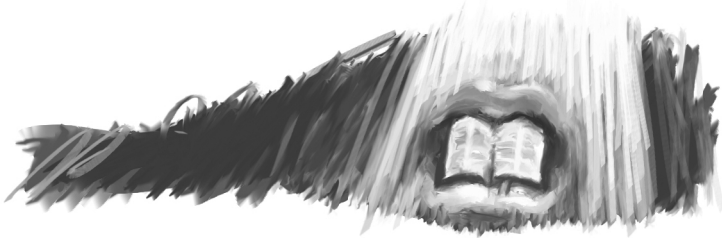


The Voice *From* Heaven



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:8, 9; 2 Sam. 12:1-7; Isa. 59:2; Jer. 38:14-19; Ezekiel 4; Amos 3:7; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; 3:1.*

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*).

Key Thought: Since the fall of humanity, the Lord has been communicating with us through various means.

How much is a human worth? From a purely chemical standpoint, quite a bit. According to various estimates, the value of the proteins, enzymes, RNA, DNA, amino acids, and biochemicals within the human body may make a person worth, literally, millions of dollars.

Of course, our true worth can be understood only through the life and death of Jesus. If our value wasn't infinite in the sight of God, such an infinite price would not have been paid for our redemption.

How, though, has the Lord revealed to us the good news of our worth and our redemption? This week we begin by looking at the various means in which God has been communicating with us.

Yes, God is still talking to us sinful and degraded creatures. The crucial question is, Will we listen to what He is saying?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 7.*

God's Search for Humanity

Before sin, Adam and Eve were in direct communication with God; after sin, that communication was broken. They no longer could speak face to face with their Maker. It was not because God had changed, but because Adam and Eve's relationship to Him had.

Read Isaiah 59:2. What principle seen here helps explain what sin has done to our relationship with God?

Because of sin, Adam and Eve were unable to stand at the presence of the Lord (*see Gen. 3:8*). They were afraid of God. Sin had driven them from the Creator. Moreover, the sin that separated humankind from the Creator also has separated nations, kingdoms, tribes, communities, churches, and families from each other. This is an unfortunate fact of life that we all have experienced, one way or another.

Read Genesis 3:9. What is the significance of this verse? Why would God, who knows all things, ask this question?

How ironic that we sometimes hear such phrases as "Man's search for God." The truth is the opposite, actually: God is searching for us. He is seeking us, using all kinds of ways and means to lead us to salvation. From Genesis to Revelation, from Moses to John, the Bible reveals God's search for humanity; it shows His desire to touch us, to let us know He is there and that He loves us despite our sins (*Isa. 5:1-5, Matt. 23:37*).

"Where are you?" The question isn't so much about where we are physically as it is about our spiritual well-being. Where are we in relationship to our Creator and Redeemer, who has done so much for us? If you were to hear the question "Where are you?" from the Lord, how would you answer, and why?

I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .

► **Key Text:** *Isaiah 55:6*

► **Teach the Class to:**

Know: That the Bible is a revelation of God's search for mankind.

Feel: The Lord's desire to restore communication between Himself and mankind.

Do: What we can do to maintain open communication with God.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Lost Communication (*Gen. 3:6-10*)

A Our direct communication with God has been broken because of sin. List and discuss some of the specific barriers to open communication with God.

B God is the initiator in restoring open communication with His people. In what ways does He attempt to do this?

C How can we respond to the Lord's desire to communicate with us?

II. God's Messengers (*Amos 3:7*)

A What special role do prophets have in our relationship with God?

B What were the various duties given to the prophets?

C How has the revelation of Christ through the prophets given us a better understanding of the Father?

III. The God of Today (*Heb. 13:8*)

A What are some of the avenues in which the Lord reveals Himself and seeks to communicate with us today?

B Though written long ago, how is the Bible still relevant in our time?

C Discuss the ways in which we can keep an open communication with our God in this century.

► **Summary:** God uses various means to reveal to us our true worth and value. One of those avenues is the Bible, which points to our salvation and redemption in Jesus.

C O N T I N U E D 

God and the Prophets

Read Amos 3:7. What does that tell us about the importance of prophets to the human race?

From the earliest days—indeed, from the time that direct communication was broken—God used prophets to communicate with us. The prophets' work consisted of numerous things: They revealed both comings of Jesus; they showed that God values human beings enough to choose from among them prophets to represent Him; they were the means by which the Lord revealed His love and character to His people; they sent warnings about impending judgments. The prophets also revealed the plan of salvation. And the Lord used the prophets to write the Bible.

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-7, Jeremiah 38:14-19, Ezekiel 4, 2 Peter 3:1. How do the prophets deliver their messages?

Compare 2 Chronicles 20:20 and Luke 16:31. Here we see two attitudes toward the prophets displayed. In a sense, we are in one of the two camps depicted here. Either we believe in what God says to us (often through His prophets) or we don't. In the end, our attitude toward the prophets merely reflects our attitude toward Him.

How do we know if we really believe? Can we be deceived into thinking we believe when we really don't, as were many of the leaders in Israel all through the nation's history?

The answer is easy. Jesus said it numerous times. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (*John 14:15, NKJV*); "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (*Luke 6:46*).

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we say that we believe in the writings of the prophets. Do we really? Have your actions in the past week reflected belief or unbelief, faith or lack of faith? What's the only way you can answer this question correctly? If you could do something over, what would it be?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

Just for Teachers: Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

Clear communication is foundational and essential to accomplishing any human endeavor. Organizations simply cannot function if people do not understand one another. Humorous (but costly) miscommunication occasionally happens in cross-cultural advertising. When Coca-Cola was first widely marketed in Japan, it was rendered phonetically in characters that literally meant “bite the wax tadpole.” Pepsi’s slogan, “Come alive with the Pepsi generation” was translated in Taiwan as “Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead.” Only after General Motors introduced the Chevy Nova in Latin America did they notice that “no va” means in Spanish, “it won’t go”—not a good recommendation for a car. Kentucky Fried Chicken’s slogan “finger lickin’ good” initially was mistranslated into Chinese as “eat your fingers off.”

Without clear communication, misunderstanding is bound to occur. So it is no wonder God has worked hard to provide humanity with clear and compelling communication about Himself and His plans for humanity.

► **STEP 2—Explore!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God’s Word?*

Bible Commentary

I. God’s Search for Humanity (*Isa. 59:1-8*)

Isaiah 59:2 says that sin is an effective blockade against clear communication between humanity and God.

Consider This: What types of sins does Isaiah identify as likely to cause this separation? Societal—sins of violence and injustice toward

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The Revelation Through Jesus Christ

While the revelation of God through His prophets is the most common method, the coming of Jesus Christ in this world is the greatest and most complete revelation of God ever given. After all, Jesus was God, here in the flesh. What more could we ask for?

Although Jesus came in a different form from what people had expected, His life and His teaching demonstrated to humanity the will of God. People who lived in the time of Christ looked for greatness to satisfy their physical expectations. They looked for power instead of humility, for majesty and not meekness. However, the coming of Jesus faithfully revealed the true character of God the Father.

How do the following texts show how Jesus fully revealed God?

Matt. 11:27

John 1:14, 18

John 14:8-11

2 Cor. 4:6

Heb. 1:1-3

Based on John 14:8-11 we know that those who have seen Him have seen the Father, because Jesus and the Father are “in” each other. Their intimate relationship is much more than that of a master and a disciple. The words that Jesus speaks are more than those of a mere human being; they are a revelation of the actions of God Himself. Therefore, when we become acquainted with Jesus, we become acquainted with God, the Father, as well. The best way to know God’s love and His goodness is to know Jesus Christ personally.

If you claim to know Jesus, how would you answer this question: What is Jesus like? Be prepared to share your answer with the class on Sabbath.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

others—or personal and private sins? Based on the types of sins listed, who do you think Isaiah is talking to?

■ *Genesis 3:8-9 shows God searching for Adam and Eve, whose sin had separated them from Him. Cite other examples in Scripture of God searching for someone (for example, the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, the invitations of Matthew 11:28 and Revelation 22:17).*

II. God and the Prophets

Consider This: The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* defines a prophet as “a person supernaturally called and qualified as a spokesman for God.”—Page 903. Evaluate this definition. How does being called differ from being qualified? Can you think of any who were called but were not qualified? (For example, Balaam.)

For those times when there is no living prophet, who is God’s spokesperson?

III. God Speaks Today


The lessons highlight texts that describe six ways God communicates with humankind: family, Christian example, the Bible, nature, circumstantial leading, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Consider This: Which of these means of communication is clearest to you? Why? Which is least clear? Why? Are all equally good at communicating all aspects of God? Explain. Besides those listed above, does God have any other ways of communicating? How do you evaluate the claims of someone who professes to have an out-of-the-ordinary light from God?

IV. God Speaks Through the Bible

A popular word applied to Scripture by conservative biblical scholars is the word *inerrancy*. This means that the Bible is without errors. Many Adventist scholars have shied away from using this word, believing that it implies a verbal style of inspiration (God dictating each word of Scripture) rather than “holy men of God” speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

One of the important concepts to remember when talking about Scripture is the extent to which God safeguarded its content. Though, at

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God Speaks Today

“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

We have discussed divine communication through the prophets and through Jesus Christ. However, divine communication has not been confined to biblical times only.

In what way does God reveal Himself to us?

Job 12:7-10

Psalms 107:1-8

John 4:16-18, 26

John 5:39

Phil. 4:9

2 Tim. 1:5

The above texts clearly show that God never intended for us to be without certainty regarding the purpose of life. He made certain that we could know the truth and the means of salvation. God has revealed Himself through nature, science, the Bible, Jesus, divine providence in our lives, human relationships, and the Holy Spirit. He also reveals Himself through the image of God reflected in those who have dedicated their lives to Him.

What about you? How has God been communicating with you lately? The more important question, however, is, How well are you listening? Again, you can know the answer easily simply by asking yourself, Am I doing what the Lord is commanding me to, or not? There's your answer.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

times, minor questions can arise (often they can be explained, too), we must emphasize that the spiritual message is, in effect, without error. That message is enough to make us “wise unto salvation.”

Consider This: Is it possible there are errors in the Bible? What sort of errors might you find—and what sort of errors would you never find?

► **STEP 3—Practice!**

Just for Teachers: This step of the learning cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question, **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

Thought Questions:

- 1 A billion Christians around the world claim to honor the Bible. How do you answer the person who asks, “If the Bible is clear, why are there so many denominations?”
- 2 Think about some of the extreme biblical interpretations you may have heard. Can you identify any mistakes that such misinterpreters commonly make? What factors distinguish good biblical interpretation from faulty?

Application Questions:

- 1 Do you tend to read bits and pieces of the Bible? Is it important to read Bible stories in context, or is going from text to text sufficient? Explain your answer.
- 2 How do we make reading the Bible less intimidating to people?

Witnessing

Do you know your Bible well enough to give someone even a basic Bible study about why you trust in Christ for salvation?

► **STEP 4—Apply!**

Just for Teachers: In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a

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God Speaks Through the Bible

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20, 21. Summarize in your own words the basic message of these two texts. What should they be saying to each of us?

In many cases, the Lord specifically asked the prophets to write down His messages; many of them have been preserved. Those preserved writings are in the Bible. For example, “Moses wrote all the words of the Lord” (*Exod. 24:4; see also Exod. 34:27, Lev. 26:46*). Joshua was commissioned to write (*Josh. 24:26*). The Lord also asked Jeremiah to write a book containing the words He would give him. Years later the prophet Daniel (*Dan. 9:2*) tells of his reading Jeremiah’s message and how the Lord had promised deliverance for God’s people after the 70 years’ captivity. Daniel himself was told to write a book especially for those living at “the time of the end” (*12:4*). Thus the Lord reveals Himself through the Bible. As the written message, the Bible is an expression of God’s will.

It is interesting that the word *Bible* is not found in the Bible. It comes from the Latin word *biblia*, “books,” which comes from the Greek word *biblos*, meaning “a book.” The Holy Bible therefore means “the holy books.” This is indeed appropriate, because the Bible is composed of many books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New.

Despite a great deal of diversity in style and form, from the first book to the last, the Bible speaks about a loving God, the Creator of the universe, who reaches out to His sinful creatures. The theme of God’s love is the focus of the Bible, which is seen particularly through Christ, who came into this world, lived as a human being, and died on Calvary. This is the greatest truth of the universe. All major Bible truths, therefore, should be studied from this perspective.

What role has the Bible played in your relationship to God? What changes might you need to make so that the Bible could have an even greater impact in your walk with Jesus?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question: With God's help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

In his famous *Church Dogmatics*, theologian Karl Barth explains what happens when the church ceases to interact directly with Scripture:

“Let the Church go away from Scripture as such. Let it replace it by its traditions, its own indefinite consciousness of its origins and nature, its own pretended direct faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost, its own exposition and application of the word of the prophets and apostles. . . . All kinds of ‘life,’ evolutions and revolutions will be possible in the Church. It can include conservative and progressive thinking in their constant action and reaction. . . . And these may give the deceptive appearance that the Church is really alive. But it does not live in the inner movement of these tensions. In them we see rather the process of decay to which the Church is at once subject when it ceases to live by the Word of God, which means by Holy Scripture.”—Page 75.

Are we Seventh-day Adventists interested in reading Scripture, as it communicates God to us, or do we only talk about Scripture, as it helps us solve our own theological arguments? When Scripture becomes the reason for our “evolutions and revolutions” and is used primarily to argue “conservative and progressive thinking in their constant action and reaction,” is it still communicating God to humankind?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Temptation and Fall,” pp. 52–62; “The Plan of Redemption,” pp. 63–70, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Introduction,” pp. v–xii, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Jesus met the people on their own ground, as one who was acquainted with their perplexities. He made truth beautiful by presenting it in the most direct and simple way. His language was pure, refined, and clear as a running stream. His voice was as music to those who had listened to the monotonous tones of the rabbis. But while His teaching was simple, He spoke as one having authority. This characteristic set His teaching in contrast with that of all others. The rabbis spoke with doubt and hesitancy, as if the Scriptures might be interpreted to mean one thing or exactly the opposite. The hearers were daily involved in greater uncertainty. But Jesus taught the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority. Whatever His subject, it was presented with power, as if His words could not be controverted.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 253.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 God has never given up on us. What are the implications of this fact as we deal with our relatives, friends, or neighbors who belong to the unchurched community? How can we have the never-give-up spirit in reaching out to others?
- 2 Discuss your answers to Tuesday’s question. What things do you see in common? What are the differences? What can you learn from one another?
- 3 What can you say to someone who claims that he or she is earnestly seeking to know God and His will? What practical things can you say to help him or her hear the voice of God?
- 4 Share various encounters in which God spoke to you in a powerful manner. What happened? How did you know for sure that it was the Lord? Did you have any means to test the experience to know if it truly was of God? If so, what were those means?