ministry. Taking the title of his book from the biblical “because . . . of their testimony” verse (Rev. 12:11, NASB), Wogu evinces the incredible power of personal stories. This is what God’s servant Ellen G. White meant when she wrote that a “Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity.”1

Because of Their Testimony begins by acknowledging the biblical importance of testimonies: “sharing our testimony of what God has done for us causes people to praise God and reflect on God’s righteousness” (2). Wogu further shows that sharing our testimonies acknowledges and proclaims Jesus, grows our faith, encourages others, and serves as a weapon for overcoming the enemy. These four cardinal reasons for testifying are built upon in the other chapters of the book.

Whether it is the personal testimony of Wogu’s transition from having a comfortable job as a social worker in a little town in Germany to accepting the call to pastor a multicultural and international congregation in Berlin; the powerful conversion story of Lakshmi from Hinduism to the Christian faith; Inger’s tremendous faith journey; the faith-building pregnancy experience of Wogu’s wife and the miraculous safe-delivery of his son, Chiedozie; or the healing experience of Favour’s new babies, in spite of bleak medical prognosis; one common element running through their testimonies is the power and reward of faith.

Wogu not only focuses on the testimonies of those who got favorable answers to their prayers but also draws powerful lessons from those who stayed faithful until death. “But one thing I need to mention is that while persecution fans the flame of Christian faith, martyrdom catalyses the faith of those who witness the death of the believers” (42).

Why is Because of Their Testimony a must-read for every pastor and laity? First, I think it will propel us to begin to ask the Lord for personal testimonies through answers to our prayers. Asking for testimonies means praying for them. So, in a way, Pastor Wogu’s book is a call to pray more, expect more, and testify more. Second, as a pastor myself, I know the indispensability of personal testimonies. Every pastor needs to have a testimony to share every time; this powerfully validates our calling.

This very book is a timely reminder to every pastor that if God has called you, He will give you testimonies. In essence, every Christian is a testifier, which is the reason this book is for everyone who wishes to boost their propensity for testimonies. Lastly, the easy-to-read nature and conciseness of this book make it a great read. Actually, it can be read on a 45-minute train ride!

On October 26, 2023, Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference, came to participate in the centenary celebration of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Eastern Nigeria. Ahead of the November 4 celebration in Aba, Abia State, church leadership organized visits to Nigerian authorities.

In a special address, Pastor Wilson gave the formula for effectiveness in leadership and government as doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Speaking directly from Micah 6:8, he noted that every decision made by leaders in government or spiritual affairs should be grounded in justice and mercy and done in humility before God and the people. He expressed words of commendation: “Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you for the hospitality of your people and your commitment to be a government that truly serves the people.”

Pastor Wilson also appealed to Governor Umo Bassey Eno to use the instrumentality of his office to encourage state institutions to provide alternative opportunities for Seventh-day Adventists and other Sabbath keepers to participate in elections, examinations, and community clean-up exercises outside Sabbath hours.

Pastor Wilson acknowledged the graciousness of the governor and his cabinet in waiting to visit with him. He prayed God’s blessings and wisdom for the governor and his team.

Governor Eno thanked Pastor Wilson for dropping by with his team. “It is not all the time that the world leaders of Christian organizations come calling. We’re only about five months in office, so as world leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, your visit is very significant for us, and we do not take it for granted,” he enthused.

Pastor Wilson was in Nigeria to lead the grand finale of the year-long celebration of 100 years of Adventism in Eastern Nigeria. He has, among other commemorative activities, attended the Year-End Council of the West-Central Africa Division, visited the uplink center of the Hope Channel International–led satellite evangelism in Port Harcourt, and presided over the worship rally and Festival of Baptism on November 4, which was the climax of the celebrations.

The Adventist Church in Nigeria has three union conferences with 312,175 members worshiping in 1,378 churches and 1,577 companies. The country has more than 223 million people, the largest population in Africa. [Chigozi Eti/Nigeria, ANN]

**DATELINE**

**A stately visit to Nigeria**

**UYO, NIGERIA**

On October 20, 2023, Maurice R. Valentine II, a dedicated servant of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, unexpectedly died, leaving a legacy of unwavering commitment to his faith and an impressive career of leadership within the Adventist Church. He was 63 years old.

Valentine was a general vice president of the General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists at the time of his death. Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the Adventist Church, shared, “Pastor Maurice Valentine’s death is a tragedy for the World Church. He was a very godly leader and an important part of our World Church leadership team. Our hearts are broken with this tragic news.”

Valentine served as a pastor in various churches across Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska over 28 years. Valentine’s life of servant leadership led him to become ministerial director of the Mid-America Union Conference.

**Remembering two world church leaders**

**SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES**

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Valentine served as a pastor in various churches across Colorado, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska over 28 years. Valentine’s life of servant leadership led him to become ministerial director of the Mid-America Union Conference.
Valentine was known for his cordiality, integrity, and deep-seated missional consciousness. His election as vice president of the GC at the 2022 GC Session was a testament to his exceptional gifts.

He is survived by his loving wife, Sharon (née Livingston), from Birmingham, UK, and their three adult children. His life and contributions to the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be remembered with deep respect and gratitude.

On the evening of January 2, 2024, Heather-Dawn Small, a dedicated leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, died, leaving a legacy of faith and togetherness. She was 66 years old.

Small began her journey working for the Adventist Church as the administrative assistant to the president of Caribbean Union College. She later served as the Children’s Ministries director then Women’s Ministries director for the Caribbean Union Conference.

In 2001, Small was called to serve her World Church family as associate director of Women’s Ministries, then became director in 2005, which at the time of her death she had held for over 18 years.

Small felt a burden to help women understand who they were in Christ, and wrote, “Helping . . . women realize that in God’s eyes they are valuable and that He has a purpose and calling for their lives is an important part of my ministry.”

In October 2009, Small partnered with ADRA, to launch enditnow®, the Adventist Church’s most ambitious initiative to mobilize members to learn and speak out against abuse and violence globally.

Small is survived by her loving husband, Pastor Joseph Small, and their two children. Wilson expressed the global church’s deep sorrow: “May the Comforter come especially close to her husband . . . and the entire Small family as well as those who are part of Women’s Ministries worldwide.” [Adventist News Network]

Transition and handover

It is your first day at your new place of ministry. It may be a new parish or a new leadership position. You are new, and a multitude of questions are racing around your head, demanding answers. Who is who? What is what? Where will I find the answers? What is the password to this computer? Where is the washroom?!

Information, please

Wherever you are, I expect you are wishing that more effort had been made to ensure your transition was a smooth one. You waste months trying to find out the information that someone (in particular, your predecessor) could have given you on (or before!) the first day.

Because of the lack of information, you can make honest but often catastrophic mistakes. I recall one assignment where, upon arrival, I began to ask some necessary but probing questions about previous administrative decisions. No one warned me about a power relationship that existed in my board, and consequently, my questions were deemed offensive. Had I known the facts, I could have found the answers in a more productive way.

The failure of our administrative systems to prepare for transitions and handovers must cost...
our organizations millions of dollars annually. Lost productivity, unnecessary worries, and many frustrations are the inevitable result. There must be a better way.

**Insist on handover notes**

When you are responsible, directly or indirectly, in a transfer, insist that the departing employee submit detailed notes to pass on to the next person. They should imagine all that they wished they had been told when they arrived. I would go as far as to insist that this be a requirement for receiving their final paycheck.

While the Bible is not a “management textbook,” it contains many passages that relate to leadership transfer. They are often expressed in blessings, curses, and prayers. Some examples include:

- Jacob’s last words to his sons (Gen. 48; 49)
- Joshua’s farewell (Josh. 23; 24)
- David’s instruction to Solomon (1 Kings 2; 1 Chron. 22; 28)
- The tragic transition from Solomon to Rehoboam (1 Kings 12)
- Jesus to His disciples (Matt. 16:21; 24; 28:18–20; Mark 13; John 17)
- Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Tim.; 2 Tim.add period; Titus)

**Continuity**

If we are serious about our ministry, we must not only be concerned with the here and now but also consider how best to ensure the continuity of our mission. I wish I had experienced this more in my career. However, I remember with gratitude that in one of my positions, the board paid for me to return fairly soon after my successor was in place to ensure a complete transition. He found this to be a blessing, and it was very satisfying personally for me to confirm what I had already put in my handover document.

Here is a list of points to consider including in the notes you pass on to your successor:

**I. Ministry in the parish**

- Geography and nearby points of interest around the parish
- Significant points of history in the parish (how it began, building projects, outreach projects, development of philosophy, and guiding principles)
- Membership at-a-glance
- Schedule of services and Sabbath School classes
- Information about board members, teachers, and leaders
- Details of interests that the church is or wants to be involved in
- Unresolved, ongoing issues
- Contacts for local ministerial association
- Arrangements with local hospitals for visitations
- Key relationships

**II. Ministry in administration**

- Location (physical/online) of files
- Your contact details if further information is needed
- Organizational chart
- Details of computer (and any other equipment). Where possible, I recommend generic email addresses (e.g., administrator@ThisMinistry.org) for continuity of communication and information. It is wonderful to inherit an email account already populated with contacts, dates, conversation threads, and other pertinent information. You may also need to introduce any software products in use or provide contact information for people who can do so.
- Security information (although this could be made available by subsequent private contact)
- Location of meeting minutes and pertinent documents
- Orientation to meeting/committee/board responsibilities
- Legal obligations and deadlines
- Ministry budget highlights and concerns
- Travel obligations and budget
- Position remuneration, allowances, and benefits not covered by the human resources department.

For international positions:

- Cultural orientation, including dress code and other areas you need to be aware of as a foreigner.\(^1\)
- Requirements and protocols for obtaining such things as driver’s licenses, visas, bank accounts, and other necessary documents and accounts.

Whether you are going into a new position or are a supervisor of one, please make sure that the successor is equipped for success!

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1. Ideally, your denomination would have a cultural orientation program, for example, instituteofworldmission.org/.
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