

THE DECALOGUE BEFORE MOUNT SINAI

**God's divinely inspired user's guide
for human interaction didn't originate with
those two stone tablets.**

General consensus indicates that the Decalogue has exerted more influence on ethics and law than any other part of Scripture—or any document outside of Scripture. In Roman Catholic moral theology, in Protestant ethics, and in Western law, the Ten Commandments have been foundational for millennia. Legal codes of the Middle Ages were often prefaced with the Ten Commandments. Many commentaries have been written on the Decalogue by both Christian and Jewish authors.

Further, the Decalogue is the towering ethical document in Scripture. It is quoted by almost every biblical writer following the Exodus, including the psalmists, the prophets, and historians. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself refers to the Decalogue and affirms its exalted nature. The

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Apostle Paul likewise speaks of the far-reaching claims of God's law, often quoting it in his various letters and epistles. The great apostle's cross-cultural ministry finds him instructing new Christians on how the Law's boundaries extend deeply into human thought. And the biblical canon closes with the Book of Revelation and its pointed reference to those "who keep the commandments of God" (Rev. 14:12, NKJV).¹

Given this scriptural emphasis, one might wonder whether ethical concerns in the canon began at Mt Sinai. Presently there is much confusion Pentateuchal criticism, which often supposes an evolution of the Decalogue.

But a close reading of the Book of Genesis suggests that even before the Fall, Adam and Eve, in newly created perfection, were given a *command* by God not to eat from a certain tree. We find a divine commandment *before* sin: "The Lord God *commanded* the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the

tree of the knowledge of good and evil *you shall not eat*" (Gen. 2:16, 17, italics supplied). The presence of law before sin suggests the positive protective nature of divine law.

This pre-Fall restriction deserves thought. From what is God protecting Adam and Eve? Could it be subtly implying that there is a standard of right and wrong operating before Adam and Eve disobey? This pre-Fall restriction at least suggests that the human couple needed to be protected from something. The implication includes the notion that sin was found in the universe before Adam and Eve disobey and that God sought to protect Adam and Eve from such.

The content of the divine command in Genesis 2:16, 17 is also significant. God first makes a positive statement to Adam and Eve: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (vs. 16).

This same feature can be seen later in the opening words of the Decalogue: "I am the Lord your

God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2). Only after this positive statement is the prohibition given, and even then, the command is not presented as an abstract ban such as "it is forbidden."

The command in Genesis 2:17, "you shall not," closely resembles the initial words of eight Decalogue precepts. The prohibition in Genesis 2 applies to only a single tree. Apparently Adam and Eve could eat freely from all other trees. Bruce Waltke is correct: "These first words of God to man assume man's freedom to choose and thus his formed moral capacity."²

From the very beginning, thus, human beings had the power of choice. They were free to make genuine decisions. The divine command to them was to assist them in making the right choice, but the choice was theirs. After the Fall, in the Genesis narratives, God continues giving commandments to humans. Of Noah it is recorded twice (6:22, 7:5). And the patriarchs are commended for obeying God's commands (18:19; 21:4; 22:18; 26:5).

Pre-Sinai Evidence for the Decalogue Commandments

The law given later at Mount Sinai can be seen less as a new law than as an authoritative expression of an already existing system of morality. In discussing patriarchal

history, Terence Fretheim notes: "These ancestral texts also demonstrate that law cannot be collapsed into the law given at Sinai. At the same time, they show that Sinai law basically conforms to already existing law."³

Intriguing hints embedded within the Genesis narratives have often been overlooked when considering ancient morality. The 10 precepts of the Decalogue are already operant in human lives.

Creation/Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3). The Sabbath appears in numerous, varied Old Testament texts. The Pentateuch contains what is considered the earliest references to it. This special day plays a prominent role in the opening chapters of Genesis at the climax of the Creation account (1:1-2:4). Genesis 2:1-3 reveals God completing His creative activity in six days, after which He "rested" on "the seventh day." The seventh day is mentioned three times, marking its importance over the previous six days.

"The 'seventh day' sabbath is 'blessed' as no other day and thereby imbued with a power unique to this day. God made this day 'holy' by separating it from all other days. Rest-day holiness is something God bestowed onto the seventh day. He manifested Himself in refraining from work and in rest as the divine Exemplar for humankind. The sequence of 'six working-days' and a

‘seventh [sabbath] rest-day’ indicates inclusively that every human being is to engage in . . . ‘imitation of God,’ by resting on the ‘seventh day.’ ‘Man’ . . . made in the . . . ‘image of God,’ (Gen. 1:26-28) is invited to follow the Exemplar.²⁴ And when the Sabbath is accented in the wilderness wanderings before Sinai, it is clear that it is not being introduced as something new (Ex. 16:28).

The creation week cycle is grounded by God in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. The weekly cycle is also incidentally mentioned functioning within the Flood narratives (Gen. 7:10; 8:10, 12).

Cain and Abel/Worship of God (Genesis 4:3, 4). Cain and Abel are found in worship outside the Garden of Eden. The brothers’ actions reveal a knowledge of divine worship, and that it involves time. Verse 3, often translated “in the course of time” (NASB) or “in the process of time” (NKJV), reads literally “at the end of days.” The only time frame given in Genesis so far is the weekly cycle set in place in Genesis 1 and 2. Thus “the end of days” in Genesis 4:3 could imply the end of the week or the seventh-day Sabbath. Though sin has resulted in preventing direct contact with God as occurred in the Garden before sin, God has not broken off contact with humanity. “Eden is off-limits to humanity, but God is not restricted to Eden’s compound.”²⁵

How the brothers were instructed regarding the worship of God, the reader is not informed. Yet it is apparent that knowledge of and means of this worship is known.

Cain/Murder and Lying (Genesis 4:3-16). This narrative is a tragic account of sin’s rapid degradation of human nature. Long before the commandment against murder was proclaimed from Mount Sinai, Cain kills his brother Abel. This horrifying deed is obviously stressed, for the word *brother* is repeated over and over in the passage. When God addresses Cain, He cites this relationship three times in three verses alone (vss. 9-11). Within Genesis 4:1-17, *Abel* and *brother* occur seven times. These repetitions jar the reader’s attention to the heinous nature of the crime: the murder of one’s own family.

As a result of this grievous murder, Cain (like the serpent in Genesis 3) “is placed under a curse. This is the first occasion in Scripture where a human is cursed, indicating the gravity of his crime against God and creation.”²⁶ Gordon Wenham notes that the overall pattern of this Genesis 4 narrative is unmistakably similar to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3, with the scenes closely parallel:

1. The central scene in each chapter is a terse description of the sin (Gen. 3:6-8//4:8) that contrasts strikingly with long dialogues before

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and afterward.

2. The following scene in each case where God investigates and condemns the sin is also remarkably alike:

“Where is Abel your brother?//”
“Where are you?” (Gen. 4:9; 3:9)

“What have you done?” (Gen. 3:9; 4:10; 3:13)

“You are cursed from the land,”//“You are more cursed than all domesticated animals; the land is cursed because of you” (Gen. 4:11; 3:14, 17).

3. Both stories conclude with the transgressors leaving the presence of God and going to live east of Eden (Gen. 4:16; 3:24).

4. In Genesis 3:24, the Lord drove Adam and Eve out of the garden. Cain’s complaint is similar: “You have driven me this day from the face of the ground” (4:14).

These parallels between Genesis 3 and 4 suggest that the two narratives should be compared to give insight into the nature of human sin. Fratricide graphically illustrates the defile-

ment of sin. In chapters 3 and 4, Eve has to be persuaded by the serpent to disregard the Creator’s advice (3:1-5); Cain is not dissuaded from his murderous intention by God’s direct appeal (4:6, 7). In chapter 3 there is no stark sense of immediate alienation between Adam and Eve with God. When God pronounces sentence on Adam, Eve, and the serpent, they accept it without protest (vss. 14-20). Cain’s negative attitude is perceptible from the outset when the Lord does not accept his sacrifice.

Clearly the writer of Genesis wants to mark parallels between the two narratives. The murder of Abel, however, is not simply a rerun of the Fall. There is further debasement. Sin’s vicious nature is more graphically demonstrated, and humanity is further alienated from God.

The Genesis narratives proceed with deliberate linkages, showing the curse of sin rapidly developing a deadly hold upon the human race. Human nature is now bent toward evil. “Human beings should know

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what an octopus fastened its tentacles upon the race when sin took hold. With terrible realism the narrative continues.”⁷

The Decalogue prohibition against murder has not yet been given. In Genesis 4, however, after the murder of Abel, God confronts Cain as a prosecutor and makes serious accusation: Cain is liable for shedding blood. A person cannot take another’s life with impunity. Significantly, Cain himself is aware that murder is wrong. What is more, in addition to murdering his brother, Cain lies.

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The Genesis 4 narrative of Cain’s murder of his brother also reveals and underscores the sacredness of

human life in God’s eyes. It is this same affirmation of life that is implied later in the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, which forbids murder. Moreover, the great anger of Cain in Genesis 4:5 is an advance presentation of the principle Jesus much later elucidates in His Sermon on the Mount, equating anger in the heart to murder.

Lamech/Bigamy and Murder (Genesis 4:19-24). In taking two wives (vs. 19), Lamech deliberately diverts from the divine ideal for marriage in Genesis 2:24, the union of one husband and one wife. The eighth commandment of the Decalogue forbidding adultery implies this same sacred view of monogamous marriage.

Lamech also brags of his murdering a person for wounding him, blatantly referring to Cain’s murder and his subsequent divine sentencing (Gen. 4:23). “Lamech’s gloating over a reputation more ruthless than infamous Cain’s shows the disparagement of human life among Cain’s

seed that was fostered by his murder of Abel.”⁸

In the literary structuring of Genesis, the genealogy of Cain, climaxing with Lamech, is juxtaposed against the genealogy of Adam/Seth, climaxing in righteous Enoch, who was translated without seeing death (Gen. 4:16-24, 26). This pairing makes the degradation caused by sin all the more glaringly obvious.

Descendants of Seth/God’s Name (Genesis 4:26). All through Scripture, the name of God is declared holy: “The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved! The Lord is great in Zion, and He is high above all the peoples. Let them praise *Your great and awesome name—He is holy*” (Ps. 99:1-3, italics supplied).

Long before Mount Sinai’s command to honor God’s name, people exalted it: “Men began to call on the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26). The command to honor God’s sacred name will later be enshrined in the third of the Ten Commandments.

Antediluvians/Morality (Genesis 6:5,11-13). The divine reason for the Flood implies that a standard of morality was being violated: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with vio-

lence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (vss. 5, 11, 12).

The phrase “the Lord saw” (Gen. 6:5) links with the creation story (“God saw,” Gen. 1:31) in a startling manner. Human evil is now presented with biting force through the inclusive words “every . . . only . . . continually”(6:5). Moreover, all of life is linked together, for all living creatures share the same deliverance or divine death sentence.

After the Flood, God gives another injunction against murder: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man” (Gen. 9:6). This statement of God is precise, again underscoring the sacredness of life with grave consequences for its wanton destruction.

The divinely pronounced principle declares that destroying human life is an offense against the Creator. The text speaks of human beings created in the very image of God, strikingly linking to the transcendent value of life announced during Creation week (Gen. 1:26, 27). The divine image is still acknowledged by God in post-Flood sinful humans, explicitly linking post-Flood humanity to Adam.

God exacts punishment for spilling the lifeblood of another human being. Twice it is mentioned in just two verses that God demands

recompense for murder. This divine statement in Genesis 9:5, 6 is addressed to humanity, long before the people of Israel were in existence. Retributive justice does not commence in the Mosaic Covenant. It is found in the divine covenant with Noah, already operating since the first murder in Genesis 4.

Noah and His Sons/Filial Irreverence and Sexual Perversion (Genesis 9:20-27). This incident involves sexual irregularity connected with drunkenness. The Hebrew word for “saw” in this text means “looked at (searchingly)” (Song of Songs 1:6; 6:11). It is not describing an innocent or accidental action. Ham’s voyeurism is of the worst sort, as the prophet Habakkuk later insists: “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, Pressing him to your bottle, Even to make him drunk, That you may look on his nakedness! You are filled with shame instead of glory” (Hab. 2:15, 16). A discussion continues among scholars regarding the exact nature of the act of Ham, but all agree that sexual perversion is apparent, as is filial irreverence.

In contrast to the terse brevity with which Ham’s deed is described, the response of the two brothers, Shem and Japheth, is detailed. The narrative slows when the other two brothers refrain from further impropriety. Twice it says that they went “backwards,” and that they covered and did not see “their father’s naked-

ness.” The fifth commandment of honoring a parent is apparently operant long before the pronouncement of it from Mount Sinai. Also implied is the standard of sexual purity of the seventh commandment.

Tower of Babel/Making a “Name” (Genesis 11:1-9). This narrative is linked to the description in Genesis 4:26 of calling “on the name of the Lord”: “Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that . . . they said to one another, ‘let us make a name for ourselves’” (11:1-4, italics supplied). The motive of the Babel builders was to achieve independence from God, implying a blatant snub of the divine. Though created in God’s image, they wanted to divorce from that fundamental connection. They deliberately disregarded the “name of God” later upheld in the third commandment of the Decalogue.

Human desire to be autonomous is as ancient as human civilization, as even a casual perusal of history would suggest. Interestingly, the Babel builders were successful in making a name for themselves. However, its lasting sense is derogatory. The term *Babel* is still synonymous with confusion, as occasional media comments hint.

Lot and His Daughters/Sexual Deviancy (Genesis 19:1-38). The moral compass of Lot and his daughters is very confused. Lurid sexual pervers-

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sion tainted their lives. The horrible depth of vice in Sodom is indicated by “young men and old” showing up at Lot’s house, revealing inter-generational corruption. The enormity of their sin is also indicated by the fact that their sacred duty of hospitality was so completely distorted that Lot’s guests were demanded for abuse, even though Lot urges them not to do “this wicked thing” (19:7, NIV).

The events of this narrative display shocking depravity. Lot does not protect his daughters but offers them to inflamed men. His “hospitality” reflects moral confusion. Later, these daughters will sexually abuse their father. The last picture of Lot, nephew of noble Abraham, is embedded in incest. “The end of choosing to carve out his career was to lose even the custody of his body. His legacy, Moab and Ammon (37f.), was destined to provide the worst carnal seduction in the history of Israel (that of Baal-Peor, Numbers 25) and the cruelest religious perversion (that of Molech, Lev.

18:21). So much stemmed from a self-regarding choice (13:10f.) and persistence in it.”

Kenneth Mathews describes this Genesis 19 narrative as involving “a web of the most vile circumstances.”¹⁰ These verses indicate another example of not honoring parents, along with issues of not committing adultery.

Abraham/Divine Worship (Genesis 22:5; 24:26, 48, 52). Though surrounded by pagan polytheistic nations, Abraham’s faithfully worship of the one true God is pictured in the Genesis narratives. His godly influence obviously spread throughout his household, for even his servants testify to their faith in the true God. On his journey to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham’s trusted servant describes how God answered his prayer for guidance: “I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master’s brother for his son” (24:48). In fact,

Like his father, Isaac bore false witness, involving the ninth commandment of the future Decalogue. When confronted with his lie, Isaac admits that he had been afraid that men might have put him to death on Rebekah's account. The pagan king scolds Isaac's prevarication regarding his relationship with Rebekah. This ruler, though not of the covenant line, recognizes that adultery is wrong.

Genesis 24 records this servant worshipping God three times!

Abimelech, Pharaoh, Abraham, and Isaac/Adultery and Lying (Genesis 12; 20; 26). Fundamental Decalogue principles are also seen as operant beyond the Covenant line. God's standard of righteousness is the same within the nations through which the patriarchs travel. The three "adultery narratives" of Genesis 12; 20; 26 involve three different places and rulers. In Genesis 20, King Abimelech finds out about Abraham and Sarah's marriage from a dream. He pleads his innocence to God because he was unaware of any existing marital relation between Abraham and Sarah. Open to divine instruction, this ruler displays a moral conscience superior to Abraham's.

Later, Isaac finds himself in a situation very similar to the one his father had experienced twice. Like his father, Isaac bore false witness, involving the ninth commandment of

the future Decalogue. When confronted with his lie, Isaac admits that he had been afraid that men might have put him to death on Rebekah's account. The pagan king scolds Isaac's prevarication regarding his relationship with Rebekah. This ruler, though not of the covenant line, recognizes that adultery is wrong. He insists, "Quite obviously, she is your wife" (Gen. 26:9).

Abimelech then administers a well-deserved rebuke to Isaac: "You would have brought guilt on us" (vs. 10). In attempting to spare his own life through deception, Isaac was risking the lives of everyone else. Remarkably, Abimelech clearly understands this principle. It is not only the immoral behavior that concerns him, but also the consequences of that behavior.

Strikingly, "outsiders" of the Covenant line in Genesis (Egyptians, Canaanites, Aramaeans) are sensitive to precepts of the Sinai Decalogue. "This functioning of law is

also evident in the treatment of other characters and their activities throughout Genesis 12–50. . . . The oughts are presented as an organic [or creational] ethic by means of creational motifs that are embedded in the narrative . . . woven into the foundations of human experience."¹¹

Rebekah's Deception and Jacob's Lies (Genesis 27)/ Laban's Lies (Genesis 29:21-26): Deceptive conversations are included in each narrative, Rebekah with her son Jacob, Jacob with his father Isaac, and later Laban with Jacob. The deceiver of his father was subsequently deceived by his father-in-law. On the first occasion, Jacob understands that his mother's plan would be a deception: "Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him" (27:11, 12).

In the presence of Isaac, Jacob utters two lies. "First, he claims to be Esau, and for good measure he adds 'your firstborn.' This phrase will remind Isaac why father and son are getting together on this occasion. Second, he claims to have captured the game and now wants to share that with Isaac. He also reminds his father that he is there for his father's blessing, not just for some food and a chat. . . . The low point in Jacob's conversation with his father is his statement that he is back so quickly because God just put the game in front of

him. Here is an appeal to deity in order to cover up duplicity."¹²

When Esau learns what has happened, he expresses how he regards Jacob's prevarication: "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" (Gen. 27:36). His anger is so great that he plans a revenge murder of his brother: "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (vs. 41).

Later, Laban exercises treachery on Jacob, dealing fraudulently with his daughter Rachel promised to Jacob after seven years of service (Gen. 29:1-28). Jacob demands an answer from Laban: "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you *deceived* me?" (vs. 25, italics added).

Rachel's Stealing (Genesis 31): "Rachel *stole* her father's household gods" when Jacob determined to leave Laban's employment (31:19, NIV, italics supplied). Laban eventually caught up with the fleeing family and inquires of Jacob: "Why did you *steal* my gods?" (vs. 30, italics supplied). The narrator mentions that "Jacob did not know that Rachel had *stolen* the gods" (vs. 32, NIV, italics supplied). Jacob defends

his innocence, which implies that he knew stealing was wrong. Rachel's act of stealing is portrayed in the narrative as wrongful. The eighth commandment of the Decalogue, however, is yet to be proclaimed from Mount Sinai.

Shechem, Hamor, Simeon, and Levi/Coveting, Rape, Murder, Lying (Genesis 34). Shechem, a determined young man, does not politely address his father when expressing his emphatic desire for Dinah. He will not allow anything to deter his compulsion for Dinah, and he is seen coveting what is not rightfully his. He takes matters into his own hands and abducts Dinah (vss. 2, 26). The verb sequence "saw . . . took" used of Shechem's treatment of Dinah is the same sequence used for the sexually unrestrained in Genesis 6:2, which then leads directly to the Flood narrative.

Dinah's brothers are furious, filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing. Their word for the "infamous deed" is an expression for the most serious kind of sexual depravity. Their insistence that "such a thing ought not to be done" (vs. 7, NASB) suggests they believed that inviolable norms had been breached.

Neither Hamor nor Shechem admits that anything wrong has been done. They both hope that a monetary payment may help smooth over the situation. Hamor even tries to

paint an appealing picture of the advantages Jacob might accrue with such an arrangement.

However, Simeon and Levi ("Dinah's full brothers," vs. 25, NLT), recoil from the sexual disgrace of their sister. They suggest an alternative. The brothers then add deceit (which involves the ninth commandment of the Decalogue) to the complex situation. Next, they commit murder, breaking the future-proclaimed sixth commandment of the Ten Commandments. When defending their actions to Jacob, Simeon and Levi argue, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" (34:31).

The very last word on this narrative, however, comes later from Jacob on his deathbed: "[speaking of Simeon and Levi] 'Cursed be their anger'" (Gen. 49:7). Jacob gives voice to the much later explicit link between anger and murder in the Sermon on the Mount. Genesis 34 paints a portrait of grim violence, including rape, deceit, and massacre resulting from covetousness.

Jacob/Idols (Genesis 35:1-4). When Jacob hears God's call to return to Bethel, he feels a need for repentance and revival in his household. Thus he urges the family to put away their idols. Why was this part of Jacob's response? The prohibition against idol worship in the Decalogue will be announced on Mount Sinai only much later.

Jacob's sons first suggest that they might murder their brother Joseph (37:20), but instead sell him to the Ishmaelites, then lie to their father about what happened to Joseph. The guilt they bear over this weighs heavily on them for years. This becomes evident later, when the brothers travel to Egypt because of a famine. Eventually they learn of Joseph's high position, which constrains them to confess their long-lasting feelings of guilt and their lying several times.

Joseph and His Brothers/Threat of Murder and Lying (Genesis 39-50). Jacob's sons first suggest that they might murder their brother Joseph (37:20), but instead sell him to the Ishmaelites, then lie to their father about what happened to Joseph. The guilt they bear over this weighs heavily on them for years. This becomes evident later, when the brothers travel to Egypt because of a famine. Eventually they learn of Joseph's high position, which constrains them to confess their long-lasting feelings of guilt and their lying several times:

Judah, when appealing to Joseph to allow Benjamin to return to his father: "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said, 'Surely he is torn to pieces'; and I have not seen him since'" (44:27, 28).

Later, after burying their father Jacob: "When Joseph's brothers saw

that their father was dead, they said, 'Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.' So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, 'Before your father died he commanded, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: 'I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.'" Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father'" (50:15-17).

Though the proclamation of the Decalogue from Sinai is yet far in the future, Joseph's brothers' consciences are obviously pricked regarding their falsehoods to their father and their treatment of their brother.

Potiphar's Wife and Joseph/Adultery (Genesis 39). The seventh of the Ten Commandments, regarding adultery, was apparently already part of Joseph's morality when he was in Egypt. The narrative paints a vivid

Joseph emphasizes that Potiphar's wife is withheld from him for she is a married woman. Most importantly, such an adulterous act would be a "great evil" and a "sin against God." Joseph's detailed argument also implies that Potiphar's wife can and should understand him. However, she was undeterred by any of Joseph's considerations.

picture of a faithless wife who turns on a young man because he refuses her improper advances. Joseph's answer to Potiphar's wife's seduction is specific: Potiphar, his master, has bestowed unlimited confidence on him. The baseness of betraying such trust would be wrong.

Further, Joseph emphasizes that she is withheld from him for she is a married woman, Potiphar's wife. Most importantly, such an adulterous act would be a "great evil" and a "sin against God." Joseph's detailed argument also implies that Potiphar's wife can and should understand him.

However, she was undeterred by any of Joseph's considerations. Nor was her seduction a one-time enticement. "Day by day" (Gen. 39:10) she approached him. Apparently she was so persistent that Joseph took the precaution of staying away from her.

With one encounter, Joseph realized that the situation called for drastic action, for Potiphar's wife "caught him by his garment, saying,

'Lie with me.' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled" (Gen. 39:12). To divert suspicion from her to Joseph, Potiphar's wife raised an outcry, protesting her innocence.

Her immoral passion for Joseph is now replaced with lying. Joseph's garment, which she holds, could be substantial evidence for her. She repeats what Joseph did and what she did, but cleverly reverses the order. The narrative has portrayed Joseph leaving his coat in her hand and fleeing outdoors (Gen. 39:12), and then Potiphar's wife shouting for help (vs. 14). When Potiphar's wife describes this incident, she first mentions her screaming. Then she describes Joseph's leaving his cloak behind in his rapid exit (vs. 15). Her clever reversal thereby depicts her as a victim, underscoring the blatant nature of her lie.

Moreover: "In relating Joseph's alleged misconduct to her servants, she identified Joseph as 'a Hebrew fellow' (vs. 14). In speaking to her husband, she identifies Joseph as *the*

Hebrew slave (vs. 17). . . . The change is certainly deliberate. To be sexually attacked by ['a fellow'] is bad enough. To be sexually attacked by a foreign slave makes her accusation all the more damning. In choosing this term, she is putting Joseph in as despicable a light as possible. It should also demand as swift a redress as possible from Potiphar, the master who has been betrayed by his servant."¹³ She also cleverly attaches "secondary blame to her own husband. After all, it is Potiphar who brought Joseph into the household."¹⁴

The Law Before Mount Sinai

All 10 precepts of the Sinai Decalogue are attested to throughout the Genesis narratives:

1. "You shall have no other gods before Me" (monotheism): Creation Week; Genesis 2:1-3; 4:3, 26; 12:1-3; 22:5; 24:48.

2. "You shall not make . . . a carved image, or . . . bow down to them nor serve them" (Ex. 20:4, 5): Jacob's urging of family to put away idols (Gen. 35:2).

3. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Ex. 20:7): calling "on the 'name of the Lord'" (Gen. 4:26).

4. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God" (Ex. 20:8, 10): Creation Week; Cain and Abel's worship time; weekly

cycle operating (Gen. 2:1-3; 4:3; 7:4, 10; 8:10, 12).

5. "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12): Noah/his sons; Lot/his daughters (Gen. 9:20-27; 19:1-38).

6. "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13): Cain kills Abel and is held accountable by God; Lamech bragging of murder; Simeon and Levi killing (Gen. 4:3-15; 4:23, 24; 34).

7. "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14): Abraham/Sarah/Pharaoh; Lot/his daughters; Abraham/Sarah/Abimelech; Isaac/Rebekah/Abimelech; Joseph/Potiphar's wife (Gen. 12:9-20; 19:30-38; 20:1-7; 26:6-11; 39:7-21).

8. "You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15): Rachel steals idols (Gen. 31:13-42).

9. "You shall not bear false witness" (Ex. 20:16): Abraham/Sarah/Pharaoh; Abraham/Sarah/Abimelech; Isaac/Rebekah/Abimelech; Jacob/Esau/Isaac; Laban/Leah and Rachel/Jacob; Dinah incident; Joseph/Potiphar's wife (Gen. 12:9-20; 20:1-7; 26:6-11; 27; 29; 34:13-27; 39).

10. "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17): Dinah/Shechem; Joseph/Potiphar's wife (Gen. 34:1-4; 39).

In light of these many Genesis indicators exhibiting the morality encoded later in the Decalogue, the commendation of Abraham given by God to Isaac is especially impressive: "I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descen-

dants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father . . . because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Gen. 26:3, 5, italics supplied).

“These terms are well-known from the pages of Deuteronomy (e.g., 11:1; 26:17), where they are the stock vocabulary for describing the keeping of the Torah revealed at Sinai.”¹⁵ This explicitly detailed statement of God “witnesses to the place of law in the pre-Sinai period and that the law given at Sinai stands in fundamental continuity with the law obeyed by Abraham.”¹⁶ God could have merely stated to Isaac that Abraham had been obedient. Instead He becomes very precise, mentioning specifically what Abraham had been obedient to.

Genesis does not record how human beings were provided with God’s laws, commandments, and statutes. But they are specifically mentioned here (Gen. 26:5), implying that knowledge of them was in place. By these selective terms, the author of the Pentateuch indicates that divine “laws, commandments, and statutes” undergird morality in the patriarchal period. And this morality is identical to that of the Decalogue.

There is another witness during the pre-Mosaic patriarchal period. Job’s personal testimony of morality

also involves Decalogue principles. His language is clear:

“I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin? And what is the portion of God from above Or the heritage of the Almighty from on high? . . . Does He not see my ways And number all my steps? If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hastened after deceit, let Him weigh me with accurate scales, and let God know my integrity. . . . If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or I have lurked at my neighbor’s doorway, . . . if I have put my confidence in gold, and called fine gold my trust, . . . and my heart became secretly enticed, that too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I would have denied God above. . . . Have I covered my transgressions like Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom, because I feared the great multitude, . . . If my land cries out against me, and its furrows weep together; if I have eaten its fruit without money, or have caused its owners to lose their lives” (Job 31:1, 2, 4-6, 9, 24, 27, 28, 33, 34, 38, 39, NASB).

This passage yields a striking moral sensitivity. And if this is the oldest book in the Bible (which the details of the text itself seem to corroborate), the principles by which Job’s conscience operates also reflect advanced knowledge of the much-later-presented Sinai Decalogue.

And Job is not even of the Covenant Line.

A close reading of the Book of Genesis suggests that the precepts of the Decalogue were the standard of human morality long before Sinai. There are implicit acknowledgments of all 10. The dramatic, overwhelming presentation of the Ten Commandments to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, rather than being an initial presentation of them, instead underscores the majestic emphasis God attaches to the Moral Law, His eternal code of righteousness. Rather than granting Israel a new code of ethics, the Genesis narratives instead give evidence that the Decalogue morality predates Sinai. Thus, their expression on Sinai suggests that God purposed to make the occasion of speaking His law on Sinai a scene of awful grandeur because of the exalted character of the Law. No wonder the psalmist was moved to chant:

“Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. . . .

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth. . . .

Oh, how I love Your law!” (Ps. 119:89, 142, 97). □

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Unless otherwise specified, Scripture references in this article are quoted from the *New King James Version*.

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³ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2005), p. 136.

⁴ Gerhard F. Hasel, “Sabbath,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman, editor-in-chief (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 5, p. 851.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁶ Kenneth A. Mathews, *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Genesis 1–11:26* in E. Ray Clendenen, gen. ed., *The New American Commentary New International Version* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2001), p. 275.

⁷ Gordon J. Wenham in David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, gen. ed., *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1–15*, (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), p. 100.

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⁹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, in D. J. Wiseman, gen. ed., *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1967), p. 136.

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¹² Victor P. Hamilton, in Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., gen. ed., *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17 in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 219, 220.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

¹⁵ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 148.

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WHAT DOES “INSPIRED” MEAN— AND NOT MEAN

**One of the keys to interpreting
Scripture is understanding the nature
of inspiration.**

Prophetic inspiration is a mysterious and complex subject that has generated many discussions in Seventh-day Adventist circles over the years. Those discussions result largely from the nature of divine inspiration and the human inability to fully grasp the supernatural inspiration process. William G. Johnsson suggests that “defining inspiration is like catching a rainbow. When we have put forth our best efforts, there will remain an elusive factor, an element of mystery.”¹

But this should not prevent us

from recognizing that God’s Word provides helpful knowledge of His mysterious communication process. While humbly admitting the limitations of our own reasoning, we should thoroughly study what the inspired writings actually say about themselves.

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The mainstream Jewish-Christian tradition holds that “in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.” As God’s spokesmen, the prophets delivered His message to the people either orally or in a written form—or even in a dramatized way. But the passing away of the Bible prophets in ancient times, and of Ellen G. White more recently, has limited the prophetic legacy quite exclusively to its written form.

A better understanding of divine accommodation and cultural conditioning of inspired writings can help us avoid the extremes of *decontextualization*, which takes the inspired writings out of the cultural context in which they came into existence, and *acculturalization*, which empties those writings from their divine nature that transcends culture.

Divine Accommodation

The mainstream Jewish-Christian tradition holds that “in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb. 1:1, NIV). As God’s spokesmen, the prophets delivered His message to the people either orally or in a written form—or even in a dramatized way. But the passing away of the Bible prophets in ancient times, and of Ellen G. White more recently, has limited the prophetic legacy quite exclusively to its written form. In

order to understand how the divine message became incarnated in the inspired writings, one has to consider the work of the Holy Spirit in speaking through genuine prophets and addressing issues of that time.

Speaking Through Available Resources. Foundational in God’s relationship with humankind have been both the prophets, as communication agents, and the languages used, as communication devices. The prophets were called and enabled by God to speak to the people in their own language. But the divine empowerment did not make void the individuality of each prophet. In 1867, Calvin E. Stowe explained: “The Bible is not given to us in any celestial or superhuman language. If it had been it would have been of no use to us, for every book intended for men must be given to them in the language of men. But every human language is of necessity, and from the very nature of the case, an

imperfect language. No human language has exactly one word and only one for each distinct idea. In every known language the same word is used to indicate different things, and different words are used to indicate the same thing. In every human language each word has more than one meaning, and each thing has generally more than one name. . . .

“The Bible is not a specimen of God’s skill as a writer, showing us God’s mode of thought, giving us God’s logic, and God’s rhetoric, and God’s style of historical narration. . . . It is always to be remembered that the writers of the Bible were ‘God’s penmen, and not God’s pens.’

“It is not the words of the Bible that were inspired, it is not the thoughts of the Bible that were inspired; it is the men who wrote the Bible that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words, not on the man’s thoughts, but on the man himself; so that he, by his own spontaneity, under the impulse of the Holy Ghost, conceives certain thoughts and gives utterance to them in certain words, both the words and the thoughts receiving the peculiar impress of the mind which conceived and uttered them, and being in fact just as really his own, as they could have been if there had been no inspiration at all in the case. . . . Inspiration generally is a purifying, and an elevation, and an intensification of the human intel-

lect subjectively, rather than an objective suggestion and communication; though suggestion and communication are not excluded.

“The Divine mind is, as it were, so diffused through the human, and the human mind is so interpenetrated with the Divine, that for the time being the utterances of the man are the word of God.²

It is worth noting that in 1886, Ellen G. White reproduced much of this statement when she penned, “The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. . . . The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But

the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”³

While Ellen White’s statement is much indebted to Stowe’s, she differs significantly from him in a few points. For instance, while Stowe stated that neither the “words” nor the “thoughts” of the Bible were inspired, White speaks only about the “words” as not being inspired. She also left out Stowe’s idea that inspiration is primarily “an intensification of the human intellect subjectively, rather than an objective suggestion and communication.”

Yet, even so, we are still left with some puzzling questions: If only the prophets themselves were inspired, and not their words, what has remained since those prophets passed away? Should we assume that we are left today with only a *non-inspired* Bible written anciently by *inspired* writers? And more: If this were the case, how could we harmonize such a view with Paul’s statement that “All scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16, NRSV)? How could we explain Ellen White’s own declarations that “The scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work themselves,”⁴ and that she herself was “just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vi-

sion, as in having the vision”?⁵

Analyzing Ellen G. White’s writings on prophetic inspiration, one can easily see that she expected something more from the Scriptures and from her own writings than just the notion of a non-inspired text that only contains an inspired message. Such a notion can be held only by those who accept the correlated theory that the Bible *contains* the Word of God without *being* the Word of God. Nonetheless, the statement that “it is not the words of the Bible that were inspired” can be better harmonized with her overall understanding of inspiration by assuming that she meant simply that God did not choose the actual wording of the Bible. This view seems to be endorsed by the following statements from her:

“I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing a vision, as in having the vision. It is impossible for me to call up things which have been shown me unless the Lord brings them before me at the time that he is pleased to have me relate or write them.”⁶

“Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.”⁷

From these statements, we might

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conclude, in general terms that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the prophets themselves selected the wording of the inspired writings. There were instances, however, in which the actual wording was provided to them. For this reason we have to recognize the “symphonic” (or, perhaps, “polyphonic”) nature of inspiration, instead of just holding to a specific “monophonic” theory of inspiration.⁸ But even in those cases in which God provided the wording to His prophets, He did it within their respective linguistic frameworks, without voiding their personal individualities. In other words, although the communication skills of the prophets usually improved over the years, the divine messages were still expressed within the limitations of the human languages used, like a precious “treasure in jars of clay” (2 Cor. 4:7, NIV). So, each prophet transmitted the divine message “in a different way, yet without contradiction.”⁹

Addressing Contemporary Issues.

The divine accommodation included not only the use of human language, with all its limitations, but also a strong thematic contextualization into the culture of the community of people to be reached by the divine message. This form of contextualization finds its climactic expression in and is modeled by the incarnation of the Son of God, who became the Son of man to save sinners from the bondage of Satan (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-11). Ellen White explains, “In Christ’s parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly; God was made manifest in the likeness of

“The birds of the air, the lilies of the field, the sower and the seed, the shepherd and the sheep—with these Christ illustrated immortal truth. He drew illustrations also from the events of life, facts of experience familiar to the hearers—the leaven, the hid treasure, the pearl, the fishing net, the lost coin, the prodigal son, the houses on the rock and the sand.”

men. So it was in Christ’s teaching: the unknown was illustrated by the known; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar.”¹⁰

This pattern of incarnation extended far beyond the reality of Christ becoming human flesh. It also shaped Christ’s teachings and even the prophetic revelation in general. According to Ellen White, “The Great Teacher brought His hearers in contact with nature, that they might listen to the voice which speaks in all created things; and as their hearts became tender and their minds receptive, He helped them to interpret the spiritual teaching of the scenes upon which their eyes rested. The parables, by means of which He loved to teach lessons of truth, show how open His spirit was to the influences of nature and how He delighted to gather the spiritual teaching from the surroundings of daily life.

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shepherd and the sheep—with these Christ illustrated immortal truth. He drew illustrations also from the events of life, facts of experience familiar to the hearers—the leaven, the hid treasure, the pearl, the fishing net, the lost coin, the prodigal son, the houses on the rock and the sand. In His lessons there was something to interest every mind, to appeal to every heart. Thus the daily task, instead of being a mere round of toil, bereft of higher thoughts, was brightened and uplifted by constant reminders of the spiritual and the unseen.”¹¹

But the whole process of divine accommodation cannot be restricted to the use of the human language and the illustrations taken from the natural world and the daily life. Much of the prophetic writings addressed contemporary issues like the problems of idolatry, immorality, and other pagan customs. So, instead of arising within a cultural vacuum, the divine messages spoke directly to the contemporary cul-

ture. Yet, one of the most important (and most controversial) questions is the following: To what extent are the divine messages conditioned by the cultural milieu in which the prophets wrote them?

Cultural Conditioning

There are at least two distinct perspectives from which one can define the cultural conditioning of the inspired writings. One is the *horizontal perspective*, which ends up reading the inspired writings as a mere product of the religious community in which they came into existence. Overlooking to a large extent the divine authorship of the inspired writings, those who accept this view usually study the inspired writings by means of the historical-critical method. Another is the *vertical perspective*, which recognizes the presence of cultural elements within the inspired writings, without denying the writings’ general status as the Word of God. This approach can survive only with the use of the historical-grammatical method. These two perspectives deserve further consideration.

Horizontal Perspective. Attempts to define the cultural conditioning of the inspired writings from a horizontal perspective tend to place them on a humanistic/cultural basis. Raymond F. Cottrell reflects this view in his articles “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to

Phenomena of the Natural World” and “Extent of the Genesis Flood,” published in 2000. Cottrell, a former associate editor of the *Adventist Review* and the founding editor of *Adventist Today*, tried to solve some of the basic tensions between faith and reason, and between the Bible and natural sciences and secular history, by suggesting a clear distinction between the “inspired message” of the Bible and the “uninspired form in which it comes to us.” Yet Cottrell viewed “the inspired message on record in the Bible” as “culturally conditioned” and “historically conditioned.” For him, “historical conditioning permeates the entire Bible. It is not incidental, nor is it exceptional or unusual; it is the invariable rule.”¹²

Under the assumption that “in matters of science, the Bible writers were on a level with their contemporaries,” Cottrell could suggest that on these matters our understanding should be informed by the more reliable data provided by modern science. His attempt to harmonize the Bible account of Creation with modern science led him to the conclusion that “at an unspecified time in the remote past, the Creator transmuted a finite portion of his infinite power into the primordial substance of the universe—perhaps in an event such as the Big Bang.”¹³ The notion that “the words and forms of expression in the Bible were historically

conditioned to their time and perspective” led the same author, elsewhere, to the conclusion that the Genesis Flood did not extend beyond the known “lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea.” He further stated that “only by reading our modern worldview of ‘all the earth’ [Gen 7:3] back into the Hebrew text can the idea of a world-wide flood be established.”¹⁴ Undoubtedly, such views empty Scripture of much of its supernatural content.

Another example of a horizontal perspective of cultural conditioning is proposed by Alden Thompson, now-retired professor of religion at Walla Walla University. More moderate than Cottrell, Thompson still makes the inspired writings dependent too much on the religious experience of both the prophets themselves and the community in which they lived. In his five-part series “From Sinai to Golgotha,” published in December 1981 in the *Adventist Review*,¹⁵ Thompson argued that “the growth from Sinai to Golgotha, from command to invitation, from fear to love, is a Biblical pattern” that “is also reflected in the experience and theology of Ellen White.”¹⁶ He theorized that it took the Israelites “1,400 years to make the journey from one mountain [Sinai] to the other [Golgotha],” and Ellen White “almost 60 years” until the 1888 Minneapolis Conference, where “the bright rays of light from Calvary fi-

nally dispelled the last shadows of Sinai.”¹⁷

So, in Thompson’s opinion, “on the one hand stands the ‘encouraging’ God of *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages* [both published after 1888]; on the other, the ‘discouraging’ God of the *Testimonies* [several of which were published prior to 1888].”¹⁸ This notion of a “maturing” prophet was further developed by Thompson in his book *Escape from the Flames: How Ellen White Grew from Fear to Joy—and Helped Me Do It Too* (2005).¹⁹

The second half of the 19th century saw a significant development indeed in the formation and consolidation of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal system. Though the post-1844 period was marked by the definition and integration of Adventist distinctive doctrines (sanctuary, three angels’ messages, seventh-day Sabbath, conditional immortality of the soul, gift of prophecy, etc.), the post-1888 period was characterized by the rediscovery and integration of some major Evangelical doctrines (justification by faith and the Trinity, including Christ’s self-existence and coeternity with the Father, and the personality of the Holy Spirit).

There is no doubt that over the years Ellen White helped the church to grow in its understanding of biblical truth. But Thompson overstates the fact that to a certain extent she was a child of her own time. By qual-

Ellen White’s “Morning Talks” at the 1883 General Conference Session contain some of her more insightful treatments on justification by faith. Even her earlier writings include insightful glimpses into the subject.

ifying as “mature” her post-1888 more expanded and elaborated theological expositions of truth, he tends to downgrade the value of her pre-1888 materials as less-developed treatments of the same subjects, suggesting that they are inaccurate and unreliable. While she was one of the main spokespersons for the post-1888 Christ-centered emphasis, this does not mean that she shared the same legalistic views of her fellow believers of the pre-1888 period.

Ellen White’s “Morning Talks” at the 1883 General Conference Session contain some of her more insightful treatments on justification by faith. Even her earlier writings include insightful glimpses into the subject.²⁰ Already in her very first vision, on the Midnight Cry (December 1844), she saw that the Advent people were safe in their traveling to the New Jerusalem only if “they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the city.”²¹ She saw also that the saints cried out at Christ’s return, “who shall be able to stand?” to which He replied, “My grace is sufficient for you.”²²

The views of Cottrell and Thompson demonstrate how the horizontal perspective of cultural conditioning binds much of the inspired writings to the cultural milieu in which they came into existence. By accepting the primacy of ancient surrounding cultures over divine revelation, Cottrell sees the Bible as an expression of those cultures, with very few ideas transcending them. By contrast, Thompson views large segments of Ellen White’s writings as primarily a reflection of her own experience within the believing community to which they originally spoke. At any rate, both approaches undermine many of the universal principles that placed those writings in direct opposition to contemporary cultures.

So the prophets are recognized as children of their own time, speaking to the needs of contemporary people, but with very little to say outside their own cultural milieu. Taking Thompson’s “from-Sinai-to-Golgotha” theory seriously, we would be tempted to select the latest writings of each prophet in order to form a special canon of more “mature” writings, in contrast to the remain-

Practices that are mentioned only in a certain context, without being kept in other ones, are more likely cultural in nature. Since the seventh-day Sabbath is commanded in the Old Testament and kept in the New Testament, it has to be regarded as universal. Meanwhile, Paul's advice not to wed was undoubtedly a temporal application, for elsewhere he counsels younger women to marry.

ing “immature” (or at least “less mature”) earlier writings. Would one suppose that Paul reaches the culmination of his theology with 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, which are practical books, rather than in his earlier writings, such as Romans and Galatians? Should we regard Ellen White’s book *The Great Controversy*, published in its revised version in 1911, as more “mature” and reliable than *The Desire of Ages*, printed 13 years earlier (in 1898)? Would not this mature-immature approach be another kind of “canon within the canon,” similar to the one Martin Luther based on the Christological principle? And more: Would this not place the reader as the judge of Scripture? Could one argue that there is a chronological-theological development in the Old Testament, from the “primitive” Pentateuch to the “mature” post-exilic books (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi)?

Several questions are raised also by the notion that the “maturing”

process took “1,400 years” for the prophetic writings of the Old Testament and “almost 60 years” for Ellen White’s writings. How long does it actually take for a prophet and his or her writings to mature? If historical maturity was reached only at Golgotha, should we consider all pre-Golgotha prophetic writings as immature? If Ellen White’s writings reached maturity only after 40 years of her prophetic ministry, what can we say about those canonical prophets with a much shorter ministry? Whatever direction one chooses to go in answering these questions, it seems that there is only one acceptable solution for such tensions: Early prophetic writings might be less developed than later writings, but they are equally trustworthy and reliable because their trustworthiness and reliability rest not on the prophets themselves but rather on God, who revealed Himself through the prophets.

Vertical Perspective. The *vertical*

perspective of cultural conditioning recognizes that the inspired writings were given through imperfect human language, addressing contemporary local issues, and being limited by local circumstances and personal characteristics (cf. John 16:12). While the *horizontal* perspective regards the inspired writings largely as confined to the religious (and sometimes even secular) culture in which they came into existence, the *vertical* perspective recognizes those writings as the divine judges of contemporary cultures and even of all other cultures. It is only this approach that allows the inspired writings to hold their status as the Word of God for humankind. But in order to understand their nature properly, one needs to distinguish universal principles from temporal applications of such principles.

One of the most difficult tasks in interpreting the inspired writings is how to distinguish universal principles from temporal applications. Such difficulty is caused largely by the fact that those writings are frequently considered merely from the perspective of the contexts in which they were originally penned and to which they were addressed. Such knowledge is indispensable to identify the temporal applications and their impact on the local community to which the message was originally addressed, but it still leaves the application open too much to the subjective views of the interpreter. Any

serious interpretation should identify not only the specific context to which the messages were originally addressed, but also their broader interaction with the whole accumulated heritage of prophetic literature. While *contextual* knowledge helps one to better understand temporal applications, *interactive* knowledge helps to identify universal principles more precisely.

An interactive study of the inspired writings recognizes that prophets lived in different cultural settings, speaking largely to those settings. For example, much of the Old Testament was written within the context of the surrounding Canaanite cultures. The New Testament came into existence within the Greco-Roman civilization. So, doctrinal teachings and ethical principles that flow from the Old Testament into the New Testament are most certainly universal in their application.

In contrast, practices that are mentioned only in a certain context, without being kept in other ones, are more likely cultural in nature. Since the seventh-day Sabbath is commanded in the Old Testament and kept in the New Testament, it has to be regarded as universal. Meanwhile, Paul’s advice not to wed (1 Cor. 7:6-9) was undoubtedly a temporal application, for elsewhere he counsels younger women to marry (1 Tim. 5:14). So, from this perspective, the

interaction within the Biblical canon itself places the prophetic messages as evaluators of culture, instead of mere cultural products.

In many instances, the message of Scripture was presented not only in opposition to the local culture, but also as transcending that culture. Ekkehardt Mueller suggests that “what God has done for the Exodus generation applies likewise to later generations,” who “still participate in his saving actions (Deut 5:2-4).²³ Furthermore, those who accept the predictive nature of Bible prophecy in general and apocalyptic prophecy in particular recognize that the content they carry applies to the time when a given prophecy is to be fulfilled.

But, even so, in Scripture we find some cultural components that, being chosen by God as signs of loyalty, end up assuming a universal application. For example, baptism and the foot-washing ceremony, based on Jewish cleansing practices, were perpetuated by Christ’s commands to all Christians of all ages (Matt. 28:18-20; John 13:1-17).

While Cottrell was not concerned with highlighting universal principles in his studies of the inspired writings, Thompson certainly was, as evident in his “law of love” motif, which unfolds itself from the one, to the two, the 10, and the many commandments.²⁴ But there are at least two major problems with Thompson’s approach.

First, the multiple universal components of the inspired writings are reduced basically into a law motif, which fails not so much by what is said but rather by what is ignored. The author would be better off by enriching his law-*monophonic* notion with a broader multi-thematic-*polyphonic* perspective, including even the theme of grace in the Old Testament.

Second, Thompson’s “from-Sinai-to-Golgotha” hermeneutical principle tends to downgrade many of the universal components of the Old Testament and of Ellen White’s pre-1888 writings. By accepting such a hermeneutical principle, we would have problems, for example, in handling the Creation story. Since its most comprehensive records are found at the very beginning of the Bible (Genesis 2 and 3), without any significant enlargement elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments, should we consider them as “less mature”? Or should we limit that principle only to matters of salvation?

Although prophets, like all other human beings, also grow in knowledge, understanding, and experience, God’s supernatural revelation is not always dependent on the prophet’s maturity. Actually, God does sometimes reveal information that goes far beyond the prophet’s own level of understanding, as in the case of the prophet Daniel. (See Daniel 8:26, 27; 12:4.) This may hap-

In Scripture we find some cultural components that, being chosen by God as signs of loyalty, end up assuming a universal application. For example, baptism and the foot-washing ceremony, based on Jewish cleansing practices, were perpetuated by Christ’s commands to all Christians of all ages.

pen in later or even in early stages of someone’s prophetic career. So, it seems more consistent just to recognize the existence of thematic-existential developments in the inspired writings, without labeling them as “mature” and “less mature.” The true Christian is indeed someone who lives ““by every word that comes from the mouth of God”” (Matt. 4:4, NRSV).

Seventh-day Adventists are being strongly tempted today, as have been many other Christians in the past, to reread the universal principles of Scripture from the perspective of their own cultural practices and to use alternative hermeneutics to endorse such practices. The historical tendency has been either to *decontextualize* the message, leaving it almost incomprehensible and irrelevant to the present generation, or to *acculturalize* it in such a way that it loses much of its original identity.

The risk of decontextualization can be lowered by recognizing that the divine message became incar-

nated in the inspired writings by the work of the Holy Spirit, who spoke through available human resources and addressed concrete contemporary issues. The danger of acculturation can be avoided by rejecting those aspects of the *horizontal* perspective of cultural conditioning that end up reading the writings as a mere product of an ancient religious community, and by accepting the *vertical* perspective, which recognizes the presence of cultural elements within the inspired writings, without denying their general status as the Word of God. A careful interpretation of the inspired writings has to recognize in them the existence of an ongoing dialogue between universal principles and temporal applications of such principles.

But, after recognizing such dialogue, the interpreter is faced with the challenging task of distinguishing universal principles from temporal applications. Contextual studies help the student to identify the temporal applications and their impact

on the local community to which the message was originally addressed, but they still leave the interpretation open too much to the subjective views of the interpreter. Any serious interpretation should also identify the broad interaction of the messages with the whole accumulated heritage of prophetic literature. While contextual knowledge helps one to better understand temporal applications, interactive knowledge helps to identify more precisely universal principles. After all, the inspired writings have to be relevant to our own generation without losing their original identity. □

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Gerhard Pfandl

In recent years, a number of Seventh-day Adventists have begun to apply the time prophecies in Daniel 12:5-13 to the future.¹ Rejecting the traditional Adventist understanding, which places the 3½ times, the 1290, and 1335 days as prophetic times in the past, they claim these time periods are to be understood as literal days still to come. This new proposal, however, contains a number of problems that make this interpretation unacceptable.

The 3½ times or 1260 days in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 are seen as two different time periods in history, one in the past and one in the future. This interpretation violates one of the fundamental principles of biblical hermeneutics, which says: “Scrip-

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ture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages.”² If this principle is discarded, prophecy becomes a wax nose that can be bent in any direction the interpreter wants it to go.

The prophecies of Daniel are given according to the principle of repetition and enlargement. This can be clearly seen by looking at the four major prophecies in the book that all begin in the time of the author and end with the Second Advent (See table below):

These parallel prophecies cover essentially the same sweep of time from Daniel’s days to the Second Advent. Each prophecy emphasizes different aspects of this time period. Daniel 2 provides the overall histori-

- Daniel 2 Babylon B Second Advent (the stone kingdom)
- Daniel 7 Babylon B Second Advent (the kingdom given to the saints)
- Daniel 8; 9 Medo-Persia B Second Advent (the little horn is broken)
- Daniel 10–12 Medo-Persia B Second Advent (the resurrection)

cal outline; Daniel 7 introduces the little horn and emphasizes its political activities in history; Daniel 8, building on Daniel 7, emphasizes the religious activities of the little horn; and Daniel 10–12 is a further explanation of the vision in Daniel 8.

This means that common elements in different chapters of the book must refer to the same things or events. For example, the little horn in Daniel 7; 8 must refer to the same historical power, not to two different powers. And if the “taking away of the daily” in Daniel 8:11 refers to events in the past, so must “the taking away of the daily” in Daniel 12:11. Similarly, if the 3½ times in Daniel 7:25 refer to the past, so must the 3½ times in Daniel 12:7. To do otherwise makes mockery of the Scripture-interprets-Scripture principle and leads to utter confusion.

The passage in Daniel 12:5-13 is seen as a new vision that contains time prophecies for the future. This view ignores the basic structure of Daniel’s visions, in which visions are always followed by explanations (See table below).

- Daniel 2 B vision (31-35), explanation (36-46).
- Daniel 7 B vision (1-14), explanation (15-27).
- Daniel 8; 9 B vision (1-12), explanation (13-26; 9:24-27)
- Daniel 10–12 B vision (11:2-12:4), explanation (12:5-13)

We must not overlook the fact that in Daniel 7; 8; 10–12, the time prophecies are always situated within the explanation section not in the visions themselves. In Daniel 7, the vision ends in verse 14, and the time prophecy is given in verse 25. In Daniel 8, the vision concludes in verse 12, and the time prophecy is given in verse 14. In Daniel 10–12, the vision ends in 12:4, and the time prophecies are given in 12:5-13. This structure is destroyed if 12:5-13 is interpreted as a new vision.

This new view completely ignores the linguistic and grammatical connections between the vision in Daniel 11 and the explanation in Daniel 12. First, it needs to be emphasized that the vision concludes in 12:4 with the command to Daniel to “seal the book.” And 12:5-13 is an epilogue to the preceding vision—in a sense to the whole book. It is not a new vision with a different topic, but an explanation of certain elements in the vision of chapter 11. This is evident from the question in 12:6, “How long shall the fulfillment of *these wonders be?*” The Hebrew word for “wonders” can be

translated as “awesome events” or “wonderful events,” and since 12:5 does not refer to any events, “these wonders” can refer to events seen only in the vision in Daniel 11. The same word is in fact used in 11:36, where it refers to the blasphemies spoken by the King of the North. This clearly indicates that Daniel 12:5-13 is part of the vision of Daniel 11:2-12:4, and not a new vision.

There is also a strong thematic and linguistic connection between Daniel 7:25 and 12:7—

““He shall . . . persecute the saints of the Most High, . . . the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time”” (Dan. 7:25).³

“He . . . swore . . . that *it shall be* for a time, times, and half a *time*; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these *things* shall be finished” (Dan. 12:7).

The shattering of the power of the holy people in 12:7 lasts for 3½ times and is the same as the persecution of the saints in 7:25, which also lasts for 3½ times.

One of the main interpretations of this new view begins both the 1260 and 1290 days in Daniel 12 with the universal Sunday law.⁴ The 1260 days are seen to end with the universal death decree, and the 1290 days that continue for another 30 days are explained as two further 15-

day time periods. The first 15 days are the “one hour” in Revelation 17:12 interpreted according to the year-day principle ($360 \div 24 = 15$); the second 15 days are the “one hour” referred to in Revelation 18:10.

What we have here is an inappropriate mix of literal and prophetic time. While the 1260 days are counted as literal days, the last 30 days of the 1290 are seen as two prophetic hours (interpreted with the year-day principle). This mixing of literal and prophetic time indicates the confusion in this new view.

Finally, this new interpretation of the times in Daniel 12 also controverts clear statements of Ellen White. In 1880 she wrote, “I have borne the testimony since the passing of the time in 1844, that there should be no definite time set by which to test God’s people. The great test on time was in 1843 and 1844; and all who have set time since these great periods marked in prophecy were deceiving and being deceived.”⁵ Though it is true that Ellen White here speaks about date setting for the Second Advent, which the new view does not, there is no indication in her writings that any kind of prophetic time would play a role in the future.

In fact, in a letter from 1850 Ellen White mentions a Brother Hewit from Dead River who be-

lieved that the destruction of the wicked and the sleep of the dead was an abomination and that Ellen White was Jezebel. She then writes, “We told him of some of his errors in the past, that the 1335 days were ended and numerous errors of his. It had but little effect. His darkness was felt upon the meeting and it dragged.”⁶ Some believe that in this statement she considers the phrase “the 1335 days were ended” to be one of the errors of Brother Hewit. The sentence, however, is generally understood to mean, “We told him of some of his errors in the past, [we told him] that the 1335 days were ended, and [we told him] many of his errors.”

Otherwise we must ask, Why would Ellen White reprimand brother Hewit and not her husband and all the other pioneers who taught that the 1335 years were ended? In an article in *The Review and Herald* in 1857, James White wrote, “Evidences are conclusive that the 1335 days ended with the 2300, with the Midnight Cry in 1844.”⁷ In the same paper, Uriah Smith in 1863 stated, “The 1290 and 1260 [years] end together in 1798.”⁸ The fact that Ellen White nowhere argued against these statements supports the read-

ing of her sentence as generally understood. At the same time, this indicates that she herself placed the 1335 days in the past.

The evidence from Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy does not support the concept that the time prophecies in Daniel 12 are still in the future. The Adventist interpretation which, in harmony with the historicist principles of interpretation, places these time prophecies in the past is still the best solution to the difficult texts in Daniel 12:5-13.

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Roy E. Gane

Short of cash but rich in curiosity, my wife and I were exploring Israel in 1987 during a break from studying at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. We carried backpacks, traveled on public buses, and slept in a little dome tent in public campgrounds.

In Haifa there was no campground, so we stayed in a youth hostel. The next day, we walked the tree-lined boulevards of that lovely northern coastal city, just below the Carmel mountain range. Near downtown was a maritime museum, which chronicled the history of boats in that region. The largest item in the exhibit looked like an old ferry.

As we walked up a ramp to enter the boat, I noticed that its Hebrew name was the equivalent of “*In Spite of the Fact That . . .*” How strange! But it made sense when we learned how the boat was used. In the 1930s and 1940s, before the country of Israel was established in 1948, there was a strict limit on the number of Jews who were permitted to emigrate to Palestine. This was a terrible problem because the Jews in Europe were being harassed and exterminated by the Nazis, but they had nowhere to go.

IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT...

Here is where the boat fits in. It was used for rescue operations to carry European refugees attempting to escape from hideous places of death, such as the concentration camps at Auschwitz and Treblinka. People crowded into the boat and huddled there. Under cover of darkness, the small ship would slip in to the shore of Palestine *in spite of the fact that* there were all kinds of obstacles, such as gunboats at sea and patrols on shore. The refugees jumped into the water to swim or wade to safety in their “promised land.”

Today there are many refugees in our hostile world. In fact, in a larger sense, we are all refugees from the cruel dictatorship of Satan, longing for a better country (Heb. 11:16). Without help we can never make it, but God has a rescue operation.

Unlike some popular preachers

today, God does not promise that His people are sure to enjoy prosperity in this life. But He promises to be with them through everything they experience, including hardship and pain:

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4, NRSV).¹

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you” (Isa. 43:2).

Where was the Lord when Daniel’s three friends were thrown into the fire? *With* them (Daniel 3:23-25)! Where was He during the time of Jacob’s trouble, when he wrestled until daybreak? In Jacob’s arms, as close as He could get (Genesis 32:24-30)!

The struggle against self and for total dependence upon God is the greatest battle God’s people have to face. It was tough for Jacob, who clung to his divine wrestling partner and would not let him go without receiving a blessing from him (vs. 26). Once he had prevailed with God (vs. 28), the crisis of meeting Esau and his 400 men turned out to be an anticlimax (33:1-17).

Gideon “wrestled” with God through signs. Once he was assured and reassured that God was with

him (Judges 6:17-24; 36-40; 7:9-15), attacking and pursuing the Midianites was still a challenge (7:16-8:12). But God had already given Him the victory before the battle, so that he could tell his troops: “Get up; for the Lord has given the army of Midian into your hand” (7:15).

Do we lose battles with evil? If so, perhaps it is because we confidently saunter into battle on our own, without prior victories gained on our knees as we insist on receiving assurance that God is with us and we are with Him. The outcome would be different if we would pray tenaciously like Jacob: “I will not let you go, unless you bless me” (Gen. 32:26).

The time of Jacob’s trouble was intense, but the time of Jesus’ trouble was incomparable. We think of His dying on the cross as a battle with forces of evil, and so it was. But He was there only because He had already won the victory during the previous night, when He had clawed the ground of a garden and cried out to His Father: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground” (Luke 22:42, 44).

That night our own fate was determined: “The awful moment had come—that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The

fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. It was not yet too late. He might wipe the bloody sweat from His brow, and leave man to perish in his iniquity. . . . His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts His baptism of blood, that through Him perishing millions may gain everlasting life.”²

Because of Jesus’ victory, His *friends* are pursued—by blessings that “shall come upon you and overtake you” (Deut. 28:2). David expresses the same idea: “Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all the days of my life” (Ps. 23:6).³ While the United States Declaration of Independence recognizes a person’s right to “the pursuit of Happiness,” God guarantees to His faithful people that happiness will pursue them!

The Lord not only rescues us and pursues us with happiness, He involves us in His operation to rescue others. Why doesn’t He just use perfect, powerful angels to share the Good News? Wouldn’t they be a lot more efficient and trouble free than humans like us? He calls us because we have the most powerful testi-

mony in the universe: that Jesus Christ is saving *us*. This was the testimony of those whom Jesus delivered from demons. He told them: “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you” (Mark 5:19).

Let’s always remember that we are all in this together as members of God’s rescue team. As God empowers us, we help one another. Our joys and rewards are breathtaking, but in many cases we must wait to see them, just as the messianic Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 waits to see the results of His sacrifice (Isa. 53:11).

At times, the going gets rough as we seek to escape this place of death. There seem to be all kinds of insurmountable obstacles between us and the inviting shores of the ultimate Promised Land. But we have a friend named Michael (Daniel 12:1). He has a “boat” for refugees. Michael will row that boat ashore, *in spite of the fact that . . .*

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Gary B. Swanson

Imagine yourself working for the U.S. Forest Service. You’ve devoted your entire career—your life—to protecting the environment so that humankind will be able to enjoy nature to its fullest. You plan and clear out hiking trails and camping sites, provide maps and guidelines, post signs to warn of difficult or dangerous terrain—knock yourself out in an effort to bring nature and humanity closer together.

You are living a mission.

And then, in your suggestion boxes, you receive feedback from campers and backpackers like these actual comments:

“Please avoid building trails that go uphill.”

“Too many rocks on the mountains.”

“The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals.”*

Does the biblical expression

* *Reader’s Digest*, (July 1998), p. 73.

CLUELESS!

“pearls before swine” come to mind?

And this sentiment appears in Scripture, too. In the Book of Numbers alone, the Israelites returned again and again to complaints of hardship and discomfort. The theme always seemed to be pining for the conveniences of Egypt, apparently prompted by a kind of mass amnesia over the historical fact that these people had actually endured for centuries the brutality of enslavement in Egypt—at one point had even been expected to provide their own straw to make bricks. In those days, there had been no concept of vacation, sick leave, mental-health days, or time-and-a-half. Yet when their trip to the Promised Land proved to be more arduous than they’d expected, they had completely forgotten the cruel oppression they had suffered at the hands of the Egyptians.

In essence, they were demanding that their leadership avoid trails that go uphill, even when their immediate necessities were consistently provided for, even when there was ulti-

mate benefit to be gained, even when they could clearly see God's leading in the cloud by day and fire by night.

In all candor, it must be recognized that there is a measure of basic human nature in the way the Israelites kept returning to their complaints. All of humanity is subject to missing—or forgetting—the point, even in spiritual matters. And this cluelessness also frequently occurred in the questions and requests that Jesus and His apostles faced in their ministries.

Just a sampling from a *mélange* of possibilities:

“What must I do to be saved?”

“You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

“Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

“Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

“Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

How to respond to approaches like these, uttered by real people—often in utmost yet misdirected sincerity? Humanly speaking, it must have taken a massive infusion of the Holy Spirit to avoid sarcasm. Or worse: to dismiss them completely.

Rooted in each of these questions and requests is a basic misunder-

standing of what it means to be a member of God's kingdom on this earth. On second thought, *misunderstanding* isn't quite the right word. Any chosen path in life depends on deliberate selection. It isn't by mere circumstance that *ignorance* and *ignore* derive from the same root. Ignorance is willful.

In 1793, a third-year university student at Cambridge, despairing over an unrequited love, ran away and joined the army. Walking into the recruiting office for the Light Dragoons, he signed up as “Silas Titus Comberbacke” and embarked on what he envisioned would be the greatest adventure of his life.

But it wasn't.

Silas soon discovered to his dismay that he wasn't cut out for the cavalry. Clearly, he had made the wrong decision. He couldn't groom his horse, couldn't keep his equipment in order, couldn't even ride. And a cavalryman who can't ride a horse has got to be a little out of place. His superior officers certainly thought so: he was assigned to clean the stables.

Young Silas was no longer despairing; now he was desperate. It wasn't as if he could simply say, “Oops! Sorry! I want out.” He sent an urgent message to his older brother James, who had to buy his release from the Light Dragoons, and he resumed his studies at Cambridge under his real name: Samuel

Taylor Coleridge.

Though the rest of Coleridge's life was hardly exemplary in every way, it can at least be said that the literary world gained when James Coleridge was willing to give his irresponsible brother a second chance and rescued him from the results of his own bad decision-making.

James didn't succumb to the temptation simply to let his younger brother suffer the ultimate consequences of his behavior. He apparently loved him too much to allow such a thing to happen. He paid the price to deliver his brother from his suffering.

From God's viewpoint, humanity—like Silas Titus Comberbacke—is experiencing the results of making wrong decisions. And this involves much more than mere observable behavior. It touches on all of the human experience: social, physical, intellectual, spiritual.

To decide, for example, that there is no God isn't an experience in which someone simply wakes up some morning and announces his or her conclusions to the world without having first examined at least some evidence and made some human pronouncements. Great decisions

are usually related to much smaller decisions. Jesus said, “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much” (Luke 16:10, NIV).

Atheists arrive at their position by rejecting the possibility of the immaterial, blaming God for human suffering, placing themselves in judgment over whether the idea of God makes sense—or any combination of these and other human conclusions.

Consider the audacity of this position: I reject God because He doesn't make sense to me!

God isn't in the business of proving Himself to humankind. Not in the rational sense.

Yet He has planned and cleared a path for life, provided maps and guidelines, and posted signs to warn of difficult or dangerous terrain—all in an effort to bring humanity closer to Him.

Allowing anything to get in the way of understanding this absolute truth is nothing less than intentional rejection. It is why humanity, outside of God's grace, is said to be spiritually “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked”—and clueless.

