

Apocalyptic or Prophetic?

The Career of the
Unknown Prophet

From Pushing Dope to
Pushing Hope—in Jesus

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**BINGO, RAFFLE TICKETS,
AND PLEDGE DRIVES**



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Conflicts Are Not Between People

By J. David Newman

My thesis that conflicts are not between people might surprise you. Conflicts only occur within people. Here is my definition. Conflicts are desperate states of mind in which persons feel their self-esteem is endangered to the point that they think something drastic must be done in order to restore their self-respect. Conflicts are feelings and thoughts that exist *inside* persons, not *outside* them. Conflicts always involve disagreement, but with hostility.

Here is an example from the life of King David. He is running from his son Absalom. During his escape he meets a man called Shimei.

“As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul’s family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king’s officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David’s right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, ‘Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!’” (2 Sam. 16:5-8, NIV).

Here we have a provocation with violent action—yelling and physical violence. One of David’s bodyguards responds. “Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, ‘Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head’” (verse 9).

In this response, we see that Abishai wants to reward violence with violence. Now notice the response of David. “But the king said, ‘What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, “Curse David,” who can ask, “Why do you do this?”’” (verse 10).

“David then said to Abishai and all his officials, ‘My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today’” (verse 11).

David did not respond with violence. He responded with grace. Although the provocation was aimed at David (not at Abishai), it was Abishai who exhibited all the traits of anger. David did not.

Each man faced a choice. Abishai chose to react. David chose to be proactive. Abishai chose to allow Shimei to affect his feelings. David did not allow Shimei to affect his feelings.

So what made the difference? Abishai chose anger because his self-esteem came under attack. His job was to protect the king, and he felt he had failed. When our self-esteem is threatened, we often resort to some kind of superiority toward the other person in order to show that we are okay. We raise our voice. We are physically abusive. We resort to lawsuits. And so on. We will find a way to get back at the other person, and then we hope that we will feel better.

David could have chosen the same course of action. After all, he was the king. He had been gravely insulted. But he chose to look to God first. He chose to look for the good in the situation, even to the extent of saying that the Lord had brought this upon him.

When the women of Israel sang their praises of David and Saul, “Saul has killed his thousands but David his ten thousands,” how did Saul choose to respond? He could have responded positively by thanking God that he had chosen such a skilled general. He could have reasoned that David might be a better fighter, but he was a better administrator.

Instead he chose self-pity. He chose to believe that David was after his throne; and to restore his sense of worth, he tried to kill David at his first opportunity.

Yes, conflicts are within people, not between people. What choices do you make?

When our self-esteem is threatened, we often resort to some kind of superiority toward the other person in order to show that we are okay.

EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the editorial board. One of the purposes of this magazine is to encourage dialogue between those of differing viewpoints within the Adventist Church. Thus, we will publish articles ranging throughout the conservative-liberal continuum.

BINGO, RAFFLE TICKETS, AND PLEDGE DRIVES

By Chester Hitchcock



DID YOU SEE THE HEADLINE THAT READ “ADVENTIST CHURCH raffles off new car at bingo game”? No, of course you didn’t. The Adventist Church does not participate in raffles and bingo. However, there is a practice among Adventist churches that some feel is on the same level: pledge drives.

Some denominations raise money by having a bingo night or by selling raffle tickets. Typically we cringe at these types of fundraisers as being unethical and unbiblical. We base our disapproval not on the fact that they are directly condemned in Scripture, but that they are forms of gambling. However, have we really given much thought to pledge drives?

A church-organized pledge drive seems problematic in at least three ways. First, it puts the church (which should be promoting debt-free living) into the position of encouraging individuals to incur a debt. Second, it motivates a person to “gamble” on whether or not he or she will retain employment and avoid unforeseen emergencies before the pledge is paid off. Third, a church budget is often planned based on the pledges made, and when the actual amount donated is less than the pledged amount, the budget is short.

What Would Jesus Do?

Here is where a Biblical problem arises. In the Old Testament, making a pledge or a vow was not a sin, but failing to keep it was. However, Jesus instructs us to not make any kind of vow or oath because to do so is “from the evil one” (Matt. 5:37, NKJV). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was making a direct reference to Deuteronomy 23:21-23 when he made clear his intention. He was instructing his followers not to make promises, pledges, oaths, or vows—even to the Lord. A contemporary reading of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:33-37 might read: “You have heard it said in Deuteronomy that you must keep your promises and pledges to the Lord, but I say to you: ‘Don’t make promises and pledges; they are of Satan. Simply let your Yes be Yes and your No be No.’”

In keeping with the context of Matthew chapter 5, Jesus also addresses other ancient laws recorded in the Old Testament such as, “an eye for an eye” (Deut. 19:21) and “hate your enemy”

(Deut. 23:3-6). Jesus says in this chapter that instead of seeking an “eye for an eye,” we should “turn the other cheek.” And instead of hating our enemies, we should “love” them. Scholars call this an antithesis (“the placing of a sentence or one of its parts against the other to which it is opposed to form a balanced contrast of ideas, as in ‘Give me liberty or give me death’ ”¹).

The words of Jesus should be ample reason to change any practice that was approved in ancient times, whether it means not making vows, oaths, promises and pledges, not seeking an “eye for an eye,” or learning to “love our enemies.”

Jesus’ disciples continued his teaching. James seems to even repeat part of Matthew 5:33-37 in his epistle: “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No,’ lest you fall into judgment” (James 5:12, NKJV).

In the early church, the apostle Peter accepted the vow of Ananias and Sapphira, as recorded in Acts chapter 5, though there is no record of his requesting it. The tragic deaths of Ananias and Sapphira may have been avoided if they had: (1) fulfilled their vow according to ancient expectations, or (2) followed Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount and not made the pledge at all. By making a pledge and then failing to pay, they were lying (verse 3) or swearing falsely to the Lord.²

The Old Testament Precedent

Even in the Old Testament, there were words of caution concerning the making of vows, pledges, and oaths. Moses wrote: “When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be a sin to you. *But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you*” (Deut. 23:21-22, emphasis added, NKJV).

The author of Ecclesiastes puts it this way: “Better not to vow than to vow and not pay” (Eccl. 5:5, NKJV).

There were many vows made by God’s people in the Old Testament, yet there is not one place where God calls for man to make a vow or promise. Instead, what we find are laws placed on those who made vows “voluntarily.” It seems that God accepts

man's vows and promises, but he demands that "if" a vow is made, it must be kept.

"If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth" (Num. 30:2, NKJV).

Ellen White's View

Two references that are helpful in understanding Ellen White's view of financial pledges are found in the compilations *Testimonies for the Church*.³ In these writings, "pledges" referred mostly to the tithes and its sacredness, as well as to systematic giving. But she

seems to be very cautious about appeals or "urgent calls"⁴ filled with the pressure of emotion, which cause some to make vows or pledges beyond their means. And she stressed to those who made vows and pledges that their pledges were more binding than any debt made to man.

She also quotes a number of Old Testament verses (Num. 30:1-2, Eccl. 5:6, Ps. 66:13-14, Prov. 20:25, Deut. 23:21-23, Ps. 76:11, and Mal. 1:12-14) so that "we may see how God regards the subject of vows."⁵ In each of these passages, we find that vows/oaths/pledges to the Lord are not flexible (in that the person making it is at liberty to pay or not pay), but that a vow to the Lord is to be kept by the one who made it.

In the following quotations, Ellen White

confirms that vows/oaths/pledges are still as binding as they were in the Old Testament:

- "When a verbal or written pledge has been made in the presence of our brethren to give a certain amount, they are the visible witnesses of a contract made between ourselves and God.

The pledge is not made to man, but to God, and is as a written note given to a neighbor. No legal bond is more binding upon the Christian for the payment of money than a pledge made to God."⁶

- "Have ministers the power to accept their excuses and say: 'You shall not be holden to your pledge; you are released from your vow'? If they venture to do this, they become partakers of the sin of which the withholder is guilty."⁷

- "Nothing but utter inability to pay can excuse one in neglecting to meet promptly his obligations to the Lord. ... A church is responsible for the pledges of its individual members. If they see that there is a brother who is neglecting to fulfill his vows, they should labor with him kindly but plainly. If he is not in circumstances which render it possible for him to pay his vow, and he is a worthy member and has a willing heart, then let the church compassionately help him."⁸

In the following quotations from *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, Mrs. White is responding to the types of appeals made at camp meetings to finance special projects. She refers to the appeals as "pressing calls" (p. 409) and "urgent calls" (p. 411). These calls resulted in people making pledges that were sometimes beyond their means. Within the space of five pages, Mrs. White uses the word "pledge" five times, indicating that she was concerned about the method of their fundraising that resulted in pledges as opposed to the use of "systematic benevolence."

- "There was a time at the commencement of our work when such sacrifice would have been *justified*, when God would have blessed all who thus ventured out to do for His cause."⁹ The "sacrifice" she is referring to in this context is that some had "suffered for the conveniences and necessities of life in order to meet their pledges."¹⁰

This statement reflects her belief that pledges were binding before God—to the point of sacrifice and suffering—and that the types of appeals that inspired these pledges were no longer "justified" any more than the sacrificial pledges.

- "I am *fully* convinced that it is *not* the best plan to bring a *pressure* upon the point of means at our camp meetings. Men and women who love the cause of God as they do their lives will *pledge* upon these occasions, when their families must suffer for the very means that they have promised to give to advance the cause."¹¹

- "Greater effort should be put forth by responsible men in the different churches to have all follow *the plan of God's arrangement*. If systematic benevolence is carried out, the *urgent calls* at camp meetings for means for various enterprises will not be necessary."¹²

When the economy is tight, pledge drives might seem more attractive than sacrificial, systematic benevolence. But as a denomination that is serious about following the Biblical evidence, we should not solicit pledges as a means of fundraising.

Here she counsels that the best way to finance God's work is through what she called "systematic benevolence." Systematic benevolence is the practice of giving a percentage of one's income to the different ministries in the church—such as evangelism, church budget, Christian education, etc.—in order to meet the church's needs as they arise. In Ellen White's view, systematic benevolence was the ultimate alternative to "urgent calls" that result in binding pledges to God. The counsel of all three of these quotations is directed toward the *fundraising method* as much as the *gifts* promised or pledged.

- "Those who minister in word and doctrine should be men of discrimination ... and should not allow the poor to pay large pledges."¹³

Knowing (as did Simon Peter) that pledges are going to be made, Mrs. White instructed pastors to try to prevent those who may pledge beyond their means. It is interesting to note that she believed pledges to the Lord were so binding that she herself took on the responsibility of paying pledges made by some who couldn't pay, yet there is no record of her making pledges on her own.

- "*God designs* that the exercise of benevolence shall be purely voluntary, not having recourse even to eloquent appeals to excite sympathy. 'God loveth a cheerful giver.' *He is not pleased to have His treasury replenished with forced supplies.* ... The plan of redemption was entirely voluntary on the part of our Redeemer, and it is the purpose of Christ that all our benevolence should be freewill offerings."¹⁴

A Creative Alternative

While pledges are voluntary in that no one is coerced to make one, once a pledge is made, it is a binding agreement before God and is no longer freewill offering. Instead, the oath or pledge becomes what Ellen White referred to as a "forced" offering, due to the Biblical nature of a pledge or oath made to the Lord. This has been clearly documented, both in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White.

According to Ellen White, "there was a time" when urgent calls that resulted in sacrificial pledges could be "justified" to accomplish the work of God; yet she clearly believed that God's "arrangement," his "design," was systematic giving and *not* pledges.

Vows, oaths, promises and pledges will probably always be made by some, though God never called for them in the Old or New Testament. What we find in the Old Testament is that God instructed Moses and the other prophets to inform the people that *if* they make a vow to the Lord, they must keep their vow, and that it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

But in the New Testament, Jesus instructs his followers in the Sermon on the Mount to not make vows or swear oaths of any kind.

We are therefore left with some very basic and clear principles regarding vows, oaths, promises, and pledges.

- Avoid appeals that pressure people to make pledges beyond their means.
- Inform those who wish to make a pledge that it is not a sin to make a pledge, but it is a sin to fail to pay it.
- Instruct people to give according to God's design—through systematic giving. Like tithes, systematic offerings are based on actual—not future—income.

It would be worthwhile for each church, school, or any other Adventist organization to discuss these things at their board meetings before promoting a pledge drive.

When the economy is tight, pledge drives might seem more attractive than sacrificial, systematic benevolence. But as a denomination that is serious about following the Biblical evidence, we should not solicit pledges as a means of fundraising. Rather, as a Christian organization that believes God can provide what is necessary to accomplish his work, let's find an alternative that does not risk jeopardizing any member's relationship with their Lord.

For example, in order to fund special projects, some churches have designed plans that encourage individuals to set "goals" rather than to make "pledges." Members receive response cards that include language similar to this: *As God prospers me in the coming year, it is my goal to give \$___ per month for ___ months.*

A goal is something we strive toward, whether we reach it or not. This method carefully disconnects the response from the religious and moral obligation associated with a "pledge" of the sort documented in Scripture.

Chester Hitchcock is pastor of the Barberton/Medina church district in the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

¹ See Dictionary.com entry for "antithesis."

² See *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, pp. 469-470, and Vol. 5, p. 150.

³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, pp. 408-412 and *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, pp. 462-476.

⁴ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 411.

⁵ See *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, pp. 470-471.

⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 4, p. 470.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 473.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 475-476.

⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 410.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, emphasis added.

¹¹ *ibid.*, emphasis added.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 411, emphasis added.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 413, emphasis added.



The JESUS-

By Joe Kidder

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM CHURCH? OFTEN WHEN I ASK THIS QUESTION in seminars on church growth or spirituality, people describe to me a church filled with joy and unity, filled with power and grace, active and involved in the community, full of love for one another and ministry to each other. They want a church putting God first, praying to him, studying his word, worshipping and praising him.

That is also my dream church. It did exist once, and it can exist again. What will bring it back is the second coming of the Holy Spirit. This dream church is described in the book of Acts: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the LORD added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47, NIV).

Acts chapter 2 not only captures our holy imagination, but it speaks powerfully to the issue of practical application. Illustrated in Acts 2 is the reorientation of the life in order to get close to God. Taking a more careful look at this special church teaches us at least four things about the Christian spiritual life, which we’ll name first, then picture, and then unpack and explore.

A Model of Wholeness

Authentic Christian living is: (1) centered on Jesus, (2) empowered by the Holy Spirit, (3) driven by spiritual practices, and (4) lived in balanced relationships.

This can be pictured using a model I call *The Jesus-Centered Life*.

Most of us live fragmented lives. Our home life, our church life, and our devotional life (if we have it at all) are unconnected—or weakly connected at best. We also have our work and entertainment, but we are often unsure how they can be spiritual

CENTERED LIFE

in nature. We compartmentalize our lives until our living looks like a string of unrelated activities.

But the life God wants us to live has Jesus as the center; everything comes from him and goes back to him. The organizing principle of this life is Jesus, and the empowering agent is the Holy Spirit. That means that my family, my work, my church, and my devotions all belong to him and are centered in him. This life is possible only through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.



How does a life like this work? In one of the churches I pastored, there was an engineer who loved and served God

passionately. James worked for a very large corporation with more than 100 people under his charge, and he was also very active in the life of the church and the community. He preached often, did Bible studies, and went on mission trips. Seeing his love and passionate service for God and the way he was led and empowered by the Spirit, people often said to him, “James, you need to be a pastor.” His answer was always, “I already am a pastor. I’m just being paid by the marketplace instead of by the church.” He continued, “No pastor is allowed in my engineering firm, but I am here every day. When my employees are hurting, I hurt with them. When they are rejoicing, I rejoice with them. I pray for them on a rotation basis and invite them over to my home.” He concluded by saying, “I am a disciple of Jesus Christ disguised as an engineer.” If you looked around James’ church, you would see 20 engineers who came to the Lord as a result of his ministry.

James’ commitment to Christ touched every area of his life. Imagine what God could do with you if your life was centered on him. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ disguised as a nurse or a teacher, a physician or even a pastor.

We can summarize the Jesus-centered life as one that lives with a passion for the presence of God, experiences his power and grace continually, and reflects his love and vision. Living the Jesus-centered life changes how we relate to people, to ourselves, and to time, possessions, pleasure, problems, and all of life.

The model pictured above visualizes this Jesus-centered life as a wheel: the center of that wheel represents Jesus, the outer rim symbolizes my life, and the connecting spokes depict the Holy Spirit. In this wheel there are four quadrants, each of them representing one of the four areas of relationship: relationship with God, with others, with self, and with resources. My life is centered on Jesus. This model is Christ-centered, Holy Spirit-empowered, and balanced in all its relational aspects.

Centered on Jesus

The life and example of the early church is a picture of the Lordship of Christ ruling over every area of life—religious, secular, emotional, and physical. It is the integration and balance of the individual and the corporate, the theological and the practical, the internal and the external, God and others, but always with Jesus in the center. Peter presented Jesus—Lord and Christ—as him to whom the people must respond: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God had made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36, NKJV). The life we see in Acts 2:42-47 is a response to Jesus as Lord; that made all the difference.

These first believers had an intense passion for God. Their souls were preoccupied with his kingdom, his purpose, his love, his creation, his people, and his vision for the world. Acts 2 records their commitment to learn more about Jesus through study, to be connected to him through prayer, and to tell the world about him through evangelism and ministry. This radical life was seen in their religious observance, in their commitment to live or die for Jesus, and also in their time, their living, and their giving. A life centered on Jesus will be changed in every area.

As a pastor I was in the habit of visiting my members in the

marketplace and reminding them that it is their place of ministry and evangelism and making a difference for the kingdom of God. On a Wednesday afternoon I had a lunch visit with Tammie, a godly and committed Christian physician from our church

The life we dream about, the life God dreams about for us and his church, and the life described in Acts 2 is a life centered on Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, driven by spiritual practices, and lived in balanced relationships.

who owned her own clinic. After lunch I asked her to give me a tour of the place, and when we finished, Tammie and I knelt down and prayed that God would bless her business and turn it into an opportunity for ministry to touch the lives of the people for eternity. I said to her: “Tammie, you are a Christian physician. Your work goes beyond physical healing into spiritual transformation. God will send you people only you can touch and bring to know the love and grace of Jesus.” Tammie, who was the daughter of

a successful public evangelist and pastor, said to me, “I never thought about it this way.” Whatever your profession, your home and business are your primary places of ministry. Turn them into opportunities to make a difference for the kingdom of God.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit

The early church was born out of a radical transformation that took place after the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. It was when the otherwise unremarkable disciples “were filled with the Holy Spirit” that they began to preach “as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4, NIV).

The vibrant church we read about in the book of Acts is a far cry from the ragtag band of disciples we find in the Gospels. In the last week of the life of Christ, it seemed that everything

Jesus did had failed, and failed miserably. By Thursday and Friday of that week, one of the disciples had denied Jesus, others abandoned him, and some even ran away from him (Mark 14:50-52; Luke 22:54-60). But this same group of people later turned the world upside down by their witness and boldness. This transformational difference in the disciples was not due to a seminar they took in leadership, evangelism, or self-improvement. It resulted from the transformational presence of the Holy Spirit. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8, NKJV).

Ellen G. White explains this incredible change that the Holy Spirit produces in the individual. “The Christian’s life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.”¹

Today in the Adventist church we are at a crossroads. In large measure we have lost our passion for God, and we are not sure how to capture it again. Some voices direct us to go back to the past and live as did our founders. Others say, “No, all that we need is to be relevant and loving.” Then there are those who promote every new church-growth program as the solution to our problems. However, the greatest need of the church today is not more programs or techniques or books or seminars; the greatest need of the church today is to be filled, guided, moved, and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Driven by Spiritual Practices

Christian disciplines are spiritual practices that facilitate growth. The list recorded in Acts includes Bible study, prayer, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, giving and sharing, worship, praise, joy, and simplicity. The early church practiced these spiritual disciplines in order for believers to advance in the Christian experience both individually and corporately. Though not all of the disciplines are recorded here, this passage has a higher concentration of spiritual disciplines than any other place in the Bible.

For the sake of space, we will highlight only a few of the most prominent. The Acts 2 church was a **learning church**: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42, NIV). It was a **fellowshipping church**: “They devoted themselves ... to the fellowship” (verse 42, NIV). It was a **praying church**: “They devoted themselves ... to prayer” (verse 42, NIV). It was a **sharing church**: “All the believers were together and had

everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” (verses 44-45, NIV). It was a **worshipping church**: “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people” (verses 46-47, NIV).

Lived in Balanced Relationships

The Acts 2 spirituality of the early church nurtured four major relationships: a relationship with God, relationships with others, a relationship to self, and a relationship with resources and time in the context of God and his will.

A Relationship With God. Not only did the first converts worship and praise God, pray, and study the Bible, but they did all of that with the utmost devotion and commitment. God was the center of their lives, and they did everything to demonstrate that he was. Prayer, study, worship, and meditation are disciplines that encourage a healthy relationship with God.

Relationships With Others. When the flame of the Spirit descended upon the gathered disciples, it turned their attention outward to the crowd. Part of the holistic and balanced portrait of spirituality we find in Acts 2 is a powerful description of the connection between the individual believer’s experience and the corporate Christian life. In this holistic model, we see that the believers had a powerful connection with God and also a strong and intentional bond with fellow believers and with their community, neighbors, and associates. Their lives were so desirable that they held the favor of all the people, and “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42). Fellowship, evangelism, ministry, encouragement, and love are disciplines that are helpful for developing health in this area of spirituality.

A Relationship With Self. Starting with the initial repentance and including everything that came after, the character of the early church was predicated on the grace of God and individual choice. In Biblical spirituality, personal choice plays a crucial role. Just as the early converts responded to Peter’s call and then chose to devote themselves to the Christian way, so also is our spirituality partially dependent upon our choice. Our relationships with God and others stem from our relationship with ourselves, a commitment we make to live totally and wholeheartedly for the glory of God. It is also about allowing God to change us into his image (2 Cor. 3:17-18; Rom. 12:1, 2).

Some of the ways that this relationship manifests itself in our lives include obedience, changing of heart and mind, guidance, and personal growth.

A Relationship With Resources. A fundamental component in spirituality is a dedication of the entire life to God. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:1-2a, NIV). From this flows a change in how we relate to what we used to call our own: time, talents, money, possessions, and bodies. The wise use of resources, regular giving, and healthful living are demonstrations of a healthy relationship with resources. The early Christians, as an outgrowth of their relationships with God, others, and themselves, had a radical relationship to resources, giving everything they owned and spending all that they were for the kingdom of God. They gave because they loved God; they gave radically because they loved radically (2 Cor. 8:1-15).

The Church We Long For

The life we dream about, the life God dreams about for us and his church, and the life described in Acts 2 is a life centered on Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, driven by spiritual practices, and lived in balanced relationships. Everyone loved the Acts 2 church. They were “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, NKJV).

A good measure of how much your church is like an Acts 2 church is to ask, “If your church were removed from this community, would it be missed?” I have asked this question hundreds of times, and the most common answer was, “I do not think they even know we are here.” My prayer is that every church would reflect the Jesus-centered life so much and serve its community in such powerful and effective ways that if your church were suddenly gone, the people of your community would have a hard time functioning without you. 🏡

Joe Kidder, D.Min, is the associate professor of Christian ministry at the Seventh-day Theological Seminary, Andrews University, in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), p. 172.

ABOUT 35 YEARS AGO, I BEGAN INTENSIVELY studying the last book of the Bible. After translating the text, I spent many hours in the Joint Universities Library on the campus of Vanderbilt University, where I tracked down every journal article I could find. At the conclusion of several years' investigation, I had written a book manuscript, which I immediately shelved!

Hardly had I turned my attention to other areas of interest when a colleague commenced a similar odyssey through the Apocalypse. As he began to tell me about his findings, I became concerned. Somehow I'd managed to weather the gales of cognitive dissonance produced by

comfortable behavior. This contemporary use of the adjective isn't at all dissonant with the more strictly Biblical and theological nuance, however.

The technical terms *apocalypse* and *apocalyptic* have the root meaning of unveiling; hence the other common name for the last book of the Bible is Revelation. Historically, it seems that apocalypse is a more recent literary genre than prophecy. One of the most obvious stylistic devices of apocalyptic literature is fantasy. Apocalypses utilize graphic—and sometimes (to our perception) exotic—imagery redolent with light, color, and sound.

with the original term.

The term *theodicy* comes from a compound Greek word that combines the terms for God and justification. Theodicy, therefore, is the theological task of defending—or justifying—God's behavior (even his existence) in the light of the monstrous “things” that especially God's people suffer but that also befall other (and innocent) people.

Theodicy is, therefore, not strictly a literary style as are prophecy and apocalypse. Indeed, both prophetic and apocalyptic writing can do theodicy, a theological enterprise.

Bible scholars have prepared lists

Apocalyptic *or* Prophetic?

By Richard W. Coffen

my research. Would his belief system also remain intact? The answer came about a year later—no. Neither did his marriage.

3 Important Technical Terms

During the past third of a century, my own personal Bible study has shifted in focus, but perhaps now is as good a time as any to share a few personal observations. At the outset, we should differentiate among three important nouns: *prophecy* (and its adjectival form *prophetic*), *apocalypse* (and its adjectival form *apocalyptic*), and *theodicy*.

The technical terms *prophecy* and *prophetic*, contrary to popular opinion, refer to predictions of the future only in a secondary sense. The chief idea inherent in the terminology is that of speaking in behalf of someone else. In the Biblical instance, the prophet is YHWH's spokesperson. The adjectival form has now evolved in usage to denote non-Biblical communication. “He spoke with a prophetic voice” doesn't necessarily mean supernatural vision, but rather an often-jarring call to exchange our comfortable ways for more appropriate but less

Apocalyptic imagery is a magnitude away from the more mundane acted-out object lessons sometimes resorted to by the prophets. Apocalyptic imagery seems more akin to the bizarre things we dream about—scary and occasionally terrifying images that seem to be dredged up from deep within the human (and perhaps even troubled) psyche. These weird figures seem to surface from so deep within the psyche, seem to be so cross-cultural, and seem fraught with so much subliminal meaning that some scholars refer to them by the Jungian term *archetypes*. Perhaps the way God “wired” the human nervous system helps to account for their genesis.

As with the term *prophetic*, so with the adjective *apocalyptic*. It, too, has evolved from its more technical meaning. In popular usage it denotes thinking and behavior that tend to teeter on the psychotic and hence are destructive. Consider, for example, the movie *Apocalypse Now*. Although this modern usage is something of a stretch from the technical connotation of the word, this development is not entirely unconnected

of distinguishing characteristics that differentiate the prophetic genre from the apocalyptic. Each trait is not always exclusively limited to one or the other, but the preponderance of occurrences typically clusters in one of the literary styles in comparison with the other. The exceptions tend to “prove” (test and demonstrate the validity of) the rule rather than to undermine it.

In this article we'll address one of the various criteria that differentiate prophecy from apocalyptic and vice versa. It's the criterion of theodicy. Both prophetic and apocalyptic literature offer theodicy.

Hot Issue in the Ancient Near East

It's hardly profound to suggest that suffering existed in the ancient Near East. Suffering exists cross-culturally and diachronically. However, one might not be far off the mark to suggest that the frequency and intensity of suffering was more of a problem than it is now.

The frequency and intensity of suffering isn't necessarily a constant in all places and in all times. In our industrial,

modern, Western society, we don't tend to be as much at the mercy of the elements—wind, heat, rain, drought, fire, earthquake, famine, disease—as was the ancient Near East. Our edifices are more sturdily constructed (thanks to government-imposed building codes), air conditioning has become common, agribusiness has access to irrigation, we proliferate fire hydrants and smoke detectors (legislated by code), and we retrofit bridges in earthquake-prone areas. Most of us aren't just one drought away from starvation (our supermarket shelves are well-stocked with items from distant sources), and modern medical science has immunization, antibiotics, surgical procedures, and well-tried anesthetic at its disposal (recent federal legislation has attempted to make these advances available to more and more Americans).

To be sure, we must not be Pollyannaish. Suffering—some of it intense—still exists even in North America (consider events of the year 2011). But we must not overlook the fact that the frequency and intensity of suffering in our Western society hardly matches the frequency and intensity experienced during Old and New Testament times. On average, people in our society ingest better diets, get more medical and dental care, grow taller, lead a more vigorous existence, and live longer than people did even 100 years ago.¹

Although we mustn't be naively or overly optimistic, the fact is that we've never had it so good. We're truly "blessed." And this recognition needn't discount the terrible suffering people encounter even today, right here in America.

So, suffering in the ancient Near East was truly a live issue. God's ancient people, who had been promised long life in a land flowing with milk and honey, often didn't find life desirable or easy. What had become of the promised *shalom*—peace and welfare? Life was tough back then, even at its best. Thus, when Aramaeans, Philistines, Egyptians, Assyrians, or Babylonians trashed the Promised Land, God's people needed clarification. Why

were *they*—God's covenant people—the butt of so much grief?

2 Very Different Approaches

The prophets and apocalypticists had a theodicy at hand, though their answers were polar opposites.

On the one hand, prophetic theodicy explained: ***You suffer because you're bad; therefore, repent and God will repent also.*** YHWH's conversation with Jeremiah illustrates this perspective. "These people ... do one evil thing after another and do not pay attention to me. ... I will certainly punish them for doing such things!" says the LORD. ... 'I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins. ... I will destroy the towns of Judah. ...' I said, ... 'Why does the land lie in ruins?' ... The LORD answered, "This has happened because these people ... have not obeyed me. ... So then, listen to what I, the LORD God of Israel who rules over all, say. 'I will make these people eat the bitter food of suffering.' ... I said, 'For the sound of wailing is soon to be heard in Zion'" (Jer. 9:3-19, NET).

YHWH's words through Jeremiah were not all doom and gloom, however. There was the hint of the possibility of repentance. "Hear what the LORD says. ... Teach your daughters this mournful song, and each of you teach your neighbor this lament. ... The LORD says, 'Wise people should not boast that they are wise. Powerful people should not boast that they are powerful. Rich people should not boast that they are rich. If people want to boast, they should boast about this: ... They should boast that they know and understand that I, the LORD, act out of faithfulness, fairness, and justice in the earth and that I desire people to do these things'" (verses 20-24, NET).

On the other hand, apocalyptic theodicy explained: ***You suffer because you're good; therefore, wait for divine deliverance.*** The last book of the Bible echoes this theodicy. "I know your tribulation and your poverty. ... Do not fear what you are about to suffer. ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev.

2:9-10, NASB). "I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, ... and they cried out ..., 'How long, O Lord, ... will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood?' ... And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer" (Rev. 6:9-11, NASB).

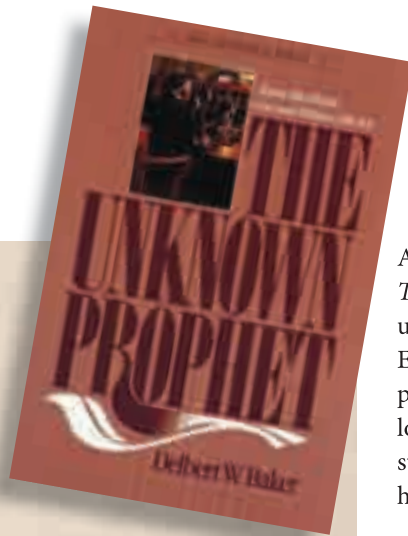
Many of us, if our temperament tilts toward pessimism, would side with Jeremiah the "weeping prophet." Some of us, if our personality predisposes us toward optimism, would likely agree with John the Revelator. Both inspired authors seem to be correct. But there's more.

Jesus recognized that God's people—those in the kingdom—consisted of both good and bad people. Remember his parables about the catch of diverse fish and the garden with both wheat and tares? He warned about the folly of *our* judging who is bad and who is good. That being the case, perhaps we'd best leave the making of theodicies to the inspired authors.

Furthermore, we live in a world plagued with gratuitous suffering, which removes us from arguments defending "getting one's just deserts." Maybe, just maybe, the wise among us should adopt an agnostic attitude when it comes to theodicies. (1) *If* the existence of suffering is a consequence of evil, and (2) *if* the existence of evil is inexplicable (Ellen White proposes that this is the case because explaining evil entails defending it), then (3) suffering is just as much a mystery as is evil. ☩

Richard W. Coffen, a retired pastor (6 years) and editor (34 years), earned B.A. and M.A. degrees in systematic theology. In more recent years, he has focused his attention on Biblical studies.

¹ During the first century, more than 30 percent of babies died at birth. Thirty-three percent who reached their first birthday died before they turned 6 years old. Of those who remained, nearly 60 percent were deceased before they reached age 16. Seventy-five percent of those survivors died before their 26th birthday. Only about 3 percent lived to be 60 years old.



ALMOST 25 YEARS HAVE ELAPSED SINCE THE DEBUT OF *The Unknown Prophet* by Delbert W. Baker. The 160-page volume ushered in denominational enlightenment regarding William Ellis Foy, the first in a trio of candidates for the role of God's prophet during the height of Millerism. Baker's book transformed long-held notions about Foy—who was traditionally upheld as a stark illustration of someone who ignored God's call—portraying him instead as a sterling exemplar of faithfulness amidst hostility.

What led to *The Unknown Prophet's* conception? How was it received by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination? How did it upend ingrained assumptions? And finally, what has been its influence on Adventism in the intervening decades?

Seventh-day Adventists have historically held that God gave visions to three individuals in the early 1840s: William Foy, Hazen Foss, and Ellen Harmon. William Foy, a black Baptist minister then in his 20s, was said to have rejected God's command to share the visions, and so God moved on to the white Hazen Foss. Foss also declined God's call to relate the visions he received, and Adventists maintain that he never had peace again. Finally, God settled on a teenage girl named Ellen Harmon, who proved to be a willing vessel.

The main source from which the Foy-rejection belief seemed to have sprung is J.N. Loughborough's book *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day*

THE CAREER OF THE UNKNOWN PROPHET

BY BENJAMIN J. BAKER

Adventists. Loughborough states that Foy was an educated mulatto from Massachusetts who was a Baptist minister, soon to be ordained an Episcopal minister.¹ The Lord gave him three visions, and Foy spoke on them wherever he was invited, donned in a clergyman's robe. Recounting the themes of Foy's visions, Loughborough wrote that "Having a good command of language, with fine descriptive powers, he [Foy] created a sensation wherever he went."² Although Foy didn't understand every part of his visions, he still related them, going as far as publishing them in a pamphlet. But alas, Loughborough writes, "He finally became exalted over the revelation, and thus lost his simplicity, hence the manifestation of this gift to him ceased, and soon after he sickened and died."³ From this account—and the subsequent reworking of it in numerous Adventist books, including the *SDA Encyclopedia*—and from the reasoning that if Foy had been faithful, then God wouldn't have given the same visions to Hazen Foss and Ellen White, Adventists concluded that William Foy rejected God's prophetic call.

A Quest to Discover the Truth

Delbert W. Baker was a graduate student at Andrews University Seminary when he first began to seriously question the negative things he had heard about William Foy.⁴ A third-generation Adventist, Baker had earned a degree in theology from Oakwood College. He was nonplussed by the scant material available on William Foy, but what he read raised more questions than answers.

Curious, in 1978 Baker began to study Foy's life in earnest. Although a pastor in the Midwest, Baker took time to travel to various New England locales, following in Foy's footsteps. In 1985 Baker became editor of *Message* and completed his research shortly thereafter. Reflecting on his quest to discover the truth about Foy, he writes: "I have researched and analyzed all of the known materials on Foy's life. My search has led me to archives, courthouses, libraries, and graveyards, to encounters with people in large cities and in obscure, out-of-the-way places. I visited places where Foy lived and worked throughout New England. My travels climaxed in Ellsworth, Maine, where Foy's tombstone is to this day."⁵ That tombstone, like many other revelations in Baker's book, would alter Adventist assumptions.

Several articles preceded publication of *The Unknown Prophet*, readying the public, as it were, for what was to come. In 1985 Ronald Graybill, editor of the *Columbia Union Visitor* and former Ellen G. White Estate research assistant, highlighted Delbert Baker's completed manuscript on William Foy in an article entitled "William Ellis Foy: A Black Adventist Prophet Rediscovered."⁶ In *Spectrum's* August 1987 issue, Tim Poirier's "Black Forerunner to Ellen White: William E. Foy" summarized Baker's research and included an interview with him on the subject.⁷ In the May 1, 1986, edition of *Adventist Review*, the Church's official organ, James Coffin, the magazine's news editor, did an upbeat piece on *Message* and featured the forthcoming book in the highlight box.⁸

And so, in late 1987, *The Unknown Prophet* was published by the Review and Herald as part of the 1888 Centennial Series, three books treating aspects of Adventist history commemorating the legendary Minneapolis General Conference. The other two volumes are also now Adventist classics: George R. Knight's *A. T. Jones: From 1888 to Apostasy* and Gary Land's *The World of Ellen G. White*.


The Unknown Prophet had an initial print run of 5,000 copies. The Review and Herald conducted an extensive marketing plan for the 1888 Centennial Series, advertising the three books consistently in Adventist periodicals. Baker himself, still editor of *Message*, traveled

frequently, preaching, promoting *Message*, and lecturing on William Foy and other topics in black Adventist history.

The Unknown Prophet sold well—so well, in fact, that the Review and Herald did a second print run of 3,100 copies in the spring of 1988 in order to meet consumer demands. A flurry of articles announcing the new book appeared. In its second issue of 1988, the *Adventist Review* displayed Foy's tombstone on the cover, with a full length-article by Baker inside.⁹ With solid backing from the highest church leaders, Adventism's official magazine, and Baker's durable research, the tide was turning and the true story of Foy was making its way into the Adventist consciousness.

In 2005 the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University republished William Foy's *Christian Experience*. The pamphlet was originally published in 1845 by J. and C.H. Pearson, two brothers residing in Portland, Maine, who believed in Foy's ministry. On the 160th anniversary, it appeared again in the Heritage Treasures Series, the first in the set with an introduction by Baker.¹⁰

But despite the truth about William Foy coming to light, more questions about the now-known prophet have yet to be explored: Do the divine choices of prophets in the 1840s reveal anything new about the manner the gift may appear in the future? What does the fact that Foy never became a Seventh-day Adventist tell us? Has the revised knowledge of Foy had any affect on SDA race relations? How should Foy's experience be used in Adventism today? Finally, what other parts of Adventist history need revising?

May God bless us as we seek to be faithful to him, as was William Foy. 

Benjamin J. Baker is a Ph.D. candidate at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

¹ Loughborough spells the name Foye.

² John Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: General Conference Association), p. 71.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Delbert W. Baker, *The Unknown Prophet* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1987), p. 15.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Ronald D. Graybill, "William Ellis Foy: A Black Prophet Rediscovered" (*Columbia Union Visitor*, Feb. 15, 1985), pp. 4-6.

⁷ Tim Poirier, "Black Forerunner to Ellen White: William E. Foy" (*Spectrum*, August 1987), pp. 23-28.

⁸ James Coffin, "Message Sharpens Image, Seeks New Readers" (*Adventist Review*, May 1, 1986), pp. 20-22.

⁹ Delbert W. Baker, "William Foy: Messenger to the Advent Believers" (*Adventist Review*, January 14, 1988), pp. 8-10.

¹⁰ William E. Foy, *Christian Experience* (Merlin D. Burt, series editor, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press), introduction.



FROM PUSHING DOPE to Pushing Hope—in Jesus

BY GREG SEREDA

I LAY ON MY BED IN TEARS, WHISPERING, “GOD, IF YOU’RE REAL, do something.” The Holy Spirit was working on me, convicting me more and more of Jesus Christ. I really needed him in my life.

For the past few years prior to crying out to the Lord, I had made a living as a drug dealer selling marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamines, and any other illegal substances I could get my hands on. I had no job, and money came fast and plenty. But that lifestyle had taken its toll on me. By the end of that time I had become a drug addict, using methamphetamines on a regular basis. I tried to stop using drugs on my own several times, but to no avail. My addiction had complete control over me. I felt so empty.

I saw a television program about the life of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit began convicting me that Jesus was real. That is when I cried out to God. Shortly afterward, on two different occasions within about two weeks, members from different churches knocked on my door and asked me if I would invite them in to share the gospel with me. I thought it odd since I

could not remember having anyone offer to share the gospel with me prior to that. But here were two different pairs of individuals offering to do so within two weeks.

I declined their offers, feeling ashamed of my condition as a drug addict. I did not want these clean, churchgoing people to recognize my condition. I felt so dirty. At the same time my roommate, who was a Christian, told me she was praying for me. She even invited me to go to church with her, but I declined her offer as well.

However, God was not through with me yet. He had to do something drastic to get my attention, though. Knocking on my front door through local church members and inviting me to go to church through my roommate was not enough, so he allowed me to go to federal prison. Oh, how I wish I had discerned God working in my life in an attempt to save me from that experience. It is like one of those folktales about a person who prays to God for help but doesn’t recognize how he tries to help him. When he questions God about it later, God replies: “I sent you three people!”

I was sentenced to nine years in federal prison for drug trafficking and gun possession. I served eight years out of that nine-year sentence. The majority of my time was served in Lompoc FCI. Do I regret it? No, I do not. In prison, I came to know Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. I developed a relationship with God by spending time in his Word every day; and I attended Sabbath worship regularly. I was even blessed by having God minister to others through me.

God used me to put Adventist literature into the hands of numerous inmates. Sometimes I was blessed through prisoners asking me to have literature sent to their family members on the street. Isn't that ironic—a prisoner ministering to people in the free world? It usually works the other way around. I stocked a shelf in the prison chapel's library with Adventist books, for inmates to read. I had the privilege of stocking a DVD shelf in the prison media center with Adventist DVDs, for inmates to watch. I conducted a weekly Adventist video class in the chapel, and I even did some one-on-one Bible studies.

Before doing all of these tasks, I was not sure just how God wanted me to minister to my fellow prisoners. For example, some people are called to specific roles, such as being a pastor. After praying about it, I was convicted to minister wherever I found the need. So that is what I did. And now, as part of my morning prayers, I ask God to help me recognize opportunities he gives me to minister to others, no matter what they are, and to take advantage of those opportunities, to the glory of his name.

I had an amazing experience in studying the Bible with a prisoner named Ivan who was a friend of mine. We were concluding a lesson that inquired whether or not Ivan was ready for Jesus' second coming. Ivan told me he had a vivid dream about Jesus' return the night before our study! Unfortunately, he did not feel he was ready for Jesus to come back, because he did not have an assurance of salvation. I shared with him how God's Word gives everyone who believes in Jesus that assurance: "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:11-13, KJV).

Needless to say, Ivan left our study that day feeling confident that he could stand on the day of Jesus' return.

Prison was also a real character builder for me. It is full of the extremes people tend to fall into. There was no shortage of racism, gang activity, or homosexuality there. Manipulation and pressure to conform to prison politics was prevalent, as well. I am so glad I had God's Word to guide me through all of that darkness. Had it not been for his Light, I could have come out of prison worse off than when I had entered, or I could have died there. Another prisoner died of a heroin overdose right before my eyes.

There was gang violence. I saw people get beat within inches of their lives. People say that you have to be in a gang in order to survive in prison. Maybe it depends on what kind of prison you are in, because I was in a low-security prison and did just fine without joining a gang. A gang is supposed to offer prisoners protection, but oftentimes it does just the opposite. If you are a part of a gang and you violate your gang's code of conduct, then they will beat you up. So gang members are in danger not only from opposing gangs, but also from members of their own gang!

There was a battle between the Southsiders and the Northsiders in the prison where I was housed, along with the medium-security prison across the street, where numerous prisoners got stabbed and beaten. I never got stabbed or beat up. I survived by staying in the Word of God, praying every day, and respecting those around me as much as possible. I found that my only true protection came from God.

"The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth ..."
(Psalm 28:7, KJV).

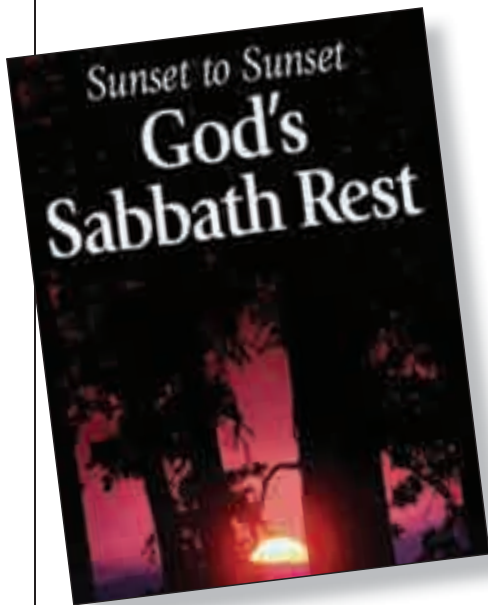
I have been out of prison for more than six months now. I did not leave Jesus where he found me—in prison—as some people thought I would. I no longer use drugs, and I do not drink or smoke. Jesus has completely changed my life. I am still in the church, and I am still adamant about sharing my faith. Happily, there is no shortage of opportunities to do so, since I have been deported to a predominantly Catholic country: Poland.

Moreover, God has filled my once-empty life with hope, meaning, and purpose. God has given me the hope of eternal life with Jesus in paradise restored—in having a relationship with him through Jesus Christ, his Son—and purpose in sharing that relationship with others. 🇵🇱

Greg Sereda writes from Poland.

Sabbath Musings

A Review by Mike Fortune



Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest, an eBook by United Church of God, 2012.

Recently a businessman friend of mine walked into my office, sat down, and asked me, “So what do Seventh-day Adventists believe?”

Trying to contain myself, I blurted out in reply, “As our name implies, one of the most significant things we believe in is worshipping on the seventh-day Saturday, because Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath and during Creation God finished his work and set that day apart and gave that sacred time to everyone on Earth.”

“Oh right,” he said. “Because Saturday is the Sabbath!” We never got to talking about the second coming and how it relates to the final part of our name.

His reply reminded me that we now live in a world where Sabbath is

becoming as familiar to businessmen as the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Interestingly, rest is now respected even by corporations trying to make money! Companies like Google give their employees one day a week to rest from their normal routines and work on company-related things that interest them but are not part of their typical job description.¹ Many churches, both Protestant and Catholic, offer services on Saturday. But what is lacking in this increasing acceptance of Sabbath rest is a better understanding of its origin, purpose, and continuing significance.

So to address this, the United Church of God created a succinct but helpful eBook called *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*. You can search for it in iBooks and read it on your iPad, but it is also available for Kindle, Nook, and a host of other e-readers and mobile devices. If you go to the publisher's website (<http://www.ucg.org/booklet/sunset-sunset-gods-sabbath-rest/>), you can download the free PDF to archive, email, or print in hard copy.

When you do, you will be pleasantly surprised at the amount of content it packs in its “pages.” Here are a few of my memorable takeaways.

Exodus 16:28 reminds us that several weeks before God spoke the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, he said the Israelites were refusing to keep his commandments and laws. Abraham also kept God's commands before they were written down, according to Genesis 26:5.

Leviticus 23:1-3 reminds us that the Sabbath is *God's* holy time—not Moses' or even Israel's. We gather in worship convocations because God chose the seventh day and made it holy. Rightly understood, we don't get to choose “one

Trying to contain myself, I blurted out in reply, “As our name implies, one of the most significant things we believe in is worshipping on the seventh-day Saturday, because Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath and during Creation God finished his work and set that day apart and gave that sacred time to everyone on Earth.”

day in seven” to gather. God decides and already has.

Hebrews 4:9 uses the Greek noun *sabbatismos*. Despite the obvious reference to Sabbath in the very sound of the word, until recently we haven't had extra-Biblical evidence written by non-Adventists linking this word with literal seventh-day Sabbath observance. That has changed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (p. 855) now states regarding the meaning of *sabbatismos*: “The words ‘sabbath rest’ translate the [Greek] noun *sabbatismos*, a unique word in the NT. This term appears also in Plutarch...for sabbath observance, and in four post-canonical Christian

writings ... for seventh day 'sabbath celebration'" (p. 855). In summary, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* decisively and correctly concludes that *sabbatismos* means keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. Therefore, Hebrews 4:9 stresses the need to continue to keep the Sabbath in a New Covenant context.

This free little eBook is worth downloading. It provides invaluable common-sense answers to current objections and questions regarding Sabbath rest. Its up-to-date footnotes from extra-Biblical sources will help you share the significance of the Sabbath with your curious friends and colleagues.

Mike Fortune is pastor of the Toledo First Church of Seventh-day Adventists. He talks about Jesus on stage and shows people that God loves them like crazy. And he loves God gadgets.

¹Stephen M.R. Covey and Greg Link with Rebecca R. Merrill, *Smart Trust: Creating Prosperity, Energy, and Joy in a Low-Trust World*, p. 76.

Current Sabbath Apologetics

By Mike Fortune

When I look at the Sabbath from this side of Calvary, what I fail to see in any of the five appearances of Jesus is where he specifically tells us that the sacred hallowedness of the seventh day has been transferred to the first day. Men have offered plenty of explanations for the alleged transfer, saying it was due to Jesus' resurrection, commission, or ascension; or because the apostles asked believers to set aside an offering at the beginning of the week; or perhaps because the Bible was completed on the first day of the week. But Jesus says nothing about it. Which is odd, don't you think?

And wouldn't John, who wrote the last of the Gospels more than 50 years after Jesus died, correct what Matthew, Mark, and Luke missed—if they had missed something so important? Wouldn't such a change warrant at least as much inspired ink as circumcision or kosher food laws or Gentiles getting the gospel?

Instead, when Jesus gives us the Great Commission, he tells us to keep the commandments he kept (which, as John 7:23 reveals, included the fourth). Yes, the Lord has a day (Revelation 1), but the Lord himself said that day is Sabbath (Mark 2), and Sabbath is the seventh day (Genesis 2). Jesus also reminds his followers in Mark 2 that the Sabbath is for all mankind/humanity (*anthropos*).

Another curious thing about the Sabbath that I've never heard other preachers address when they talk about it is that God predicted it would be changed. Daniel 7:25 says a little horn/kingdom would think to change God's times and laws. What's the only law in the Ten Commandments that has anything to do with time? The fourth. And as church history reveals (as early as the mid 100s—specifically in Barnabas' and Justin Martyr's writings), it didn't take long to do so. Still today the Roman Catholic Church claims it changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.

What I also find curious is why nobody ever mentions that after the cross, but before the second coming, Revelation 12 says the great

dragon/devil (verse 9) would—through religion and the politics of the first beast (Rev. 13:1-10) and a second lamblike beast (Rev. 13:11-18)—make it his mission to attack the first four of the Ten Commandments of God. The first commandment ("no other Gods") is attacked in Revelation 13:8. The second commandment ("no images") is attacked in Revelation 13:15. The third commandment ("no blaspheming/taking God's name in vain") is attacked in Revelation 13:6. Barna says Christians' lifestyles are no different than that of the world, which regularly attacks these first three commandments of God. And in my opinion, whenever we preach Sunday sacredness or even "one day in seven" instead of the seventh day, we attack the fourth commandment as well.

Therefore, may I humbly suggest to you that the Sabbath is not only about resting in the finished work of Jesus' creation and salvation; it's also simply about obeying God, not the great dragon. No, we should not let any man judge us as to which day to keep. But shouldn't it be okay with us if God does? What if there's a reason the word "worship" shows up repeatedly in Revelation 13 and 14? And every time it does, it's in the context of an invitation to worship the great dragon or the beasts on his team, but the one time it appears with an invitation for every tribe nation language and people on earth to worship the true God (Rev. 14:6-7), it quotes the fourth commandment ("worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water"). Which sends the reader back to remember creation.

So as poorly as some seventh-day sabbatarians have presented this topic over the years, leading to extreme and ridiculous legalistic approaches to it, I believe there are some good reasons this side of Calvary to sincerely observe Sabbath on the seventh day. Namely, (1) the absence of specific explanations regarding an enormous change of its solemnity, (2) the prophetic warning that it would be changed and obvious historic proof that it has been, and (3) the unusual word *sabbatismos*, which remains for all God's people in Hebrews 4 and which extra-Biblical sources from the first century have identified with seventh-day Sabbath-keeping.

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Dollars, Candy Bars, and Tacks Under the Wrists

By Alden Thompson

Piano lessons are nearly a universal American disease, at least for Adventists. Electronic gadgets may win in the end, but my students still admit to at least one piano lesson along the way. Knowledge of the Bible and Ellen White may be hazy, but they know about piano lessons.

That's good, because good theology is lurking there. Like stories (with apologies to C.S. Lewis), piano lessons smuggle theology into people's minds unawares. So here's some piano lesson theology.

My classroom triggered this story. I was expounding on Paul's "stick or gentle love" offer in 1 Corinthians 4:21 as he groped for the key to Corinthian hearts. His point: On the way to spontaneous goodness, God uses both threats and bribes.

In my early piano lessons, that meant a gold, silver, or red star. Even bad music got a star. But I was so competitive that anything less than gold felt like punishment. I didn't expect gold for no practice, but if I did practice and still played badly, shouldn't I get a gold star just for effort? You can sense the "theology" trickling through here.

But no two people experience guilt in the same way. I may be a special case, because I feel a touch of guilt for just about everything in life. At the eye doctor, for example, I feel guilty because my left eye lags behind the right. Though the eye is entirely blameless, I still feel guilty for its bad performance. It's not a disabling guilt, mind you; I've never lost a moment's sleep over it. But it's there. Food, especially home-grown vegetables,

confronts me with a similar problem. I'll eat a marginal tomato just because I don't want it to feel bad.

But now to the classroom. When I asked about threats and bribes in piano lessons, one student said her

But no two people experience guilt in the same way. I may be a special case, because I feel a touch of guilt for just about everything in life.

teacher used candy bars and dollar bills. Immediately a classmate across the aisle said that his teacher used tacks next to the keyboard to keep up his wrists!

The goal for both was good music as the teacher searched for what works. Would the same teacher use both tacks and candy bars? Not likely. But having one of each might be good. In my case, I think my tough teacher was too mean and my nice one too gentle, though they both had good intentions. Maybe they balanced each other out.

Remarkably, Ellen White makes that very point for Bible teachers. Students need "different" teachers, even if they don't all know as much about the Bible. Her clinching argument is the diversity of Bible writers. We need

them all—Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul—because "the minds of men differ." Even "the most learned teacher" can "fall far short of teaching all that should be taught."¹

Jeremiah describes the ideal: when goodness comes naturally. No threats, no bribes, no commands, because God's law is written on the heart. "No longer shall they ... say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34, NRSV).

Note that this "new" covenant is an Old Testament promise for Old Testament people. It's not Old Testament law (Sinai) and New Testament grace (Golgotha). God always saves by grace, and law is always his gracious gift. But en route to the ideal, some get dollars and candy bars, while others get tacks under the wrists—and, as we all know, the Old Testament has lots of tacks.

Even when longing to spend eternity with God, we might still need the heavy hand. Gentle Jesus, who never killed anyone, never even struck anyone, still used strong words: "If you make a little one stumble" he said, "you'd be better off with a millstone around your neck and drowned in the depths of the sea" (cf. Matt. 18:6). Tough stuff. And it's from Jesus.

So let's listen carefully and dream dreams of a kingdom where no one hurts or destroys, because all that we need is written on our hearts.

¹Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, pp. 432-433.



Encourages Thought and Growth

We have enjoyed *Adventist Today* very much and look forward to future issues. The topics are very timely and thought-provoking, as they encourage Adventist members to grow in ways the corporate church does not. We will continue to support your work as we are able.

BONNIE STARR
San Diego, California

China Study

I am emailing you to ask permission to photocopy the article “The China Study: Incredible Science? Or Science That’s Not So Credible?” published in the March-April 2012 issue of *Adventist Today*. I have a number of student dietitians who have read the book, *The China Study*, and will benefit from reading this paper. I have 20 students in my course. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

GEORGIA E. HODGKIN, EDD, RD, FADA
Loma Linda University
School of Allied Health Professions professor and associate chair
Loma Linda, California

I have another bone to pick—why did *Adventist Today* print that article on T. Colin Campbell (March-April 2012) without an article on the other side? I can’t believe that was allowed to happen. There are many questions about it: why couldn’t or didn’t [the article’s author, Dr. Roger N. Trubey] get it published in a professional journal? Why start with *Adventist Today*?

It seems to fly in the face of other studies done—Colin Campbell’s isn’t the only one. Is this part of the agenda or bias of *Adventist Today*’s board? It certainly disputes the findings of the Adventist Health Study. What other studies can be done that aren’t observational studies over wide populations? It does not coincide with other population studies done over decades—such as that of Japan and their growing use of animal products, etc.

He [Dr. Trubey] seems to agree with dairy—OK—and with wheat and gluten avoidance, but then most naturopathic doctors are obsessed with gluten-free [diets], even though very few professionals seem to indicate this as a widespread problem. It feeds into providing many products found in natural food stores. While salt sensitivity is more widespread and tied in with hypertension, yet it is almost impossible to find low-sodium prepared foods. And hypertension is a serious disease and common in the population.

ELLA RYDZEWSKI
Clarksville, Maryland

Don’t Need Spiritual Warfare

The review by Rajkumar Dixit in *Adventist Today* (January-February 2012) considered a book by Derek Morris titled

Radical Protection (Autumn House, 2011). The article started out with a question and then made a statement: “Do you believe in spiritual warfare? While most Christians would readily agree that there is a supernatural battle taking place in the heavenly realm, it appears that little is taught on this subject in Adventist circles.” I would agree with this statement if it was amended to say that “While most conservative and fundamentalist Christians would readily agree...?” Otherwise, the statement is almost certainly incorrect.

I would suggest that the majority of 21st-century Christians in the mainline Christian denominations most certainly would not agree with the premise of the book being reviewed: “that every person is under attack by Satan and his angels.” I suspect they would regard that assertion as reflecting a medieval view of the spiritual realm, which regretfully has continued to be advanced in a number of conservative and fundamentalist Christian bodies, including the conservative wing of Adventism.

It could be argued that what every person is being “attacked” by are problems created by the social and political environment in which one was raised and the resulting psychological issues that are created by that experience. We can produce a lot of dysfunctional behavior all by ourselves. We don’t need some supernatural entity to blame it on.

ERVIN TAYLOR
Loma Linda, California



The Perfect Pastor

Heinrich Dietrich Flechterbergensterner (who said it was okay to use his name, though I'm thinking of charging him rent for the space it takes up) is a head elder from an arid and nearly inaccessible corner of North Dakota. His pastor has seven churches, which means that the local congregation sees him only two or three times a year. The joy of these reunions is always tempered by the fact that the guest-book lady can never remember him and always asks him to sign in.

"Hey, A-Man," texts Heinrich. "If there were more of you, would you be 'Amen'? Ha, ha, ha." This pleasantry concluded, he continues: "Any advice about how we can get more of a pastoral presence out here?"

As it happens, Heinie, I have the answer for you, and like most answers, it is found on the iPad. There's an app in development called PerfectPastor, and such is the need—and the rapidity of app-development these days—that it will probably be available before you have finished reading this paragraph.

PerfectPastor will be downloadable for \$0.89 (\$0.99 minus tithe), and its genius is that it gathers all of the other relevant apps (which you must also buy, but take it out of combined budget) to do everything a pastor should be doing. As head elder, here's how you'd put it to work Sabbath morning.

Come early to church with your iPad and set it on an eye-height music stand near

Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

the front door. Start the app, and you will instantly see the realistic and animated face of "Rick," whose name was chosen from surveys as the most popular pastoral monicker. Rick has a nearly shaven head, cool glasses, a black T-shirt, and a perpetual smile. (The hair and garb can be customized, of course, using the "Conservative-to-Loosey-Goosey" slider on the edge of the screen. A perceptive elder with his finger on the slider can even adjust it to suit each new visitor.)

"Hi," says Rick in a fetching baritone, and instantly you know that you are his friend, and that he will remember your name forever after hearing it once and will think about you all through the week.

The rest of the Sabbath morning is pure joy. Rick is properly silent (but chucklingly appreciative and enthusiastically "Amen"-prone) during the member-led Sabbath School class, but he comes to life again as, from his perch on the pulpit, he leads out in the announcement period. After jovially insisting that you read your bulletin carefully, he allows each announcement-giver just 45 seconds, after which you hear a tasteful but penetrating rendition of "O, Zion Haste," which gradually increases in volume until the iPad camera detects that the announcement-giver has sat down.

The Adventist Hymnal app, of course, is the source of the worship music, with Rick's baritone as a bonus. Again, a slider customizes his singing voice from Michael Card through Steve Green through the Gettys, down to the latest current adenoidal Christian-pop style.

A bit of pre-thought is required when

setting up the sermon segment. An optional link to the Weather Channel allows Rick to murmur accurate comments about current meteorological conditions, including temperature and barometric readings and a brief forecast if desired, including the obligatory "It may be raining outside, but there's sunshine in our hearts! Amen? Amen!"

Thanks to additional wonderful screen-sliders, you can choose sermon illustrations as crisp and fresh as the latest CNN news bulletin, all the way back to apocryphal stories from the 1890s where little boys or girls utter supposedly spontaneous wisdom in perfectly polished prose, while addressing grownups as "sir" or "miss." A small icon gives you the option of "Spurgeon-only" illustrations.

Touch another slider, and you can select a sermon style along the spectrum of expository to topical to running-commentary to homey-and-rambling. Spirit of Prophecy quotes can be inserted with a frequency of from zero to 85 percent. And everything is delivered in Rick's perfect baritone, while the iPad camera is constantly scanning the congregation. If heads begin to nod, Rick wags his finger in time to a trumpet-blast rendition of "O Christians Awake!"

Heinie, there's more—much, much more—but I hope this helps. Grab that iPad, and check out PerfectPastor!

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has "the answer." As a former member of "the remnant of the remnant," Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org.

NEWS



TOO MUCH “SPIN” (CAN RUIN ANY WEBSITE)

Adventist Today (AT) is working hard this year to emphasize spin-free news.

Maybe that’s one reason the Website has tripled in traffic since January. Besides, *atoday.org*’s columnists and bloggers now represent what we believe is the most wide-ranging group of thinkers and writers ever assembled by an Adventist-oriented publisher—ever.

Free Newsletter

To help you enjoy the new *atoday.org*, we’d like to email you each Friday morning a complimentary issue of *AT Update*, with thumbnail summaries of all new Adventist Today news and opinion pieces published that week. *No Strings Attached, Nothing to Buy, Your Email Address Held in Strict Confidence.*

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