

The Tent and the Missionary: Reading Scripture as an Adventist

By Kendra Haloviak

I first learned to read the stories of Scripture under a Sabbath tent. After my dad had spent a long week going to classes during the day and working nights, he spent Friday evenings with his preschool daughter. We shared an exciting routine. As the Sabbath drew near, Dad and I made the living room of our apartment into a huge tent. We took blankets and held down the edges with large coffee table books. Then we took broom and mop handles and raised the middle of each blanket to form a huge tent that would have brought pride to any pastoral team that has worked camp pitch for summer camp meeting.

Dad and I crawled under the tent and read Bible stories until one or both of us fell asleep. We read about Esther, Joseph, Jesus, the little maid who helped Namaan, and my favorite of all Bible stories back then, baby Moses.

I wonder how those earliest readings shaped what I read . . .

- dim lights under the blankets . . . how did they color what I saw?
- that connection of Scripture with Friday evenings/the beginning of Sabbath . . . and
- a time set aside for kids and building tents and reading Bible stories
- how did that setting select where I read . . . my questions? My answers?

Back in those years “reading the Bible” and “keeping the Sabbath holy” was a blast . . . an adventure that invited participation. . . .

Under the Sabbath tent, we were traveling with the children of Israel as they set up their tents in the wilderness! (With carpet, air conditioning, heating, indoor plumbing. . . .)

We joined Jacob and Joseph, Rachel and Ruth. . . .

Reading the Bible was safe, cozy, reassuring. . . .

Eventually the stories mingled with my dreams. . . .

I was carried off to bed and the tent was put away, the coffee table books properly arranged again. . . .

I wonder how the Seventh-day Adventism of those early readings influenced/shaped my readings . . . what I saw . . . how I read (past tense) . . . how I read (present tense) . . .

The next morning I headed off to Sabbath School, where yet more adventures awaited. . . .

My friends and I always checked whether the person who had come to give the mission story brought a bag. Most did. These were the best stories.

We knew that at some point in the story of far away lands and strange children—who were really just like us, who loved to hear stories about Jesus—the missionary pulled out a spear, or mask, or tribal wear . . . something that we could see . . . and sometimes touch. And this thing—from so far away—connected us to another child . . . a little boy or girl who needed our prayers and our pennies . . . a little boy or girl who didn't have a Bible or picture books or felts, but who would do anything to learn about the stories of Scripture. We listened carefully, we gave our money gladly, we sang enthusiastically, we prayed earnestly.

I wonder how those mission stories shaped my earliest readings of Scripture . . .

- the urgency of the Second Advent
- the dedication of the missionaries
- the needs of children around the globe
- the songs about Jesus coming again.

Is it possible to talk about “Adventist Imagination” and the reading of Scripture? What does—that might—that mean? How does our Adventist Heritage affect the ways we read?

- where we choose to read . . . canon within the canon
- the questions we bring to the text . . .
- the contributions we make to biblical interpretation. . . .

To use language in Fritz Guy's *Thinking Theologically*, in his discussion of “Adventist Heritage,” how does an appreciation for sacred time shape our readings? How does a hope in the ultimate triumph of God's love?



Ruth gleaning in the fields of Boaz.

- A focus on the continuing ministry of Christ?
- A concern for health and wholeness?
- A commitment to truth?

Recently, in my “Jesus and the Gospels” class, we did a close reading of the story in Luke 13:10-17 of the bent-over woman. I'm always fascinated by what students see as they study a passage. They bring their close-reading essays, and we discuss those together. Of course, I prepare to share insights from various sources that aid my own understanding of the particular text and the Gospel in which it is found.

In the case of Luke 13, I am particularly grateful for insights from Joel B. Green, Leon Morris, contributions to InterVarsity Press's *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, and contributors to *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, Jerome Neyrey, editor.

In class, we discussed and noted that . . .

This is the last time in Luke's Gospel that Jesus is recorded as teaching in a synagogue, or even being in one. In his journey to Jerusalem there is more and more tension with the Jewish leaders. Toward the end of Luke's travel narrative, as Jesus restores another person, this time a “son of Abraham” whose name is recorded as Zacchaeus, the conflict and tension will not turn to rejoicing, as in this story, but the crowd will be silent.

Sickness in the passage—the sickness that has crippled this woman for eighteen years—is attributed first to a spirit, then to Satan. There is a demonic, even cosmic dimension to her illness. Satan keeps her bound. Therefore, the healing that takes place emphasizes a deliverance from Satan's grip: a messianic deliverance. The battle between Jesus and Satan plays

out in these few verses, in this short narrative, in the life of this bent-over woman. The story ends with the woman able to stand up straight!

The phrase “daughter of Abraham” is used only this one time in the Greek Bible. The crippled woman is restored to membership in the community. The Sabbath is the day of restoring Abraham’s children! This Sabbath is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God!

From Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*: “It is in the sanctuary and on the Sabbath . . . that he [Jesus] commonly meets his people and gives them the joys of his salvation” (89).

The phrase “it is necessary” shows up in Luke’s Gospel eighteen times (2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 11:42; 12:12; 13:14, 16, 33; 15:32; 17:25; 18:1; 19:5; 21:9; 22:7, 3; 24:7, 26, 44), and ten more times in Acts! Although the synagogue leader is trying to keep the congregation faithful to the Torah, Jesus suggests that precisely in order to keep the Sabbath “it is necessary” to release the woman from her illness. This is the whole point of the Sabbath! She must be made whole today, for it is the perfect day to be released from bondage. It is on the Sabbath that the whole world will be released from bondage and rest in God’s finished work of salvation.

In class, we discussed these and other ideas. Then I collected the students’ typed essays, eager to see the insights from those too shy to talk in class.

Joel Schander is a senior computer science and journalism major. Born and raised an SDA Christian, he has recently reaffirmed his commitment to Adventism.

In his paper, Joel shared an insight that was new to me. Joel expanded the boundaries of our periscope to include the parable just before the story of the bent-over woman.

According to his essay, Joel thinks that Luke purposely tells about a barren tree right before the bent-over woman passage. Luke does this because that is how society saw her—useless, unable to produce, taking up limited ground and resources. For Joel, the owner of the vineyard and fig tree is like the synagogue leader—both first ignore the barren one, then work against its restoration within the garden.

It is only when the gardener/Jesus intervenes that the barren one has the possibility of a future . . . and all this takes place on the Sabbath!

I was so blessed to read Joel’s paper. Could Joel have made these connections without being a Seventh-day Adventist? Of course. But did his Adventism move him closer to this interpretation?

Did Joel see the gardener as Jesus because of an understanding of Jesus as intercessor? Was Joel more open to the Sabbath as restoration because he has been a Sabbath keeper most of his life?

Or is it possible that certain ways of experiencing Sabbath as a Sabbath keeper could make one less likely to see Sabbath as restoration, as with the synagogue leader, for example.

In addition to closing off certain readings, does our Seventh-day Adventism make others possible?

In *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, Joel B. Green sees the woman, previously excluded by the shame of her illness, “now restored to the community of God’s people” (97). As mentioned in Jesus’ inaugural sermon in Luke 4, here is “release” for those who are captive. Here is pardon, forgiveness. The bent-over woman is set free from her bondage.

When God overcomes/releases what Satan binds, it is the embodiment of the Second Advent!

This Sabbath in Luke 13 is a preview of the Second Advent . . .

- when slaves, whose lot in life is to work all the time, cease from their labors like everybody else
- when women who have only looked down, are straight again and can see Jesus and everyone else face-to-face.

As I read Luke 13:10-17, and, thanks to Joel, Luke 13:6-9, I see the very descriptions of our “Adventist Heritage” expressed by Fritz Guy . . .



There have been moments...when I have pondered the
meaninglessness of my life and the apparent absence of God from it.

- an appreciation for sacred time
- a hope in the ultimate triumph of God's love
- a focus on the continuing ministry of Christ
- a concern for health and wholeness
- a commitment to truth.

Ah, you say, but of course you see your convictions in this text. And I say . . . thank you to the Sabbath tent and the missionaries . . . teachers, textbooks, classes, conversations . . . and to students like Joel, who shaped and continue to shape the way I read Scripture as an Adventist.

Works Consulted

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Kendra Haloviak is associate professor of religion at Columbia Union College. She presented this article as a devotional at a meeting of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies, November 17, 2000.

Reading Scripture Imaginatively

Proverbs vs. Ecclesiastes

By Casey Butterfield

Of all Bible books, I have appreciated Proverbs the most. I have loved its bits of wisdom. They have seemed like quick fixes for spiritual hunger. Flipping open the Bible to Proverbs, I could immediately find something I could apply today.

However, since I have read Ecclesiastes, I think we might have a new winner. I love the pessimistic side of Ecclesiastes. It gives us such a bleak view of life. The writers must have been bitter. They probably had a good excuse to be that way. They were in exile, living rough, dismal lives. God was not making his presence obvious, so the authors of Ecclesiastes had a good excuse to question God's involvement in everyday life.

Both Ecclesiastes and Proverbs take the stance that wisdom is the key to a successful life. In Ecclesiastes 7:25, this insight is placed in a short blurb that contrasts wisdom and foolishness. In this respect, as well, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs are similar. Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:20, is another section about the wise and the foolish.

But the books are not alike in their views of the balance between actions and consequences. Whereas Proverbs sees that evil is punished and good rewarded, Ecclesiastes takes the stance that righteousness is not always rewarded and that sin isn't always punished.

In this respect, Ecclesiastes applies to today's culture. I like the facts not only that I can relate to its take on life and wisdom, but also that I can apply it today. In today's world, good is not always the winner. Sometimes good people lose. There are many cases in today's world where the bad guy wins. Today, evil is often rewarded.

This is why I appreciate the approach to life taken