Roy Gane’s article, “Sanctuary Principles for the Church Community” is timely and reinforces God’s yearning to be with us, His creation. As he has rightfully said, God wants to be the center of our universe and our eternal flame. He gives us the blueprint mapping out the directions for us to follow. It is heartening to know that despite our sinfulness, God has included us in His plan of salvation.

It would be wise for us all, but certainly ministers and educators, to empower congregations and students to develop ideas and innovations for the speedy accomplishment of the Lord’s work while being careful that in trying to be holy we do not exclude any of God’s children worldwide.

As the Lord has set out the principles for the church, let us use Gane’s timely reminder to be Christ-like in our mission.

Beverly Henry
Mandeville, Jamaica

Regarding Roy Gane’s article on the protocols of God-centered worship, I found his 15 points to be enlightening and challenging at the same time. I have always adhered to Gane’s premise that the people of Israel and their plight are a precursor to our own church community; and therefore, their significance should be studied in order to see our prophetic purpose as a church with an advent message. His point of assigning God the primary and only importance of our worship was well taken.

The only thing I find problematic is the question of how does a modern, or postmodern, church determine which protocols to follow. It was clear from the article that we must learn from the mistakes the Israelites made and assume the humble position of John the Baptist, who said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” However, many false preachers and prophets have said the same thing and have quoted Scripture verbatim only to lead their flocks astray. The message in Gane’s article was inspiring, yet our current church structure would find difficulty in communicating it.

Fabian A. Carballo
Colton, California

The role of women in Scripture deserves another critical, unbiased look.

Many modern feminist writers argue that Old Testament patriarchy is the major influence behind all subsequent repression of women. Rightly drawing attention to the pain and inequities women are still forced to bear, they are correct in noting that these grievous matters need to be addressed and resolved. In their view, however, nothing will change as long as patriarchal religions such as Judaism and Christianity exist, for it is just such systems that force women into subservience. The language in feminist literature against patriarchy is often bitter and uncompromising.

Offenses against women are horrifying. Feminist complaints are compelling. Though the abominable record of the mistreatment of women continues to this day, however, the charge that Old Testament patriarchy is its primary cause should be scrutinized. Textual indicators within Scripture depict matriarchy far more positively than feminism acknowledges.

Hagar

Hagar is not a matriarch in the Covenant line. She is, however, one of the “well women” of Genesis. Poignant details are recorded in Genesis 21, when she and her son are excluded from Abraham’s family.

BY JO ANN DAVIDSON *

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God does not abandon Hagar or her son Ishmael in their devastating situation. When they are at the point of death in the wilderness of Beersheba, God directs them to a well. He also promises to make Ishmael a great nation. Indeed, it is arresting how similar is His promise to Hagar and her son to the one they have been hearing in Abraham’s household regarding the son of promise.

After surveying the Genesis narratives, Trevor Dennis asserts that this Egyptian slave woman is “more highly honored in some respects than almost any other figure in the Bible.” For example, the angel of the Lord appears, for the first time in the Bible. “1 For example, the angel of the Lord appears, for the first time in the Bible. 1 For example, the angel of the Lord appears, for the first time in the Bible. “1 For example, the angel of the Lord appears, for the first time in the Bible. “1 For example, the angel of the Lord appears, for the first time in the Bible.

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- The angel of the Lord appears, for the first time in the Bible.
- Hagar and Ishmael are highly honored in some respects.
- Abraham is highly honored in some respects.
- Sarah is highly honored in some respects.

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After wrestling with God all night at the river Jabbok, Jacob names the spot, Peniel, or ‘The face of God’ (Gen. 32:30). After coming so close to sacrificing Isaac . . . Abraham names the place, “The Lord Sees” (22:14). Abraham’s name is very close to the one Hagar gives God. Yet, like Jacob, Abraham names the place of encounter. . . . Elsewhere Abraham calls upon the name of God (12:8; 13:4; 21:33), but that is a very different exercise. Moreover, Hagar does not name her God as an aside, or declare his identity to herself after he has left the stage. She names him to his face: ‘You are the God who Sees Me.”

This occasion is also one of the three times in Genesis when a woman dialogues with God.

REBEKAH

Rebekah, a prominent matriarch in Genesis, is notable. “Rather than minimizing Rebekah’s contribution to the Israelite people, the [Genesis] narratives that introduce and develop the portrait of the second of the matriarchs are striking in the way she is depicted. Although she is described as being a beautiful wife for Isaac, she is not appreciated solely for her appearance. Like Abraham, her independence and trust are demonstrated by her willingness to leave her family and travel to a strange land.”

Narrative details such as dialogue, narrative pace, genealogical notation, and other literary features suggest the prominence of Rebekah in Israel’s history. She appears in the text as a young woman who takes a great risk leaving her home and venturing into uncertainty. The Genesis narratives follow her journey as she then marries and becomes a mother. Both Rebekah’s character and her journey are extensively recorded in contrast to her husband Isaac, the patriarch, of whom little is written.

Rebekah’s many positive qualities and strength of character are displayed in her life as a matriarch. Her actions attest to a certain degree of female autonomy in the biblical world.”

Rebekah’s genealogical designation alone is striking. In Genesis 22:20–24, the genealogy lists the children born to Abraham’s brother Nahor and his sister-in-law Milcah. Their eight sons are named, but the offspring of these eight sons (the next generation) are included in two cases. Only the children of Kemuel and Bethuel are given, and we are informed that “Bethuel begat Rebekah” (vs. 23, KJV). This is arresting, for she is the only named offspring of her father, yet later the narrative includes her brother Laban.

If the narratives following the
death and burial of Sarah are considered “patriarchal” by feminists, they should deal with the life of the patriarch Isaac. Instead, the reader’s attention is focused on Rebekah. Apart from the incident in which Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son, we know nothing of the boyhood or youth of Isaac. By contrast, Rebekah is depicted more fully. “The power of her personality is evident even when as a young girl she takes command of her destiny and leaves for Canaan.”

When Abraham directs his servant to find a wife for Isaac, one remark in his instructions is also indicative of a woman’s status during the patriarchal era. Abraham declares that “if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath” (24:8, NKJV). The patriarch is assuming a young girl will be willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath.”

“The references to haste that punctuate the narrative: ‘She made haste and lowered her pitcher . . . she made haste and lowered her pitcher into the trough . . . she ran again to the well’ . . . bears more than the obvious complimentary implications for character and judgment. It echoes nothing less than Abraham’s model hospitality, ‘He ran to meet them . . . Abraham made haste into the tent . . . Abraham ran to the tent. . . he made haste to prepare it’ (18:2–7) . . . the elevating analogy stamps her as worthy of the patriarch himself.”

According to the text, both Abraham and Rebekah leave behind “their country,” “their kindred,” and their “father’s house.” Both will be “blessed” and “become great.” It has been suggested that “with this blessing the narrator quietly moves Rebecca into the cycle of God’s promises to the patriarchs.”

After Rebecca marries Isaac and becomes pregnant, she apparently experiences great difficulty. In agony she inquires of the Lord. She does this herself (25:22). The phrase “to inquire” is significant in the Old Testament. Prominent prophets like Moses and Elisha and leading kings of Israel inquire of the Lord. So does Rebekah, and she receives a personal oracle from Yahweh that her older son is destined to serve the younger.

A concentric chiastic structure in this scene serves to underscore the importance of Rebekah’s divine oracle:

A. Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah (vs. 20)
B. Rebekah was barren; prayer for children answered (vss. 20, 21)
C. his wife Rebekah conceived (vs. 21)
D. the children struggled together within her (vs. 22)
E. Rebekah asks for—an ORACLE (vs. 22)
F. Yahweh grants her—an ORACLE (vs. 23)
G. her days to be delivered were fulfilled (vs. 24)
H. and behold, there were twins in her womb (vs. 24)
I. birth and appearance of Jacob and Esau (vss. 25, 26)
J. Isaac was 60 years old when she bore them (vs. 26)

Highly significant also is the formula used to announce Rebekah’s delivery: “Her days were fulfilled for her to give birth” (25:24, NKJV). This formula is used of only three biblical women: Elizabeth and Mary in the New Testament and Rebekah in the Old Testament.

Later, when Esau her son marries two Hittite women, the text informs us that this is “a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah” (26:35, NKJV, italics supplied). This inclusion of Rebekah’s distress regarding Esau’s marriage to pagan women reveals that Rebekah is just as concerned about the covenant line as is Isaac.

It bears repeating that the Genesis narrator exhibits far more interest in Rebekah than in her husband Isaac, the patriarch. Characterization of Rebekah yields a deeper understanding of her significance. . . All of these actions are given without a polemical context, and the narrator does nothing to indicate
Feminists have been right to focus attention on the abuse of women inside and outside the church. But they have been wrong in their assumption that Old Testament patriarchy is a prime cause of this long-standing oppression of women. The patriarchal system is a pivotal issue in their understanding of female repression. Old Testament matriarchy, however, exhibited in Genesis suggests a different perspective from that implied by feminist literature.

that these were unusual activities for a woman to take. . . . The presentation of Rebekah shows that women in Israel were viewed as persons who could make crucial decisions about their futures, whose prayers were acknowledged.”

RACHEL
During the next generation of patriarchy, Jacob tells his wives Leah and Rachel (whom he met at a well) of God’s command to “return to the land of your fathers” (Gen. 31:3, NKJV). In the process, he recounts the poor treatment he has received at the hands of their father to persuade them of the reasonableness of leaving.

“Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, ‘Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father’s house? Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. For all these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children’s; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it’” (vss. 14-16, NKJV).

They add to Jacob’s description the hurts they themselves have suffered from their father and urge Jacob to hearken to the Lord’s word. They are not afraid to oppose their father. Nor is Jacob a male figure who issues commands to his wives, as might be expected from feminist depictions of patriarchy.

We again find a repeated Genesis formula regarding the Covenant: the sundering of human family ties for a divine purpose. Abraham is called to abandon his home for the place God will show him. Rebecca, too, abandons family and land, traveling from Haran to far-off Canaan. The same breaking of family ties is assented to by Rachel and Leah.

“The capacity to leave is a measure of the clear awareness of the exigencies of their chosen status. . . .

In the story of Genesis, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah know, with neither melancholy nor capriciousness, how to give up their moorings in order to enter further into the covenant, how to keep themselves available to the summonings of a God who chose them. . . . This certainly argues for their extreme consciousness of the demands pertaining to the Promise, but also, and jointly, for the necessity of a common receptiveness on the part of man and woman to the urgent solicitations of the holy Word.”

Not Old Testament Doormats
The Genesis “well women” are not “wall flowers”! It would be unfair to the narrative portraits of these women to argue that women bowed in submission to all men. Rather, though respectful of their husbands, these women are intelligent and willful. “Far from conforming to a traditional servitude, these women grace the pages of Genesis with their laughter, their sorrows, their strength, and their power.”

Feminists have been right to focus attention on the abuse of women inside and outside the church. But they have been wrong in their assumption that Old Testament patriarchy is a prime cause of this long-standing oppression of women. The patriarchal system is a pivotal issue in their understanding of female repression. Old Testament matriarchy, however, as exhibited in Genesis suggests a different perspective from that implied by feminist literature.

Feminists are correct in demanding redress of the long-accumulating record of the subjugation of women. But they need to rethink the cause of this repression. The Genesis matriarchs are not suppressed or oppressed women. Biblical patriarchy must be defined by the biblical narratives.

Carol Meyers proposes that many of the details recorded in the Old Testament seem to indicate a rather equitable situation between male and female up to the time of the Israelite monarchy. The result of establishing the throne in Israel, she argues, brought great changes to the Israelite patriarchal society, with the former position of the female diminishing from that time on: “Feminists who condemn or bewail the apparent patriarchy of ancient or other societies may be deflecting their energies from what should be the real focus of their concern: the transformation of functional gender balance to situations of real imbalance.”

The suggestion that the suppression of women in Scripture begins with the emergence of the Israelite monarchy is borne out textually in the narratives. God warns Samuel of the results to Israel should they insist
on having a king (1 Samuel 8). When the monarchy is instated, one notices a sudden shift in textual emphasis from women and men in basic equivalence to kings, court intrigue, war, with women almost disappearing. This then becomes characteristic of the subsequent Old Testament historical documents. The narrator thus subtly substantiates the fulfillment of God’s prediction with this dramatic textual transition. The monarchy signals the end of vigorous matriarchy.

A New Testament Well Woman

Though the narrative of John 4 is found in the New Testament and was written in Greek, the writer was a Jew. Thus it would not seem unreasonable to suggest that it may exhibit the same Old Testament narrative properties.

Ongoing discussion of John 4 points to a need for re-evaluating the numerous narrative details of this passage as they cast light on the status of women. All the verbal and literary subtleties that are part of this narrative need to be accorded their proper attention to accurately inform interpretation.

Regarding the sequencing of Hebrew narratives, the theology of John’s Gospel is expressed not only by choice of vocabulary, but also by the author’s careful linking and balancing of one narrative scene with another. This becomes obvious in the conversation of Jesus and Nicodemus, a learned Israelite rabbi (John 3), immediately preceding Christ’s conversation with a Samaritan divorcee (John 4). The differences between Nicodemus and the well woman in grasping the words of Christ are thus highlighted.

The number of verses in the well scene of John 4 signal its importance. Even more striking is the length of the first conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus. Dialogue is widely acknowledged as one of the notable features of the fourth Gospel, as it is in all biblical narratives where it appears. The initial conversation in John 4 is one of the longest found in all four Gospels, taking up more than half of this particular narrative. On this basis alone, John 4 is a significant passage. In chapter four of the fourth Gospel “we have . . . one of the most momentous utterances of our Lord.”

Within the first dialogue, the logic of Jesus’ seemingly abrupt turn from the subject of water to His request, “‘Go, call your husband, and come here’” (John 4:16, NKJV), attracts much attention. Some commentators imply that this disrupts the flow of the conversation. A favorite Johannine literary transition device in a dialogue, however, regularly alerts the reader of Jesus’ supernatural knowledge (1:42, 48; 2:4–3:2). Jesus’ request for her to bring her husband functions as preparation for His revealing to the woman that He knows all things. Her reaction shows that it has that effect: “‘Sir, . . . I can see that you are a prophet’” (4:19, NIV).

But in reality there is no real digression in the conversation. Jesus has heard the woman’s desire to thirst no more. Thus, He is gently leading her to recognize her need of a Savior.

The ensuing remarks of Christ (John 4:21-24), His longest speech in the first dialogue, are widely recognized as foundational statements for mission theology, doctrine of the church, and the theology of worship. Cahill even suggests a chiastic structure of this narrative with the apex highlighting true worship:

A. Meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (vss. 5-9)

B. Dialogue on living water (vss. 10-15)

C. Dialogue on true worship (vss. 16-26)

D. Dialogue on true food (vss. 27-38)

A Meeting of Samaritans and Jesus (vss. 39-42)Jesus has already shown that He is free from Jewish prejudice against the Samaritans. Now He seeks to instruct this Samaritan woman regarding the Jews. He declares that the great truths of redemption have been committed to them, and that from them the Messiah is to come.

The historical problem of Jewish versus Samaritan worship is thus transformed into a declaration of the true encounter with God, ultimately climaxing in Christ’s dramatic “I AM.”
This well woman is consistently portrayed by commentators as a disreputable character incapable of grasping intelligent theological discourse. The details within the narrative, however, do not yield that picture. Even her questions of Christ suggest differently. Her profound grasp of the theological thinking of her day is reflected in her intelligent questions about worship.

The Samaritan woman. Because the first dialogue in John 4 contains a single reference to her unlawful marital status (vv. 16-18), most interpreters have restricted their understanding of this woman to this one single clue. As a result, she has been evaluated in a less-than-positive light. Some examples:

1. The time reference of the “sixth hour” (John 4:6, KJV), when Jesus is said to have arrived at the well, is interpreted by some to mean that the woman comes to the well in the middle of the day to avoid meeting anyone in her great embarrassment.

   Well use, however, was not restricted to the evening hours, except by shepherds. Other noon-time encounters at local wells are not unheard of in Scripture. Jacob meets with Rachel at the well near Haran during midday (Gen. 29:7). It is also important to remember that no one at that time had running water in the home. Furthermore, the comment of time in the narrative is grammatically connected with Christ’s journey and His weariness.

   2. Major commentators, in the usual negative characterization of this woman, wonder, when she at first misinterprets Christ’s reference to “living water,” whether a Samaritan woman would typically have been able to comprehend even the most elementary concepts of such a discussion.

   Nicodemus, however, in just the previous chapter, also initially misinterprets Christ’s comments literally. However, this is characterized as merely a misunderstanding.

   3. Other damaging indications regarding the well woman include her being referred to as a “five-time loser” and a “tramp.” This kind of characterization is common among commentators.

   Whatever adjectives are attached to this woman regarding her reputation and her marriages, the consistent implication is that she is a low-class person, and any fault in the marriage failures are hers. Even her witness concerning the Messiah to the “men” of Samaria is interpreted negatively.

   This well woman is consistently portrayed by commentators as a disreputable character incapable of grasping intelligent theological discourse. The details within the narrative, however, do not yield that picture. Even her questions of Christ suggest differently. Her profound grasp of the theological thinking of her day is reflected in her intelligent questions about worship.

   The negative characterizations of the Samaritan woman have also not been informed by this woman’s political savvy revealed in the narrative. She is not culturally naive. Her conversation with Christ opens with evidence that she is well aware of the political situation between the Samaritans and the Jews (vs. 9) and seems to teasingly wonder about the “ignorance” of these matters on the part of the Jewish gentleman at the well when she responds to Jesus’ request for a drink of water: “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (vs. 9, NKJV).

   Furthermore, as the conversation progresses, contrary to the evaluation of her in the commentaries, the Samaritan woman’s understanding of the Stranger deepens. She begins to call Him “sir” and then wonders if He may be a prophet. Her questions and comments consistently reveal her grasp of both Samaritan and Jewish theology. The conversation in the narrative clearly reveals that she is not unschooled in contemporary political or theological matters.

   As far as her having no influence—after the conviction that Christ is the Messiah penetrates her heart, she overlooks the reason she came to the well, which strikingly fulfills Christ’s earlier promise regarding thirst. She leaves her water pot and hurries to the town. She goes to where she knows the people, including men, are gathered, resting in the heat of noontide. And at her invitation they come to see for themselves the one of whom she testifies.

   Textual evidence does not support the idea of her having no influence. Nor does it allow her to be the town harlot. It is hardly possible that if she were truly a low-class prostitute, the men of Samaria would openly follow her to meet an individual described as being able to reveal everything a person has ever done, which is the well woman’s testimony to them about Christ.

   What the narrative details seem to portray is an intelligent city woman with a keen mind who has pondered the theological and polit-
ical realities of her day and culture. The progression in the dialogue reveals Jesus’ desire to bring this woman to faith, knowing that her mind and heart can grasp theological verities. With this one solitary divorcee, Jesus discusses the fundamental issues of Christian theology and worship, making His most profound theological statement on true worship to this supposedly “ignorant” woman, even though He Himself has warned about casting “pearls before swine” (Matt. 7:6, KJV).

Like modern commentators, His own disciples seem not to see any potential in this well woman, for when they return, they wonder why Jesus is speaking to her (John 4:27). Nor have they seen Samaria as a potential area for mission, but solely as a place to purchase food. The woman, however, is of a different mind and goes immediately to invite the people of her town to come meet Jesus. And Jesus waxes eloquent to the disciples about the ready harvest of Samaria: “Do you not say, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest”? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (vs. 35, NKJV).

The woman’s witness to the men of Samaria is an occasion for Jesus to become excited about the harvest of His ministry. And in a place as unlikely as Samaria, this harvest is ready. The well woman “proved herself a more effective missionary than [Christ’s] own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were focused upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that right around them was a harvest ready to be gathered. But through the woman whom they despised, a whole cityful were brought to hear the Saviour.”

Some scholars suggest that the well woman is only half-hearted in her acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. The clues in the narrative suggest instead that she is rather immediate in accepting His divine claim when she grasps who He is. The learned Nicodemus, by contrast, has been unable to make such connections from similar concepts spoken by Jesus in the previous chapter. Unlike Nicodemus, who quietly disappears from the scene as Jesus’ partner in conversation, the Samaritan woman invites the men and women of Samaria to meet Jesus. In contrast to Christ’s disciples, who go into the city only to buy bread, she hurries there to share the “Bread of Life.”

The Pharisees of Israel have despised Jesus, demanding a sign that He is the Son of God. But the Samaritans demand nothing, and Jesus performs no miracles among them, except to reveal to the well woman that He knows her marital status. And many in Samaria receive Him. In their new joy they say to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world,” giving demonstrable confirmation of the influence of this woman’s testimony. Moreover, the Samaritan acknowledgment of the Messiah is proclaimed in the distinctive designation, “Savior of the world” (vs. 42, NKJV).

Conclusion

Feminists deserve to be chided for their castigation that biblical patriarchy subjugates women. Old Testament narratives paint a different picture. The matriarchs are not suppressed women. Rather, they are willful and directive within a basic position of gender equality with the patriarchs. The consistent picture in Genesis finds both men and women cooking and doing other household chores. Both genders take care of sheep. It isn’t until the later institution of the monarchy that this is drastically affected. Feminists are free to deplore patriarchy, but they cannot use the Genesis matriarchs as evidence to support that position.

In the New Testament, the gentle chiding is for the commentators on the Gospel of John who seem to miss numerous important narrative details in John 4, and as a result underestimate this well woman. Rather than a low-class prostitute, she is pictured as a well-informed city woman to whom people listen when she speaks. A whole town full of people believe her testimony regarding the Jewish man at the well and go with her to find Him.

Yes, she has been divorced five times.
times, but the text never informs the reader who has been at fault in those divorces. Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged that divorce in that era seems to be the sole prerogative of the male. Within the John 4 narrative, it is important to notice that Jesus is not criticizing the well woman’s previous marriages, but rather noting her present situation of living with a man without being married. In fact, He twice commends her honesty in describing her present marital status.

And Christ unfolds to her the most profound and sublime theology. Christ, throughout all four Gospels, is portrayed as One who knows all things and all people. In the John 4 narrative, He surely knows not only that the well woman’s mind is capable of understanding theological discourse, but even more importantly, that her heart is receptive. In fact, careful narrative work throughout the fourth Gospel reveals that it is women who are the privileged recipients of Jesus’ most important self-revelations (e.g., Mary, Martha, and the Samaritan woman).

The well woman of John 4 deserves our respect and a fresh evaluation of her character. Sensitive narrative analysis can help point us in the right direction. Interpretation of biblical narratives used to shape theology demands careful attention to every detail.

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SBY SAMUEL KORANTENG-PIPIM* 

SUFFERING MANY THINGS

The differing ways in which Jesus responded to Jairus and the woman with the issue of blood speak volumes on how we should respond to suffering.

Ellen Dipenaar, a dedicated Christian South African, contracted leprosy and was sent to a leprosarium. While she was receiving treatment, her only son died of polio, her husband succumbed to cancer, and her sister died in a car accident. As if this weren’t enough, she discovered that growths on her legs were gangrenous, a condition that led to amputation. Then, when her doctor prescribed eye-drops, the nurse who administered the medication made a serious mistake: instead of eye-drops, she administered acid, which led to Ellen’s blindness!

Many faithful Christians around the world are suffering many things on account of their faith. Why is it that sometimes when people make a commitment to be faithful to Christ, their lives go from bad to worse?

There are Adventists who are in prison or who have lost their jobs because they would not compromise their biblical convictions through Sabbath work, lying, or fighting in their tribes’ or nations’ wars. Adventist refugees are starving to death in troubled regions of the world because they will not eat unclean foods, sometimes the only available provision to keep themselves alive. Adventists have been disowned by

*Samuel Koranteng-Pipim is Director of Public Campus Ministries for the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
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The passage focuses on Jairus, shifts to the woman, and finally moves back to Jairus. It sandwiches one story (the woman’s) within another story (Jairus’s). Inasmuch as the passage begins and concludes with Jairus, it can be said that Jairus is the principal focus of the entire passage. The key to understanding his story, however, lies in the story of the woman with an issue of blood. This story-within-the-story offers valuable lessons on what to do when, after taking a stand for Jesus, situations go from bad to worse.

A Chapter of Sorrows

Mark 5 begins with the painful account of a man living in a tomb, possessed by evil spirits. Another man emerges from his house brokenhearted because his only daughter is seriously ill. Then we are told of a woman who, for 12 years, has been suffering from a bleeding disorder. Finally, we are taken into a home where a young girl lies dead.

This chapter describes individuals who are suffering many things: demon possession; sudden, acute illness; chronic, incurable illness; poverty; ridicule and scorn; and death.

In verses 21-34 is the account of the woman with an issue of blood. The account of her condition is intricately woven together with Jairus’s experience.

The passage divides into three distinct parts:

Part 1 (vss. 21-24) begins on a note of urgency, with an emergency in the house of Jairus, who comes to Jesus, asking Him to heal his dying daughter—his only daughter (Luke 8:42). Jesus responds immediately. As He heads toward the home of Jairus, a large crowd goes with Him.

Part 2 (vss. 25-34) opens abruptly with a shift from the emergency situation of Jairus to an anonymous woman with an issue of blood. Her arrival on the scene causes a delay in the journey to the home of Jairus. For 12 years this woman has unsuccessfully tried everything. Finally, she decides to go to Jesus by pressing through the crowd and touching the hem of His garment. Just then, Jesus asks what seems to the disciples to be a rather ridiculous question: “Who touched My clothes?” (vs. 30, NKJV). At Christ’s persistence, the woman confesses what has happened, and Jesus encourages her to go home in peace.

In Part 3 (vss. 35-43) the narrative shifts back to Jairus. Messengers from his house arrive with the bad news of the child’s death. Jesus ignores the news, urges Jairus to have faith, and goes to his home with Peter, James, and John. Despite the scorn and ridicule of professional mourners, Jesus raises the dead child back to life and charges the parents not to publicize the miracle.

The passage focuses on Jairus, shifts to the woman, and finally moves back to Jairus. It sandwiches one story (the woman’s) within another story (Jairus’s). Inasmuch as the passage begins and concludes with Jairus, it can be said that Jairus is the principal focus of the entire passage. The key to understanding his story, however, lies in the story of the woman with an issue of blood. This story-within-the-story offers valuable lessons on what to do when, after taking a stand for Jesus, situations go from bad to worse.

A Closer Look

A casual reading of Mark 5:21-43 reveals some general parallels between the two stories of Jairus and the woman: both have desperate needs; both go to Jesus for help; and both are helped by Jesus. When the two accounts move closely, however, some interesting contrasts emerge:

1. Names. Whereas Jairus is identified by name, the woman’s name is not given; she is simply identified as “a certain woman” (vs. 25, KJV). These are a prominent, well-known person and an anonymous, unknown individual.

2. Condition. The woman’s condition may be described as chronic. She has battled an incurable illness for 12 years. On the other hand, Jairus’s daughter’s situation is acute, a sudden, terminal illness.

3. Time/duration. The woman has suffered in her condition for 12 years. This is also the age of Jairus’s daughter (vs. 42). In other words, the year in which the child is born is the exact year in which the woman begins bleeding! Thus, while Jairus’s daughter experiences 12 years of vitality and health, the woman suffers 12 years of continuous illness. Jairus experiences 12 years of joy and hope; the woman suffers 12 years of deterioration and despair.
4. Religious status. Jairus is a ruler of the synagogue. But the woman, because of her issue of blood, would be an outcast from the synagogue, for according to Leviticus 15:25-33, the woman’s condition made her unclean, and any contact with others made them unclean as well.

5. Social/economic status. The woman is economically handicapped, having spent all that she has on many physicians. But Jairus is a man of means, with servants and social respectability.

6. Options. For the woman, Jesus is the last resort. She has unsuccessfully tried other remedies and options. But apparently, for Jairus, Jesus is His first choice; he goes straight to Jesus when his child takes ill.

7. Advocate. The woman has no one to plead her case with Jesus, so she has to go herself. Jairus serves as a mouthpiece to plead the case for his daughter.


9. Direction of approach. The woman approaches Jesus from behind (vs. 27), falling later at His feet at the end of her encounter with Him. On the other hand, Jairus comes to Jesus face to face, falling at Jesus’ feet at the beginning of his encounter.

10. Result of delay. Because of Jesus’ delay in going to Jairus’s home, the woman is healed. But because of the delay, Jairus’s daughter dies.

11. Word from Jesus. Jesus speaks to the woman only after the good news of her healing. But He speaks to Jairus in the text only after the bad news of the child’s death.

12. Testimonies. Though the woman comes to Jesus secretly, her healing is made public. On the other hand, though Jairus comes publicly to Jesus, the healing of his child is to be kept secret (vs. 43).

The differences and similarities in the two stories help in understanding why Mark sandwiches the story of the woman within that of Jairus.

The Trial of Jairus’s Faith

Jairus exercises great faith when he comes publicly to Jesus, an unpopular decision that could cost him his job as a ruler of the synagogue. He could have come to Jesus secretly like the woman or like Nicodemus, another ruler of the synagogue (John 3). But Jairus takes a stand for the Man of Galilee. He recognizes that the Man who associates with sinners and tax collectors is none other than the Messiah.

Jairus has come to a point in his life at which nothing, not even his social standing, job, or wealth, matters to him more than one simple fact: His child is dying. And only a Savior can save her. Every other earthly consideration pales into insignificance. Thus, he makes a costly decision for Christ. He does right because it is right and leaves the consequences to God. And God always honors those who take a stand with Him, regardless of circumstances.

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Christ rewards this faith by immediately setting out to Jairus’s house. But since every true faith requires public testing, Jairus’s faith is also tried. Notice how Jesus allows Jairus’s faith to be tested.

• Delay by the crowd. Jesus is on a life-and-death errand—an emergency situation in Jairus’s home—and the crowd impedes His movement. Jesus could drive away the throng that surrounds him, but He chooses not to do so. Later, after the child has died, Christ sends away the crowd (vs. 37). But when Jesus might be expected to do something about the crowd, which is jostling and obstructing His movement, He does nothing.

Imagine the driver of an ambulance caught in traffic yet refusing to sound his sirens? Imagine how Jairus feels when the crowd delays the movement of Jesus to his home.

Why does the Lord often delay when we trust Him with our urgent cases?

• Silence of Jesus. Jairus experiences another trial. Notice that besides not asking the crowd to give way, Jesus also does not speak a word of encouragement to Jairus, assuring him that all will be well. Instead, Jesus allows His movement to be interrupted by the woman.

Why does the Lord often allow our cherished plans to be interrupted? Why does the Lord speak to others, but not to Jairus? Why does He sometimes seem to care about others, while appearing indifferent
to our plight? And, worse still, why does Jesus stop and ask a seemingly pointless question: “Who touched my clothes?” (vs. 30, NKJV).

To the disciples this is not logical, since Jesus has been jostled and touched by a host of individuals. The fact remains, however, that what Jesus says may not always be logical to the rational mind. It is illogical to insist that one should never lie, steal, kill, or break any of God’s Ten Commandments to save life. The Christian does not always operate on human logic, but on faith in God and His Word. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:5, 6, NKJV).

But the question still remains: Why is it that when one puts one’s trust in the Lord He sometimes allows plans to be interrupted? Why does the Lord seem silent when, at the same time, He appears to pay attention to others? Why does He call on others while He appears to pass us by?

To Jairus, the delay by the crowd, the interruption by the woman and Christ’s silence and seeming hesitation is a trial of his faith. Imagine Jairus saying to himself: Master, if we continue to delay, my child will die! The immediate mission is to assist a dying girl. Why are you concerned about the insignificance of someone touching your clothes? Further delay will be catastrophic.

But Jesus still delays.

• Further delay by the woman. Jesus looks in the direction of the woman, and speaks to her (vss. 32, 34), but not a word to Jairus. Imagine what is going through Jairus’s mind: Lord, this woman’s situation is chronic, not an emergency like mine! “Trembling with fear” the woman falls at Christ feet and tells all (vs. 33, NIV). She is afraid because she has broken the rules of the Torah (God’s law) regarding ritual uncleanness. By touching Jesus, she fears, she has made Him ritually unclean (Num. 5:1-4; Lev. 15:25). Even worse, she is asked to acknowledge her uncleanness in the presence of a leader of her local synagogue. Besides the courage such a step would involve, Jesus is asking her to do something humiliating: talk about her problem in front of men. It is one thing for a woman to discuss this kind of problem with other women; it is another to declare the uncleanness before a large crowd, including the disciples of Christ and the ruler of the synagogue.

Meanwhile, as the woman tells the whole truth (vs. 33, NKJV), Jairus waits impatiently. Imagine what telling the whole truth entailed!

The Bible simply says that the woman “came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth” (vs. 33, KJV). While she is telling her entire story to Jesus and all within hearing, Jairus is seemingly ignored by Christ. Jesus patiently listens and gives encouragement to the woman: “Daughter, your faith [not your superstitious touch of My garment] has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction” (vs. 34, NKJV). But not a word to Jairus.

• From bad to worse. Just then messengers from Jairus’s home arrive with bad news: “Your daughter is dead” (vs. 35, NKJV). It is easy to imagine Jairus saying to himself: With all these delays, I knew it would come to this.

Christians sometimes hear these dreadful words: “Your loved one is dead!” “Your job is ended!” “Your career is over!” “Your future is hopeless!” “Your marriage is over!” “Your cancer is terminal!”

Often, these cruel words come when they’ve just committed or rededicated their life to Christ. The verdict is announced when they’re trying to do what is right, such as getting out of an immoral relationship or returning a faithful tithe.

Why do things go from bad to worse at the very time someone is trying to do the right thing? They are doing their best to honor God’s Sabbath, only to lose their job. They try to do God’s will and their spouse threatens divorce. They try to tell the truth under dire circumstances and are fired from their job.

And then they are told, “Yours is a hopeless case. Don’t waste Christ’s time.” Jairus experiences this: “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” (vs. 35, NKJV).

• More trials. But Christ’s words and actions after the bad news may test the faith of Jairus even more. When the situation becomes hopeless, Jesus speaks some strange words to Jairus: “Do not be afraid; only believe” (vs. 36, NKJV). To us this may sound hopeful because we know how the story ends. Think of how it sounds to Jairus to be told, “Be not afraid.” Afraid? What is there to fear now? The worst has occurred. And believe? What is there to
believe? The girl is dead!
Someone has said that whenever God says, “Don’t be afraid,” it is time to start worrying, because He is about to ask you to do the impossible. (Consider Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, Mary.) But whenever Jesus says, “Be not afraid,” that command is also a promise.
Therefore, when someone says, “It is finished,” Jesus says, “Fear not. It is the beginning.” When someone says, “I’m sorry, that’s the end,” Jesus says “Fear not. It’s not the end; it is to be continued.”
The real question is: Do we trust God enough to believe in His word? Do we believe that He knows what is best? Do we believe He has power to save—even in difficult situations?
Those words of Jesus, “‘Do not be afraid; only believe’” are calculated to encourage Jairus so he does not give up. For just then, Jesus does another strange thing: He drives away the crowd, save Peter, James, and John. Why does He now send away the crowd? Why does He choose to do so now that all is lost? Why hasn’t He sent away the crowd earlier, when there was hope for the child’s healing?
Perhaps Jesus is teaching Jairus that God’s ways are not our ways. His timing is always the best. All we have to do at all times is to trust Him.
• Trials at home. Jairus’s trial is not over when he hears home. He is greeted by the weeping of mourners, confirming that indeed, the child is dead. What will Jesus do now that the situation has gone from bad to worse?
Speaking to Jairus, whose faith is then wavering, Jesus declares that the child is not dead but only sleeping. Though death is the most hopeless condition in this life, Jesus calls it “sleep.” And if death is simply sleep, then there is hope for the most hopeless situation. That’s why the Christian is exhorted to be “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10, KJV). And this is why we must not attempt to save our jobs, positions, or even our lives at the cost of our obedience to the One who calls death merely sleep.
But Jairus’s faith is to be tried one last time. At the words of Jesus that the child is not dead but asleep, the mourners stop their weeping and laugh Him to scorn. Their ridicule is not so much directed at Christ as it is at Jairus. The funeral professionals seemed to say: “What does this man think? Doesn’t he know the difference between death and sleep? And, you, Jairus, is this the kind of person on whom you are willing to stake your career and child’s life?”
At this point perhaps Jairus wonders: Why does the Lord allow things to go from bad to worse? And why does He permit enemies to subject His children to scorn and ridicule?
The Reward of Faith
The Good News is that in all such trials, Jesus is always very near. If we remain faithful, He will honor our faith—even as He does for Jairus. The One who once stood at Lazarus’ tomb and said “Come forth” now goes to Jairus’s daughter’s room, takes the child by the hand and commands: “‘Talitha, cumi’ which is translated, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’” (vs. 41, NKJV).
“Talitha, cumi,” Jesus speaks in Aramaic. Mark translates His words into Greek, and that Greek is emphatic. He literally says: “Little girl, it is I who say to you, arise.”
“Some may say that you are dead, but I say to you, arise.”
The same Jesus who brings life out of death can transform hopeless situations today. Our responsibility is to remain faithful, no matter what.
Perhaps we may be asking what Jesus is seeking to teach by the delay, silence, bad news, and scorn? Consider four possible lessons:
1. Divine timing. One reason is to teach something about the mystery of divine timing. Despite what may appear as a delay or interruption in our plans and expectations, God’s timing is never late.
Never talk about delay without knowing God’s arrival time. It is inappropriate to speak of delay as it pertains to the second coming of Christ. Jesus has not given His arrival time. How can we speak of delay with regard to God’s plan for our lives unless we fully know what He is seeking to do in our lives? Since God’s time never knows a delay, we must always trust Him, no
We must dare to take a stand for Christ and His truth, no matter what. If teachers can’t take a stand for unpopular theological truth, how will their students do so? If pastors and church leaders are unwilling to take unpopular stands, how can they expect their members and churches to do so? If parents are unprepared to honor the Lord, how can their children be expected to make decisions of faith for the Lord?

matter how long it may seem.

“To all who are reaching out to feel the guiding hand of God, the moment of greatest discouragement is the time when divine help is nearest.”

“When in faith we take hold of His strength, he will change, wonderfully change, the most hopeless, discouraging outlook. He will do this for the glory of His name.”

2. The nature of true faith. Another lesson Jesus was teaching was that true faith steps forward regardless of humiliation, intimidation, scorn, or even loss. It is the nature of true faith to take a stand—even in the face of obstacles. One cannot secretly hold to faith. Faith requires public testing. It calls for a public stand regardless of consequences.

The woman with an issue of blood takes a courageous and humiliating step of faith when she steps forward publicly to talk about her uncleanness. Jairus takes a courageous step of faith when he decides to come to Jesus publicly—even amidst derision.

We must also dare to take a stand for Christ and His truth, no matter what. If teachers can’t take a stand for unpopular theological truth, how will their students do so? If pastors and church leaders are unwilling to take unpopular stands, how can they expect their members and churches to do so? If parents are unprepared to honor the Lord, how can their children be expected to make decisions of faith for the Lord?

In deciding upon any course of action we are not to ask whether we can see that harm will result from it, but whether it is in keeping with the will of God.”

“True Christian principle will not stop to weigh consequences. It does not ask, What will people think of me if I do this? or, How will it affect my worldly prospects if I do that?”

3. The reward for faithfulness. Jesus was also teaching that divine blessing will always attend those who are faithful to the Lord. He will never fail anyone who puts trust in Him.

“Those who take Christ at His word, and surrender their souls to His keeping, their lives to His ordering, will find peace and quietude. Nothing of the world can make them sad when Jesus makes them glad by His presence.”

4. Comfort in suffering. Perhaps the most important reason that Jesus allows the faith of Jairus to be tried is to instruct him through the experience of the woman. Though Jarius’s ordeal is bitter, he was not alone in his pain. Another person is also suffering—and has been, for 12 years. Sometimes our trials are designed to help us appreciate others. Pain makes us more sympathetic; disappointment makes us more humble; and hardship keeps us dependent on God.

Jesus is teaching Jairus from the experience of the woman. It is here that the contrasting characteristics identified earlier between the woman and Jairus become most helpful. If Jesus is able to help the woman’s hopeless case, what about Jarius?

Jesus does not needlessly delay, keep silent, or utter ridiculous or strange words. It is His design to instruct Jairus. This is, perhaps, the most important message contained in the story-within-the-story: If Jesus did it for the woman, how much more would He not do for Jairus?

Lessons for Today

All of us have felt pain. Ours may be similar to Jairus’s. Perhaps it is a loved one who is in serious difficulty. Or it may be that our situation is similar to the woman. We are the one actually bleeding to death. Perhaps it is our health, finances, or family situation that is slowly but hopelessly bleeding.

Whatever the situation, we must go to Jesus with our burdens. We may choose to go to Him like the woman—secretly in the closets of our homes, or silently and anonymously in church (as did Hannah, the mother of Samuel). Or we may choose to go to Jesus like Jarius—openly in church or prayer meeting, during the time for prayer requests.

Another lesson is that we must not fear taking a stand for Jesus. The times in which we live call for men and women who dare to risk all for Jesus’ sake. If we do not stand up for something, we shall fall for anything. Fear of censure from our critics and fear of losing our jobs should not prevent us from doing the right thing. Neither should we wait until retirement before declaring where we stand on issues. Both the woman and Jairus take risks. And so must we.
“Often the follower of Christ is brought where he cannot serve God and carry forward his worldly enterprises. Perhaps it appears that obedience to some plain requirement of God will cut off his means of support. Satan would make him believe that he must sacrifice his conscientious convictions. But the only thing in our world upon which we can rely is the word of God... Matt. 6:33. Even in this life it is not for our good to depart from the will of our Father in heaven. When we learn the power of His word, we shall not follow the suggestions of Satan in order to obtain food or to save our lives. Our only questions will be, What is God’s command? and what is His promise? Knowing these, we shall obey the one, and trust the other.”

Finally, when we take a stand for the Lord and He seems to delay, and our prospects grow darker and darker, we are still to trust Him. Each of us should say with Job: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15, NKJV). With the three Hebrew young men, we must be able to say: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Dan. 3:17, 18, NKJV).

“The season of distress before God’s people will call for a faith that will not falter. His children must make it manifest that He is the only object of their worship, and that no consideration, not even that of life itself, can induce them to make the least concession to false worship. To the loyal heart, the commands of sinful, finite men will sink into insignificance beside the word of the eternal God. Truth will be obeyed though the result be imprisonment or exile or death.”

The story-within-the-story tells us that when you take a stand for Jesus and things go from bad to worse, you are still to trust Him, even if He delays, and even if your plans are interrupted.

When you are told that because of your faith, “your daughter is dead,” tell them she is only asleep; she will rise again.

REFERENCES
1 The Desire of Ages, p. 528.
2 Prophets and Kings, p. 260.
3 Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 634.
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7 Prophets and Kings, pp. 512, 513.
The relationship between death and the Fall creates some intriguing points of discussion and study.

The issue of whether or not death occurred before the entrance of sin on Earth presents many fascinating facets, all of which have potentially significant theological implications for Seventh-day Adventists. Was there death on Earth before the Fall? Was death part of God’s original plan for creation before sin entered the world, or was it introduced as a punishment for wickedness after the Fall? Was animal death included in the death sentence at the Fall, or did animals die before the Fall?

Does the Bible Recognize Death Prior to the Fall?

One of the ideas we occasionally hear that would supposedly solve the tension between the Bible's short Earth history and the deep time that conventional science demands is that there were perhaps two creations.

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A Perfect, Completed Creation

Of course, this lack of any reference to an earlier creation has provided an open field wherein speculation can and has run without restraint. Though the Bible provides no knowledge of a “precreation creation,” nuances in the Hebrew text appear to preclude it.

Jacques Doukhan argues that each stage of the Creation is unambiguously characterized as good. Moreover, both Genesis 1 and 2 teach that perfect peace reigned, not just between the human couple, but also between humans and the animal kingdom. The end of the creative process is characterized by a word generally translated as “finished” or “completed” (2:1, 2, NIV). Doukhan argues that this word conveys more than the mere chronological idea of “end.” It also implies the quantitative idea that nothing is missing and there is nothing to add, confirming that death and all the evil that will strike later have not yet (an important concept in Hebrew) affected the world.

Doukhan then goes on to argue: “At the same time, the biblical text does not allow for speculation or supposition of a precreation in which death and destruction would already have been involved. It clearly indicates that the ‘heavens and earth’ which are presented in Genesis 2a (the conclusion of the creation story) are the same as those in Genesis 1:1 (the introduction of the creation story).”1 Doukhan concludes, “The event of creation (Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a) testifies to, and is told as, a complete and total event which admits neither the possibility of a prework in a distant past (gap-theory) nor a postwork in the future (evolution).”2

Doukhan’s argument becomes even more potent if one accepts...
In many respects, the ancient peoples of the Near East were obsessed with the topic of death, as is evident in their elaborate burial rituals and in many of their writings. However, there is not much in ancient literature on the origin of death.

Richard Davidson’s analysis of Genesis 1. Davidson’s work is significant because he argues that the phrase “in the beginning” in verse 1 points back to the “ultimate” beginning of the universe, not simply the beginning of this Earth. Davidson supports Sailerhammer’s linguistic argument that Genesis 1:1 refers to this initial creation of the universe and that it is separate from the creation found in the rest of Genesis 1, which would have happened more recently. (Though this can support an old Earth but young life argument, the time between the beginning of the universe and the Earth itself was not the focus or even a concern of an ancient Hebrew.) Combining Doukhan and Davidson’s analyses, the Hebrew writer is arguing that God’s creative activity throughout the universe was not completed until this Earth, itself, was created. If this analysis is correct, it not only precludes an earthly precreation with its subsequent death, but also denies that death occurred anywhere in God’s entire created universe prior to the Fall. Nevertheless, even if one rejects Davidson’s argument, Doukhan’s argument alone maintains that the Hebrew text denies any precreation or death before the Fall.

The “Not Yet” of Creation

Doukhan offers additional arguments on why death did not exist before the Fall. One of these deals with the Hebrew word terem, which conveys the concept of “not yet.” The entire Eden story is clearly written from the perspective of a writer who has already experienced the effects of death and suffering and therefore describes the events of Genesis 2 as a “not yet” situation. Doukhan adds other textual elements that support the idea that Genesis 2 does indeed serve as a prologue for Genesis 3. Though some are explicit, many more are implicit. For example, the dust from which man is made anticipates the dust to which he will return after the Fall; the assignment of Adam and Eve to keep the garden anticipates their being forced out, whereupon the cherubim are entrusted to keep the garden.

It could be added that the “not yet” concept is also displayed in a play on words between arom (naked, as it pertains to the humans) and aron (cunning, as it pertains to the serpent). The former points to the latter to indicate the tragedy that will be later initiated through the association between the serpent and human beings, which has not yet occurred. Taken together, these all point to a great divide in Earth’s history—a time before sin and death, and a time after. Sin and death do not occur until Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve disobey God.
Was Death Part of the Original Creation?

In many respects, the ancient peoples of the Near East were obsessed with the topic of death, as is evident in their elaborate burial rituals and in many of their writings. However, there is not much in ancient literature on the origin of death.

The closest such story, perhaps, is from the Epic of Gilgamesh, and is commonly referred to as “Gilgamesh and the Magic Plant.” The essence of the story is that after the death of his dear friend and companion Enkidu, with whom he had shared many adventures, a distraught Gilgamesh sets off in search of eternal life. Gilgamesh learns that the long-lived hero of the Flood, Utnapishtim, knows the secret of avoiding death. Gilgamesh seeks out Utnapishtim and learns from him that before the flood, continued eating of a certain plant would forestall death.

Gilgamesh asks Utnapishtim for the location of the plant and learns that it is now at the bottom of the sea, submerged there during the great flood. Determined to retrieve the plant, Gilgamesh obtains a boat and rows out to the middle of the sea. When he arrives over the spot where the plant is submerged, he takes a great breath, dives down into the depths, finds the plant, and retrieves it. He rows back to shore, where, exhausted from his ordeal, he falls into a deep sleep. While he is sleeping, a snake slithers along the shore, sees the plant, and eats it. When Gilgamesh wakes up, he finds his plant gone! He spies a snake skin nearby and realizes that the snake has deprived him of eternal life!

Various scholars have contemplated what this story might have meant to the ancients. Some have suggested it was intended to answer the question, Why do snakes shed their skin? They apparently understood this as a way the snake rejuvenated itself. Others note that there were strong traditions among ancient Mesopotamians that the antediluvians had incredibly long life spans. Gilgamesh and the Magic Plant answers why this is so.

Others have pointed out, however, that Gilgamesh begins his quest for the magic plant after the death of his dear friend Enkidu, and that the story, perhaps, was intended to answer the question, Why do people die, or conversely, why don’t they live forever? The answer seems to be that death had its origins when humankind lost access to the magic plant—that we were deprived of eternal life because a nasty snake stole it from us.

The second folk story Bailey detects is that humans were intended to be mortal—to die—from the very beginning. His evidence for this is the verses that show that humans share a common essence with the animal kingdom. Since he assumes that animals died from the beginning, so must humans have died. He also assumes that in this folk story, humans were always forbidden access to the tree of life. Unfortunately, he asserts, only a fragment of this second explanation is preserved in the Bible, including only a part of the following verse: “The Lord God said, . . . lest [humankind] put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever” (Gen. 3:22, KJV). Bailey bemoans the fact that at this point the text breaks off, leaving us without the ending of this second story. Nevertheless, this verse fragment shows, according to Bailey, that God never intended to make
There are indications within Scripture in addition to Romans 8 that indicate that the death of animals is a moral problem and that their death—indeed, their present behavior as manifested in the predator/prey relationship—is tied directly to the acts of humanity, especially the human disobedience that led to the Fall.

Humans mortal from the beginning, and that this verse fragment was later merged into the first story.

Bailey argues that the idea of death as punishment does not appear in the rest of the Old Testament and, thus, explanation number 2 provides the basic perspective of the rest of the Old Testament. The idea that death was divine punishment did not emerge, he says, until the intertestamental period and, especially, the New Testament period.

In a more recent study on death in the Bible, Kent Harold Richards acknowledges that there seems to be little preoccupation with the origin of death in the Old Testament, that is, few texts directly address this issue, Genesis 3 being the major exception. In contrast with Bailey, however, Richards notes that “the understanding of death as part of some original plan is far less compatible with the wide range of texts.” That is to say, death was not a built-in part of God’s original creation according to the Bible.

Rather, Richards argues, the most obvious explanation for the origin of death is as a punishment for disobeying God. Whereas Bailey fails to identify any Old Testament texts, apart from Genesis 3, that support the idea that death was the result of divine punishment, Richards identifies numerous others, e.g., “‘Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die’” (Eze. 18:4, NKJV). Other such texts include Psalm 37:9, 10, 20, 34; 68:2; Isaiah 40:24; Malachi 4:1; and John 3:16. Though these latter don’t refer to the original death sentence, they emanate from that judgment and were indeed part of the ancient Israelite understanding.

Is the Death of Animals a Moral Issue?

How could a loving God allow millions of years of death and suffering in the animal kingdom prior to the creation of humankind? This seems especially incongruent with the description given of our Creator as a God who assures us of His love by reminding us that He does not forget even a sparrow (Luke 12:6) and that He feeds the ravens (vs. 24). Therefore we should not worry about whether He will care for us, for are we not “of more value than many sparrows” (vs. 7, NKJV)?

It is often suggested that the Bible is concerned only with human death (Rom. 5:12), that the death of animals is not a moral problem. This argument seems to be contradicted by Romans 8:19–23: “The earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the first- fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (NKJV).

Advocates of the idea that death reigned in nature for millions of years prior to the appearance of human-kind have given considerable attention to this passage. This is because the common reading of the text suggests that nature was directly affected by the Fall. Since this interpretation contradicts the model that holds that death existed in nature for millions of years prior to the seven-day Creation (and hence the Fall), there have been several attempts to reinterpret the passage.

The focus of attention has been on the word ktisis, “creation.” Opponents of the traditional view argue that it can be translated as “creature” (which is true) and that “creature” is the intended meaning here. Moreover, they argue that the creature referred to is not the sub-human creation, but rather is a non-Christian human. They differ on who these individuals are, but the prominent suggestions are either Gentiles or Jews.

There are several problems with this alternate interpretation. For one thing, this translation seems to go against the majority of commentators and translators.

For another, for the “creature” interpretation to work, interpreters must deny that the author intended to personify nature. To accomplish this, they simply assert that early Christians did not personify “creation.” However, there is considerable evidence that ktisis was indeed personified and represented as a woman in both the Greek and early Christian world. Indeed, several mosaic floors illustrate the personification of ktisis. Moreover, the refer-
in Romans 8 to the pains of childbirth reinforces the idea that the early Christians did indeed adapt the Greek personification of nature, and that is how *ktisis* is being used here.

There are, however, indications within Scripture in addition to Romans 8 that indicate that the death of animals is a moral problem and that their death—indeed, their present behavior as manifested in the predator/prey relationship—is tied directly to the acts of humankind, especially the human disobedience that led to the Fall. Insights into this issue come from two studies—the one by Doukhan and another by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, an Israeli scholar.

Frymer-Kensky’s study into the cause of the Flood provides valuable insights into human/animal behavior prior to the Flood. According to Frymer-Kensky, Genesis states explicitly that God decided to destroy the world because of the wickedness of humankind (Gen. 6:5). Although this traditionally has been understood to mean that God destroyed the world as a punishment for humanity’s sins, this understanding of the passage entails serious theological problems, such as the propriety of God’s destroying all life on Earth because of the sins of humankind. She is arguing that rather than the sins of human beings, it was the shedding of blood—the Flood was not so much punishment as a cleansing act.

Frymer-Kensky goes on, however, to answer this dilemma by noting that, according to the Book of Genesis, the God caused the Flood because of the world’s *ḥōq śāmās*. This word may sound familiar because its Arabic cognate is essentially the same as the name for a current militant Palestinian terrorist group. It is usually translated into English as “violence,” but as Frymer-Kensky points out, the term is very complex, with a wide range of meanings that render normal lexical analysis insufficient. Rather, she employs a semantic analysis to grasp more fully the nature of this evil that was so great that it necessitated the Flood. Semantic analysis includes a close examination of the context of the word, not only of the biblical text, but also of its extra-biblical parallels, such as the Atrahasis Epic.

Frymer-Kensky points out that in both the Atrahasis Epic and Genesis 1–11, solutions are proposed to deal with the problem of humankind and to prevent these problems from reoccurring. Since the problems are perceived as quite different in each of these primeval histories, however, the solutions are likewise different. In Atrahasis, the problem is overpopulation, and the solution involves ways of inhibiting human reproduction. In Genesis, the problem is *ḥōq śāmās* and the solution involves inhibiting its reoccurrence.

What, precisely, is *ḥōq śāmās*? Frymer-Kensky shows that the answer to the problem is in the solution. In the case of Genesis 1–11, the solution is provided in the laws that God established in God’s covenant with Noah immediately after the Flood.

According to Genesis 9, God issued three commandments to Noah and his sons immediately after the Flood: (1) He commanded humans to be fruitful, to increase, multiply, and swarm over the Earth; (2) He announced that although humans may eat meat, they must not eat animals alive (or eat the blood, which is tantamount to the same thing [Gen. 9:4]); and (3) He declared that no one, neither beasts nor humans, can kill a human being without forfeiting their own life (Gen. 9:5, 6, NKJV).

That animals are included in the new law implementing capital punishment is an indictment of the role they played in bringing violence into the world. The world had descended into an environment of wanton mayhem, indiscriminate killing, wherein humans were killing humans, humans were killing animals (and eating them alive), and animals were killing humans (and, no doubt, eating them).

42

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God attempts to reduce the aggressiveness of the animal kingdom toward humankind by proclaiming: “The fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea” (Gen. 9:2, NASB).

Jacques Doukhan describes both the relationship of humans and animals, and the nature of their behavior as they were ordained by God during Creation week. He points out that the Hebrew verb radah (to have dominion), which is used to express humanity’s special relationship to the animal kingdom, “is a term which belongs to the language of the suzerain-vassal covenant without any suggestion of abuse or cruelty. In the parallel text of Gen 2, man’s relationship to nature is also described in the positive terms of covenant. Man gives names to the animals and not only indicates thereby the establishment of a covenant between him and them, but also declares his lordship over them. That death and suffering are not part of this relationship is clearly suggested in Genesis 1, where man’s dominion over the animals is directly associated with the question of food source. The food provided, both for man and animal, is to be that produced from plants, not animals (cf. Gen 1:28–30). In Gen 2 the same peaceful harmony lies in the fact that animals are designed to provide companionship for man, even if neither complete nor adequate (Gen 2:18).”

This is quite the opposite of how the Bible describes the antediluvian world—a world in which the animal kingdom is in rebellion, and the peaceful relationship between humans and beasts, and beast with beast has broken down—not only were humans killing one another, but animals were killing humans as well.

In essence, hQāmās represents the complete breakdown of the covenant that God had established between humankind and the animal kingdom in Genesis 1:28–30. Rather than the peaceful, non-predatory world where humans rule over the animals benevolently, and the only food sources for both are plants, hQāmās signals a planet in rebellion in which humans no longer rule and the animals no longer submit. Both are now locked into a mutually aggressive relationship of kill or be killed, and the mouths of both are stained with the blood of one another.

This is not to say that the violence did not include humans killing each other (murder); it certainly included that, but the bloodshed went well beyond that, extending into the animal kingdom itself. It also includes the emergence of a carnivorous appetite—a taste for blood—on the part of both humans and beasts. Hence we can understand the stern new prohibitions that God places upon both humans and beasts after the Flood subsides.

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The significance of this Old Testament understanding of hQāmās from the time of Noah did not simply fade away in later biblical times. Indeed, it continued to be embedded within later Old Testament laws and, according to Frymer-Kensky, was still significant during the time of the New Testament church—they were seen as Pre-Jewish and, hence, universal.

It is important to note that these prohibitions delivered to Noah did not restore the Earth to its pre-Fall state. The benevolent lordship and peaceful relationship between humans and beasts described in Genesis 1:28–30 no longer existed—the covenant was broken. The strife and competition that emerged between humans and the former subjects of their kingdom continues, although animals now fear humankind. The food source for both humans and beasts was no longer restricted to plants; both now ate flesh, although humans were prohibited from eating the blood. And the killing of humans
by both other humans and animals was explicitly prohibited and to be punished by death. These latter restrictions were intended to reduce the negative impact of the Fall on nature by restricting in the strongest possible way (through capital punishment) the savagery of חָוָּם. The emergence of חָוָּם introduces a new element that appears in the post-Fall world that was not part of the original creation. The repeated pictures throughout the Old Testament of a New Earth must be seen within the context of חָוָּם. The new world order is a world in which humanity no longer strives with nature. Rather, the peaceful coexistence that pertained to the edenic world is seen as restored. It is not just coincidence that these utopian descriptions are linked to idiom atic characteristic of the verses. Idioms can contain literal elements with regard to the nature and/or length of life in the New Earth is not the point of Isaiah 65 — only that life won’t be lost through conflict. The key is verse 23, which summarizes the preceding verses by proclaiming that God’s people will not labor in vain or bear children for calamity. The threats of the past—including very real threats that Israel was confronting, such as siege warfare—will not exist in the New Earth. Verse 20 is not saying that people won’t live forever in the New Earth; rather, it is saying they will not be subject to the ravages of conflict that characterized their present existence.

The anti-strife message of verses 19–22 is capped off in verse 25, where the wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. This verse stands apart from 19–22 in that it is not describing the ravages of war; rather, it is simply describing a new world order that will not be characterized by strife. It is interesting that it does not say the Babylonian will get along with the Israelite—even though this is certainly included. But the new world order extends to all aspects of God’s domain, including nature. The Lord says: “‘They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain’” (Isa. 11:9, NASB).

By failing to view this passage in its historical context, critics miss the idiomatic characteristic of the verses. The point is not that we might or might not build houses in the New Earth, but that others won’t take them from us in battle. The point is not that we might or might not plant vineyards in the New Earth, but that the deadly conflict that typified Israel’s existence will no longer claim life.

In short, the nature and/or length of life in the New Earth is not the point of Isaiah 65—only that life won’t be lost through conflict. The

Idioms can contain literal elements with regard to the immediate historical context. For example, building houses and having others inhabit them, or planting a vineyard and having another reap the harvest was a very real concern in Iron Age Israel, which found itself constantly under attack from outside invaders. Premature death was also associated with warfare and siege conditions.
reference in verse 22b to the days of His people being like the lifetime of a tree can actually be viewed as a symbolic of eternal life. To argue that Isaiah 65 envisions death in the New Earth is not only incorrect, but is completely missing the point of the passage. Other passages, of course, are more explicit about eternal life (Isa. 25:8; Dan. 12:2, 3).

Regarding Psalm 104, there is no question that it is a Creation Psalm. Some suggest, however, that it teaches that death was a part of the original creation. The implication of this is that animal death is not tied to the Fall and could have, therefore, existed for possibly millions of years before the Fall, which then brought death to humans as well. This interpretation, however, erroneously assumes that Psalm 104 is describing the pristine creation—God’s creation as it was after the first week, but before the Fall. There is no doubt that Psalm 104 is a Creation Psalm, but its intent was not to describe the pristine, pre-Fall creation. Rather, its point is simply to give God credit for the creation as it was at the time of the psalmist.

Within the context of these indicators that show it is the psalmist’s world that is being described and not the pristine, unfallen world, the references to “beasts of the forest [that] prowl about” (vs. 20, NASB) and “young lions” (vs. 10, KJV) make perfect sense. God’s creative acts penetrate the fallen world—He is still the Creator, even of this fallen world.

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4 Doukhan, op cit., p. 16.

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The mission of Apollo 16 placed a special camera onto the surface of the Moon. Photographs from this camera surprised scientists by revealing that substantial amounts of hydrogen are leaving Earth's atmosphere. What did this mean? Water molecules in the upper atmosphere above the ozone layer are shattered into atomic and molecular oxygen and hydrogen by the Sun's ultraviolet radiation. The hydrogen is lighter than the oxygen and so rises away from the Earth and was thus recorded by the Moon camera. On the other hand, the oxygen is heavier than the hydrogen and falls downward to the Earth. This atomic oxygen is an important source of atmospheric oxygen that is produced without reference to living things, like plants, and their photosynthesis process. Photosynthesis, of course, also makes oxygen.

This space program discovery means, importantly, that oxygen was present in primitive Earth conditions long before any life forms were present. How, therefore, did life get started with this enemy of life forms always present? Evolutionary scientists received this information with a mixed reception, because of the unfavorable implication for origin of life studies.

More good news for creationists came in 1973, when Mariner 10 spacecraft flew by the planet Venus and sent back information that the upper atmosphere of Venus was very
similar in oxygen content to that of Earth. We know of no plant life growing on Venus, therefore, we now have strong evidence that a primitive planet’s atmosphere like that on Venus can contain atomic oxygen even though vegetation is not present on the planet, provided water vapor is available.

This discovery means that we cannot postulate the existence of long periods of the early atmosphere on so-called primitive planet Earth that were free from oxygen. In other words oxygen, the foe of simple life forms, was present on Earth at the time of the alleged primordial soup. How, then, did life appear on Earth? The space program has shown that life could not have arisen spontaneously and naturally as claimed by evolutionary theory. However, life is here. How did it arise?

Evolutionary scientists have refused to accept as true the biblical account of the origin of life forms at the hand and word of God. However, as Ellen White states, “Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony. By different methods, and in different languages, they witness to the same great truths.” The space program discoveries confirm what the book of nature tells us that if oxygen has always been on planet Earth, life could not have arisen by evolutionary principles. As Snow and Javor rightly suggest, this conclusion shows, in harmony with biblical revelation, that life came “through a creative act by the One who commanded that ‘the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind’ (Gen. 1:24).” This is a faith-building implication.

Sometimes science has pleasant surprises for the creationist. The discovery of the existence of oxygen at all times on our Earth, which would block the evolutionary development of life forms, is powerful and encouraging. This strengthens our faith in the biblical statement that, “the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:8, NASB).

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2 Ibid., p. 159.

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4 Education, p. 128.

5 Snow and Javor, op cit., p. 160.

IN JULY 21, 2007, AT ONE MINUTE PAST MIDNIGHT, THE SEVENTH AND LAST HARRY POTTER BOOK, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, went on sale. Released globally in 93 countries, Deathly Hallows broke sales records as the fastest-selling book ever, selling more than 11 million copies in England and in the United States in the first 24 hours following its release. The previous record, nine million in its first day, had been held by Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, volume six of the series.

The Harry Potter books are available in 66 languages in more than 200 countries, and to date about 340 million copies have been sold. What is it in these books that makes children who haven’t read a book in their lives, suddenly read every page of every book J. K. Rowling produces? And many read them more than once. Parents report reading levels jumping four grades in two years. What is it that makes these books the biggest phenomenon in publishing history?

Harry Potter is a young boy in need of friends. His parents were killed by the evil sorcerer Lord Voldemort, and he grows up with an aunt, an uncle, and a cousin who mistreat him throughout his childhood. While living with these relatives, he receives a message that he is to attend Hogwart’s School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he discovers that he has supernatural powers. The books recount his experiences and adventures at Hogwart’s School. Millions of children identify with Harry the orphan because he is marginalized yet admirable.

The books have been praised to highest heaven and condemned to the lowest hell. The division of opinions is not simply between committed and nominal Christians, but goes right through the conservative evangelical camp. The evangelical magazine Christianity Today has defended the books, and some churches have even used Harry Potter to teach Sunday school.
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On the other side of the fence, Jack Brock, pastor of the Community Church in Alamogordo, New Mexico, organized a public book burning of Harry Potter books. An Adventist school in Australia banned the books from its premises and was praised and condemned on a nationwide TV news station. Richard Abanes, who wrote the book *Harry Potter and the Bible*, considers the books harmful to children primarily because they introduce them to the occult. Furthermore, he asserts that there is no place for God in these books: “Harry Potter lives in a world free of any religion or spirituality of any kind. He lives surrounded by ghosts but has no one to pray to, even if he were so inclined, which he isn’t” (*Time*, July 23, 2007).

Scripture warns us about the activity of spiritualism in the time of the end. The apostle Paul wrote, “The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1, NKJV). And he adds: “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9, NKJV).

The Book of Revelation tells us that, prior to Armageddon, the spirits of demons will work through the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (16:13, 14); and Ellen White wrote: “Through the two great er-
tualist himself. He became one of their lecturers and authors. Playing around with spiritualism can be deadly. There should be no place for spiritualistic material, books, games, or videos in our homes or schools.

Just as we try to shield our children from drugs, alcohol, and nicotine, so we need to explain to them why spiritualistic material is not good for them, however appealing it may be.

Paul says, “whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil 4:8, NKJV). Very little in the Harry Potter books is true, noble, just, pure, or lovely. “It is only a fairy tale,” some may say. True, but does imaginary witchcraft and wizardry influence the reader’s mind? You bet it does!

It is a law, says Ellen White, both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature, that by beholding we become changed. “The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence.”

Astrology, Marian apparitions, New Age, witchcraft, Satanism, channeling, black magic—the list goes on and on. All these different forms of spiritualism show that Satan is extremely active because he knows his time is short.

The good news in the whole story is that Satan has no power over God’s people. Jesus defeated Satan 2,000 years ago, and he cannot harm any of God’s children, unless they invite him into their lives.

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W O R K S T A T I O N  T W O

Gary B. Swanson

It takes only one brain cell to recognize Jennifer Aniston, Halle Berry, or Bill Clinton.

This edifying bit of information comes as the result of a recent research project by the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California. As part of a treatment for epilepsy, devices were planted in test subjects to monitor brain-cell activity. When the subjects were shown photos of famous people, it took only one brain cell to recognize them.

Though this may at first blush seem to be of negligible value, it may add some light to an ongoing discussion among scientists over how many cells it takes to effect recognition. Many have thought that it would take many cells to recognize, say, one’s own grandmother. Neurobiologist Jerome Lettvin coined the term “grandmother cell” to poke fun at those who thought that such recognition could take as little as a single neuron.

But it appears that grandmother cells may actually exist. Considering that the average human brain of an adult contains some 10 billion interconnected cells, it makes you wonder: When we recognize a newspaper photograph to be that of George W. Bush, for example, what are the rest of the cells doing?

We know that through electro-chemical impulses the brain controls both voluntary and involuntary behavior. While we’re utilizing one or more brain cells to decide whether we recognize a celebrity in a photograph, whole other sections of the brain are firing to keep our physical body running: heartbeat, digestion—at the risk of being overly simplistic, basically the plumbing and air conditioning.

Presumably, though, the grandmother cells would be included in the voluntary part of the brain. We “voluntarily” program our minds to remember specific bits of information. Computer people would call this the storage of data. And the superficial bits of information, such as the likeness of Johnny Depp on
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the cover of Time magazine, apparently don’t take much brain power. Which would seem to make mistaken identity an uncommon occurrence.

Yet in the everyday world, occurrences of mistaken identity continue to be frequent. And, interestingly, there are quite a few accounts of such self-encountered those who should in Scripture—even when Jesus Himself encountered those who should have been able to recognize Him.

Apparently not.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that it would be this way: “He has no form or comeliness” (53:2, NKJV). And the Spirit of Prophecy elaborates: “In the eyes of the world He possessed no beauty that they should desire Him.”* It seems that there was nothing in His physical appearance that made Him extraordinary in His surroundings. Men were not struck speechless by His bearing. Women didn’t swoon at His drop-dead handsomeness.

He passed through His short life on this Earth with hardly anyone taking a second look. And even those who came into personal contact with Him seldom concluded that He was anything more than a somewhat off-center kind of guy from a backwater town in the hinterland of the vast Roman Empire. Generally speaking, everyone shrugged.

Occasionally even His closest acquaintances mistook Him for someone else: Cleopas and friend on the road to Emmaus, for example, and Mary at His gravesite. Of course, these two incidents of mistaken identity could be understandable; after all, who could have expected to know who He was when He appeared to them after they had all witnessed His death? Believing in the possibility of resurrection is all well and good, but surely it would take at least some time to elapse for any of us to have it all sink in.

But this doesn’t mean that He went entirely unnoticed during His lifetime. There were a few who did recognize Him for who He truly was, though their response wasn’t based on the fact that He was devastatingly beautiful. It was more a matter that those who recognized Him knew what to be looking for. They weren’t relying at all on eyesight. The ability to know who He was depended not on visual acuity, but on a condition of the heart.

There were at least two notable occasions when Jesus was instantly recognized: only eight days after His birth when He was brought by His parents to the Temple for the rite of circumcision (Luke 2); and near the very beginning of His ministry in His experience with John the Baptist (Matthew 3; John 1).

At the first incident, two elderly people—apparently unrelated—had been led by the Holy Spirit to be in the Temple on the eighth day after Jesus’ birth. It was time for Joseph and Mary to offer a sacrifice to mark the birth of their child. Simeon had received the assurance that sometime before the end of His life He would see the Messiah. Somehow he knew that this infant in the Temple that day was the promised One. Before the astonished parents, he foretold Jesus’ earthly and cosmic ministry. Then Anna, a prophetess, “coming in that instant” (Luke 2:38, NKJV), added her testimony to that of Simeon.

The second incident was a much more public—and much more explicit—event. Jesus had come to the Jordan River to be baptized by John, but the Baptist recognized Him for who He was and said that it would be more appropriate for Jesus to be baptizing him. At Jesus’ insistence, however, John complied.

Shortly after this a group of priests and Levites, sent by the Pharisees, asked John the Baptist whether he himself was the Messiah. John’s response was blunt: “I am not the Christ” (John 1:20, NKJV). Just at that moment, however, He saw Jesus coming toward him, and, remembering vividly the demonstration of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism, John testified: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (vs. 29, NKJV).

There were surely other instances when Jesus was instantly recognized as the Messiah, but these are two of the more familiar. What was it that prompted this recognition? It certainly must have involved a great deal more than the mere firing of one grandmother cell, the kind of awareness of someone’s celebrity.

Recognizing Jesus for who He truly is comes as the result of knowing God. In Scripture the expression to “know God” encompasses far more than knowing a bunch of facts about Him, e.g., God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, etc. “The world through wisdom did not know God” (1 Cor. 1:21, NKJV, italics supplied). Worldly knowledge and wisdom aren’t nearly enough.

Knowledge, in Scripture, is relational: “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8, NKJV).

Just as surely today as it was in Jesus’ time, to know Him—to recognize Him—is to have a living relationship with Him. To know Him means to have Him know us (Matt. 25:12). When we are enjoying this relationship, our grandmother cells will do far more than fire. Our minds—and our hearts—will explode.

*The Desire of Ages, p. 23.