

Adventist World

01/2020

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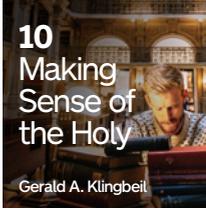
simple
nuanced
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A **faithful** reading of Scripture
historical
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The Church
I Want to
Belong to Is...

FAITHFUL
TO SCRIPTURE

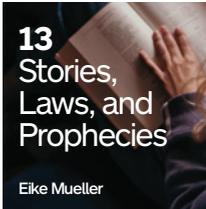


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Faithful Listening to the Word

BY BILL KNOTT

Before I learned to read the Word—before my childish eyes and mind had discovered how to decipher printed codes upon a page—I knew the sound of Scripture in my ears.

On glorious Sabbath afternoons in the botanical gardens of the city where we lived, my father would gather our family beneath a pin oak tree silhouetted against the flaming red sky of a Texas sunset. And there on the scratchy wool blanket that protected us from the red ants and the mites, I would hear the words of the Psalms in my father's sonorous voice:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases."

Now, more than a half century later, I still "hear" those words each time my eyes settle on Psalm 103, for there's a memory from the sound of things that often doesn't linger in the eye.

With the welcome growth of literacy in almost every nation of the world during the past two centuries, we rightly celebrate the ability of each individual to read the Word of God; to study—as we do in school—the visual structure of the text, comparing verse with verse, and adding truth to truth. The growth of this Advent movement around the globe has assumed the priority of literacy, and of teaching people both the joy and responsibility of private devotional study of the Bible. As one Bible society memorably phrased it: "They can't read the Word if they can't read the words."

But this shouldn't cause us to forget the great and powerful *sound* of God's Word in our ears, read aloud to us by some benevolent figure, or read aloud to ourselves in moments when hearing God's Word from our own mouths quiets us, calms our hearts, and soothes our griefs and pains.



Almost all of Scripture—from the books of Moses to the visions of John the Revelator—was meant to be read, recited, or sung aloud, usually in groups, in house churches, or in public worship spaces. Jesus spoke, not wrote, His teachings and His sermons, and the fact that we may read them in our own language today shouldn't obscure our ability to "hear" Him when our eyes

move across the page. Paul's and Peter's letters to the churches were intended to convey the personal relationship the apostles enjoyed with those who listened. The reason we cherish these epistles today is because the Spirit breathed through both those who wrote and those who read them aloud to faithful congregations.

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," Paul wrote 20 centuries ago (Rom. 10:17). Let's celebrate—again—the public and private reading of the Word aloud, that we may truly align our lives with John's seven-times-repeated counsel: *"Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches"* (Rev. 2:17, NRSV).*

The church I want to belong to is faithful to Scripture.

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We believe in the power of prayer, and we welcome prayer requests that can be shared at our weekly staff worship every Wednesday morning. Send your requests to prayer@adventistworld.org, and pray for us as we work together to advance God's kingdom.

Abner De los Santos, a vice president of the Adventist Church, leads revival meetings for an English-speaking Adventist congregation in Pune, Maharashtra, India, in June 2019. He and his wife, Leticia, spent several weeks in India to connect with church members and neighbors.

Photo: Marcos Paseggi, Adventist World



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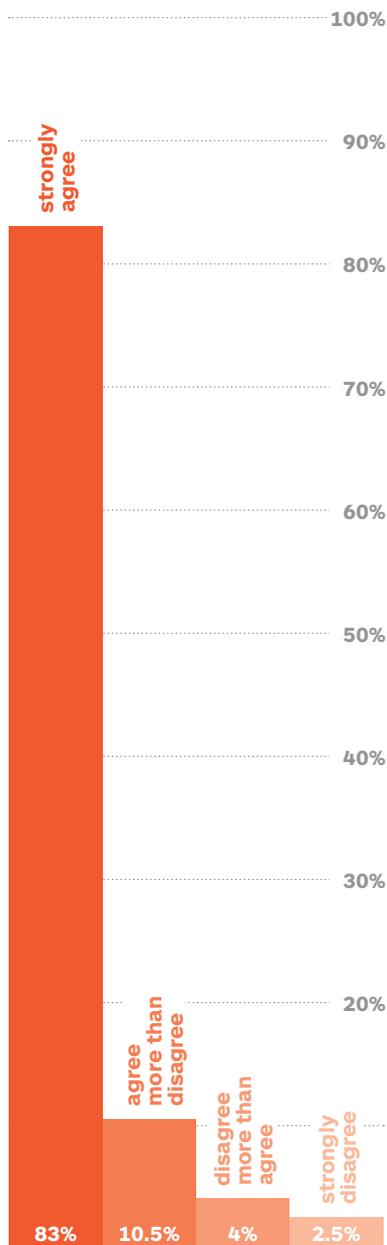
The number of years of missionary work in its territory celebrated by the South American Division on September 9, 2019. A few weeks later church leaders gathered near a backroad corner in Crespo Campo, Entre Ríos, Argentina—the spot where the first Adventist congregation in South America was organized. More than 140 people attended the service, including church leaders from the South American Division and the Argentina Union Conference church regions.

“Young people have given us a clear message. They told us, ‘We want to be challenged. We want to get involved in mission. We want to play an active part.’”

—South American Division Adventist Volunteer Services director Joni Roger de Oliveira. Approximately 3,600 people from eight countries in South America met for the fifth annual “I Will Go” International Congress at Peruvian Adventist University in Ñaña, Lima, Peru, September 11-14, 2019. The event drew Seventh-day Adventist college students and professionals eager to dedicate their talents to serve the Adventist Church and communities around the world.

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church is God’s true last-day church with a message to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ.”

Source: General Conference Global Membership Survey



“We don’t have all the data on the long-term effects of vaping on the body, but we do know that the short-term effects can be detrimental to lungs, especially in teens, as their lungs are still developing.”

—Laren Tan, a physician with Loma Linda University Health, who is beginning a regional tour to speak with junior high and high school students about the dangers of vaping. Hundreds of cases of vaping-related disease, some resulting in death, have been reported in the United States.

2,000

The number of people who recently gathered for a Seventh-day Adventist youth congress in Nanga Eboko, Cameroon. The opening ceremony took place in the main square of the town of 30,000 located about 160 kilometers (100 miles) from the capital city of Yaoundé. Nanga Eboko is considered the cradle of Adventist mission work in Central Africa, which began in 1926.

“The people are very gracious and kind. It’s been a real joy to interact with them.”

—Ron Jimenez, president/CEO of AdventHealth Palm Coast in the United States, speaking of the leadership of the Vista del Jardín Medical Center in the Dominican Republic. AdventHealth, a health system that operates 47 hospitals in nine states of the United States of America, recently signed a partnership agreement with Vista del Jardín. The agreement formalizes the Dominican medical center’s status as one of 10 footprints in AdventHealth’s Global Mission Impact (GMI) program, which creates long-term relationships for sharing resources and expertise.

450

The number of Karen refugees who participated in trauma training seminars organized by the School of Social Work at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States, and Advocates for Southeast Asians and the Persecuted (ASAP) Ministries. Their initiative is called Sensory Trauma Education Programs (STEPS); it brings awareness to trauma, promotes emotional healing, and provides training sessions and presentations specifically for local refugee churches and groups.

“You look at it all and think, *Where to start? Where to rebuild? When will it be possible for them to re-start their life?*”

—Elie Henry, president of the Inter-American Division as he toured Marsh Harbour, the largest city on Abaco, in the Bahamas, and one of the hardest-hit areas by Hurricane Dorian. The hurricane was one of the strongest on record to occur in the Atlantic Ocean. At least 61 people died in the storm. Among the dead were eight who perished when a new and almost completed Adventist church made of concrete collapsed as islanders sought shelter in the structure.



Photo: Libna Stevens, Inter-American Division News

In India, It's Reaching Out to Reach In

By Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist World*

It's a tool tried and true, church experts say: When you get a local church involved in connecting with friends and neighbors, church members are the first ones to benefit. India is no exception, as local congregations across the nation are spending an increasing amount of time and funds to improve the lives of their fellow citizens.

"As we strive to improve the health and well-being of our neighbors, church members are also reaping the benefits of lining up together behind a common goal," church leaders say.

CONCERTED EFFORTS

Several congregations, whose growth has been stagnant for decades, are being revitalized as church members build meaningful relationships with local society, thanks to the popular "lifestyle counseling." In an Adventist World Radio health clinic effort in Chennai in June 2019, every one of the more than 3,000 patients who attended received tips for healthier living.

It is something that was achieved thanks only to carefully coordinated efforts, leaders said.

"The work in Chennai required the union of members, lay pastors, and health professionals," one of the coordinators said. "Unlike health clinics in other Indian cities, this one involved more than 600 volunteers who reached out to the city's middle class. At the same time we provided a daily meal to more than 2,000 people."

Efforts to help people live better lives are transcending the walls of local Adventist congregations. In Kolkata the Adventist-sponsored health clinic in June 2019 reached

an agreement with a public health facility so that patients could be referred there if needed. "It shows public institutions are also interested in the services we provide," one of the initiative coordinators said.

BEYOND PHYSICAL HEALTH

But it's not only about physical health, church leaders said. A comprehensive approach requires providing values-based instruction and opportunities for children and adults to sing, play, and learn.

On a sweltering summer evening in Chennai, a narrow staircase leads to a fourth-floor flat roof and a small adjacent room where an Adventist volunteer shares spiritual principles for better living. Half of the visitors sit under the stars as people sing, pray, and learn. Meetings at this venue are part of an initiative that requires meeting people where they are.

"We rent rooms, usually close to public transportation, so people can easily attend," a church coordinator said. "These small-venue meetings are proving to be very successful," he added.

As members serve their neighbors, Adventist congregations reap the benefits.

Another key element is prayer. Indian society values spirituality, blessings, and prayer specifically for a person. After a meeting it's common to see a line of people waiting for the speaker to pray and bless the old, the sick, and the children.

"Prayer is a powerful tool to connect with people," a regional church leader says. "It opens many doors."

THE POWER OF TMI

All across India church leaders have been inviting every member to get involved in one capacity or another, as part of Total Member Involvement (TMI), an initiative of the world church that seeks to get everyone involved in ministry. Other Adventist initiatives, such as Mission to the Cities and Comprehensive Health, have similar goals.

"TMI is having a great impact on all of us," asserts one of the regional church presidents. "We are the first ones to enjoy God's blessings, as true repentance leads to true revival in our local churches," he says. "Thanks be to God; we already see the results." ☺



A woman listens attentively to the message preached by Leticia De Los Santos with the help of an interpreter in Pune, Maharashtra, India, in June 2019. Hundreds of people, mostly women, attended revival meetings at the local Marathi-speaking Adventist congregation.

Photo: Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist World*

Fire in Kolkata

By Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist World*

According to media outlets, the June afternoon is the hottest day of the year in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. The annual monsoon rains are late this year, and it shows.

In a central location, just a few blocks away from the shrine where world-renowned Mother Teresa of Calcutta rests from her earthly labors, there's anything but rest. It is a beehive of activity during the last day of a health clinic at the Kolkata Seventh-day Adventist School on Park Street. People come and go with anxious and hopeful looks as they arrive; thankful and relieved faces as they leave.

Inside, past the reception where every person checks in and walks into the central covered courtyard, people of all ages line up in every corner, patiently waiting for a free medical/dental consultation. Every school administrative office and classroom now doubles as a physician's office. Every age group is taken care of as signs guide eager residents to various medical specialties.

Bonded by a common need, differences fade away, organizers said. "Hindus, Muslims, Christians—they all come in search of better health. All of them share a common goal: to feel better."

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

As evening approaches, the sun disappears behind the upscale stores and banyan trees lining Park Street. The motionless air, however, seems almost as sticky and stifling as ever. Only the air-conditioned Seventh-day Adventist church by the school brings some relief to health clinic volunteers, church

A health clinic ignites a desire for better health in one of India's most populous cities.



Donning dark glasses as they get used to brighter light, a group of patients who went through cataract surgery at an Adventist-sponsored health clinic in Kolkata, West Bengal, India, pose for a group picture with church leaders and members at the Kolkata Seventh-day Adventist Church in June 2019.

Photo: Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist World*

leaders, and visitors as they flock to the sanctuary for a special moment.

Among them a group stands out from the rest. Donning black sunglasses, they sit in the pews, motionless and in complete silence. They are a sizable part of the 260 neighbors who went through cataract surgery in a few days. Now they wait for their eyes to get used to brighter light.

Adventist Church president Ted Wilson has been invited to address the crowd. After some general greetings, he zeroes in on that prominent group of visitors.

"Today you are getting a new lease on life, a new beginning," Wilson tells them. "I will be praying for you so you can start taking care of your physical and spiritual life as well."

IN SEARCH OF BETTER HEALTH

"A comprehensive health approach is a key to reach people's hearts," says Jacob Prabhakar, leader of the Eyes for India supporting ministry. "We praise God for this initiative, which

has united volunteers from every hospital for a common goal."

Prabhakar, an Adventist, is a world-renowned eye surgeon who conducts screening eye clinics in rural communities across India and beyond. He thinks the last initiatives are signs of a trend that is just starting. "This is just the beginning of what we can do on behalf of the people. We should repeat this process in many Indian cities," he suggests hopefully.

"This model can be certainly replicated," local church leaders agree. They see it as a fire that has nothing to do with the scorching weather. It is a warm and bright fire, they believe, that no monsoon rain will ever quench.

"God blesses every effort we do for Him, even when the task is enormous," Wilson tells the attentive crowd filling the sanctuary. "It is something that impresses people and makes them realize God has something bigger in store." ©

1,134,842

The membership of SUD as of June 30, 2019.

120,000

The number of shelter kits delivered by ADRA in India to the coastal town of Puri in India, where communities were hardest hit by Cyclone Fani. It was one of the strongest cyclones to have hit India in the past 20 years, according to the Indian government's Meteorological Department. News outlets reported that 64 people died.

“My dear church members, we need eye salve. We need the Spirit of the Lord to lead us. Let that eye salve be placed in our eyes so that we will receive His Spirit in us so that we can see our self-satisfied condition.”

—Ezras Lakra, SUD president, speaking at the Jeevan Jyothi Seventh-day Adventist Church. Lakra challenged the congregation with a message centered on the letter to the church in Laodicea, found in the book of Revelation.

Maranatha Dedicates School Building in India

A little more than one year after breaking ground at the Seventh-day Adventist School in Khunti, Jharkhand, India, the large 12-classroom Elementary Education Center (EEC) on campus is complete. The project has been sponsored by Maranatha Volunteers International, a United States-based supporting ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Adventist School has an enrollment of 1,300, but is forced to turn away hundreds of children each year because of lack of space. 📍

“People came to us to ask, ‘Why are you doing this? Tell us more about you.’”

One of the organizers of numerous community service events in India. Activities included temperance rallies to help people stop smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, and using drugs, and a citywide cleanup day. In addition, a series of occasional mini-health fairs were organized with blood sugar tests and fresh fruit and vegetable juices. Adventist volunteers also offered massages and hydrotherapy treatments.



Photo: Tom Lloyd, Maranatha Volunteers International

Perspective



Photo: Ron Hansen

Our Experience in India

Last June we had the privilege of being in India together with others, participating in a Total Member Involvement (TMI) event.

It was a unique experience. We enjoyed our time with the people there. Both my wife, Leticia, and I had opportunity to share a series of presentations over a period of two weeks. She was assigned to speak at a church that has approximately 200 members. Meanwhile, I was assigned to another nearby church, with about 400 members, many of them young people.

The attendance at both sites was very good every night. Many friends joined the Adventist members and enjoyed the message. We are sure that, although English is not our first language, God helped us to express His message in an understandable way. As a result, a group of people decided to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour.

On one of the nights, as Leticia was finishing a presentation, several women came and asked her for a prayer of intercession. She began to pray for each one individually. During the last prayer something strange happened. They heard a terrible scream. When Leticia opened

her eyes, she saw that one of the women had fallen to the ground.

All the people there stopped speaking. Something terrible was happening. A woman who was possessed by an evil spirit was moving on the ground, like a handkerchief moved by the wind. She tried to take off her clothes. Immediately the pastor of the church began to pray. Leticia did the same. She remembered Psalms 23, 91, 121, and repeated them.

Every person in the room prayed. Meanwhile, the pastor prayed in a loud voice. It was like a war between good and evil. You could see the woman—pale, sweaty, and exhausted. Leticia started to sing “I Surrender All,” and others joined her. The evil spirit left the woman. Satan’s opposition when the gospel message is shared was evident. But it was also clearly evident that “Satan trembles and flees before the weakest soul who finds refuge in that mighty name”* of Jesus.

Before Leticia began to speak during the second week, the pastor told her: “Sister Leticia, make an appeal; it’s time to do it.” She made it. As her interpreter was speaking, she prayed: “Please Lord, let at least one person decide to follow You, just one.”

She invited the people, and saw one person stand up. She praised God. God did what she asked for.

The next night she prayed again, but this time she asked, “Lord, You know who is ready to follow You.” A group of people responded to the appeal.

By the end of the series, 12 people had decided to become disciples of Jesus.

At my location, I had experiences similar to Leticia’s. Many young people decided to accept Jesus. It was amazing to see them surrender their lives to God.

To be a disciple of Christ in a country dominated by other cultures and religions is not easy. But praise God for those who are ready to open their hearts to Jesus.

The promise of the Holy Spirit is real for us today. When we believe, we will see more miracles everywhere.

The church in India has challenges, but God is in control and will care for His people. He promises, “So shall My word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). ©

*Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 131.

Abner De los Santos serves as a general vice president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He and **Leticia** are originally from **Mexico**, and have two adult children.

FAITHFUL TO SCRIPTURE

Making Sense of the Holy

A concise primer for
biblical interpretation

BY GERALD A. KLINGBEIL

The Bible elicits many different responses.

Some consider it just another ancient book containing many unbelievable stories; others feel stirred by its message of hope. Christians recognize it as inspired, or “God-breathed,” as suggested by the literal translation of the Greek term *theopneustos* found in 2 Timothy 3:16. This God-breathed word is like a “light shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19, NIV), communicated by God through prophets who spoke (and later wrote) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

God’s enduring love story, however, requires translation and interpretation. Biblical authors wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek. They lived in vastly differing cultures and under diverse historical circumstances thousands of years before us. How can we make sure that we truly understand not only what they wrote, but what they (and the Spirit inspiring them) *really meant*?

ENTER BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

If we want to avoid erroneous interpretations of the Bible, we need to pay close attention to the principles and rules of biblical interpretation. Scholars call this field “hermeneutics.” Most of us recognize some of these principles. The battle cry of the Protestant Reformation, *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone), reminds us that the Bible alone is the final norm of truth in our lives. Tradition and even our own ideas are really irrelevant when we look for God-inspired truth. *Tota scriptura* is another important principle. It suggests that *all* Scripture—both Old Testament and New Testament—is inspired by God and thus fully authoritative.

The Reformers also highlighted the analogy of Scripture. What does this mean? If all Scripture is truly inspired by God, then we will also find a fundamental unity and harmony in all of it. This unity and harmony requires that Scripture be its own interpreter. That means practically that we read every-

thing the Bible includes about a given topic if we truly want to understand the topic or theme.

The final principle that we need to remember is this: spiritual things need to be spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:11, 14). As Martin Luther noted long ago, we come to God's Word as beggars, requiring the Spirit's illuminating power. This recognition is humbling and exhilarating at the same time. We are humbled because we recognize that we are in need of the same Spirit who breathed life into words written by frail prophets in ages past. At the same time, we are also exhilarated, for digging deeper into Scripture offers us a chance to encounter the living God again and again—wherever we are.

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

Adventists have always used the historical-grammatical (also called historical-biblical) method of interpretation. This method grows naturally out of the basic principles already mentioned. It has two anchors. It accepts the self-testimony of Scripture but pays careful attention to the language of the text, its structure, historical context, and cultural context.

Every encounter with the biblical text, however, begins with a translation. Most of us don't read Hebrew, Aramaic, or Koine Greek, so we have to rely on different translations. A good strategy for careful Bible study and interpretation is to compare translations, for every translation (including the English King James Version) involves interpretation. Literal translations can be helpful, but they do not always represent the *better* translation. Reading a wide variety of translations

ensures a better understanding of the biblical text.

Context is key when we read Scripture. Context works on different levels. Each text has an immediate context—verses surrounding it that offer more information so that we can make sense of the text. Larger text units represent the next level of context. They do not always correspond to chapters (as obvious in Isaiah 52:13-53:12). A number of chapters together can form a bigger subunit. Genesis 1-3 tells us of God's marvelous creation and humanity's deep fall. The next chapters contain information about the growth and development of humanity, followed by another section dealing with the Flood (Gen. 6-10), brought on by humanity's wickedness. Reading these sections together will help us avoid pulling something out of its context.

Entire books are the next larger context. Authors did not just write as ideas came to mind. The Bible was not the result of divine dictation (at least for most of its content). We can see clear structures, often laid out as an architect lays out the plan for a house. Biblical authors were careful and focused when they communicated God's message.

Once we have understood the immediate and larger context of a given text, we want to know when it was written and who wrote it. What was the historical context? Jonah's prophetic book did not emerge in a vacuum. Israel suffered from many Assyrian incursions and other external threats during his lifetime. Moments of relative peace often alternated with periods of severe national crises. Knowing this may help us better understand Jonah's actions, and perhaps even some of his emotions.

Reach for Your Scriptures

A personal Bible study practice can take on many forms.

BY CINDY TUTSCH

At my recent annual physical, my new primary-care physician looked at my history of broken bones. She wasn't too impressed with my litany of good, reasonable explanations for those eight broken bones, and sent me off for an osteoporosis test. You guessed it: I have osteoporosis.

No matter that osteoporosis is not really reversible, I'm attacking it with a vengeance. At least I can keep it from getting worse! Prescription-strength vitamin D, kale or broccoli just about every day, vitamin K, lots of exercise, especially

weight-bearing exercise, calcium supplements, tofu.

Forty-five years ago, when *Steps to Christ* helped me discover that my connection with Jesus needed help, I started Word supplements. He's the "calcium" I need to avoid breaking our relationship again. With a new year and fresh slate ahead of us, this is a wonderful time to start or reinvigorate a personal Bible study and devotion time of your own. The following tips work for me. There is nothing inspired in this particular way of ingesting the Word of God, but I share these ideas in the hope they may be helpful to you.

We are humbled because we recognize that we are in need of the same Spirit who breathed life into words written by frail prophets in ages past.

FINDING GOD

Biblical interpretation, however, is concerned not only with history and culture and languages. Ultimately, we want to understand better who God is and what He is doing in this world. A good question we can ask ourselves as we read a text or chapter is: "What does this text or chapter tell me about God and His character?" That's really the essence of theology—and it doesn't require an academic degree.

Sometimes the answer to this question may be straightforward; sometimes we may have to read "between the lines" and pay attention to the larger story.

Moses' engagement with God on the mountain that ultimately led to God's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6, 7 offers some clear answers to this question: God is compassionate, long-suffering, gracious, merciful, and so much more. At the same time, however, the biblical text tells us that He is also a righteous judge who takes sin seriously. It's thrilling to find God in Scripture in many unexpected places.

AND MY LIFE?

Understanding the Bible is not purely an academic exercise. It's an existential encounter as we relate to texts inspired by God's Spirit to communicate His grand plan of salvation. Once we have learned something about God's actions in this world, we have to answer a very basic, yet also very personal, question: *What does this mean for my life, today, as I relate to God and to people around me?* The application of biblical truth learned from digging deeper into His Word often requires a decision. It's a response to the God of Scripture who continuously pursues His creation with the age-old question: "Where are you My child? Come home, for I want to spend eternity with you!" ©

Gerald A. Klingbeil, D.Litt., an associate editor of *Adventist World*, is passionate about God's Word—both the written and the incarnated.

■ I start my day with reading my Bible in four places—two chapters from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament, and a couple pages from both Psalms and Isaiah. Sometimes I use a commentary, but I usually just talk to God about what I'm reading and wait for His response.

■ Laminated verses—I put them in my purse, in the car, in the bathroom, on my bedside table. I'm trying to memorize more Scripture. The laminated Scriptures help me with my goal to scroll less on social media and watch fewer cat videos. This is one effective way to get in the habit of ingesting the Word. You doubtless have some habits that work well for you.

■ I could tell you I exercise while listening to audio Scripture through my earbuds. But I don't. I do have old-school CDs of narrated Scripture, though, and on a road trip (or long commute) I often listen for a while.

■ I keep key rings with Scripture promises in my coat pockets. I like to flip through them while walking, kind of like studying Greek vocabulary, but far more gratifying!

■ My husband and I do a soup supper, followed by Bible study, every Friday night in our home, with seekers and new believers. We use a simple format of Bible studies I wrote for teens.*

■ We chain-reference texts in our Bibles. This time is precious. Our highly diverse group has bonded. We talk about the texts. We talk about

how those texts might change our previous understanding of the topic; we talk about how those texts might change us. Then we pray that the Lord will write His Word on our hearts in the week to come.

There are many ways to study the Bible. By topic, by inductive or deductive methods, by book, by the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—though the gospel is on display throughout all of Scripture. My exercise TV coach says, "Just do it! Don't quit!" The Spirit says the same. ©

*41 Bible Studies for Teens. AdventSource.org

Cindy Tutsch is semiretired in the Pacific Northwest, United States.



Stories, Laws, and Prophecies

How to make sense of biblical genres

BY EIKE MUELLER

We all receive lots of mail, maybe more e-mails today than physical letters. Some are letters from loved ones in faraway places. Other letters contain bills or statements. Then there is a flood of newsletters and advertisements—some helpful, others annoying. We easily recognize the different types of letters or e-mails we receive because each has its own unique style of writing and presentation: we relate differently to each.

The Bible also contains a variety of styles, often referred to as *genres* in hermeneutics. Recognizing the *genre* of a biblical passage is vital to interpret and apply Scripture properly, because each genre functions

differently. Despite cultural and stylistic changes over time, we can recognize the different genres by carefully reading and listening to larger sections of Scripture.

NARRATIVE

Stories comprise the largest category in the Bible. The narrative genre depicts historical events, often including time references, but recasts these stories from God's perspective.

Narratives are easily recognizable: there are characters who act out the plot in the scenes. Despite the focus on human actors and actions, the purpose of these stories is to reveal who God is and how His people should live in this world. This includes both positive and negative examples of humans

following God's will for their lives, or others acting contrary to God. At times there are demonstrations of faithfulness in these stories; other times readers are confronted with pain and suffering.

The gospel accounts are a subset of narratives to describe in a biographical manner the key events of Jesus' life and ministry on this earth. Here God's self-revelation in Jesus' words and actions becomes the full focus.

LAW CODE

Law codes are often considered "dry" and incomprehensible. Despite this perception, the laws in Exodus, Leviticus, and Matthew 5-7 give clarity to what God expects of us: how to treat Him and one another. Additionally, the law demonstrates how grave the consequences of sin are.

Legal code can generally be divided into two categories: apodictive and casuistic laws. Apodictive laws are universally valid because of who God is. Often the rationale for these commands is expressed in the well-known statement "for I the Lord your God am holy." Casuistic laws, or case law, on the other hand, present very specific situations from which general applications are made and usually contain an "if this . . . then that" formula. In case law, the principle remains true even if the specifics vary based on time or culture.*

There are specific subcategories of law such as covenant law (and covenant lawsuits), and ritual laws that include purity and sacrificial laws. As Hebrews points out, Jesus' death on the cross supplants the sacrificial laws that pointed to Him. Purity regulations, on the other hand, are at times universal, at other times connected to the Temple and the sacrificial system.

PROPHETIC

In the prophetic genre God communicates to an individual or a group through a prophet, often to warn of imminent divine judgment. The audience is indicted with the ominous words “thus says the Lord,” followed by specific counts of transgressing God’s laws. The focus of prophecy is to reveal hidden and ignored sins (past and present) rather than reveal only future events. The purpose of these stark warnings is to elicit repentance in the hearers.

APOCALYPTIC

Apocalyptic visions are a subcategory of prophetic oracles that present a rough outline of earthly and heavenly future events. This genre employs symbolism predominantly, along with a cosmic perspective to reveal how God will resolve the sin problem. The purpose is not so

much a detailed account of earthly events or to incite fear, but instead to give hope and comfort to faithful followers. These writings remind believers that God is in control and will come again to claim His own and restore the world.

POETIC

The Psalms are a collection of ancient hymns, but shorter poetic sayings are found in many biblical books. Poetry puts in words the greatest human emotions: fear, love, and adoration. It describes injustice, often in strong language, but also praises God’s salvation and majesty.

Most important, however, biblical poetry always turns to God to express good and bad feelings and trusts that God will resolve all injustice. The beauty of Hebrew rhyme is lost in translation, but the typical Hebrew style of using parallelisms and vivid imagery still

inspire deep feelings today. Even if we have never met a shepherd, we all can relate to the imagery of the words, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

It is important to realize that poetry is evocative language. It does not necessarily make a factual declaration. Also, the historical setting and occasion for a particular psalm is often unknown, but it is helpful if it is available.

WISDOM

Wisdom literature is a collection of riddles, proverbs, or allegories that convey reflections on life, either existentially or practically, and provide advice for life. This down-to-earth nature of pithy wisdom sayings indicates the difference to poetic literature. Despite its practical nature, the wisdom genre is grounded in a dependence on God, the foundation of genuine wisdom.

Scripture and Obedience

Faith comes from loving.

BY SHIPRAH FEPULEA’I

There’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Trust and obedience go hand in hand: you follow the Lamb wherever He goes because you trust Him. Can we ever meaningfully obey God if we do not first trust in God?

TRUST (FAITH)

It’s impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). Faith, the state of trusting, always comes first. God starts us off by giving us each a portion of faith (Rom. 12:3). Obedience that pleases Him flows from that gift of faith in Him. I cannot obey God if I cannot trust Him. Then, for my further growth in obedience to His Word, I must ask Him to increase my faith, my trust in Him (see Luke 17:5).

There are two different kinds of trust. There’s functional faith in someone’s abilities that derives from believing that they have the skills to accomplish something. But that

EPISTLE

The New Testament contains personal correspondence between apostles and churches. The authors at times answer questions from the church, share theological instruction, counsel on specific church issues, offer personal advice, but also communicate joy and encouragement. The letters generally follow a letterhead formula that introduces the author and readers and opens with a greeting and blessing. The conclusion consists of personal well-wishes to the church and a blessing. Even though epistles include general truths, they are communication between two entities in the first century.

PARABLE

Parables were a well-known style in the ancient world in which a story, historical or fictional, illustrates the speaker's argument. Jesus uses par-

Recognizing the genre of a biblical passage is vital to interpret and apply Scripture properly, because each genre functions differently.

ables as His predominant method to share the reality and future of the kingdom of heaven. Parables employ a relatable real-world setting, though often a very cryptic focus on a single main point, and often have a surprise twist at the end.

Like our real or virtual mailbox, the Bible contains many different styles with different forms and functions: some describe historical events, others imaginative; some are descriptive, others prescriptive. Recognizing the genre and applying questions based on the brief genre descriptions above to

any Bible passage will deepen our understanding of God. Ultimately, interpreting Scripture means allowing God's ancient words to ring true in our lives today. ☺

* For a more in-depth study see the three-part article series by Daniel I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Law to New Testament Christians," *Ministry* (2006).

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may not mean that I'm at peace knowing deep down in my heart that someone is for me. Only relational trust can take care of that concern. Relational trust is imperative for the health of any relationship, natural or supernatural!

So often we know that God is able, but question if God will truly come through. Will the Almighty Creator take care of my family and me? When I survive a tragedy, did God take care of me? The challenge is not so much to my confidence in His functional capacity, but to my relational trust: if He could have prevented some tragedy, but didn't, can I know that my God is for me?

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I found myself here a few years ago. Every area of my life seemed to be under attack. The last straw was a diagnosis that required specialized surgery to take care of a rare health disorder. I prayed, "God, if You are out there, I need You to help me, because I can't see, hear, or feel You; I seem to be slowly losing hope, and, to be honest, my trust in You."

WHAT DID I DISCOVER?

I discovered precisely this: that my trusting obedience to Him is the fruit of His love and kindness to me. As Paul put

it: "Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that *God's kindness* is intended to lead you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4, NIV). God's kindness instills and develops in me ever higher hope and deeper trust in Him. To hope and obey again after despair, you and I must experience God's kindness again.

BEING LOVED

It's God's kindness, God's everlasting kind of love, rather than any human virtue, that leads to renewed intimacy with Him. Meaningful obedience cannot be extorted apart from trust. Nobody can make you trust them if you cannot see that they care about you. So, yes, pray that you obey and keep the faith. But perhaps even more importantly, pray with me, "God, will You please overwhelm me with Your love again?" First, be loved. Then tell me how your trust in God grows and how your obedience naturally, or perhaps supernaturally, follows new love—as happened to me after my surgery and healing. ☺

Shiphrah Fepulea'i shares her faith and testimony of God's faithful love in the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Our Sure Foundation

The solid Word of God



One of the biggest battles we will ever face is over the authority of the Word of God. The devil has always hated God's Word and does everything he can to neutralize its effect. Our sacred responsibility as Seventh-day Adventists is to protect, lift up, and promote the lifesaving power of God's sure Word—the Bible.

The world around us is falling apart. People are distraught about security and personal safety. Life has become uncertain. What is needed is not a political, military, or social solution, but a return to a solid foundation—God's sure Word.

Peter shared tremendous certainty in God as he faced his approaching death: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitness for His majesty. . . . And so we have the prophetic word confirmed ["a more sure word of prophecy" (KJV)], which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:16-19).

The Word of God has always been a light shining in a dark place. The Bible is authoritative. It is our handbook for living, not just something to put on a table or

analyze for academic purposes.

Peter went on to write: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (verses 20, 21).

People have always needed a sure foundation. The sure word of prophecy is something we can count on. It points to Christ, His righteousness, His salvation, His ministry in the most holy place, and His final redemption of His people at His second coming. It is our enormous privilege to share it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But sadly, the Word of God is frequently ignored. Some misinterpret and misapply that which is plainly taught in Scripture. The Bible is reinterpreted by those who participate in higher criticism or the historical-critical approach to Scripture; those who place themselves above Scripture as they interpret it according to their own standards and approaches.

AS IT READS

We Seventh-day Adventists faithfully follow and promote the historical-biblical method of interpreting Scripture, allowing the Bible to interpret itself. The

Methods of Bible Study document, voted by representatives of the world church,¹ outlines how to study God's Holy Word, following the historicist view of prophecy and biblical understanding. Ellen White wrote: "If we would not build our hopes of heaven upon a false foundation we must accept the Bible as it reads and believe that the Lord means what He says."²

As we face the last days of earth's history, there will be determined efforts by Satan to destroy the effectiveness of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. We see the neutralization of God's authoritative Word all around us. It is Satan's plan to undermine God's plain "Thus saith the Lord," knowing that if he can get God's people to look to themselves and their own opinions he can bring in dissension, disunity, and tension. It is one of his greatest tools against the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Word of God is the product of heavenly inspiration and provides an accurate account of the great controversy between good and evil—between Christ and Satan. This is why the devil is determined to destroy the truth found in the Bible, but he will not succeed.

God is faithful. Through His power let's respond in faithfulness

to Him. There are absolutes, and they are found in the Word of God.

THE BEREANS

We read about the Bereans in Acts 17. “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (verses 10, 11, KJV).

Many of the Jews in Thessalonica were jealous of Paul and Silas’ popularity and were unwilling to dig deeply into the Word, allowing the gospel to transform their lives. Instead, they succeeded in putting the city into an uproar. To avoid further violence, the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. There they found open-minded Jews who were willing to listen and dig into the Scriptures to prove whether or not what they heard was right. The truth became real to them.

Ellen White observed: “Daily they searched the inspired records, and as they compared scripture with scripture, heavenly angels were beside them, enlightening their minds and impressing their hearts.”³ Today heavenly angels are by our sides, opening our minds as we prayerfully study the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit brings conviction and conversion.

DANGERS AND DISTRACTIONS

We are living in the Laodicean last-day period when Christianity is often superficial. The devil will try everything to distract us from the Bible and the truth, using every possible means to take us away from God’s Word.

Another great danger we face is living in an age of “experiential religion.” People claim you have to

“feel” the spirit, asserting religion must be “experienced” to be real. Emphasis is placed more on feeling, similar to the Thessalonians, rather than on searching the Scriptures, as the Bereans did.

Ellen White warned: “In the last days, the earth will be almost destitute of true faith. Upon the merest pretense, the Word of God will be considered unreliable, while human reasoning will be received, though it be in opposition to plain Scripture facts.”⁴ Feelings lie, but truth is based on the authority of Scripture. God’s Word never lies.

HIDDEN TREASURE

There are physical and mental benefits from studying the Bible and focusing on eternal values, as opposed to spending time on trivial things. We are promised, “The Bible is the book of books. It will give you life and health. It is a soother of the nerves, and imparts solidity of mind and firm principle.”⁵

The Word of God is like hidden treasure, as illustrated by Christ’s parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matt. 13:44).

Reflecting on this, Ellen White observed: “In the parable the field containing the treasure represents the Holy Scriptures. And the gospel is the treasure. The earth itself is not so interlaced with golden veins and filled with precious things as is the Word of God.”⁶

The Bible reveals that salvation is possible only through complete reliance on Christ. It tells us the Sabbath is Christ’s special seal and covenant with His command-keeping people. It confirms our belief and hope in a soon, literal second coming of Christ.

While the church will be deluged with apostasies and false doctrine,

The Bible is authoritative. It is our handbook for living.

the Word of God stands sure. “All should see the necessity of understanding the truth for themselves. . . . Apostasies have occurred and the Lord has permitted matters of this nature to develop in the past in order to show how easily His people will be misled when they depend upon the words of men instead of searching the Scriptures for themselves, as did the noble Bereans, to see if these things are so.”⁷

Only in following the lead of the Bereans will we be able to stand the final test, since the Bible is the only foundation on which to build. Satan will seek to destroy confidence in the landmark biblical truths we hold dear, but he will not succeed.

Jesus is coming soon! Be a Berean, searching the Scriptures daily to know the Word. Cherish it, believe it, love it, share it. Let us overcome the Laodicean crisis by hiding God’s Word in our hearts, being people of the Book, and sharing it with others. ☺

¹ The Methods of Bible Study document was voted at the Church’s Annual Council on October 12, 1986, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Available at www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/-/methods-of-bible-study/

² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 5, p. 171.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 231.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1870), vol. 1, p. 89.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1938), p. 22.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900, 1941), p. 104.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), book 2, pp. 392-394.

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Millennial Voices

Life Lessons



Happy New Year! This is the time people all around the world are making resolutions. Mine is simple—I resolve to be happy. I choose to embrace the joy of the Lord as the strength for my life.

If it were only that simple.

Unfortunately, grief is a language spoken by many. My friend, Michael, for example, has sung the song of grief with the seasoned panache of a refined musician. If grief was an art, he would be the Renaissance artist that paints grief to life.

Michael lost his mother when he was a toddler. His relatives tell him he was one of those children who would be soothed only by someone that they

were comfortable with. His mother could soothe him as none other.

Her death was not sudden. Her body failed slowly and became more frail by the week. Her immune system was not strong enough to fight the disease that attacked her like a marauder—all this while her baby needed her. She knew she wouldn't make it, and one can only imagine the grief and pain that she felt. The thought of her struggle still causes Michael pain.

Michael's mother left him with her parents, as his father had abandoned them long ago. His grandparents raised him as one of their own.

Life deals all of us different blows. Michael's portion was never to bask in a comfort zone, for he was repeatedly plucked from the comforts of love and family. His grandmother, who took him in as her own child and raised him as a mother: her life was snuffed out by a stroke.

Michael lost a close friend to a freak car accident that resulted in his friend's death but saved 13 other lives. He had to take another dear friend to a morgue in the middle of the night because his friend gave up on life, having struggled with mental illness.

In spite of it all, *Michael has learned to live*. He draws courage from the One who came to give us "real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of" (John 10:10, Message).¹

Michael also learned to long. He longs for a place where "the wolf and the lamb will feed together" (Isa. 65:25, NIV) and where there will be

"no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Rev. 21:4, NIV). Paul says that "even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are insignificant compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us" (2 Cor. 4:16-18, Message).

Michael has learned to sing. The caged bird can learn to sing only when its owner covers the cage, forcing it to listen and learn the one song it is meant to sing. With the distractions of daylight, and hearing the music of other voices, the caged bird will not sing the song that its master seeks to teach it. Indeed, Michael's grief taught him that God "has a song to teach us, and when we have learned it amid the shadows of affliction we can sing it ever afterward."²

Michael has also recognized one foundational constant in life: *God has no orphans*. He is truly "a father to the fatherless" (Ps. 68:5, NIV).

As we work to make 2020 an intentionally happy new year, Michael's experience is a reminder that even in grief we can find joy.©

¹ Texts credited to Message are from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

² Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 472.

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Scripture: Its Beginnings



Before the entrance of sin, Adam enjoyed open communion with his Maker; but since man separated himself from God by transgression, the human race has been cut off from this high privilege. By the plan of redemption, however, a way has been opened whereby the inhabitants of the earth may still have connection with heaven. God has communicated with [men and women] by His Spirit, and divine light has been imparted to the world by revelations to His chosen servants. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21).

HISTORICAL BEGINNINGS

During the first twenty-five hundred years of human history, there was no written revelation. . . . The preparation of the written word began in the time of Moses. Inspired revelations were then embodied in an inspired book. This work continued during the long period of sixteen hundred years—from Moses, the historian of creation and the law, to John, the recorder of the most sublime truths of the gospel.

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all “given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language.

The Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

HUMANITY’S INPUT

Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. . . .

As presented through different individuals, the truth is brought out in its varied aspects. One writer is more strongly impressed with one phase of the subject; he grasps those points that harmonize with his experience or with his power of perception and appreciation; another seizes upon a different phase; and each, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind—a different aspect of the truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all. And the truths thus revealed unite to form a perfect whole, adapted to meet the wants of [humanity] in all the circumstances and experiences of life.

God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write.

The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth. ©

Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This excerpt was taken from *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), pp. v-vii.

Light, Salt, and Water

The following devotional describes some object lessons offered by a physicist engaging both science and the Word.

The editors.

In the greatest sermon ever delivered, Jesus, on a hill near the Sea of Galilee, said of His followers: “You are the salt of the earth” and “you are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:13, 14).

I know that Jesus didn’t intend these remarks to be a meditation on the elemental nature of salt and light, but as a student of physics, I can’t resist using nature to draw some spiritual lessons. Please indulge me.

Salt is a compound made up of two elements, sodium and chlorine, technically known as sodium chloride. The taste buds in our tongues have specialized nerve endings that are stimulated on receiving the sodium and chlorine ions dissolved in water. These ions trigger an imbalance in the electrical charge within the sensory nerves, and this signal is sent to the brain, where it is decoded as the sensation of saltiness.



Salt was often used to preserve food, because salt inhibits bacterial growth. Preservation is achieved as salt is embedded into the moisture of food cells. So for salt to be salty and preserve, *it has to be dissolved in water.*

On the other hand, we were told in physics classes that light is an electromagnetic wave that does not need a medium to propagate and is capable of traveling in a vacuum.

Light is not only a wave, but in certain circumstances it exhibits particle-like behavior, in discrete packages of energy known as photons. Scientists, for lack of a better explanation, talk of the “dual nature” of light: wavelike and particlelike. Bear in mind that in classical physics, waves and particles are mutually exclusive properties or concepts. How can two mutually exclusive properties be merged in a single physical entity we call light?

Since I was a child I have always been curious. I remember receiving a brand-new tricycle toy from my parents. It ran “automatically” as I wound it up. I wanted to know how it worked, so I dismantled it and discovered the spring mechanism responsible for the driving force. But I ended up with a problem, for I was unable to assemble it again. This inquisitive characteristic was partly responsible for my going into the field of research in physics.

This same curiosity remained after I was baptized and became a Christian at the age of 22. So when Jesus refers to His disciples as “salt” and “light,” I cannot help trying to grasp a deeper meaning in this imagery.

MORE LIGHT

Jesus says of Himself: “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5; cf. John 12:46). Looking at the dual nature of light, we can understand how appropriate this self-description

is. Light has two simultaneous natures that manifest themselves differently in different circumstances; and Jesus is the only one in the whole universe that embodies both the divine and human nature. How appropriate for Jesus, then, to refer to Himself as the “light of the world.”

The wavelike characteristic of light may be a metaphor for understanding the divine nature of Jesus, since electromagnetic waves are nonmaterial, nonlocalized in space. That means they can fill the whole environment, do not need matter to propagate, and pierce through even the interstellar vacuum. One way of thinking about this might be that the particlelike characteristic of light can be thought of as paralleling the human nature of Jesus, since particles are localized in space (they occupy a definite place in space) and can interact with each other “shoulder to shoulder.” Jesus is truly the light of this world, not only at the top of the Mount of Transfiguration but also in all instances in which He touched the “untouchables.” Since He is the source of light, His followers are encouraged to reflect His light to the world, as planets and satellites reflect the sun’s light.

EXPLOSIVE AND POISONOUS

Nowhere in Scripture do we find Jesus referring to Himself as the “salt of the earth.” If the “salt” qualification is to be understood in the sense of giving flavor and preserving life amid a world of sin, wouldn’t Jesus be the true source of abundant life and the true agency that preserves life? Why, then, does Jesus never refer to Himself as the salt of the earth?

I started to think of reasons for this from a scientific angle. We already noted that salt is composed of sodium and chlorine. Sodium is a highly reactive soft metal that

Light has two simultaneous natures that manifest themselves differently in different circumstances.

burns violently and explosively, and in contact with water also explodes. Chlorine is a greenish poisonous gas that is present in many household cleaning products. None of these atomic elements’ characteristics would be appropriate to illustrate some attribute of Jesus. But it might be argued that these characteristics describe well our fallen human nature: explosive and poisonous. How fascinating that the combination of sodium and chlorine gives salt—a flavor-enhancing and food-preserving product.

Here is one spiritual lesson that we might draw from this: salt by itself cannot flavor food, nor preserve it. Only when salt is mixed with water can it flavor a meal, stimulate our taste buds, and also preserve. Only in combination with water these characteristics of salt become operational and active. A possible application for this characteristic of salt is that no one can ever be the salt of the earth by themselves. We all need Jesus, the “water of life” (John 4:14), to become the real “salt of the earth.” ☉

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Special Feature

The Adventist World Team



Marvene Thorpe-Baptiste
Editorial Assessment Coordinator

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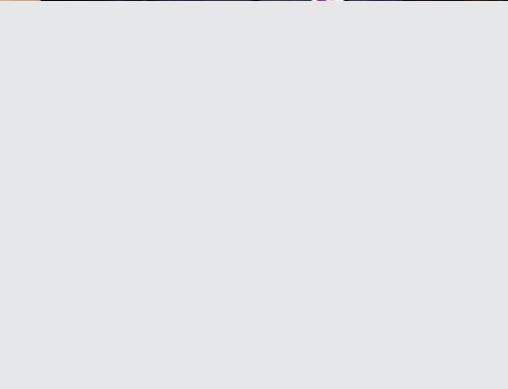
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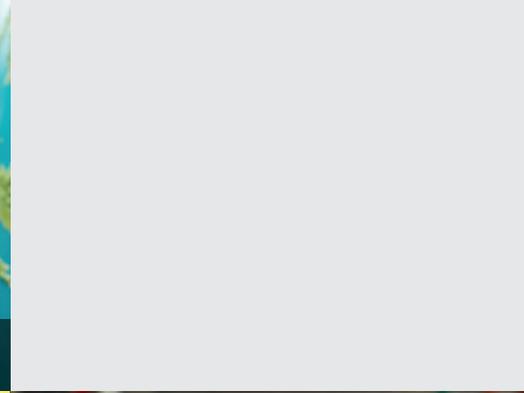
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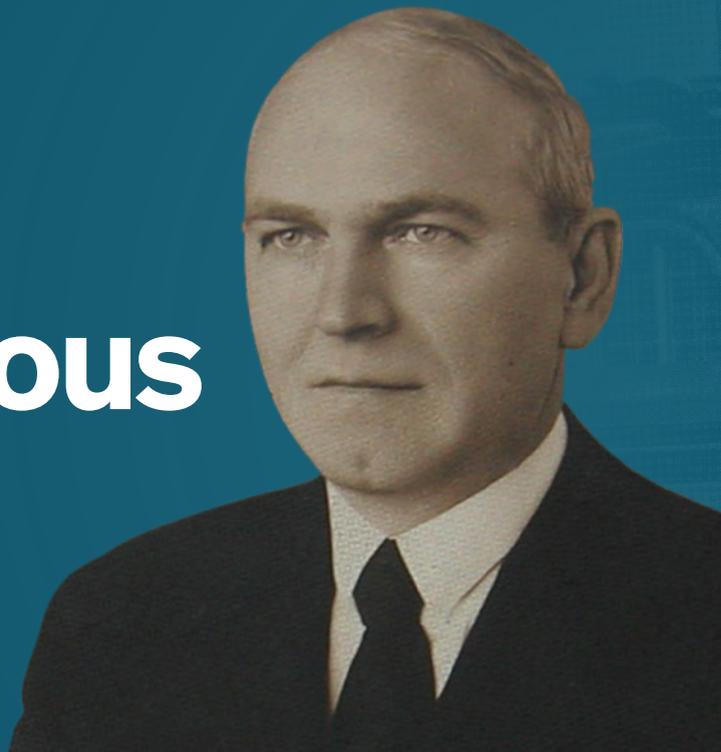


Greg Scott
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All photos are by Aaron Thomas, except: Sandra Blackmer, by Larry Blackmer; Sharon Tennyson, by Victor Hulbert; and Kim Brown, by David Sherwin.

A “Righteous Gentile”

An Adventist who rescued Jews during World War II



Outside Jerusalem, near Yad Vashem, the memorial center of the Six Million, a quiet garden is planted with trees in memory of righteous non-Jews who rescued Jews during Nazi persecution in World War II. Each tree bears a plaque telling about the “Righteous Gentile” in whose honor the tree was planted. One tree was planted in memory of a Hungarian Adventist pastor, László Michnay (1893–1965), a courageous and brave Christian

leader who helped more than 50 Jews escape the Holocaust.

“There were so few that had the courage for this,” recalls Magda Berzenczey, Michnay’s daughter, referring to Adventists who helped Jews during the Nazi period. “Yes, there were some, but there should have been more, many more.”

She continued by telling me the story of her father, who made his mark in history as the “Adventist Wallenberg.” The Swedish diplomat, Raoul Wallenberg, whose fate is still unclear to this day, is known to have protected thousands of Jews from the Holocaust in Hungary. Michnay and Wallenberg knew each other personally and undertook the same mission: to save people from the cruelty of the Nazis.

FEARLESS IN THE FACE OF BIGOTRY

Until March 1944 Jews in Hungary felt relatively safe in the face of German occupation, although they met with increasing discrimination through the race laws of 1941, comparable to the Nuremberg Laws. The Jewish journalist Vilmos Mezöfi, who was later saved by Michnay, recalls that in 1943 the fearless Adventist pastor gave a public lecture on the “Jewish Question” in the largest Adventist chapel in Budapest.

Among the hundreds of listeners in the audience were plainclothes police officers. “My dear Christian sisters and brothers,” declared Michnay from the pulpit, “you can only be faithful and honest followers of Christ if you take Jews, our next-of-kin, into your protection.” The pastor was aware of the growing anti-Semitic feelings that had spread among Adventist members. Jews, at that time, comprised 16 percent of Budapest’s population. Adventist congregations in Hungary had accepted a number of Jewish converts in the past.

A police summons after the memorable lecture did not intimidate Michnay. In October 1944, when Hitler’s fascist-backed Arrow Cross Party, under its fanatical leader Ferenc Szálasi, overthrew the Horthy regime and organized the transport of thousands of Hungarian Jews to Nazi death camps, Michnay decided to build up a clandestine network for the rescue of Jews. His faithful wife, Jolán, a “mother in Israel,” supported him wholeheartedly.

Central to his rescue operation was the Adventist church building on Székely Bertalan Street, near the Jewish ghetto. In a range of small rooms, corridors, and corners of this building—in cellars, attics, under the stairways, and behind the stage—the fearless pastor kept in hiding a number of Jews, code-named “U-boats.” He made no distinction between Adventists of Jewish descent or Jews. Michnay tried to help everyone who asked.

Although secretly watched by the Gestapo, Michnay was fortunate that only local Hungarian police officers knocked at the door of the church building. German police would have been more thorough in their searches. Each time an unwelcome visitor

László Michnay, a courageous and brave Christian leader, helped more than 50 Jews escape the Holocaust.

appeared at the door, Michnay spoke in a loud voice, engaging the visitor in conversation, thus warning the persecuted ones in the house and giving them time to find their hiding places. Michnay's early connection with Szálasi may have proved to be helpful, as the Hungarian police officers always left without carefully searching the chapel, despite their suspicions.

THE CIRCLE WIDENS

Michnay and Szálasi, though animated by very different passions, had been schoolmates, and a bond between them remained from their earliest youth. Long before Szálasi's career as a Nazi leader, Michnay, always ready to help, contributed small amounts of money to keep his unemployed school friend from criminal activities. These amounts were withdrawn from the monthly salary payments to his daughter, Magda, who worked as a secretary in the Adventist mission office.

When Michnay could not hide any more Jews in the Adventist chapel—approximately 30 “U-boats”—he arranged new hiding places outside Budapest. The Vámosi family was one such case. First he took the family to

Istvan Oláh, an Adventist pastor living in a Budapest suburb. Oláh worked closely with Michnay and hid Jews in his apartment. A few days later the family found safe hiding until the end of the war in the remote home of an Adventist farmer, Imre Török, in Vác, Sejce, north of Budapest.

Michnay took Arpád Roóz, who later became treasurer of the Hungarian Adventist Union, to the home of the dentist Zsigmond Csiki in Miskolc, a city 180 kilometers (112 miles) northeast of Budapest, where Roóz survived the Nazi terror unharmed.

Michnay's daughter, Magda, born in 1925, stayed behind, hiding in the Adventist chapel in Budapest. As a surviving witness, she has been able to describe the strenuous underground life in the church building: the daily fear of discovery; survival in the smallest of spaces; the trauma of not being able to move for many hours; constant thirst and hunger; nagging self-reproach and concern about the helpers who risked their lives; and the frightening question as to how long this underground existence would last.

Michnay displayed not only boldness and organizational skills, but

also creativity in his rescue actions. In the autumn of 1944 he asked Károly Berzenczey, his daughter Magda's fiancé, to disguise himself as a craftsman to smuggle the young Jewish girl, Jutka Holczer, out of the ghetto. Magda chatted up the soldiers, while Károly, with the small girl in his rucksack, slipped out of the ghetto. The dangerous plan succeeded.

COURAGE IN CRISIS

Michnay's rescue work was successful only because he had the full backing and support of his wife and children and the help of some brave Adventist church members.

They held up a mirror to the many silent bystanders and fearful observers within the church and beyond, consistently following the example of Jesus. Their courageous witness can help us not to repeat the mistakes of the past and forget the unparalleled human tragedy of the Holocaust.

There should have been more helpers such as László Michnay. ©

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Life Without Sin?

Q

Is 1 John 3:9 teaching that before the Second Coming we are expected to reach a spiritual condition of sinless perfection in which we no longer sin?

A

Let me quote the biblical passage: “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” John is not speaking here about what is expected from the last generation of believers, but what God has always expected from all Christians. We should examine the verse and its context.

CONTENT OF THE VERSE

Different Bible translations have rendered the verb “to sin” in different ways. This is because the Greek verb is in the present tense. So we find, for example, a Christian “does not continue to sin” or “does not continually/habitually sin.” According to these translations John is not saying that believers will not sin, but that they will not be controlled by sin. This is an attractive interpretation, but perhaps not necessarily the best one.

Notice that not sinning is made dependent on having been born of God and having “His seed remain” in us. It cannot be achieved independent of the indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

THE FALSE TEACHING

John writes to protect believers from false teachers, who promoted a radical separation between their religious experience and the ethical-redemptive values of the Christian life. They appeared to have reached a spiritual state undamaged by sinful behavior. They claimed to have fellowship with God, yet they walked

in darkness, a metaphor for sin and death (1 John 1:6). They claim to have no sin, while John clarifies that this is self-deception (verse 8). They also claim to know Christ, to be in Him, but they do not obey His commandments (1 John 2:4).

According to John, if we claim to be in Christ we have to walk as Jesus walked (verse 6). For instance, we cannot hate others while claiming to live in the light (verse 9). We should interpret 1 John 3:9 in the context of this radical separation between religious experience and Christian behavior.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

Christians who have been born of God act in ways that correspond to a life lived in fellowship with the Lord. The Christian faith is not abstract knowledge or a mystical experience, but a dynamic way of living—walking as Jesus walked. There is no excuse for sinning, but this does not mean that believers have reached a state of sinless perfection. For John, Christian perfection means first that we have “overcome the world” (1 John 5:4)—that is to say, we are not “under the control of the evil one” (verse 19, NIV). Second, John makes the nature of Christian perfection dependent on constant reliance on Christ’s forgiving grace: “I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2:1, 2, NIV). There will never be a moment when we would not need His grace. Third, John recognizes that Christians may fail by committing “a sin that does not lead to death,” but this does not place them outside God’s power to give them life (1 John 5:16, NIV). We should never separate atonement from God’s transforming and keeping grace. ©

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, now retired, has served the church as a pastor, professor, and theologian.



Health & Wellness

Salt

Should it be eliminated from our diets?

I have heard arguments for and against the use of salt. Some advocate a salt-free diet; others, no restrictions. Still others advocate sea salt. I am 24 years old, feel very well, and have a family history of high blood pressure. What should I do to stay healthy?

We assume your blood pressure is now normal. But with a family history of high blood pressure (hypertension), you run the risk of developing this problem at some point. It's good to be aware and proactive.

Preventive strategies against hypertension include the following (and sound remarkably like following the Adventist health message):

- Maintain a normal body mass index (measured as the ratio of your weight in kilograms divided by the square of your height in meters). The ideal number is between 18.5 and 24.9 kg/m².
- Remain physically active with at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity daily (do not neglect muscle strength training), or strive for 10,000 steps per day.
- Never smoke or use tobacco products.
- Do not consume alcohol.
- Keep salt (sodium) intake below 2,300 milligrams of salt per day.

The World Health Organization recommends a maximum of 2,000 milligrams per day (approximately one teaspoon), and the American Heart Association recommends 1,500 milligrams per day (approximately three quarters of a teaspoon). This is *total intake*, meaning the salt in food as it is *served*, and includes also the salt you may choose to add.

- Eat a nutritious diet rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, and nuts, and low in saturated fat.

When we use the word “salt” in the health setting, we’re referring mainly to sodium. Sodium is an essential element for the normal physiological functioning of the body. It is present in every cell and is vital for survival. Eliminating salt will not give better health—it may cause health problems (e.g., Addison’s disease).

Then there is the myth that sea salt is healthier than table salt. This is not true. Other marketing ploys include using desert salt, flavored salt, colored salt—but they all contain similar amounts of sodium, weight for weight.

Beware of processed foods, especially pickled, preserved, dried, and refined foods. These are often high in sodium content, as salt is a preservative. Read the labels and be a discerning consumer for your health’s sake.

There have been numerous debates in the scientific literature with arguments for and against lowering the intake of salt to improve health, and especially to help decrease the overall problem of high blood pressure and improve its treatments and outcomes. Most of the evidence is robust and favors the reduction of salt intake as the best choice. Explore the use of lemon juice and some of the healthy, aromatic herbs to assist you in cutting back your salt intake.

We have been instructed to *be* the salt of the earth, effectively flavoring the societies in which we live. By God’s grace we may live healthy and balanced lives and share the good news of improved health here on earth and the promise of eternal life to come. ©

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God's Jeep



**“May I Tell
You a Story?”**

BY DICK DUERKSEN

I don't want the enemy to get any of our heavy equipment, so take a couple of the oldest bulldozers and dig some holes in the jungle. Big holes! A bunch of them! Then gas up the rest of our bulldozers, loaders, and jeeps and drive 'em into the holes. Bury every one of them so deep and well-hidden that the enemy will never know they're there.”

The United States Army commander was serious, but with a sly smile he turned to one of his most respected officers. “Make sure the most trustworthy villagers know where the holes are. After the war they might have a use for some of the trucks. Maybe even for a jeep or two.”

Tom and Betty wanted to be missionaries. It would be a great adventure, they thought, a divine opportunity to serve and share the gospel in a distant land. Because Tom's grandfather had worked in India, they asked church leaders if there might be a chance for them to go back and continue the work the family had begun before World War II.

When the assignment finally came through, they were asked to go to the

state of Assam in northeast India, where they were to serve at a boarding school.

“And to visit villages and share the gospel in the state of Nagaland,” Tom and Betty read in the letter. Though they were excited to be going to the Shillong school in Assam, it was the adventure of taking the gospel to people in Nagaland that captured Pastor Tom's attention.

Once in Shillong they quickly learned that Nagaland wasn't giving missionaries visas to visit their villages. “No” was the immediate and certain response to every creative approach Tom made with officials. Then, after nearly giving up, Tom was finally given a visa to visit the village of Yacool. “For two hours only,” the visa read.

Trouble was, there was hardly any transportation, the roads were terrible, and it would probably take days to get there. All for only two hours with the people. Yet Tom “knew” this was why they had come to India, so he begged rides and finally was able to use his visa and visit the village.

“What do you do with two hours in Yacool?” Tom asked himself. “You make friends with the chief!”

It took several visits, but Tom and the chief became good friends. One day the

“Dig here,” the man said. Everyone went to work.

chief asked if Tom would like to have his own vehicle to drive on the rugged mountain roads. “That would be like a gift from God,” Tom answered. Together, with a small group of men, the chief led him deep into the jungle until one of the men pointed at a bumpy pile of dirt, rocks, and vegetation.

“Dig here,” the man said. Everyone went to work. You guessed it! In the overgrown jungle burial chamber they found a genuine U.S. Army jeep. Tom cleaned it up, topped off the gas, started the engine. He was thrilled when God’s little green gift ran perfectly!

Yet the jeep wasn’t perfect. It was too small to carry all of the supplies and people he would be moving around in the mountains of Nagaland, so Tom added a five-foot pickup bed. With more scrap metal and spare parts, he built a small trailer to follow along behind. Now the Jeep was uglier, but much more useful.

Pastor Tom made many trips back to the villages to share about Jesus. Even though he was only beginning to learn the Naga language, a few of the villagers had learned some English from the soldiers, and together they found ways to communicate. Several people were impacted by the Bible messages and chose to be baptized. A couple families told Tom that their children were in a government school that required Saturday exams. If they accepted the Bible Sabbath, they would have to leave school.

Pastor Tom went to the chief. Though his friend understood the Sabbath testing problem, he was unable to fix it. Yet he felt favorably toward the families who were accepting Christianity, and was eager for all of the village children to get the best possible education. “I wonder, could the boys go back to Shil-

long with you and go to school there?” the chief asked.

On Tom’s next “two-hour visit,” the chief called the people together and told them to bring any young men they would like to have go with Pastor Tom.

“Pastor Tom will be here only for a few hours, so you must make a quick decision and get ready fast if you want your sons to go to school with him.”

An hour later 13 teenage boys showed up at the jeep, eager for a better life, and willing to join Pastor Tom on an adventure. By pushing tightly together, all 13 of the boys were barely able to fit into the jeep and trailer.

Just a few minutes down the rutted road they heard a call from the village. One of the youngest boys had hurried home to ask his parents’ permission to go away to school, and he was now sprinting down the track, eager to find a place in the “school jeep.” Even though the jeep was already too full, all the boys yelled, “We can take one more! We can take one more!” Somehow, the last boy found a slice of space, and Tom bounced down the road with 14 new students in God’s jeep.

Four days later, when they arrived at the mission compound, Betty, Tom’s wife, was thrilled to see Tom and his jeepload of dirty, muddy, happy boys! She had been waiting, without hearing any word from her husband for more than a month, as Tom had transformed the jeep, secured the necessary permits, driven to Yacool, found the boys, and driven home with his jeepload of excited teenagers—young men who had been gathered by God to become future pastors and church leaders in Nagaland and throughout India. ©

Dick Duerksen, a pastor and storyteller living in **Portland, Oregon, United States**.

Adventist World

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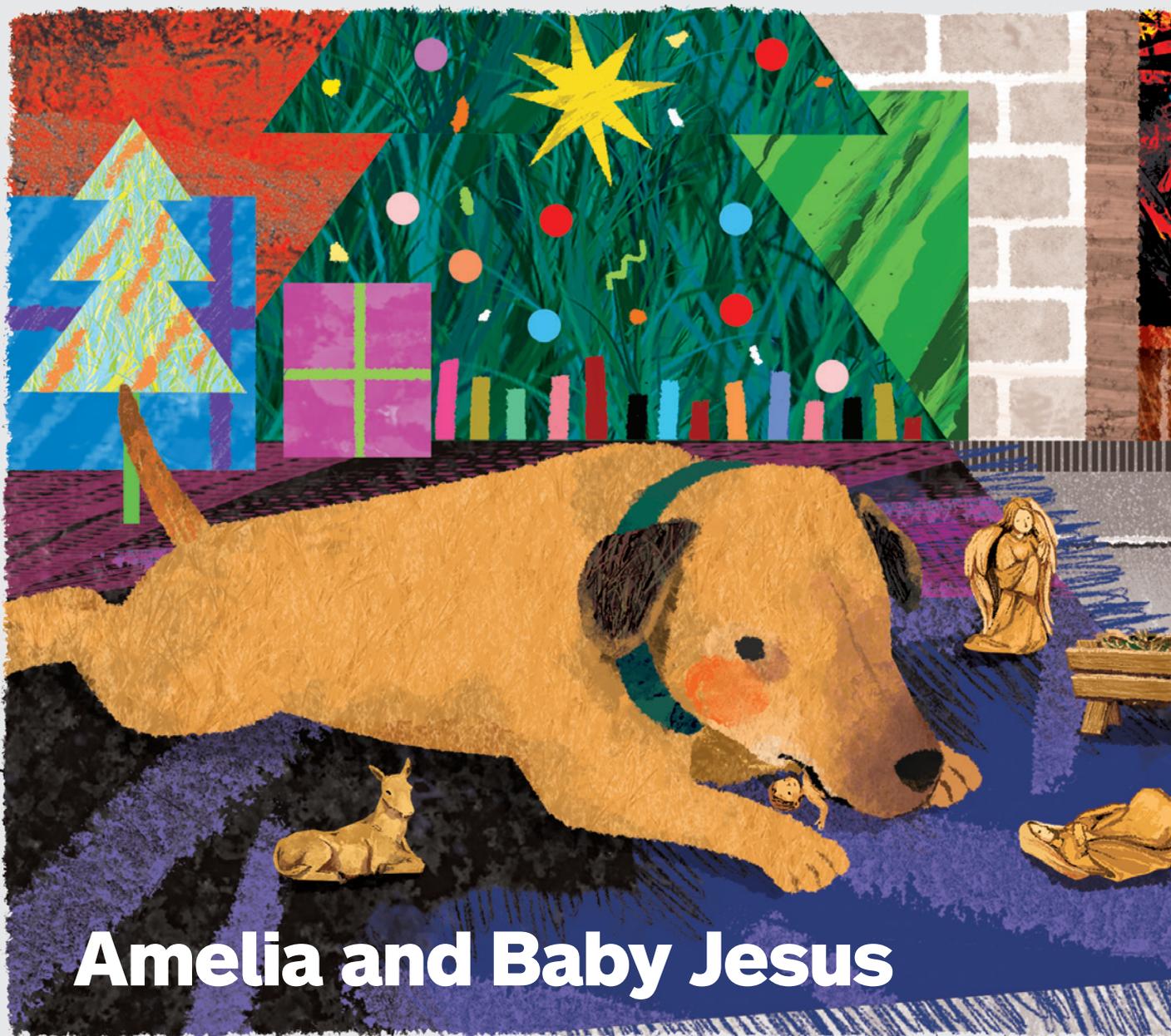
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Seventh-day
Adventist Church



Amelia and Baby Jesus

One Christmas my wife and I went shopping. As we were driving along, my cell phone rang. My wife, Chantal, took the call and listened carefully. On the other end our oldest daughter, Hannah, nearly in tears, told us about a tragedy that had just occurred.

In winter our dog Amelia loves to sneak into our living room and lie in the sun (especially in the mornings when the sun hits

that room). Amelia is normally a good and obedient dog—but not that day. The Christmas tree stood in one corner. In the bay window, Chantal had placed a simple wooden Nativity scene from Germany. Baby Jesus was lying in a manger; shepherds sat around, there were some Wise Men standing—oh, yes, Mary and Joseph were there also.

Then the unthinkable happened. Amelia, sniffing around those figures, decided to test

the wood strength of—you guessed it—Baby Jesus. When our daughter rescued the figure and the manger, the damage had already been done, and both were badly mangled. I still remember the last sentence of Hannah's report on the phone: "Well, the crib and Jesus now look more authentic."

She got it right. Jesus, lying in a mangled crib—that's more authentic. That's the real story.



Bible Treasure:

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”

(1 John 4:9, 10, NIV).

With all the wonderful Christmas songs, candle lighting, gifts, and food we’ve just enjoyed—we may have overlooked this part of the story. But it is this side of the story that tells me (not just the world) that I am loved, that I have value, and that God has a way—for me.

Jesus chose to be born in a peasant’s family, living a life of hardship. He did it because He loves us in spite of our sin that we so carefully try to hide. The

broken and mangled Baby Jesus is a powerful reminder of what the gospel is all about. It’s real good news that has the power to transform lives. And it’s an invitation to let God fix the real problems we have.

Let’s remember this part of the story as we start a new year! ©

This first appeared in *KidsView*, January 2012.

Think About It

What are some things you want Jesus to help you with this year?



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