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Our title poses a very great question indeed. Let's restate it slightly to ask, Who's in charge of my life, my destiny? Before answering, be careful to think through all implications. Your response to this question may expose your willingness—or reluctance—to accept the authority of God as manifested in the two primary mechanisms He has chosen, in His infinite wisdom, to guide His true followers into His ark of safety. A rejection of either mechanism ultimately imperils one's eternal standing with Heaven. Please read on.

According to the most current list of fundamental beliefs held in common by the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide, two of those beliefs bear upon this matter of authority. In the next two paragraphs we render the exact wording of the beliefs, adding italics to spotlight our emphasis in the present instance.

**The Word of God.** The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history.

**The Gift of Prophecy.** One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.

Do you accept these two statements without reservation? I sincerely hope so. Anything less than full acceptance could leave you open to any number of false doctrines, with possible loss of eternal life. That's a very sobering consideration. In His loving wisdom and tender mercy, God has placed this double hedge about us for our own good. Wandering outside the borders of His authority, as once happened in a certain Edenic garden of old, is an action fraught with the highest danger.

So please, dear reader, whatever you do, stay with the ark. The seas may get rough at times, but God's great ship is going through. I have watched close personal Adventist friends get caught up in the confusing maelstrom of what the Bible terms "every wind of doctrine," and have been made sick at heart to witness the result: their "ears . . . turned unto fables." Never forget that God's archenemy is alive and well, and he lives right here on planet Earth. But we can and must disappoint the deceiver, achieving each successive victory in the strength of Jesus Christ.

**Singed but Not Burnt**
Once upon a time, a 22-year-old Vietnam veteran returned to his fatherland jaded, cocky, and ready to complete an interrupted higher education in a public university at a time when he was now three years older, and presumably more mature, than most of his fellow students. During his military service he had already cast aside all the effects of a boyhood Christian upbringing. Thus deprived of any anchor, he was completely unprepared for what was about to threaten to bury any semblance of a spiritual life forever.

As supplemental reading for the second of a two-part required course called Western Institutions, this young man’s history professor recommended in the course syllabus two books: Charles Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle* and Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason*. The doubt created in the student’s mind by reading the first book gave way to outright skepticism upon reading the second. After reflecting upon Paine’s treatise, this young fellow promptly announced to his newlywed bride that he had now espoused Deism, just like Paine, and that here was a philosophy that seemed intellectually satisfying.

But, thanks be to God, the juvenescent bride promptly rejected any such notion as so much rubbish, and refused to go along with such a harebrained idea. Yes, dear friends, that young woman, my wife Penny, had a head on her own shoulders and knew how to use it!

For my own part, I abandoned all hope of discovering any true religion, and thus stopped seeking such for a full 10 years—that is, until this same young woman unwittingly turned my attention to the investigation of Bible prophecy as a verifiable means of determining whether Christianity might constitute the only true religion. That’s a story we don’t have room to tell here, although it appears in a recent *Adventist Review* (“My Search for Truth,” April 13, 2006, pages 27-29).

Let us now fast-forward in our story to reach the point where, as a brand-new Adventist, I began to undertake an earnest study of the entire Spirit of Prophecy library. I soon encountered some passages that rendered me absolutely thunderstruck. "The youth of today will be likely to meet skeptics and infidels wherever they may go, and how necessary that they be equipped, so that they may be able to give a reason of their hope with meekness and fear. Thomas Paine has passed into his grave, but his works live to curse the world, and those who doubt the truth of God’s Word will place these infidel productions in the hands of the young and inexperienced, to fill their hearts with the poisonous atmosphere of doubt. The spirit of Satan works through wicked men to carry on his schemes for the ruin of souls” (*Messages to Young People*, p. 85). Evidently God sees a qualitative, significant difference between a Deist and an infidel!

Friends, if I hadn’t already become a convicted Seventh-day Adventist shortly before discovering such passages, they would have been sufficient to confirm forever my belief in the validity of the gift of the Spirit of Prophecy. At this precise moment in my life God certainly had my attention, for these words exactly described my very own life experience. The Lord’s modern-day prophetess registered other pointed comments about Mr. Paine, two of which follow.

"Satan is now doing, through individuals like Thomas Paine, what he has been trying to do since his fall. He is, through his power and lying wonders, tearing away the foundation of the Christian’s hope, and putting out the sun that is to light the narrow way to Heaven. He is making the world believe that the Bible is uninspired, no better than a storybook, while he holds out something to take its place; namely, spiritual manifestations" (*Early Writings*, p. 265).

"Now [a certain brother Torr] has changed. He did not take up his duties. He did not follow the light. He seemed to enjoy the suggestions and statements of [certain weak, contemptible] tracts, and sent them everywhere. Next he was without an anchor, and he began to read Tom Paine and has come out an infidel. He says there is no personal Devil—no pre-existence of Christ, no prayer is called for. He is sowing his seeds of death . . . (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, pp. 64, 65).

So you see, it makes all the difference in the world, not only what we read, but also whom we accept as authority over our lives. My 10-year sidetrack nearly derailed my spiritual life forever—at the very least it retarded all spiritual progress. In sum, I got singed, and very nearly burnt.

It matters very much, as we said at the outset, whose authority we accept over our lives. In this and the next issue of *Adventists Affirm* we explore the great dual theme of the authority both of Scripture and of the Spirit of Prophecy for today’s believer. We have been blessed to assemble a very fine group of
contributing authors to explore this theme from several angles. We believe you will be both AFFIRMed and blessed as you read and reflect on the articles herein. We wish to extend sincerest thanks to each one of this issue’s authors. Borrowing the immortal words of Charles Dickens’s Tiny Tim Cratchit, we say in all humility and gratitude, God bless us, every one!
It is not difficult to make the case that the Bible is the single most important book ever written. Even if one denies its extraordinary claim to be "inspired" by God, the Bible’s remarkable influence on law, government, literature, morality, art, science, philosophy, and society is without peer on the vast landscape of recorded human history. If one accepts the Bible’s claim to be inspired, as I do, then its importance and uniqueness is so far-reaching as to defy overstatement and embellishment. It follows logically that a book written by God would be the most consequential, significant, and momentous Book ever written.

But is that claim—the claim to be written via "the inspiration of God" (literally, God-breathed)—true? I believe that the answer to this most important of questions is Yes. I have not always believed this. Nearly ten years ago I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour, and the Bible as the unique revelation of God to humanity. Since that time, my studied conviction that the Bible is God’s Word has grown stronger. I have found the Bible to be the voice of God to my soul. You can too!

So how can you be sure that the Bible is, in fact, God’s Word? A compelling, rational, and yet simple case can be made by considering the following three areas: claims, content, and consistency.

The Bible’s Unique Claim

The Bible claims to be the Word of God. Consider the following passage.

And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

Let us note several things. First, Paul here refers to the "Holy Scriptures"and "Scripture" in writing to young Timothy. This demonstrates that the Old Testament Scriptures were a well-defined body of literature. Paul knew that Timothy would know what he was referring to when he said "Scriptures". The importance of this point should not be overlooked.

But the primary reason for noting this passage is found in verse 16. Here we find a remarkable claim that the Bible makes about itself, namely, to be "given by inspiration of God.” The Greek here literally means...
"God-breathed." This is no mean claim! It is a claim that is nearly singular in all literature! Consider, for example, the many millions of books that are to be found at the Library of Congress. How many of them make the claim to be God-breathed?

Another pivotal passage that addresses the Bible's unique claims about itself is found in 2 Peter 1:19-21: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the Day Star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Verse 20 tells us that Scripture is not to be privately interpreted. Verse 21 tells us why: because God gave it. God, then, as its Author, is uniquely qualified to offer the correct interpretation of His Word. There are, in fact, only two kinds of interpretations (the almost staggering number of Bible commentaries notwithstanding): right and wrong. God's interpretation is sure to be the right one. God has set up the Scripture as a systematic and organic whole. The end result of this divine architecture is that Bible is its own best interpreter. The systematic theological consistency of the Bible ensures this. More on this later.

Consider the following illustration: Imagine that you are standing in an art gallery looking at a painting. The painting is a stylistically modern one and contains shapes, colors, and textures in a creative but not perfectly clear arrangement. The people around you begin to wonder out loud what the painting means. "I think the large red triangle represents pain in the world," says one. "The contrasting blue and yellow circles suggest love and sadness," chimes another. Everyone around you seems to have an idea as to what the painting means. But then, at just that moment, the painter walks up! And he begins to tell what the once obscure painting means. Now whose interpretation is sure to be more accurate, the observers' or the painter's?

So it is with the Bible. God is the Author, and thus He is uniquely qualified to be its best Interpreter. He does this through the systematic (and thus self-checking) consistency of the Bible and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Scripture is "of no private interpretation."

A book written by God Himself! Think of it. That would, without controversy, make the Bible the most important book ever written wouldn't it? Of course there is a vast difference between making the claim and demonstrating the truthfulness of that claim. Yet even here we must not miss a critical, but easily overlooked, point: The Bible's unique claim about itself necessarily puts it in a class all its own.

Why? Because extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. The Bible must be placed in an altogether different category from 99.999999% of all other books ever written, simply because it makes such an audacious and ambitious claim. It would need to be subjected to a battery of tests that millions of other books, which do not make such far-reaching claims, would not.

Consider, for example, my claim to be 34 years old. It is unlikely that someone would demand proof for such an ordinary claim. After all, there are millions of people who are 34 years old. But if someone claimed to be able to fly from New York to London by simply flapping his arms rapidly up and down, then it would be altogether normal for others to say, with significant incredulity in their voices, "Prove it!" Again, extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.

So is there extraordinary evidence that supports the Bible's extraordinary claim to be God-breathed? I believe the answer is Yes. Let us consider some of the evidence in the second and third parts of this article: content and consistency.

The Bible's Unique Content

One word: prophecy. Prophecy is a foretelling of events. It has been suggested that a full 30% of the Bible is prophecy. Jesus gave a particularly simple yet salient definition of prophecy in John 14:19. It reads: "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe."

Pretty simple, really. Jesus basically says, "I'll tell you what is going to happen in the future, and when it comes to pass just as I have said, then you will have confidence that what I am telling you is the truth."

This is not difficult logic to follow. And here is why: In order for Jesus to declare the future, He must first know the future. But that, of course, is the rub. Historians tell us of the past. Journalists tell us of the present. But who is able to tell us, with pinpoint accuracy, of the future? Surely not fortunetellers. Or politicians. Or weathermen. Or Nostradamus. Only God could do it.
Consider, for example, Isaiah 46:9, 10: "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure."

In verse 9 God simply says, "I am God and no one else is God." In verse 10 He says, "I’ll prove it: I know the future and I will declare the future." It is difficult to argue with this logic! If any being could consistently, accurately, and perfectly foretell the future without equivocation, then that Being would be, by definition, really, God.

So God puts Himself on trial in the Bible’s predictive prophecies. And the verdict? God is God! Consider just a portion of His prophetic record:

- Daniel 2 accurately foretold more than 2,500 years of human history.
- Daniel 7 accurately foretold the rise of the antichrist power with laserlike precision and detail.
- Daniel 8 accurately foretold the rise of Greece, Medo-Persia, pagan and papal Rome, and the cleansing of the sanctuary.
- Daniel 9 accurately foretold the year of the baptism (A.D. 27), and death (A.D. 31) of God’s Messiah, Jesus Christ, and the giving of the Gospel to the Gentiles (A.D. 34).
- Daniel 11 accurately foretold in staggering particulars the details of the Medo-Persian, Greek, and the pagan and papal phases of Rome.
- Revelation 10 accurately foretold the rise of the great Advent movement.
- Revelation 11 accurately foretold the coming of the French Revolution.
- Revelation 13 accurately foretold the rise and character of the United States of America, and the growth, temporary demise, and resurrection of the modern papacy.
- The numerous Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament that point unmistakably to Jesus of Nazareth are well known and well documented.

Other fulfillments, many of them, could be cited, but the case is more than made by the above-mentioned fulfillments.

The prophetic record is an amazing one indeed. God has compellingly demonstrated, in the pages of Scripture, His ability to accurately and consistently foretell the future well in advance. By way of review, as simple logic necessitates, in order for God to declare the future He must first know the future.

God knows the future. God, in the Bible, has declared the future. This unique content, that is, prophetic content, ably buttresses the Bible's unique claim to be God-breathed. If prophecy is true, then the Bible is true. If the Bible is true—in the most emphatic and profound sense of the word true—then the God of the Bible is, necessarily, the one, true God.

Someone may object, of course, that the prophecies of the Bible are not actually prophetic. "Perhaps," they say, "they are merely coincidental." This objection is easily surmounted. Once a person is familiar with the scope and specificity of the predictive Biblical prophecies, this objection fades nearly immediately. Consider, for example, just the prophecy of Daniel chapter two. God foretold, some 600 years before the time of Christ, the following events/nations:

1. The rise and existence of the Babylonian Empire.
2. The subsequent rise and existence of the Medo-Persian Empire.
3. The subsequent rise and existence of the Grecian empire.
4. The subsequent rise and existence of the Roman Empire.
5. The subsequent division of Rome's far-reaching and incomparably powerful empire into non-adhering factions-turned-nations.
6. The continued, contemporary non-adherence of divided Rome (now, modern Europe).

The only element of this prophecy left to be fulfilled—the seventh—is the setting up of God’s eternal kingdom at the Second Coming of Jesus. Thus, Daniel the prophet accurately foretold more than 2,500 years of human history with clarion and unimpeachable accuracy. The prophecy is so simple and compelling, and yet so accurate, that the modern critic of the Bible is faced with a single option: Deny the 6th-century B.C. authorship of Daniel. But the critic’s objection is itself a frank nod of admission to the prophecy’s accuracy. So accuracy, then, is not the question; the date of authorship is.

Of course, the critic’s objection is based on a naturalistic or higher-critical world view that disallows predictive prophecy by definition. So the objection exists because it has to! For the critic, there is no other option.
It is beyond the scope of this article to address the dating of the authorship of the book of Daniel. Our point is a simpler one: The prophecies are accurate. If one leaves higher critical and skeptical thinking aside, there is little reason to question the traditional dating of Daniel. Daniel was written, the suggestions of some higher critical scholars notwithstanding, some 600 years before the time of Christ.

Another may object that the prophetic fulfillments are merely “coincidental,” but this objection hardly merits a response. Again, the nature of the scope and specificity of the prophecies utterly rules out coincidental fulfillments. They are just too specific and too accurate.

Perhaps the supposed fulfillments are merely the product of a creative interpretation. “That’s just your interpretation,” is a familiar refrain. But this, too, is an inadequate objection for at least three reasons. First, as stated above, the Bible is its own best interpreter, and thus the Bible’s built-in and systematic consistency becomes the winnower of “private” interpretations. Second, the specificity of the prophecies and the corresponding historical fulfillments essentially demand a single interpretation—the right one. Third, the consensus of the church’s interpretation of, for example, Daniel—when the Biblical, historicist principle of prophetic interpretation is employed—is an additional and compelling evidence.

The Bible's prophecies are real. The Bible's prophecies are predictive. The Bible's prophecies are true. The Bible's prophecies are supernatural. The Bible is God's Word.

The logic is not difficult to follow.

The first time I understood Daniel's predictive prophecies, beginning with chapter 2, I was sitting in a coffee shop in Laramie, Wyoming. I was a 23-year-old purple-haired punk rocker who thought he knew everything. I was a 4.0 student at the University of Wyoming, well on my way to becoming a doctor. I was not a Christian, and had very little to no interest in things religious. I was not predisposed to accept blindly religious propaganda. Hardly.

And then I read and understood Daniel's prophecies.

And everything changed. It can for you too!

God’s Spirit, through Daniel’s prophecies, penetrated my heart (and my mind!), and brought me face to face with God and His Word—or perhaps better, brought me face to face with God through His Word.

There are, it should be noted, other important elements of the Bible’s unique content that could be cited. They include, but are not limited to:

- the soul-stirring beauty of the literature itself
- the consistent and virtuous moral framework presented therein
- the incomparably compelling picture of God and of His interaction with the world
- the rich, Providence-laden histories of God’s people
- the uniquely sublime and peerless teachings of Jesus Christ
- the enthralling and morally unimpeachable life of Jesus Christ

So the Bible's extraordinary content—particularly its prophetic content—supports the Bible's extraordinary claim to be God-breathed.

**The Bible's Unique Consistency**

The Bible’s unique consistency strongly suggests its supernatural origin. We will briefly consider four areas of consistency: internal, conservational, cultural, and experiential.

**Internal Consistency**

The word Bible comes from the Greek and Latin biblia, which means “books.” The Bible, in the strictest term of the word, is not a book. Rather it is a collection of books—66 books, to be precise. These books were written over a period of approximately 1,500 years, by nearly 40 authors writing on three continents. The authors came, many of them, from radically different cultural, geographical, personal, vocational, and educational backgrounds.

Yet, the internal consistency of the Bible is so remarkable as to defy naturalistic explanation. Think of it: The Bible writers were addressing the most fundamental, controversial, and significant questions that exist in the entirety of human experience and of recorded human history, namely:
• the nature and character of God
• the origin, nature, meaning, and destiny of mankind
• the world and the nature of reality
• morality
• ultimate destiny and purpose

The authors of the 66 books of the Bible present an unassailably consistent picture, despite their diverse situations, personalities, cultural leanings, educational backgrounds, and time frames. So much so that one can say with a perfectly straight face that the Bible contains no theological or philosophical contradictions. Moses agrees with Matthew, Jeremiah agrees with John, the prophets agree with Paul, etc. The 39 books of the Old Testament are theologically consistent; the 27 books of the New Testament are consistent. And what is more: the two testaments are perfectly consistent—theologically and philosophically—with each other. Both, in fact, find their consummate fulfillment in God’s Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

This unity between the two testaments has been communicated thusly: The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed; the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

The Bible's internal consistency strongly suggests is supernatural origin.

Conservational Consistency
The Bible, that is the text of the Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—has been preserved intact throughout the centuries and millennia despite the nonexistence of technological amenities like computers, hard drives, copy machines, fax machines, CDs, etc.

Since the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947, for example, we can be certain that the Old Testament we have today is fundamentally the same as the Old Testament Jesus would have read. The Jews' meticulously precise preservation of the Old Testament text is well documented and well known by Biblical scholars. While there are variant readings from certain Old Testament manuscripts, consistency, not disharmony, is the rule.

Even before the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, scholars had excellent reasons to believe that the Old Testament had been extraordinarily preserved. The discovery of the scrolls was confirmatory, not revelatory, with regards to the preservation of the Old Testament text.

The New Testament text has also been extraordinarily preserved. There are more than 5,000 extant ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The proportion of agreement of these manuscripts has been estimated at between 97 and 98 percent! Moreover, the two to three percent disparity does not represent anything like theological disparity. The differences are generally very minor and are frequently the product of so-called terms of appellation (e.g., "the Lord Jesus" versus "the Lord Jesus Christ, forever") which have no injurious consequence whatever on the essential meaning of a given text.

The sheer number of Greek manuscripts (to say nothing of the manuscripts written and preserved in other languages) is, by ancient standards, uniquely impressive. One commentator has suggested that "we have more and greater evidence that Jesus of Nazareth lived and spoke these words than we do that William Shakespeare lived and wrote the many plays and sonnets for which he is well known." And Jesus Christ antedated Mr. Shakespeare by some 1,600 years! For more on the preservation and remarkable consistency of the New Testament, the reader is referred to the easy-to-read classic on the subject, The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? by classics scholar F.F. Bruce.

The Bible's remarkably consistent preservation and conservation is without equal in ancient literature. No other ancient volume even begins to approach the number, quality, and consistency of the Biblical manuscripts. For the Christian, this is not really extraordinary at all. After all, if God was the Author—through His penmen, the prophets and the apostles—then it stands to reason that He would also take care of His Book, thus ensuring its continued authority and relevance even for modern man.

The Bible's conservational consistency strongly suggests its supernatural origin.

Cultural Consistency
The Bible has universal cultural appeal. Africans love it! Americans love it! Russians love it! So do Romanians and Jamaicans, and everyone in between. Men love it. Women love it. So do children and the elderly.

The Bible is transculturally popular. It is appreciated, read, and adored in a way that no other book in the
history of humanity has been. It is a classic in any culture and in any language. For example, it is consistently
the best-selling book in the United States. It was the first book (the New Testament portion) ever to be
produced on a printing press. It is arguably the single most popular book in the world. One could wish, of
course, that it were also the most read, studied, and obeyed book in the world!

How does one explain the universal appeal of the Bible? Apart from a supernatural origin, it would be, I think,
difficult to do. It is, after all, an ancient book. How many ancient books does the average modern man or
woman read? Very few indeed! How is it that an ancient book is so perfectly calculated to address the needs of
modern man? How can peoples from radically and fundamentally different cultures find such solace and
meaning in its pages?

The answer, for the Christian believer, is not a difficult one. It’s God’s Book! Of course it is going to have
transcultural popularity and relevance! I have traveled from Australia to Africa and from Sweden to South
Dakota, and have seen thousands listen riveted to the preached Word. There is a transforming, captivating, and
supernatural attraction to the Bible.

The multicultural consistency, multicultural popularity, and multicultural relevancy of the Bible strongly suggest
its supernatural origin.

Experiential Consistency
Cultures are made up of people, of individuals. It follows, then, that if the Bible is culturally relevant and
consistent that it must necessarily be individually relevant and consistent. That is, it must scratch where people
are itching; it must apply to one’s own personal experience. It must be experientially consistent.

Earlier we posed the question: How is it that an ancient book is so perfectly calculated to address the needs of
modern man? This is an important question. And it is easily answered, if one accepts the Christian believer’s
perspective on the nature and origin of the Bible. A book written and individually applied (through the
illumination given by the Holy Spirit) by God is sure to have a supernatural attraction and personal relevance.
The attraction of the Bible is found in the communion that an individual has with God through its pages. It is no
ordinary book. Neither is it dead. Or tame. Paul, the author of Hebrews, in chapter 4, verse 12, says: “For the
Word of God is quick [that is, living], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to
the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and
intents of the heart.”

The Word, according to this verse is:
1. living (as opposed to dead)
2. powerful (as opposed to feeble)
3. sharp (as opposed to jejune)
4. a discerner of the thoughts and intents of one’s own heart

The Bible is alive. It is God’s living, discerning, vivifying, encouraging, rebuking, empowering, humbling, and
awesome Word. It is His book to you, to your soul. If you open your heart and your mind to God and His Word,
He will speak to you—powerfully and personally. The great and sublime truths of Scripture will be applied to
your own case, your own needs, struggles, and situation. God will do this manifestly through the reading of His
Bible—His Book. He will do it for you! Because He loves you and cares for you!

The Bible in this sense is self-authenticating. The proof, as my mother used to say, is in the pudding. God will
give you a personal revelation of Himself (and of yourself) in the pages of the Bible as His inspiring, instructing,
and illuminating Spirit applies them. Some may object to the concept of the Bible being self-authenticating.
“That begs the very question you are trying to answer,” they might say. But this is not the case at all. Notice
that we did not say the only authentication of the Bible is its own self-authentication. It is one authentication
among others, which include, but are not limited to, the Bible’s unique content and consistency.

The Bible’s self-authentication as God’s Word to the world is plainly knowable to those who are willing to hear it.
The evidence of one’s personal experience with God through His Word is one that cannot be gainsaid. He that
has an ear to hear, let him hear “what saith the Lord.” God will not be silent. He will speak to you personally
and powerfully. He will speak in a way that you will know that God is speaking. He will speak to receptors more
important than your ears; He will speak to your heart and your soul.

If you are willing to hear and willing to heed what is said, then you can expect to hear God’s voice in the Bible.
Jesus said: “If any one is willing to do His will, he shall know about the teaching, whether it is from God or
originates with Me” (John 7:17, Weymouth, emphasis mine). Notice the importance of being willing. Second Corinthians 8:12 says that there must “be first a willing mind.”

Are you willing to hear and to heed the voice of God in His Book? If so, then God will give unmistakable evidence that He is real and that He is mighty to save. This evidence will be internally knowable and personally certain. And what is more, it squares soundly with external verifications such as the nature of reality, the origin of the universe and the world, the origin and meaning of life, the centrality of relationships, the destiny of mankind, the enterprises (and limits) of science, the reality of an objective morality, and the record of history, among others.

In short, the Bible is consistent with one’s personal, internal reality and with objective, external reality as well.

The Bible’s experiential consistency strongly suggests its supernatural origin.

Experientially Consistent Versus Experientially Driven: A Critical Distinction

The Bible, properly understood and applied, is consistent with our experience, but it is not to be driven by our experience. Experience driven theology is a dangerous precipice over which many a well-meaning believer has fallen headlong. And it is a morass from which escape is neither easy nor common.

Our experience is important, yes. But we must be careful to make our experience subject to the truths of God’s Word, not the other way around. That is, the Bible becomes the arbiter of one’s experience rather than one’s experience being the arbiter of the Bible.

One of Luther’s closest associates, Philipp Melanchthon, said, “The Bible must be understood grammatically before it can be understood theologically.” That is, we must first know what the words are and what they mean, before we can arrange them into a systematic, theological construct. Melanchthon’s statement could be modified, while still utterly maintaining the thrust and intent, this way: “The Bible must be understood grammatically before it can be understood experientially.” That is, we must be sure that our experience squares with the words; we must not force the words to conform to our experience.

The Bible is experientially consistent, yes. But it is not to be experientially driven.

As I was finishing the writing of this article, I was on a plane flying from Orlando to Detroit. Every seat in the plane was taken. And by the providence of God I ended up sitting next to a Oneness Pentecostal. About halfway through the flight we began to talk about the Bible and the things of God. I could tell he had a chip in his shoulder about something, but I didn’t know at the first what it was. I knew soon enough that it was an emphatic commitment to the oneness of God, as opposed to the triune nature of God. He stated his position vigorously, and even cited a few texts of Scripture (mainly Deuteronomy 6:4).

As providence would have it, I had just finished teaching at an ARISE seminar for 12 hours on the Godhead and the triune nature of God! So the many texts in favor of the Biblical position were absolutely fresh and clear in my mind. God is so good! I took Craig on a whirlwind ride of Biblical texts and evidences for the better part of half hour. I was very polite, and always framed my points as questions rather than declarations. My demeanor was disarming, but each text of Scripture was unmistakably clear and right to the point. He stammered and groped for explanations, but he had none.

Finally, in a burst of frustration he said, “Well, what happens when you’re baptized?!” I knew he wanted me to say that you speak with tongues.

“You believe in your heart that Jesus’ death was your death, and that His life is your life,” I said. He pushed me further: “But then what?” he asked.

“God gives you power to lead a changed life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit and by obedience.”

He became increasingly flustered. “Are you filled with Spirit?” he demanded.

“Yes, by God’s grace I am,” I responded.

“Has God given you the holy utterance, the gift of tongues as evidence of that infilling?” he retorted.

A study on the nature of the gift of tongues ensued. Again, I was very deferential and kind, but allowed the
Bible to speak plainly and unequivocally about this oft-misunderstood topic. He was nearly speechless.

Then in an act of what can only be described as conversational desperation, he said, "I would encourage you to pray for the experience of speaking in tongues; it is such an awesome and powerful experience." Then he described to me in considerable detail what happens in his church when "the Spirit falls." Everything he said centered upon experience, feelings, and emotion. He strongly encouraged me to "pray for this experience."

When he had no answer for a text of the Scripture, he defaulted to his experience. The text was clearly being made subordinate to his experience. This is a recipe for deception if there ever was one. Notice how the apostle Peter subjects his experience to the "more sure word of prophecy" in 2 Peter 1:16-21:

> For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the Excellent Glory, This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from Heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the Day Star arise in your hearts:
>
> Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Peter here recounts his experience on the mount of transfiguration. And what an experience that would have been! Yet notice the language of verse 19 where Peter says that something is "more sure." What is "more sure" than Peter’s amazing experience? In this context, it is the Word of God! Just look at verses 19-21!

The lesson is not difficult to grasp. Experience must not drive our understanding of Scripture. It is consistent with experience—powerfully and personally so!—but it is not to be subordinate to one’s experience, no matter how fun, satisfying, emotional, or powerful that experience may be! I hope my new friend Craig learns this lesson. And soon.

**Conclusion**

The Bible is the most important book ever written. More than this, it is God’s Own book—His Word to the world. This claim is not just far-reaching; it is true. The unique content and unique consistency of the Bible support this truth claim. Finally, and most importantly, the Bible is not just God’s Word to the world—it is God’s Word to you.
Since the dawn of archaeological research in the ancient Near East in 1799,¹ no other discipline has provided more new data and insights on the people, places, and events of the Bible. The scope of archaeology spans the globe and seeks to understand ancient cultures and lifeways through a study of the material remains of the past, impacting both our understanding of origins and ultimately what we have become today. This bridge between who we were and what we have become continues to fascinate thinking individuals around the world with the penetrating questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Today, after the demise of modernism, postmodernism has become the major basis for forming new worldviews.² Although by its very philosophical premise it defies definition, Os Guinness has offered this summary: “Where modernism was a manifesto of human self-confidence and self-congratulation, postmodernism is a confession of modesty, if not despair. There is no truth; only truths. There is no grand reason; only reasons. There is no privileged civilization (or culture, belief, norm and style); only a multiplicity of cultures, beliefs, norms and styles. There is no universal justice; only interests and the competition of interest groups.”³

In the end, writes Oxford theologian Alister McGrath, “this disillusionment with the modernism of the Enlightenment” has led to a philosophy where “the truth is that there is no truth.”⁴ This major premise has led to a radical reinterpretation of the Bible, resulting in a new level of critique on Biblical history. Niels Peter Lemche of the University of Copenhagen writes that genuine “historical recollections of Israel’s early history are not to be found in the Old Testament historical narrative,” therefore “we cannot save the biblical history of early Israel.”⁵ In another recently published collection of essays entitled Can a “History of Israel” Be Written?, Hans M. Barstad concludes: “If historical (verifiable) truth should be our only concern, the history of Israel should not only be very short (written on ten pages or so), but it would also be utterly boring.”⁶ One might dismiss these discussions to the ivory tower of scholarship, and wonder what kind of direct impact it has had on popular thinking. But these reinterpretations have received major headlines in the popular press. One article from U.S. News and World Report is entitled, “The Fight for History.”⁷ According to one popular book available in major bookstores, The Bible Unearthed, by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, the new vision of ancient Israel tells us that “the historical saga contained in the Bible—from Abraham’s encounter with God . . . to the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah—was not a miraculous revelation, but a brilliant product of the human imagination.”⁸ The recent blockbuster thriller The Da Vinci Code, has left millions of people around the world wondering whether the Bible is simply a pious hoax or cover-up. These individuals are faced with major questions that strike at the very core of issues surrounding the reliability of the Bible.⁹ Or as one recent bestseller’s title queries, Is the Bible True?¹⁰ For Christianity, the answers to these questions are essential in its present claim for viability in a rapidly changing world.

William G. Dever, one of America’s foremost Near Eastern archaeologists, addresses these views in a recent book entitled, What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? He writes, “The irony is that the most deadly attack on the Bible and its veracity, in either the historical or the
theological meaning, has come recently not from its traditional enemies—atheists, skeptics, or even those 'Godless Communists' feared by Bible-believing people until recently—but from the Bible’s well-meaning friends.\footnote{11} Archaeology is one of the major disciplines that allows us to defend ourselves against postmodern revisionism as hundreds of archaeologists work every year to uncover the past. Recent discoveries in the past 15 years have given cogent answers backed up by factual evidence against postmodern criticism. In this short essay we will look at a few of these areas.

**People: David and Goliath**

The story of David and Goliath has captured the imagination of Bible students through the ages. It is the story of the faith of an unprotected youth withstanding an armored Philistine champion. It is the story of an Israelite army cowering in the Valley of Elah while the Philistines taunt them and their God. Five stones against iron shields, helmets, and swords. But what is the history behind the story? Were there a Goliath and a David?

In 1992 Philip Davies, professor of Biblical studies at the University of Sheffield, appealing to archaeology, wrote, "The biblical 'empire'of David and Solomon has not the faintest echo in the archaeological record—as yet."\footnote{12} He concluded that David and Solomon were no more historical than King Arthur of the Round Table. But his argument is one from silence. In the view of Davies and other postmodern scholars, the characters and stories of the Bible must have a historical (archaeological) counterpart. "Unless this is done, there can be no real basis for claiming that biblical 'Israel' has any particular relationship to history."\footnote{13} The Bible is guilty until proven innocent.\footnote{14} But such arguments from silence are dangerous in any discipline. In archaeology, with hundreds of archaeologists working in the Middle East today, it can be devastating.

The following year, in July 1993, archaeologists at Tel Dan in northern Israel uncovered a remarkable find. Outside the gate to the city, a basalt stone was found reused in a wall. Upon turning over the stone, a volunteer noticed a written inscription. The excavator and a linguist later published the text, which mentioned a victory by the Aramean King Ben-Hadad who boasts of defeating the "house of David" and the "house of Israel." The inscription is dated on the basis of the writing to 850 B.C.\footnote{15} The significance of the inscription is that it mentions for the first time the name David. It is used here in the context of referring to "the house of David," the dynastic name for Judah also used in the Bible (1 Kings 12:26; 14:8; 2 Kings 17:21). The point is that there is no reason to name a dynasty after someone who did not exist.

As recently as the summer of 2005, an exciting archaeological discovery was made that sheds additional light on the story of David and Goliath. According to the Bible, Goliath came from Gath (1 Samuel 17:4), one of the five cities of the Philistines. Modern excavations at Gath (Tel es-Safi) directed by Aren Maier of Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv, during the 2005 season uncovered a broken piece of pottery with an inscription. According to Dr. Maier in his presentation to the American Schools of Oriental Research in Philadelphia in November 2005, the letters are written in a proto-Canaanite script (in Semitic letters). The letters written without vowels are: ALWT and WLT. However, while the script is Semitic, the language it is written in is Indo-European. The names could thus be constructed as "Wylattes" or "Alyattes." In the hearing of an Israelite it might sound like this: Wylattes/WLT/Goliath. That the names are written in Indo-European in a Semitic script is significant. Indo-European points to an Aegean (Greek) origin, which is the same place that the Bible describes as the origin of the Philistines (Genesis 10:14). Its writing in a Semitic script indicates some adaptation of the language in written form to the local Canaanite environment where the Philistines settled.

Where was this inscription found? As archaeologists uncover the ancient cities layer by layer, they can date artifacts within those layers. This inscription was found below the massive destruction of the city, which archaeologists have identified with the military campaign of Hazael of Syria (2 Kings 12:17). The inscription is thus sealed in a stratigraphic context and can be dated to the tenth to ninth centuries B.C., around 950 B.C., to no later than 880 B.C. The context is important, because it establishes that the name "Goliath" was known at Philistine Gath about 70 years after the event between David and Goliath was recorded in 1 Samuel 17. Dr. Maier, a well-respected archaeologist who is currently director of the Institute of Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University, concludes that while the inscription probably does not name the Biblical Goliath directly, it does point to "a Goliath or rather two Goliath-like names." This affirms that these names were used at Philistine Gath some years after the Bible records the conflict...
between David and Goliath.

**Places/Cities: Hazor, Gezer, and the United Monarchy**

According to 1 Kings 9:15, 16, Solomon refortified the cities of Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, and Jerusalem. What is the archaeological evidence of this refortification? In the 1950s when archaeologists were working at Hazor, they uncovered a monumental gate that dated to the time of Solomon. Yigael Yadin, the excavator from Hebrew University, predicted that similar gates would be found at the other sites mentioned in the Biblical text. His hypothesis was confirmed. In the late 1960s, excavations at Gezer revealed a gate with the same architecture, and it was dated by archaeologists to the tenth century, the time of Solomon. Texts found at the two sites confirm the identification with Hazor and Gezer. But postmodern scholars began to question this correlation with Solomon’s activities, stating that the gate should be dated later in history.

In 1990, I was privileged to participate in the renewed excavations at Gezer. During that season, working with Professor William G. Dever of the University of Arizona, we uncovered the evidence needed to firmly place the gate in the tenth century. That date has been reconfirmed by new excavations at Gezer in 2006. For the past three summers (2003-2006), Southern Adventist University has been involved with the renewed excavations at Hazor, the largest Old Testament site in Israel. These two sites have produced impressive evidence for the period of Solomon. The gates of these cities and their associated areas produced tenth-century red-slipped and burnished pottery. The architecture of both gates consisted of finely hewn ashlar stones that are reminiscent of the Biblical account’s description of skilled Phoenician workers that were hired by Solomon to complete the work. Today, archaeologists continue to unearth evidence that confirms the Biblical descriptions of the tenth century.

**Polities/Cultures: Canaan and Philistia**

Niels Peter Lemche has boldly stated that Canaan and the Canaanites were not well defined in the second millennium B.C. In his book *The Canaanites and Their Land*, he writes: “Evidently the inhabitants of the supposed Canaanite territory in Western Asia had no clear idea of the actual size of this Canaan, nor did they know exactly where Canaan was situated.” In essence, “the Canaanites of the ancient Near East did not know that they were themselves Canaanites.” Lemche’s conclusions have been challenged, but he has maintained his interpretation of historical sources, which he calls “imprecise” and “ambiguous.”

This revisionist history of Canaan and the Canaanites simply cannot be supported by the archaeological evidence at hand. The term Canaan appears for the first time in ancient Near Eastern texts, and it is from this evidence that most scholars have defined the region. Texts from the ancient city of Ebla located in Syria (circa 2400 B.C.) mention Canaan for the first time where it is to be understood as a land or region. Archives of ancient cuneiform texts from Alalakh and Mari also indicate that people from this region were known as Canaanites, and clear distinctions are made between these and other groups. The Amarna letters found at Egypt provide the most helpful documentation of the political organization of Canaan around 1400 B.C. Here, phrases like “all of Canaan,” “the cities of Canaan,” “the lands of Canaan,” and “the land of Canaan” express a geographical and territorial entity with certain mentioned boundaries that constitute the Egyptian province in western Asia.

The Egyptians refer to Canaan and Canaanites 15 times in records of military campaigns into the region. In these descriptions, the inhabitants are not only described but also pictured in reliefs on temple walls in Egypt. The consistent portrayal of these reliefs indicates that Canaan was a territory filled with cities and inhabitants that stretched from Gaza in the south to the southern areas of modern Lebanon. Certainly from the texts excavated by archaeologists, there is much to illuminate this ancient territory referred to in Scripture.

The Bible describes the Philistines as a group originating from Caphtor or Crete (Genesis 10:14; Jeremiah 47:4; Amos 9:7). In 1992, Thomas L. Thompson wrote: “That the ‘Philistines’ are to be understood as representing a foreign population intrusive to Palestine must certainly be denied.” He claimed that the archaeological evidence was “superficial” and stated that “Philistine” pottery does not simply reflect Philistine people. Nor is there any justification for seeing these potters themselves as immigrants or as descendants of immigrants. Rather the pottery reflects a synthesis of ceramic
traditions of more than one population group." Unfortunately, there is no development of this hypothesis in respect to the pottery and other material culture, leaving the archaeologist wondering what Thompson meant. The fact is that archaeology has vividly illuminated the Biblical Philistines in the past 20 years.

Based on Egyptian texts and pottery (painted with the same motifs as Mycenaean and other Aegean wares), the Philistines have been traditionally viewed not as an indigenous group of people but coming either as invading conquerors or as a migrating group from the Aegean world. The Egyptian reliefs of Ramses III at Medinet Habu depict these “Sea Peoples” arriving on ships and overland in carts. Papyrus Harris I claims that the Egyptian saying, "Philistines were made ashes," referred to their demise at the military might of Egypt.

The archaeological record can be cited in support of this reconstruction. The devastation of sites throughout the southern Levant during the period of the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age transition has been attributed to these desperate groups of "Sea Peoples" from the Aegean (Greek) world. The pottery assemblages at Philistine cities such as Ashkelon, Ashdod, Tel Miqne-Ekron, and Tel Qasile produced remarkably new wares with Aegean influences following these destructions, and neutron activation analysis has confirmed that this pottery was made locally rather than imported. New types of architecture indicating Aegean influences include (1) hearth rooms at Ekron and Qasile with parallels in Pylos, Mycenae, and Tiryns, Greece; and (2) features of the Aegean megaron (largest room in a house) building evident at Ekron. Furthermore, cultic influences are attributed to the "Ashdoda" figurine with parallels from Mycenae. Excavations at these and other sites indicate that Philistine culture was sophisticated and advanced compared to the contemporary Israelites. It is no wonder Samson was tempted to go down to the Philistines (Judges 14:1).

Conclusion

Archaeology represents one of the few disciplines that deals exclusively with the realia—artifacts, buildings, cities, and lands—those tangible, three-dimensional facts that, although covered with the sands of time, bear testimony to the people, places, and events of the past. As these monuments continue to be uncovered year after year, the Biblical world emerges more fully, providing us with glimpses of its rich and varied scope. There is a growing need for careful archaeological research in the Middle East. Biblical scholars and historians now faced with the challenges of postmodernism are increasingly turning to the field of archaeology as the primary source of information about Biblical history. Although the discipline is still in its infancy, archaeology is beginning to fill in the details of the grand Biblical story from its earliest beginnings. In that quest, the revisionist claims of postmodern scholarship continue to be challenged by the rock records of the Middle East.

Note on Author*

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NOTES


9 Postmodern approaches to the Bible were critiqued by William G. Dever, What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001).
11 Dever, What Did the Biblical Writers Know?, p. 3.
13 Ibid., p. 60.
17 For this discussion in general, see Gary N. Knoppers, "The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy From Recent Histories of Israel," Journal of Biblical Literature 116 (1997), pp. 19-44; Dever, What Did the Biblical Writers Know?
21 Ibid., p. 152.
23 Lemche, Canaanites, p. 152.
26 Ibid., p. 271.
28 For a general overview, see Trude Dothan, The Philistines and Their Material Culture (New Haven: Yale University, 1982); Trude Dothan and Moshe Dothan, People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines (New York: Macmillan, 1992).
Without this book there would be no sacred music, oratorios, beloved hymns, and Negro spirituals.

The composer of the "Hallelujah Chorus," George Frideric Handel, was not a religious man. Yet, even this world-famous composer was moved and inspired by words from this nonpareil book.

After several years of failure in opera, Handel was plunged into poverty and despair. At the age of sixty he was bitter, depressed, and defeated. When asked to write the music for a sacred oratorio, he glanced through the pages of the manuscript with little enthusiasm for the task. But something happened when his eyes suddenly caught the words, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people . . . For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given . . . He shall lead His flock like a shepherd . . . Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden."

The April 1948 Reader's Digest reports that as Handel kept reading, the text began to quicken his pulses, warm his heart, and inspire wonderful melodies. The glorious words, "He shall reign forever and ever . . . King of kings, and Lord of lords . . . Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" fired his creative genius.

Grasping a pen, Handel jotted down in feverish haste the wonderful notes that raced through his mind. For twenty-four days and nights he worked tirelessly, as if transported to another world, paying little attention to the meals that were brought to him and hardly stopping to rest. His faithful servant became greatly worried; he had never known the master to act like this. Indeed, he appeared to be mad—writing, writing, writing, then striding about the room with tears coursing down his cheeks, singing "Hallelujah" at the top of his voice.

Messiah, the greatest oratorio ever written, was born of an experience induced by the power of a book. Handel said of the occasion, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself." No wonder King George II was so moved when the oratorio was first presented in London that he rose spontaneously to his feet at the beginning of the "Hallelujah Chorus," and all of the throng with him! No wonder audiences still rise today every time the "Hallelujah Chorus" is sung.

A Nameless Book. But what is this book that inspired Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus"? What is this book that has power to warm hearts, inspire hope, and transport even non-religious people to behold God in His majesty?

Strangely, this nonpareil book is also nameless! It is simply called the Book.

A Respected Book. Indeed, many of the world’s most renowned people have testified to the value and inestimable importance of the Bible.

Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientists of all time, once said: "We account the Scriptures of God to be the most sublime philosophy. I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever"
George Washington Carver, the African-American genius of Tuskegee Institute, has been called the world’s greatest biochemist. He is best known for his discovery of hundreds of valuable uses for the peanut and sweet potato. In 1921 Dr. Carver was invited to testify before the United States Senate Ways and Means Committee on the possibilities of the peanut. Though initially given ten minutes to speak, he so captivated the committee that the chairman said, “Go ahead, Brother. Your time is unlimited.” Carver spoke for one hour and forty-five minutes.

At the conclusion of his presentation the chairman asked, “Dr. Carver, how did you learn all of these things?”

Carver replied, “From an old Book.”


The famed scientist replied, “The Bible.”

“Does the Bible tell about peanuts?” the surprised Senator inquired.

“No, Sir,” Dr. Carver replied, “but it tells about the God Who made the peanut. I asked Him to show me what to do with the peanut, and He did.”

Thomas Jefferson also speaks about this Book: “I have said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make better citizens, better fathers, and better husbands. . . . The Bible makes the best people in the world.”

Similarly, Daniel Webster, a foremost American statesman, author, lexicographer, and orator testifies: “I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the will and Word of God.”

A Timeless Book. Unlike other books that come and go because their ideas no longer fit the thoughts of different ages or meet the needs of human hearts, the Bible is a timeless Book.

Onetime professor of English at Princeton University, author and diplomat Henry Van Dyke, has accurately remarked:

Born in the East and clothed in Oriental form and imagery, the Bible walks the ways of all the world with familiar feet and enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It has learned to speak in hundreds of languages to the heart of man. It comes into the palace to tell the monarch that he is a servant of the Most High, and into the cottage to assure the peasant that he is a son of God. Children listen to its stories with wonder and delight, and the wise men ponder them as parables of life. It has a word of peace for the time of peril, and word of comfort for the day of calamity, a word of light for the hour of darkness. Its oracles are repeated in the assembly of the people, and its counsels whispered in the ear of the lonely. The wicked and the proud tremble at its warning, but to the wounded and the penitent it has a mother’s voice. The wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad by it, and the fire on the hearth has lit the reading of its well-worn page. It has woven itself into our deepest affections and colored our dearest dreams; so that love and friendship, sympathy and devotion, memory and hope, put on the beautiful garments of its treasured speech, breathing frankincense and myrrh. . .

No man is poor or desolate who has this treasure for his own. When the landscape darkens and the trembling pilgrim comes to the valley named “of the shadow,” he is not afraid to enter: he takes the rod and staff of Scripture in his hand; he says to friend and comrade, “Good-by; we shall meet again;” and comforted by that support, he goes toward the lonely pass as one who walks through darkness into light.

Truly, this Book is like no other book.

A Unique Book. The Bible was written by some 40 different authors on three different continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe), in countries hundreds of miles apart, over a period of about 1,500 years. It deals with matters of universal interest: history, philosophy, science, health, architecture, religion, prophecies, etc. It speaks to the needs of every generation, offers solutions to life’s perplexities, and even reveals the origin and future of our world. It has brought peace to troubled consciences, comfort to the sorrowful, hope to the despairing, courage to the despondent, and the assurance of reunion to the bereaved.

Originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the Bible has been published in more languages than any
other book in history, and yet it has not lost its original emphasis.

This unique Book appeals to the young as well as the old, rich as well as poor, simple as well as wise. It advocates the rights of every individual, including the cause of the poor and defenseless, and it demonstrates a mysterious power to transform lives.

A careful reading of this unique Book reveals that it was written by men from every level of political and social life—from the king upon his throne down to the herdsmen, shepherds, fishermen, and petty politicians.

Onetime President of the Southern Baptist Convention, W. A. Criswell, has written this about the Bible: “Here are words written by princes, by poets, by philosophers, by fishermen, by statesmen, by prophets, by priests, by publicans, by physicians, by men learned in the wisdom of Egypt, by men educated in the school of Babylon, by men trained at the feet of rabbis like Gamaliel. Men of every grade and class are represented in this miraculous Volume. The circumstances under which the Book was written were sometimes most difficult and always most varying. Parts of it were written in tents, deserts, cities, palaces, and dungeons. Some of it was written in times of imminent danger and other parts in times of ecstatic joy.”

But the remarkable thing about the Bible is that, despite the circumstances that gave birth to the 66 different books comprising this Book, the contents of the Bible show a unique harmony. Observes H.L. Hastings: “It contains all kinds of writing; but what a jumble it would be if sixty-six books were written in this way by ordinary men. Suppose, for instance, that we get sixty-six medical books written by thirty or forty different doctors of various schools, . . . bind them all together, and then undertake to doctor a man according to that book! . . . Or suppose you get thirty-five ministers writing books on theology, and then see if you can find any leather strong enough to hold the books together.”

**A Well-preserved Book.** But there is more: the Bible has been preserved remarkably during the process of transmission. Despite the fact that it was written on perishable material and was copied and recopied for hundreds of years before the invention of the printing press or computers, the Bible’s two sections—the Old and New Testaments—when compared to all other ancient manuscripts, have displayed an unusual correctness in transmission.

With reference to the Old Testament, the section of the Bible written in Hebrew and Aramaic, the remarkable accuracy with which the scribes wrote down the text is due to strict rules that they followed. For example, no word or letter could be written from memory. The words or letters of each section were counted, and if these did not tally with the newly made copies, the new copy was discarded altogether and the task begun again. Who ever counted the letters and syllables and words of Plato or Aristotle? Cicero or Seneca?

On the other hand, the New Testament was written in Koine Greek—the common language of people in apostolic times. Though there are no original copies of the earliest writings of the apostles, we have the later handwritten copies that have survived. These are called manuscripts—from the Latin words *manu scriptum*, meaning “written by hand.”

Generally speaking, the New Testament manuscripts are much more recent to us than the Old Testament. But unlike the well trained Old Testament copyists who were extremely careful in copying every word of the ancient documents, factors such as the great demand for copies of the New Testament to instruct new believers and the frequent interruptions in the copying process due to hostilities and persecutions led to hasty and sometimes careless copying of the original New Testament manuscripts. Fortunately for us, because of the many New Testament manuscripts that have been preserved, we can always cross-check any section whenever there is any doubt.

Because of the unique preservation of the original text of the Bible, Christians can be absolutely certain of its essential accuracy. The late Sir Frederic Kenyon, onetime director of the British Museum and an authority on Bible manuscripts put it this way: “The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries.”

**An Enduring Book.** Still, of all the books ever produced, the Bible has suffered the most vicious attack. Yet it has survived the persecution of critics and enemies. It is like an anvil that has worn out the hammers of criticism. The hammers of the agnostics, atheists, and higher critics have been pecking away at this book for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If the Book had not been the Book of God, human beings would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers, Communists and revolutionaries have all tried their hand at it; they die and the book still lives.
The Book has come down to us floating upon a sea of blood—every page stained with the blood of martyrs.

Bernard Ramm, a Christian scientist and theologian once asked rhetorically whether, beside the Bible, there has ever been a book on philosophy, religion, psychology, or any other subject that has been so “chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified . . . with such venom and skepticism? with such thoroughness and erudition? upon every chapter, line, and tenet?” He concluded: “A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and the committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put. . . . Considering the thorough learning of the critics and the ferocity and precision of the attacks, we would expect the Bible to have been permanently entombed in some Christian genizah [a storage room for worn-out Scripture manuscripts]. But such is hardly the case. The Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions.”

Jesus said it best almost 2,000 years ago: “Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

How do we account for the remarkable power, universal appeal, unity, and survival of this ancient Book?

A Revealed Book. Though written by human penmen, the Bible makes a bold claim to its divine origin. The apostle Paul wrote: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The word “inspiration” [theopneustos in the Greek], literally means “God-breathed,” that is to say, all the books of the Bible have a divine origin.

Charles Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism, argued that “the Bible must be the invention of either good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.” He reasons:

1. It could not be the invention of good men or angels, for they neither would nor could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying, “Thus saith the Lord,” when it was their own invention.
2. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils, for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin, and condemns their souls to Hell to all eternity.
3. Therefore, I draw this conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration.

In other words, the Bible is not simply an inspiring book by some good human writers; it is an inspired Book from God.

An Inspired Book. Probably the most mysterious thing about the Bible is the manner in which God, the principal Author of the Book, was able to employ fallible human beings as His instruments to write down His message in a trustworthy manner. The unique cooperation between God and the Bible’s human writers is known technically as “inspiration.”

The apostle Peter describes it this way: “Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). The Greek word used here, phero, means “to bear” or “to carry along.” It was a term used by sailors for a sailing ship being carried along by the wind. As Peter was himself a fisherman, his use of this word is significant. It implies that the human writers of the Bible were gently led by the Spirit in communicating the message that God had given them by revelation. Because the Bible is the product of this cooperative effort between the human and the Divine, its message is “sure.” The apostle Peter again asserts:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths [Greek, mythos, a story, whatever its significance, that has no factual basis] when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. . . . And we have the prophetic Word made more sure [Greek, bebaioteron, which has the force of “standing firm on the feet,” “steadfast,” “reliable,” “valid”]. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:16-19, RSV)

In his letter to the Christians of Thessalonica, the apostle Paul summed up: “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

In other words, the fact that the Scriptures are inspired implies that the Bible is truly the Word of God.

A Trustworthy Book. One unmistakable piece of evidence that the Bible has a divine imprint is the impartial
manner in which its human writers recorded biographical accounts of its heroes and heroines.

Noah, the survivor of the Flood, got drunk and exposed his nakedness; Abraham, the friend of God, lied and doubted God; Lot, the hero of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, got drunk and had an incestuous relationship with his daughters; Miriam, the beautiful singer and prophetess of Israel, had a racial and jealousy problem and was struck with leprosy; Rahab, the woman of faith and the ancestor of Jesus Christ, was a prostitute; David, a man after God’s Own heart, was guilty of adultery and murder; Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, lived the life of a fool; Judas, one of the most influential among the twelve disciples of Christ, was a thief and a traitor; Peter, a leading apostle of Christ, denied his Master with curses and swearing; John, the apostle of love, called for fire to destroy his enemies; and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, persecuted the followers of Christ.

If the biographical accounts in the Scriptures were simply human efforts to enhance the moral standing of some prominent men and women, the writers would have covered up, judiciously omitted, or reconstructed the negative and embarrassing aspects of those lives.

This is the way men write history; but when the Lord undertakes to tell His story of a sinful man, He does not select a poor, miserable beggar, and show him up; He does not give even the name of the thief on the cross, nor of the guilty woman to whom He said, “Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more”; but He takes King David from the throne, and sets him down in sackcloth and ashes, and wrings from his heart the cry, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.” And then when he is pardoned, forgiven, cleansed, and made whiter than snow, the pen of inspiration writes down the whole dark, damning record of his crimes, and the king on his throne has not power, nor wealth, nor influence enough to blot the page.

And a book which tells the faults of those who wrote it, and which tells you that “there is none righteous, no, not one,” bears in it the marks of a true book; for we all know that men have faults, and failings, and sins; and among all the men whose lives are recorded in that book, each man has some defect, some blot, except one, and that is “the Man Christ Jesus” (H.L. Hastings, Will the Old Book Stand? [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1923, pp. 17, 18]).

A Spiritual Book. Robert H. Pierson, onetime president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote: “The Bible is more than a good or true book... Man may write a good book, a true book, even a wonderful book, but man has never produced a volume that compares with the Holy Scriptures. The Bible lives! Through its sacred pages God moves and speaks to human hearts. It is a Book of divine origin destined from the beginning to fill a unique need among the human family. No other volume has successfully challenged it.”

This living Book points out to sinners a way of pardon, of peace, and of redemption. It tells us how human beings subject to like passions as we are, may yet be men of mighty faith, having fellowship with God, and prevailing in effectual and fervent prayer. It tells us how we who have sinned against the Most High may be cleansed from bloodguiltiness, washed and made whiter than snow, and find life and peace in Christ the Lord. It tells us how we, redeemed through God’s mercy, may stand stainless as angels in the presence of the eternal King.

A Neglected Book. Though there are unmistakable evidences of the Book’s power to transform lives, though it remains the world’s bestselling book, and though copies of it can be found in many homes, hotel rooms, and libraries, the surprising thing is that the Bible is the most neglected book!

The famous English preacher George Whitefield said, “God has condescended to become an author, and yet people will not read His writings. There are very few that ever gave this Book of God, the grand charter of salvation, one fair reading through.”

One of the most acclaimed Christian writers, Ellen G. White, wrote: “If we will let it speak to us, the Bible will teach us what nothing else can teach. But alas! everything else is dwelt upon except the Word of God. Worthless literature, fictitious stories, are greedily devoured, while the Bible, with all its treasures of sacred truth, lies neglected upon our tables. The Sacred Word, if made the rule of life, will refine, elevate, and sanctify. It is the voice of God to man. Will we heed it?” (Messages to Young People, p. 257).

A Life-changing Book. H. L. Hastings has perceptively observed:

There are men who study philosophy, astronomy, geology, geography, and mathematics; but did you
ever hear a man say, "I was an outcast, a wretched inebriate, a disgrace to my race, and a nuisance in the world, until I began to study mathematics, and learned the multiplication table, and then turned my attention to geology, got me a little hammer, and knocked off the corners of the rocks and then studied the formation of the earth, and since that time I have been happy as the day is long; I feel like singing all the time; my soul is full of triumph and peace; and health and blessing have come to my desolate home once more"? Did you ever hear a man ascribe his redemption and salvation from intemperance and sin to the multiplication table or the science of mathematics or geology?

But I can bring you, not one man, or two, or ten, but men by the thousand who will tell you, "I was wretched; I was lost; I broke my poor old mother's heart; I beggared my family; my wife was heart-stricken and dejected; my children fled from the sound of their father's footsteps; I was ruined, reckless, helpless, homeless, hopeless, until I heard the words of that Book!"

And he will tell you the very word which fastened on his soul. Maybe it was, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"; perhaps it was, "Behold the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world"; it may have been, "God so loved the world, that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He can tell you the very word that saved his soul. And since that word entered his heart, he will tell you that hope has dawned upon his vision, that joy has inspired his heart, and that his mouth is filled with grateful song. He will tell you that the blush of health has come back to his poor wife's faded cheek; that the old hats have vanished from the windows of his desolate home; that his rags have been exchanged for good clothes; that his children run to meet him when he comes; that there is bread on his table, fire on his hearth, and comfort in his dwelling. He will tell you all that, and he will tell you that this Book has wrought the change.

Yes, there is power in the Book, a power that can change your life and your circumstances. Its power rests on the fact that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

A Book Like No Other Book. When was the last time you read the Book? How much time do you spend daily with the Bible? Don't you think it is about time to begin reading God’s inspired Word”—the Book that is like no other book?

On July 28, 1917, Woodrow Wilson wrote these pertinent words:

The Bible is the Word of life. I beg that you will read it and find this out for yourselves—read, not little snatches here and there, but long passages that will really be the road to the heart of it. You will find it not only full of real men and women, but also of the things you have wondered about and been troubled about all your life, as men have been always; and the more you read, the more will it become plain to you the things that are worthwhile and what are not, what things make men happy—loyalty, right dealing, speaking the truth, readiness to give everything for what they think their duty, and, most of all, the wish that they may have the approval of the Christ, Who gave everything for them—and the things that are guaranteed to make men unhappy—selfishness, cowardice, greed, and everything that is low and mean.

When you have read the Bible you will know that it is the Word of God, because you will have found it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty.

The promise God gave to Joshua can be ours if we heed His counsel: "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success" (Joshua 1:8).

This promised blessing will bring peace to our troubled consciences, comfort to our broken hearts, light to our perplexed minds, and strength to our discouraged souls.
The Word and Ellen White

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Introduction

Late in May 1909, 328 delegates came together as leaders of the church representing 83,000 members around the world. Ellen White, now 81 years of age, met with them in a tent pitched on the grounds of the Washington Missionary College. On Sunday afternoon, June 6, she gave the last of her eleven addresses. “With trembling lips and a voice touched with deep emotion” (Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White, vol. 6, p. 197), she spoke for the last time in person to the world church in session. At the end of her sermon she moved away from the desk to take her seat, but then turned back to the pulpit. She picked up the Bible on the desk, opened it, and held it up in her trembling hands for all to see. “Brethren and Sisters,” she said, “I commend unto you this Book.”

How appropriate was this last message spoken to the church in session! How effectively did her words summarize the overall purpose of her gift and the essence of her counsel!

Though some today would make her writings an addition to the Sacred Canon, there was no doubt in her mind of the relationship between her writings and the Word of God.

Ellen White’s descriptions of the Bible highlight its importance. She called it the “Book of books” (Child Guidance, p. 513); “God’s Own Book” (Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 17); “the inspired Book of God” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 497); “the most precious book in the world” (“The Bible the Colored People’s Hope,” Review and Herald, December 24, 1895); and an “infallible Guide” (My Life Today, p. 25) that “is able to guide every step of the way to the City of God” (Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p. 461). The Bible, she affirms, “is God’s voice speaking to us just as surely as though we could hear Him with our ears.” Its study should be regarded as “an audience with the Most High” (In Heavenly Places, p. 134). Its truths “are the utterances of the Most High” (My Life Today, p. 24).

What counsel, then, does she give for receiving these words from God into our hearts?

Let us consider five principles:

1. Receiving the Word requires a correct attitude of heart.

Commenting on Jesus’ words in John 7:16, 17, Ellen White reminded us that “the perception and appreciation of truth . . . depends less upon the mind than upon the heart” (The Desire of Ages, p. 45). Here, the power of our intellect, the eloquence of our tongue, the number of our talents, is of no avail. What counts is what lies in our innermost being which only God sees. The Bible is “plain to all who study
it with a prayerful heart. Every truly honest soul will come to a light of truth" (The Great Controversy, p. 520).

We are called to lay aside our “preconceived opinions” and our “hereditary and cultivated ideas.” We will “never reach the truth” if we search the Scriptures to vindicate our own opinions (Manuscript 12, 1901, in Manuscript Releases, vol. 3, p. 431). Self-reliance has no part in the study of the Word—only “a prayerful reliance upon God and a sincere desire to do His will” (The Great Controversy, p. 599).

We may know all this to be true in theory, but do we understand the gravity of opening the Word without these qualities of heart? When the Bible “is opened without reverence and without prayer; when the thoughts and affections are not fixed upon God, or in harmony with His will,” what is the result? “The mind is clouded with doubts; . . . skepticism strengthens. The enemy takes control of the thoughts, and he suggests interpretations that are not correct” (Steps to Christ, p. 110). She reminded the 1888 delegates that “many, many will be lost because they have not studied their Bibles upon their knees, with earnest prayer to God . . . ” (Letter 20, 1888, in Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, pp. 39, 40).

2. Receiving the Word requires our submission to the impressions and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are able neither to understand nor explain the Scriptures (The Great Controversy, pp. 526, 527; Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 411). It is the work of the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth and to the One Who said He was “the Truth.” Through the Spirit acting upon God’s Word, Jesus comes to us as an abiding Presence (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 389; see also Selected Messages, bk. 2, pp. 38, 39). In this most solemn hour of the world’s history when the destiny of the world’s teeming millions is soon to be decided, how much “we need to be guided by the Spirit of truth” (The Great Controversy, p. 601).

But the presence of the Holy Spirit is not the only promise of Heaven’s involvement when we study the Word. “It is the office of heavenly angels to prepare the heart so to comprehend God’s Word that we shall be charmed with its beauty, admonished by its warnings, or animated and strengthened by its promises” (ibid., p. 600).

3. Receiving the Word is dependent on our “rightly dividing” and interpreting the Word.

Biblical hermeneutics giving us rules for interpreting the Scriptures was never the subject of even one article by Ellen White. However, scattered among her writings are guiding principles that help us search for the truth “as it is in Jesus.” She recognized, for example, the importance of the study of context. In the chapter aptly named “Snares of Satan,” she warns against the practice of some seizing upon “passages of Scripture separated from the context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite” (ibid., p. 521).

She was concerned that the “time and place” of the writing must be considered when interpreting inspired counsel (Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 57). She also acknowledged the need to study the words used by the inspired author, for “different meanings are expressed by the same word” (ibid., p. 20). However, some with “an active imagination” focus on words that describe “figures and symbols” and “interpret them to suit their fancy, with little regard to the testimony of Scripture as its own interpreter” (The Great Controversy, p. 521).

We must avoid giving the impression that only scholars using advanced critical methods can determine Biblical truth, for she emphasized repeatedly that even the poor and uneducated (Gospel Workers, p. 123) can understand the Scriptures, “if the seeker after truth will compare Scripture with Scripture” under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. She believed that “the Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be the key that will unlock other passages. . . . By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side,” their “true meaning . . . will be made evident” (“The Science of Salvation, the First of Sciences,” Review and Herald, December 1, 1891).

4. Receiving the Word encourages us to maintain a balance between established truth and openness to a further unfolding of it.
The search for the truth "as it is in Jesus" has been an ongoing quest for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. During the Sabbath conferences of the late 1840s and in the years that followed, the pioneers "searched for the truth as for hidden treasure." From their study of the Word they erected certain "pillars," set out certain "landmarks"—truths from the Bible that identified the essentials of the church's message to the world. They were foundational truths "in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood" (Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 207).

Fifty years later, however, the church faced questions about its understanding of some of these foundational teachings from those promoting pantheism. In a vision Ellen White was shown that the "foundation of our faith, which was established by so much prayer, such earnest searching of the Scriptures, was being taken down, pillar by pillar. Our faith was to have nothing to rest upon—the sanctuary was gone, the atonement was gone" (Sermons and Talks, vol. 1, p. 34, emphasis mine). In 1904 she responded to these threats by appealing to what had been confirmed as foundational "pillars of our faith" for the past fifty years (Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 207, 208). Truth that had been established from God's Word in the early years must still be truth later, though the understanding of it will broaden, for the "path of the righteous is . . . shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Proverbs 4:18, NIV).

When Elder A.F. Ballenger raised his questions about the significance of the 2300-year prophecy, 1844, and the second phase of Christ's high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, Ellen White appealed to the evidence and authority of the Bible. She believed he was teaching "theories that cannot be substantiated by the Word of God." She said she had come to the General Conference session in Washington in 1905 to testify "in vindication of the truth of God's Word and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in confirmation of Bible truth" (Manuscript Release 760, p. 4). Any application of Scripture that moved "one pillar of the foundation that God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake." Then she added, "God never contradicts Himself" (Letter 329, 1905, in Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 162).

She believed that "new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 127). Truth, by its very nature, must agree with what has formerly been established as truth. To her it was unthinkable that the Holy Spirit would later deny what He had previously confirmed. She predicted that in the future some would arise claiming to have "new light, which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit." Her counsel was "not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith." Thus she could write, "When the power of God testifies to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. No aftersuppositions contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained" (Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 161).

Yet that is not all that Ellen White would say to us about our search for truth. She gives us an insistent call to maintain a balance between holding to truth that has in the past been established from the Word and confirmed by the Spirit, and a humble recognition that the Lord has much more to teach us and we must be open to His leading. She saw that our understanding of truth should be continually "advancing" and that we need to "walk in the increasing light" ("Open the Heart to Light," Review and Herald, March 25, 1890). "There is no excuse," she declared, "for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed," and even "that all our expositions of Scripture are without error" ("Christ Our Hope," ibid., December 20, 1892). In fact, she identified as "the greatest evil that could ever come to us as a people" the tendency to consider our doctrines, "because long cherished," to be "on every point infallible" (Manuscript 37, 1890, in The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, p. 830).

It is refreshing to hear her acknowledge that "age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation" ("Christ Our Hope," Review and Herald, December 20, 1892). In 1888 she wrote that if a doctrine we have entertained as truth totters and falls after investigation, "let it fall, the sooner the better" (Letter 7, 1888, in The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, p. 187). Seventh-day Adventists are just as likely to establish their own traditions as those "in ancient times," if the "investigation of the Scriptures" starts "no new questions," or raises "no difference of opinion," which will drive us back to searching the Bible for ourselves (Gospel Workers, p. 298).

Throughout the history of the church, when God's people have been "growing in grace" they have
obtained "a clearer understanding of His Word," seeing "new light and beauty in its sacred truths." This should "continue to the end." But, she warned, when our "spiritual life declines," the tendency is "to cease to advance in the knowledge of truth." We become satisfied with what we already know, and "discourage any further investigation" of the Word. We become "conservative," she said—meaning holding onto the past—and seek to avoid discussion (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 706, 707).

In 1889 she identified "a spirit of pharisaism" coming into the church, with some of its members saying, "We have the truth. There is no more light for the people of God." Such a position, she warned, was "not safe. . . . We should take the Bible and investigate it closely for ourselves" ("The Necessity of Dying to Self," Review and Herald, June 18, 1889).

That challenge is still before us today. How much we need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading. We must turn away from any method of study of the Word leading into paths that take us away from those great distinctive truths that have made us a people. Yet we must be open to follow Him gladly and with open hearts, as He would lead His people more deeply and broadly into the glories of both the written and living Word.

5. Receiving the Word means more than an intellectual acceptance of doctrinal truth. Its ultimate purpose is the development of a character reflecting Christ's life of loving and unselfish service for others.

In 2 Timothy 3:17 the apostle Paul described the purpose of the Word. It was given not just for doctrinal teaching. It was to rebuke, correct, and train in righteousness so that we may be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (NKJV). If our Adventist heritage teaches us anything, it tells us how often we have forgotten this. The principles of the Word must not just be stored in the head but applied to the life. It is so easy to be deceived into thinking that because we are standing up for truth "when champions are few," that we must be God's saints regardless of the spirit in which we do it. As Dr. George Knight has reminded us, saints can get "angry" when upholding truth (Angry Saints, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1989).

As early as 1873 Ellen White acknowledged that "as a people" we were "triumphing in the clearness and strength of the truth." We were "fully sustained by an overwhelming amount of plain Scriptural testimony," yet "we were very much wanting" in such virtues as humility, faith, and love ("The Laodicean Church," Review and Herald, September 16, 1873). We have missed the point if we think the Minneapolis Conference was only a confrontation over righteousness by faith, the law in Galatians, or the nature of Christ. Ellen White's concerns centered on our great need to apply the principles of the Word and the attributes of the character of Jesus to the practical issues of daily living and personal relationships. "The matter of the law in Galatians," she wrote in 1890, was "of minor consequence in comparison with the spirit you have brought into your faith." Then in words that should be written in all our hearts, "The most convincing testimony that we can bear to others that we have the truth is the spirit that attends the advocacy of that truth. If it sanctifies the heart of the receiver, if it makes him gentle, kind, forbearing, true and Christlike, then he will give some evidence of the fact that he has the genuine truth" (Letter 83, 1890, in The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, p. 632).

What a challenge is before us when we remember "the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His [God's] character of love" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 415). That will mean not only preaching about God's love, but also living it, for there is "nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour's love" (ibid., p. 419). Is that the reason why she wrote in 1886: "Search the Bible, for it tells you of Jesus. I want you to read the Bible and see the matchless charms of Jesus. I want you to fall in love with the Man of Calvary, so that at every step you can say to the world, His 'ways are ways of pleasantness, and all' His 'paths are peace' (Proverbs 3:17)?" (Manuscript 80, 1886, in Manuscript Releases, vol. 9, pp. 250, 251)? Here is the greatest secret of experiencing the power of the Word and the ultimate reason for receiving its principles into our hearts.