

Seventh-day Adventists
BELIEVE

A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrine



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A WORD ABOUT THE FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

THROUGH THE YEARS, SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS have been reluctant to formalize a creed, in the usual sense of that term. However, from time to time, for practical purposes, we have found it necessary to summarize our beliefs in an organized structure.

In 1872 the Adventist press at Battle Creek published a “synopsis of our faith” in 25 propositions. This document, slightly revised and expanded to 28 sections, appeared in the denominational *Yearbook* of 1889 and was inserted again in the years 1905–1914. Later, in response to an appeal from church leaders in Africa for “a statement which would help government officials and others to a better understanding of our work,” a committee of four, including the president of the General Conference, prepared a statement encompassing “the principal features” of belief as they may be summarized. This statement of 22 fundamental beliefs, first printed in the 1931 *Yearbook*, stood until the 1980 General Conference session replaced it with a similar but more comprehensive summary in 27 paragraphs, published under the title “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.”

Even in publishing that 1980 summary, the church took steps to assure that it would not come to be viewed as an unchangeable creed. The statement of fundamental beliefs preamble reads:

“Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.”

Such an expansion and revision occurred at the 2005 session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in St. Louis, Missouri, USA, when an additional fundamental belief was voted, not to add new or previously unknown material, but to express better the church’s understanding of God’s power to give victorious life over the powers of evil to believers in Jesus Christ (see chapter 11).

This present volume is based on these short summary statements, which appear at the beginning of each chapter. Our aim in this book is to present for our members, friends, and other interested individuals—in an expanded, readable, and practical manner—these doctrinal convictions and their significance for Adventist Christians in today’s society. Although this volume is not an officially voted statement (only the summary statements have been officially voted by the General Conference in session), it may be viewed as a theological exposition, representative of “the truth as it is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21) that Seventh-day Adventists around the globe cherish and proclaim.

We gratefully acknowledge the vision of former General Conference president Neal C. Wilson, and other denominational officers, who originally authorized and encouraged the Ministerial Association to undertake preparation of this volume’s first edition in 1988 in order to furnish reliable information on the beliefs of our church. The current 2018 (third) edition reflects the updating of the 28 fundamental beliefs as voted by the 2015 world session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, convened at San Antonio, Texas, USA. The new edition includes some textual revision, smoothening of language, and clarifications in the flow of expressions. We acknowledge several scholars and technicians who provided the manuscript for the first two editions, and the current revision: P. G. Damsteegt, Norman Gulley, Laurel Damsteegt, John M. Fowler, Mary Louise McDowell, David Jarnes, Kenneth Wade, Alfredo Garcia-Marenko, and the Ministerial Association secretaries, James A. Cress, W. Floyd Bresee, and Jerry Page. A select committee of 194 individuals from all of the church’s world divisions plus a smaller editorial committee of leaders, theologians, and pastors gave additional supervision to the preparation of this book. Jonas Arrais, associate Ministerial Association secretary, piloted the current edition. We also acknowledge the valuable assistance rendered by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference in reviewing the content of this volume.

Finally, special tribute should be paid to J. Robert Spangler, former Ministerial Association secretary and longtime editor of *Ministry* magazine, who initiated the concept and funding for the original project.

We pray that as you consider each of these fundamental beliefs, you will clearly see Jesus and His plan of abundance for your personal life.

Ministerial Association
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
March 1, 2018

TO THE READERS OF THIS BOOK...

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ABOUT GOD? Who is He? What does He expect of us? What is He really like?

God told Moses that no human could see His face and live. But Jesus told Philip that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father (John 14:9). Since He walked among us—indeed, became one of us—we are able to perceive who God is and what He is like.

We have written this exposition of our major beliefs to reveal how Seventh-day Adventists perceive God. This is what we believe about His love, kindness, mercy, grace, justice, benevolence, purity, righteousness, and peace. Through Jesus Christ we see God benevolently holding children on His lap. We see Him weeping as He shares the sorrow of the mourners at the tomb of Lazarus. We see His love as He cries, “Forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

We have written this book to share our vision of Christ—a vision that finds its focus at Calvary, where “mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10). At Calvary He became sin for us—He who knew no sin—“that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

We have written this book believing that every doctrine, every belief, must reveal the love of our Lord. Here is a Person with an unconditional love and commitment unparalleled in human history. Recognizing that He who is the incarnation of truth is infinite, we humbly confess that there is still much truth to be discovered.

We have written this book conscious of our indebtedness to the rich biblical truths we have received from the Christian church of history. We acknowledge the noble line of witnesses—such as Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Tyndale, Calvin, Knox, and Wesley—whose advance into new light led the church forward to a fuller understanding of God’s character. And that understanding is ever progressive. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18, KJV). Yet as we find new facets of God’s revelation, they will harmonize perfectly with the united testimony of the Scriptures.

We have written this book with the guidance of a clear directive continually reminding us that “if you search the Scriptures to vindicate your own opinions, you will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says. If conviction comes as you search, if you see

that your cherished opinions are not in harmony with the truth, do not misinterpret the truth in order to suit your own belief, but accept the light given. Open mind and heart that you may behold wondrous things out of God's Word" (Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1900], p. 112).

We have not written this book to serve as a creed—a statement of beliefs set in theological concrete. Adventists have but one creed: "The Bible, and the Bible alone."

We have not written this book to satisfy curiosity. This is not a speculative work—unless one considers the Bible to be that! Rather, it is a thorough, biblically based, Christ-centered exposition of what we believe. And the beliefs expressed are not the product of a studious afternoon; they represent more than 150 years of prayer, study, prayer, reflection, prayer. . . . In other words, they are the product of Adventist growth "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

We have written this book aware that some will ask if doctrine is really important in an age that finds itself struggling to survive the threat of nuclear annihilation, an age preoccupied with the explosive growth of technology, an age in which Christian endeavor tries vainly to press back the brooding specters of poverty, hunger, injustice, and ignorance.

We have written this book with the deep conviction that all doctrines, when properly understood, center on Him—the Way, the Truth, and the Life—and are extremely important. Doctrines define the character of the God we serve. They interpret events, both past and present, establishing a sense of place and purpose in the cosmos. They describe the objectives of God as He acts. Doctrines are a guide for Christians, giving stability in what otherwise would be unbalancing experiences, injecting certainty into a society that denies absolutes. Doctrines feed the human intellect and establish goals that inspire Christians and motivate them with concern for other persons.

We have written this book to lead Adventist believers into a deeper relationship with Christ through a study of the Bible. Knowing Him and His will is vitally important in this age of deception, doctrinal pluralism, and apathy. Such a knowledge is the Christian's only safeguard against those who, "like savage wolves," will come speaking perverse things in order to subvert the truth and destroy the faith of God's people (see Acts 20:29, 30). Especially in these last days, to keep from being "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men" (Eph. 4:14), all must have a right concept of God's character, government, and pur-

poses. Only those who have fortified their minds with the truth of the Scriptures will be able to stand in the final conflict.

We have written this book to assist those who are interested in knowing why we believe what we believe. This study, written by Adventists themselves, is not just window dressing. Carefully researched, it represents an authentic exposition of Adventist beliefs.

Finally, we have written this book recognizing that Christ-centered doctrine performs three obvious functions: first, it edifies the church; second, it preserves the truth; and third, it communicates the gospel in all its richness.

True doctrine calls for far more than mere belief—it calls for action. Through the Holy Spirit, Christian beliefs become loving deeds. A true knowledge of God, His Son, and the Holy Spirit is “saving knowledge.” That is the theme of this book.—Editors.

Chapter 1

THE WORD OF GOD

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)

NO BOOK HAS BEEN SO LOVED, so revered, as the Bible. It has inspired the greatest, noblest acts in human history. The Bible's uniqueness does not come from its unparalleled political, cultural, and social influence, but from its source and its subject matter. It is God's revelation of the unique God-man: the Son of God, Jesus Christ—the Savior of the world.

DIVINE REVELATION

Throughout history, while some have questioned God's existence, many have confidently testified that He exists and that He has disclosed Himself. In what ways has God revealed Himself, and how does the Bible function in His revelation?

General Revelation. The insight into God's character that history, human behavior, conscience, and nature provide is frequently called "general revelation" because it is available to all and appeals to reason.

For millions, "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). The sunshine, rain, hills, and streams all testify of a loving Creator. "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

Others see evidence of a caring God in the happy relationships and extraordinary love between friends, family members, husband and wife, parents and children. "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you" (Isa. 66:13). "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him" (Ps. 103:13).

Yet the same sunshine that testifies of a loving Creator can turn the earth into a parched desert, bringing starvation. The same rain can turn into a rushing flood that drowns families; the same lofty hill can crack, crumble—and then crush. And human relationships often involve jealousy, envy, anger, and even hatred that leads to murder. The world around us gives mixed signals, presenting more questions than it answers. It reveals a conflict between good and evil but does not explain how and why the conflict started, who is fighting, why, or who will ultimately win.

Special Revelation. Sin obscures God’s self-revelation through creation by limiting our ability to interpret God’s testimony. In love God gave a special revelation of Himself to help us get answers to the great and perplexing questions of life. Through both the Old and New Testaments He disclosed Himself to us in a specific way, leaving no questions about His character of love. At first His revelation came through prophets; then His ultimate revelation, through the person of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1, 2).

The Bible declares the truth about God and reveals Him as a person. Both areas of revelation are necessary: We need to know God through Jesus Christ (John 17:3), as well as “the truth that is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21, NIV). And by means of the Scriptures God breaks through our mental, mortal, and spiritual limitations, communicating His eagerness to save us.

THE FOCUS OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Bible reveals God and exposes humanity. It exposes our predicament and reveals His solution. It presents us as lost, estranged from God, and reveals Jesus as the one who finds us and brings us back to God.

Jesus Christ is the focus of Scripture. The Old Testament sets forth the Son of God as the Messiah, the world’s Redeemer; the New Testament reveals Him as Jesus Christ, the Savior. Every book, either through symbol or reality, reveals some phase of His work and character. Jesus’ death on the cross is the ultimate revelation of God’s character.

The cross makes this ultimate revelation because it brings together two extremes: humanity’s unfathomable evil and God’s inexhaustible love. What could give us greater insight into human fallibility? What could better reveal sin? The cross reveals a God who allowed His only Son to die for humanity’s sin. What a sacrifice! What greater revelation of love could He have made? Indeed, the focus of the Bible is Jesus Christ. He is at the center stage of the cosmic drama. Soon His triumph at Calvary will culminate in the elimination of evil. Human beings and God will be reunited.

The theme of God's love, particularly as seen in Christ's sacrificial death on the cross—the grandest truth of the universe—is the focus of the Bible. All major Bible truths, therefore, should be studied from this perspective.

AUTHORSHIP OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Bible's authority for faith and practice rises from its origin. Its writers viewed the Bible as distinct from other literature. They referred to it as "Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2), "sacred writings" (2 Tim. 3:15, RSV), and the "oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12).

The uniqueness of the Scriptures is based on their origin and source. The Bible writers claimed they did not originate their messages but received them from divine sources. It was through divine revelation that they were able to "see" the truths they passed on (see Isa. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Jer. 38:21).

These writers pointed to the Holy Spirit as the one who communicated through the prophets to the people (Neh. 9:30; cf. Zech. 7:12). David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). Ezekiel wrote, "the Spirit entered me," "the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me," "the Spirit took me up" (Eze. 2:2; 11:5, 24). And Micah testified, "I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord" (Micah 3:8).

The New Testament recognized the role of the Holy Spirit in the production of the Old Testament. Jesus said that David was inspired by the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36). Paul believed that the Holy Spirit spoke "through Isaiah" (Acts 28:25). Peter revealed that the Holy Spirit guided all the prophets, not just a few (1 Peter 1:10, 11; 2 Peter 1:21). At times the writer faded completely into the background, and only the real author—the Holy Spirit—was acknowledged: "The Holy Spirit says . . ." "By this the Holy Spirit indicates . . ." (Heb. 3:7; 9:8, RSV).

The New Testament writers recognized the Holy Spirit as the source of their own messages also. Paul explained, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith" (1 Tim. 4:1). John spoke of being "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). And Jesus commissioned His apostles through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2; cf. Eph. 3:3–5).

So God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, has revealed Himself through the Holy Scriptures. God wrote them, not with His hands, but with other hands—about 40 pairs—over a period of more than 1,500 years. And since God the Holy Spirit inspired the writers, God, then, is its author.

INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

“All Scripture,” Paul says, “is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Greek word *theopneustos*, translated as “inspiration,” literally means, “God-breathed.” God “breathed” truth into the minds of humans that He chose. They, in turn, expressed it in the words found in the Scriptures. Inspiration, therefore, is the process through which God communicates His eternal truth.

The Process of Inspiration. Divine revelation was given by inspiration of God to “holy men of God” who were “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). These revelations were embodied in human language with all its limitations and imperfections, yet they remained God’s testimony. God inspired men—not words.

Were the prophets as passive as tape recorders that replay exactly what is recorded? In some instances writers were commanded to express the exact words of God, but in most cases God instructed them to write what they saw or heard. In these latter cases, the writers used their own language, patterns, and style.

Paul observed that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (1 Cor. 14:32). Genuine inspiration does not obliterate the prophet’s individuality, reason, integrity, or personality. To some degree, Moses’ relationship with Aaron illustrates the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the writer. God said to Moses, “I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet” (Ex. 7:1; cf. Ex. 4:15, 16). Moses informed Aaron of God’s messages, and, in turn, Aaron communicated them in his own vocabulary and style to Pharaoh. Likewise, Bible writers conveyed divine commands, thoughts, and ideas in their own style of language. It is because God communicates in this way that the vocabulary of the different books of the Bible varies, and reflects the education and culture of the writers.

The Bible “is not God’s mode of thought and expression. . . . 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.”¹ “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 and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”²

In one instance we have God speaking and writing the exact words, the Ten Commandments. They are of divine, not human composition

(Ex. 20:1-17; 31:18; Deut. 10:4, 5), yet even these had to be expressed within the limits of human language.

The Bible, then, is divine truth expressed in human language. Imagine trying to teach quantum physics to a baby. Such is the type of problem God faces in His attempt to communicate divine truths to sinful, limited humanity. It is our limitations that restrict what God can communicate to us.

Observe the parallel that exists between the incarnate Jesus and the Bible. Jesus is both God and man, the divine and the human in one. So is the Bible: the divine and human combined. As it was said of Christ, so it can be affirmed of the Bible, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This divine-human combination makes the Bible unique among literary works.

Inspiration and the Writers. The Holy Spirit prepared certain persons to communicate divine truth. The Bible does not explain in detail how He qualified these individuals, but in some way He formed a union between the divine and the human agent.

Those who had a part in writing the Bible were not chosen because of natural talents. Nor did divine revelation necessarily convert the person or assure him of eternal life. Balaam proclaimed a divine message under inspiration while acting contrary to God’s counsels (Num. 22-24). David, who was used by the Holy Spirit, committed great crimes (cf. Ps. 51). All the writers of the Bible were humans with sinful natures, needing God’s grace daily (cf. Rom. 3:12).

The inspiration the biblical writers experienced was more than illumination or divine guidance, for these come to all who seek truth. In fact, the biblical writers sometimes wrote without fully understanding the divine message they communicated (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The writers’ responses to the messages they bore were not uniform. Daniel and John said they were greatly perplexed over their writings (Dan. 8:27; Rev. 5:4), and 1 Peter 1:10 indicates that other writers searched for the meaning of their messages or those of others. Sometimes these individuals feared to proclaim an inspired message, and some even debated with God (Hab. 1; Jonah 1:1-3; 4:1-11).

The Method and Content of Revelation. Frequently the Holy Spirit communicated divine knowledge by means of visions and dreams (Num. 12:6). Sometimes He spoke audibly or to the inner senses. God spoke to Samuel “in his ear” (1 Sam. 9:15). Zechariah received symbolic representations with explanations (Zech. 4). The visions of heaven that Paul and John received were accompanied by oral instructions (2 Cor. 12:1-4; Rev. 4; 5). Ezekiel observed events transpiring in another location

(Eze. 8). Some writers participated in their visions, performing certain functions as part of the vision itself (Rev. 10).

As to contents, to some the Spirit revealed events yet to occur (Dan. 2; 7; 8; 12). Other writers recorded historical events, either on the basis of personal experience or through selecting materials from existing historical records (Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles., the Gospels, Acts).

Inspiration and History. The biblical assertion that “all Scripture is inspired by God” or “God-breathed,” profitable, and authoritative for moral and spiritual living (2 Tim. 3:15, 16, RSV; NIV) leaves no question about divine guidance in the selection process. Whether the information came from personal observation, oral or written sources, or direct revelation, it all came to the writer through the Holy Spirit’s guidance. This guarantees the Bible’s trustworthiness.

The Bible reveals God’s plan in His dynamic interaction with the human race, not in a collection of abstract doctrines. His self-revelation stands rooted in real events that occurred in a definite time and place. The reliability of the historical accounts is extremely important because they form the framework of our understanding of God’s character and His purpose for us. An accurate understanding leads to eternal life, but an incorrect view leads to confusion and death.

God commanded certain individuals to write a history of His dealings with Israel. These historical narratives, written from a viewpoint different from that of secular history, comprise an important part of the Bible (cf. Num. 33:1, 2; Joshua 24:25, 26; Eze. 24:2). They provide us with accurate, objective history, from a divine perspective. The Holy Spirit gave the writers special insights so that they could record events in the controversy between good and evil, which demonstrate the character of God and guide people in their quest for salvation.

These historical incidents are “types” or “examples” “written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11). Paul adds, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4, NIV). The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah serves as “an example” or warning (2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7). Abraham’s experience of justification is an example for every believer (Rom. 4:1–25; James 2:14–22). Even Old Testament civil laws, filled with deep spiritual meaning, are written for our benefit today (1 Cor. 9:8, 9).

Luke mentions that he wrote his Gospel because he wanted to give an account of Jesus’ life, “that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed” (Luke 1:4). John’s criterion for selecting

which incidents of Jesus' life to include in his Gospel was "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). God led the Bible writers to present history in a way that would guide us to salvation.

The biographies of biblical personalities provide another evidence of divine inspiration. These accounts carefully delineate both the weaknesses and strengths of their characters. They faithfully depict their sins, as well as successes.

No cover-up shrouds Noah's lack of self-control or Abraham's deception. The fits of temper that Moses, Paul, James, and John exhibited are recorded.

Bible history exposes the failures of Israel's wisest king and the frailties of the 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles. Scripture makes no excuse for them, nor does it attempt to minimize their guilt. It portrays them all for what they were and what they became or failed to become by the grace of God. Without divine inspiration no biographer could write such a perceptive analysis.

The Bible's writers viewed all the historical narratives it contains as true historical records, not as myths or symbols. Many contemporary skeptics reject the stories of Adam and Eve, Jonah, and the Flood. Yet Jesus accepted them as historically accurate and spiritually relevant (Matt. 12:39-41; 19:4-6; 24:37-39).

The Bible does not teach partial inspiration or degrees of inspiration. These theories are speculations that rob the Bible of its divine authority.

The Accuracy of the Scriptures. Just as Jesus "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), so, in order for us to understand truth, the Bible was given in the language of humanity. The inspiration of the Scriptures guarantees their trustworthiness.

How far did God safeguard the transmission of the text beyond assuring that its message is valid and true? It is clear that while the ancient manuscripts vary, the essential truths have been preserved.³ While it is quite possible that copyists and translators of the Bible made minor mistakes, evidence from biblical archaeology reveals that many alleged errors were really misunderstandings on the part of scholars. Some of these problems arose because people were reading biblical history and customs through Western eyes. We must admit that humans know only in part—their insight into divine operations remains fragmentary.

Perceived discrepancies, then, should not erode confidence in the Scriptures; they often are products of our inaccurate perceptions rather than actual mistakes. Is God on trial when we come across a sentence or text that we cannot fully understand? We may never be able to explain

every text in Scripture, but we do not have to. Fulfilled prophecies verify the Scripture's reliability.

In spite of attempts to destroy it, the Bible has been preserved with amazing, even miraculous, accuracy. Comparison of the Dead Sea scrolls with later manuscripts of the Old Testament demonstrates the carefulness with which it has been transmitted.⁴ They confirm the trustworthiness and reliability of the Scriptures as the infallible revelation of God's will.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Scriptures have divine authority because in them God speaks through the Holy Spirit. Thus the Bible is the written evidence for the Word of God. Where is the evidence for this claim, and what are implications for our lives and our pursuit of knowledge?

The Claims of the Scriptures. The Bible writers testify that their messages come directly from God. It is "the word of the Lord" that came to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and others (Jer. 1:1, 2, 9; Eze. 1:3; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1). As messengers of the Lord (Haggai 1:13; 2 Chron. 36:16), God's prophets were commanded to speak in His name, saying, "Thus says the Lord" (Eze. 2:4; cf. Isa. 7:7) His words constitute their divine credentials and authority.

At times the human agent God is using recedes into the background. Matthew alludes to the authority behind the Old Testament prophet he quotes with the words "all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (Matt. 1:22). He sees the Lord as the direct agency, the authority; the prophet is the indirect agency.

Peter classifies Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Peter 3:15, 16). And Paul testifies regarding what he wrote, "I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12, RSV). New Testament writers accepted the words of Christ as Scripture and regarded them as having the same authority as the Old Testament writings (1 Tim. 5:18; Luke 10:7).

Jesus and the Authority of Scripture. Throughout His ministry, Jesus stressed the authority of the Scriptures. When tempted by Satan or battling His opponents, "It is written" was His defense and offense (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 20:17). "Man shall not live by bread alone," He said, "but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). When asked how one could enter into eternal life, He answered, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" (Luke 10:26).

Jesus placed the Bible above human traditions and opinions. He re-

buked the Jews for setting aside the authority of the Scriptures (Mark 7:7-9) and appealed to them to study the Scriptures more carefully, saying, "Haven't you ever read what the Scriptures say?" (Matt. 21:42, TEV; cf. Mark 12:10, 26).

He strongly believed in the authority of the prophetic word and revealed that it pointed to Himself. The Scriptures, He said, "testify of me." "If you believe Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (John 5:39, 46). Jesus' most convincing assertion that He had a divine mission issued from His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 24:25-27).

So without reservation Christ accepted the Holy Scriptures as the authoritative revelation of God's will for the human race. He saw the Scriptures as a body of truth, an objective revelation, given to lead humanity out of the darkness of faulty traditions and myths into the true light of a saving knowledge.

The Holy Spirit and the Authority of Scripture. During Jesus' life the religious leaders and the careless crowd did not discern His true identity. Some felt He was a prophet like John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah—merely a man. When Peter confessed that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus pointed out that it was divine illumination that made possible his confession (Matt. 16:13-17). Paul emphasizes this truth: "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

So it is with the written Word of God. Without the Holy Spirit's illumination of our minds we could never correctly understand the Bible or even acknowledge it as God's authoritative will.⁵ Because "no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11), it follows that "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Consequently, "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Cor. 1:18).

Only with the aid of the Holy Spirit, who searches "the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10), can one become convicted of the authority of the Bible as a revelation of God and His will. It is then that the cross becomes "the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18) and one can join Paul's testimony, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

The Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit can never be separated. The Holy Spirit is both the author and the revealer of biblical truth.

The Scriptures' authority in our lives increases or decreases in accord with our concept of inspiration. If we perceive the Bible as being merely

a collection of human testimonies or if the authority we grant it in some way depends on how it moves our feelings or emotions, we sap its authority in our lives. But when we discern God's voice speaking through the writers, no matter how weak and human they may have been, the Scriptures become the absolute authority in matters of doctrine, re-proof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).

The Scope of Scriptural Authority. Contradictions between Scripture and science are frequently the result of speculation. When we cannot harmonize science with Scripture, it is because we have "an imperfect comprehension of either science or revelation . . . but rightly understood, they are in perfect harmony."⁶

All human wisdom must be subject to the authority of Scripture. The Bible truths are the norm by which all other ideas must be tested. Judging the Word of God by finite human standards is like trying to measure the distance to the stars with a yardstick. The Bible must not be subjected to human norms. It is superior to all human wisdom and writings. Rather than our judging the Bible, all will be judged by it, for it is the standard of character and test of all experience and thought.

Finally, the Scriptures retain authority even over the gifts that come from the Holy Spirit, including guidance through the gift of prophecy or speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12; 14:1; Eph. 4:7-16). The gifts of the Spirit do not supersede the Bible; indeed, they must be tested by the Bible, and, if not in accord with it, they must be discarded as not genuine. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). (See chapter 18 of this book.)

THE UNITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

A superficial reading of the Scriptures will yield a superficial understanding of it. Read in such a way, the Bible may appear to be a jumble of stories, sermons, and history. Yet those open to the illumination of the Spirit of God, those willing to search for the hidden truths with patience and much prayer, will discover that the Bible evidences an underlying unity in what it teaches about the principles of salvation. The Bible is not monotonously uniform. Rather, it comprises a rich and colorful diversity of harmonious testimonies of rare and distinct beauty. And because of its variety of perspectives it is better able to meet human needs through all times.

God has not revealed Himself to humanity in a continuous chain of unbroken utterances, but little by little, through successive generations. Whether penned by Moses in a Midian field or Paul in a Roman prison,

its books reveal the same Spirit-inspired communication. An understanding of this “progressive revelation” contributes to an understanding of the Bible and its unity.

Though written generations apart, the truths of the Old and New Testaments remain inseparable; they do not contradict each other. The two testaments are one, as God is one. The Old Testament, through prophecies and symbols, reveals the gospel of the Savior to come; the New Testament, through the life of Jesus, reveals the Savior who came—the gospel in reality. Both reveal the same God. The Old Testament serves as foundation for the New. It provides the key to unlock the New, while the New explains the mysteries of the Old.

God graciously calls us to become acquainted with Him by searching His Word. In it we can find the rich blessing of the assurance of our salvation. We can discover for ourselves that the Scriptures are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Through them we “may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. God has revealed Himself in general and specific revelations. Explain with examples what this means.
2. What is the meaning of “inspiration”? How did inspiration work in the communication of divine truth?
3. Why were the Scriptures given? How do you know that the Bible is the sure Word of God?
4. What authority does Scripture have on human life and destiny? What did Jesus say about the authority of the Scriptures? How is scriptural authority related to the Holy Spirit’s function?
5. Although the completion of the Bible took more than 1,500 years and some 40 writers, and it deals with various fields such as theology, law, prophecy, history, biography, songs, stories, letters, etc., it is one in unity, message, and purpose. How do you explain such a phenomenon?

NOTES

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958, 1980), book 1, p. 21.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 For a reason for some variant readings, see Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945), pp. 220, 221.
- 4 See Siegfried H. Horn, *The Spade Confirms the Book*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980).
- 5 For the general Seventh-day Adventist understanding of biblical interpretation, see General Conference Committee, Report of the General Conference Committee Annual Council, Oct. 12, 1986, "Methods of Bible Study," distributed by the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. See also *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. G. M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1974); Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1980). Cf. P. Gerard Damsteegt, "Interpreting the Bible" (paper prepared for the Far Eastern Division Biblical Research Committee Meeting, Singapore, May 1986).
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1890, 1958), p. 114.