

Revelation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 7:1–6, Ps. 19:1–4, Rom. 1:18–20, 2 Tim. 3:14–16, Heb. 1:1–3.*

Memory Text: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (*Hebrews 1:1, 2, NIV*).

For some people, God is a distant power who at a remote moment in the past set the world in motion but no longer interferes with what happens here. That, of course, is not the God portrayed in the Bible, who instead is consistently shown to be a loving Father, the Creator who continues to take an intimate interest in His creatures. He is the Covenant God, and He seeks to establish a bond between Himself and the people made in His image.

This God is a great Communicator. Human words cannot adequately explain who and what God is, but the fact that He constantly is referred to as speaking to His people is utterly significant.

As soon as Adam was created, God spoke to Him. Immediately after the first human inhabitant of this world had sinned, God called to him, Adam, “‘where are you?’” (*Gen. 3:9, NIV*). And ever since, God has spoken to humankind in various ways (*Heb. 1:1*). Even on the final page of the Bible we find confirmation of this in the divine appeal, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’” (*Rev. 22:17, NIV*). This week we’ll look at various ways He speaks to us today.

The Week at a Glance: The God who spoke the world into existence speaks to all who are willing to listen.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 2.

God Reveals Himself Through Nature

Read Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20. These are the two most cited texts when the concept of God’s revelation through nature is under discussion. Summarize in your own words what these two passages teach us.

“God has surrounded us with nature’s beautiful scenery in order to attract and interest the mind. It is His design that we should associate the glories of nature with His character. If we faithfully study the book of nature, we shall find it a fruitful source for contemplating the infinite love and power of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 144. Those who believe in the Bible will be confirmed in their convictions that when they look at the starlit sky or see the majestic trees in the forests and the beauty of the setting sun behind snow-covered mountaintops, they are seeing the works of a loving and powerful Creator. When they see an eagle in flight, admire a tulip, or marvel about the intricacies of the human body, they see evidences of God’s invisible qualities and agree that nature indeed declares the glory of God.

But the Bible passages take us a step further. They also suggest that the nonbeliever, by looking at nature, will somehow catch a glimpse of a divine Power that designed and made all that is. In today’s world many close their eyes to this aspect. They have imbibed evolutionary thinking and want to explain all that exists in terms of chance and necessity. But, increasingly, scholars are admitting that there is so much evidence of intelligent design that this can be ignored only by those who stubbornly close their eyes to it.

Ask yourself a simple question: What is the more logical and reasonable explanation for the beauty and complexity of life: pure chance or a purposeful and planned-out creation? Defend your answer.

Read Psalm 19:1–4 and Romans 1:18–20 again. To what extent is God revealed in nature? At the same time, what things about God does nature not tell us? However revealing nature is, what else do we know about God that we can’t find by looking at the glories of creation?

God Speaks Through Our Conscience

“Conscience” is sometimes defined as the faculty, or inward principle, that helps us decide between right and wrong. Even those who do not believe in God usually possess some insight into what is morally acceptable and what must be rejected (*Rom. 2:14, 15*). The Christian believes that God is the supreme Lawgiver and that He has placed in humanity a conscience, even though sin has blunted this God-given tool for moral decision-making. In most Bible translations we do not find the word *conscience* in the Old Testament, though it occurs numerous times in the New Testament. But whether or not the term is used, the concept is present throughout Scripture.

Name a few stories in which we can see the impact of conscience on the lives of people. (See, for instance, *Gen. 42:18–23, Daniel 5, Matt. 27:3–5, John 8:1–9*.)

Important though our conscience is, it is not always totally trustworthy. We notice that people in good conscience often come to very diverse conclusions about what to do in particular circumstances. The apostle Paul was aware of this, as his remarkable statement in 1 Corinthians 4:4 shows: “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me” (*NIV*). The same apostle also warns that we can resist the pull of our conscience. In fact, some people appear to have seared their consciences with a hot iron (*1 Tim. 4:2*) or have corrupted them (*Titus 1:15*). On the other hand, there are ways of sharpening one’s conscience. Being in tune with God by regularly reading His Word and by frequently communicating with Him in prayer will make us more sensitive to the voice of the Spirit, who can speak to us through our conscience.

How do you arrive at important moral decisions? Do you listen to your conscience? How can you be sure that your small, inner voice is not overruled by other voices in and around you? How can you know whether or not you can trust your conscience? When was the last time you let your conscience be your guide and ended up making a wrong moral decision? What did you learn from that experience that could help you from repeating it?

God Speaks Through Prophets

Many people have a very restricted view of the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is mainly seen in terms of predictions, and the prophets they are aware of are those who have given their names to a number of books in the Bible. The facts are different. God used prophets on a much wider scale than one would think. And prophecy is not only about predictions. It stands for much more.

How does the relationship between Moses and his brother Aaron illustrate the key meaning of the word *prophet*? *Exod. 7:1–6*.

The passage of Exodus 7:1–6 highlights the true work of a prophet. Moses, who himself is referred to as a great prophet (*Deut. 34:10–12*), was assisted by his brother, who served as his spokesperson. “Moses is like God to Aaron, who is like a prophet to Pharaoh. The clear idea is that prophets don’t manufacture their own speeches but only pass on what they have heard from God.”—Jon Dybdahl, *Exodus*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1994), p. 80.

A prophet is a man or a woman who speaks on behalf of God. Those words have authority because the message comes from God, even though the prophet may choose his or her own words to convey that message. God used this manner of communicating with His people quite extensively, as Amos underlined when he stated, “The Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (*Amos 3:7, NIV*).

What does Scripture say about the continuation of the gift of prophecy beyond Old Testament times? Look at the following sample of the New Testament evidence. What do you conclude?

1. Prophets mentioned by name (*Luke 1:67, 2:36, Acts 13:1*)
2. The abiding gift (*1 Cor. 12:28, 14:1–5*)
3. False prophets (*2 Pet. 2:1, Rev. 2:20*)
4. A characteristic of the remnant church (*Rev. 12:17, 19:10*)

What has been the impact of the writings of Ellen G. White (who had the gift of prophecy) upon your own life? How has God spoken to you through her ministry? In what ways could you better avail yourself of the blessings of this gift?

God Reveals Himself in His Word

Many of the things God has revealed through His prophets in the past have not been handed down and have not, eventually, found their way into the Bible. But some of those revelations from God, which were received by a few dozen people during a period of more than fifteen hundred years, were written down. The compilations of these writings is our Bible. Jesus and His contemporaries treasured the writings that we today refer to as the Old Testament. Today our Scriptures include also the Gospels and other apostolic writings from the first period of the church.

Paul commended Timothy for his diligent reading of God's Word, which, he said, has the capacity to make you wise for salvation. How does he in this context further describe the influence of the Written Word of God? 2 Tim. 3:14–16.

“As we contemplate the great things of God's Word, we look into a fountain that broadens and deepens beneath our gaze. Its breadth and depth pass our knowledge. As we gaze, the vision widens; stretched out before us, we behold a boundless, shoreless sea. Such study has vivifying power. The mind and heart acquire new strength, new life.

“This experience is the highest evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible. We receive God's Word as food for the soul through the same evidence by which we receive bread as food for the body.”
—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 26.

More Bibles are sold today than ever before. New versions for specific target groups keep appearing. We have Bible versions that are more easily accessible to beginners, while we also have versions that lend themselves to liturgical use. And this is a good thing. But that does not necessarily mean that the Bible also is more widely read. In fact, there are indications that Bible reading among Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, is on the wane. Many do not know their Bible as a former generation once knew it. But only at our own eternal peril can we ignore the Word of God, which has the power to speak to us afresh every time we open it.

How much time did you spend with your Bible during the past week? In the past month? Is Bible reading a prominent feature in your daily program? If not, why not? Compare the time you spent in front of the TV with the time spent reading the Word. What changes might you need to make?

Christ—God Comes to Us in Person

Getting letters from someone on a regular basis can go a long way toward getting to know that person more intimately. Receiving a picture will reveal another dimension of that person. But you will not really know that person until you actually have spent time face-to-face.

Because of sin, God could no longer commune with us as He had done with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Though He has communicated with us very effectively in various ways, He wanted to give us a fuller picture of Himself. And this He has done through Jesus.

How did God provide us with this full picture of Himself? *John 1:1, 2; John 14:9; Heb. 1:1–3.*

The precise wording of John 1:1 is important. John does not say that God showed Himself in the flesh, or appeared in the flesh. Rather, John says that Jesus became flesh at a definite point in time. Jesus came from above and became flesh; that is, He took on Himself our humanity. That our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became flesh for our salvation is probably the one tenet of the Christian faith that is basic to all Christian denominations.

What relationship is there between God's revelation in Scripture and His revelation in Jesus Christ? *John 5:36–40.*

For some the study of the Bible is an end in itself. Indeed, many gifted Bible scholars don't believe in God at all. Yet, reading the Bible without seeking to know the Lord whom it reveals can no more lead you to salvation than reading a recipe can fill your empty stomach.

Jesus Christ is the focus of the Scriptures. The Bible is about Him, about what He has revealed to us regarding the nature and character of God. The Bible doesn't save us, but it is the authoritative source of truth about the only One who can, Jesus of Nazareth.

It's one thing to read the Bible; it's another to know the Bible; and it's another to recite texts by memory. But do you know the Lord revealed in the Bible? What are ways in which you can read the Bible in order to come away from it knowing God better?

Further Study: “Many are the ways in which God is seeking to make Himself known to us and bring us into communion with Him. Nature speaks to our senses without ceasing. The open heart will be impressed with the love and glory of God as revealed through the works of His hands. The listening ear can hear and understand the communications of God through the things of nature. The green fields, the lofty trees, the buds and flowers, the passing cloud, the falling rain, the babbling brook, the glories of the heavens, speak to our hearts, and invite us to become acquainted with Him who made them all.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 85. Read this entire chapter in *Steps to Christ*, titled “A Knowledge of God” (pp. 85–91).

Discussion Questions:

- 1** To what extent does nature help us find God? Does nature teach us anything about the God of the Bible, or does it merely impress us that there must be Something or Someone out there?
- 2** In class, talk about the importance of following one’s conscience. Then talk about the dangers that are involved. What are ways we can help others know if and when they can trust the prompting of their conscience?
- 3** What role do culture and upbringing have on the shaping of your conscience? In what ways has your culture influenced your concepts of right and wrong? How can you learn to transcend culture when you need to, that is, when your culture teaches something that is against the clear teaching of the Word of God?
- 4** If the gift of prophecy is a spiritual gift to God’s church, should we expect it to play a prominent role in our day and age? May we expect God to raise up other prophets similar to the way He called Ellen G. White more than a century ago? Discuss.
- 5** What are ways that we can study the Bible in order to come away knowing God better? What are ways to study the Bible and come away not knowing God any more than when we first started reading?

Summary: God wants to communicate with us. He does so through nature and by speaking through our conscience. Throughout the ages He has used prophets, and He has made the prophetic gift available even for His church today. The Bible, God’s Written Word, remains the divine Guidebook for our pilgrimage. Its focus is on what God has done for us, most sublimely in entering this world in the Person of His Son, to which all Scriptures testify.

God's Stubborn Warrior

by SUSAN CASTILLO

David Ramos is a man of humble origins. Born in Cuba, he finished the sixth grade before he was taken from school at age 16 to join the Cuban army. When his commander learned that David was a Seventh-day Adventist, he did everything he could to force David to give up his faith. He was mistreated and punished, denied visits from his family, and kept in solitary confinement. He was subjected to hard labor and was denied proper food. At one time he was denied food for six days while he was forced to work hard at night and in the cold.

After each punishment, the guards would offer him a better education, a good job, and passes to go home if only he renounced his belief in God. But David refused to give up his faith. And his refusal infuriated his superiors, who dealt him more serious punishment and worse treatment. For three years David was persecuted and imprisoned for his faith, but he refused to renounce his Savior.

After leaving the military, David returned home and continued serving God. He was active in his church, giving Bible studies, preaching, and bringing others to Jesus.

He rode his bicycle from town to town to visit people and share God's love with them. One day as he rode along a highway, he was struck by a bus and seriously injured. He endured several surgeries and spent months recovering from his injuries. But instead of feeling bitter, David thanked God for saving his life.

Then an opportunity opened for David to bring his family to America. Their first home was in a refugee-style camp in Florida, where Cuban refugees were housed until they could be processed for immigration. While living in the camp, David continued his work for God and led many fellow refugees to the Savior. He often took his aging mother with him in her wheelchair when he went to study the Bible with someone or to preach.

Eventually David and his family settled in Oklahoma, where he continued his mission to share God's love with his new neighbors. God has blessed his efforts, and David has been instrumental in establishing a Spanish church in Oklahoma City.

David still suffers from the effects of the persecution he received while in the military and the bicycle accident. But he continues working tirelessly to lead others to Christ. He is a stubborn warrior in the army of God.

Your mission offerings help make it possible for thousands to hear the gospel and choose to follow the Savior.

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