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ABSTRACT

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COURSE IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
BASED ON A BOOK-BY-BOOK APPROACH TO THE BIBLE**

by

Daniel Duda

Adviser: Richard M. Davidson

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Report

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

**Title: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COURSE IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
BASED ON A BOOK-BY-BOOK APPROACH TO THE BIBLE**

Name of researcher: Daniel Duda

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Richard M. Davidson, Ph. D.

Date completed: July 1992

The purpose of this project was to develop an undergraduate college course in Biblical Theology. Part One establishes a theoretical background by exploring the biblical and theological foundations.

Chapter 1 states the purpose, justification, and limitations of the project. Chapter 2 begins with a historical review of the discipline. Following J. Gabler's definition, Biblical Theology became a purely historical and descriptive discipline which delineates the theological views of the biblical writings and the communities of their origin, explaining "what it meant" in biblical times. This brought an emphasis on diversity and development within the Scripture.

The discipline split into separate Old Testament and New Testament Theologies, which later were succeeded by studies of the religion of ancient Israel and the early church. This occurred mainly because historical criticism regarded the biblical text as data from which to reconstruct history, and looked not so much at the text as through the text to the history which lies behind it.

Chapter 3 defines Biblical Theology as an ordered study of the understanding of the revelation of God that (1) has as its source the entire canonical Scriptures, (2) is limited to the Scriptures, and (3) is based on its final Christian form. The relationship to Exegesis and Systematic Theology is also explored.

Chapter 4 considers methodology. Theologians are classified as using systematic, historical and thematic approaches. A book-by-book approach is proposed and the reasons for this approach are presented. Various "centers" are discussed and the cosmic conflict between God and Satan is proposed as an orientation point for the whole Bible.

Part Two is a practical development of the course. Chapter 5 contains the course objectives, requirements, and basic course outline. Chapter 6 consists of Study Guide Questions for each Bible book, which are intended for students' home study in preparation for the class. Some examples of interpretation of the Pentateuch are given in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 consists of a theoretical and practical summary and conclusions reached in this study and in the teaching of the course.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COURSE IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
BASED ON A BOOK-BY-BOOK APPROACH TO THE BIBLE

A Project Report
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Daniel Duda
July 1992

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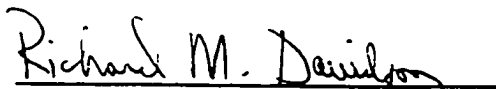
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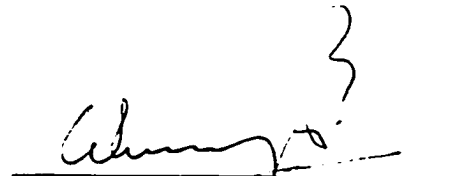
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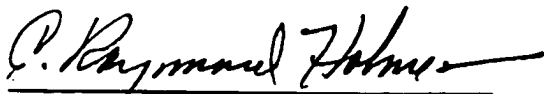
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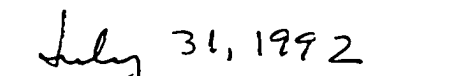

Dean,
SDA Theological Seminary



C. Raymond Holmes



Atilio R. Dupertuis


Date Approved

To all my knowledge-thirsty students in *Zaokski SDA
Theological Seminary* who so eagerly listened to
these ideas presented to them in the
Russian language

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | ix |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | x |
| Chapter | |
| I. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Purpose of the Project | 1 |
| Justification for the Project | 2 |
| Limitations of the Project | 6 |
| PART ONE | |
| THEORETICAL BACKGROUND | |
| II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIBLICAL AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW | 9 |
| Biblical Theology | 9 |
| Biblical Theology as a College Subject | 9 |
| Biblical Theology as a Theological Discipline | 10 |
| A Brief History of Biblical Theology | 11 |
| J. P. Gabler's Definition of Biblical Theology | 14 |
| History of Biblical Theology after J. P. Gabler | 16 |
| The Historical-Critical Method | 19 |
| Systematic Theology | 24 |
| Roman Catholic Theology | 26 |
| Protestant Theology | 28 |
| III. THE DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY | 31 |
| Definition of Biblical Theology | 32 |
| The Source of Biblical Theology | 35 |
| The Interpretation Method for Biblical Theology | 38 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| The Scope of Biblical Theology | 40 |
| Biblical Theology Is a Christian Discipline | 42 |
| Tota Scriptura | 44 |
| Relationships to Other Disciplines of Theology | 46 |
| Biblical Theology and Exegesis | 47 |
| Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology | 49 |
| Implications for Doing Biblical Theology | 54 |
| | |
| IV. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING | |
| BIBLICAL THEOLOGY | 56 |
| | |
| The Need for a Proper Methodology | 56 |
| The Systematic Approach | 57 |
| The Historical Approach | 59 |
| The Thematic Approach | 61 |
| The Center of the Bible | 63 |
| The Major Propositions for an OT Center | 63 |
| Single Concept Proposal | 63 |
| Formulas Proposals | 65 |
| Literary Units Proposals | 66 |
| The Major Propositions for an NT Center | 67 |
| Evaluation of the Quest for the Center | 70 |
| A Proposal for Methodology | 72 |
| The Structure of Biblical Theology | 73 |
| A Book-by-book Approach | 75 |
| A Proposal for Center | 77 |
| Orientation Point | 79 |
| Cosmic Conflict Between God And Satan | 79 |
| A View of Both God and Satan | 80 |
| Isaiah | 80 |
| Ezekiel | 81 |
| John in the Revelation | 81 |
| Other Cosmic Conflict Allusions | 82 |
| Conflict in Genesis | 82 |
| The Day of Atonement Ritual | 83 |
| Conflict in Job | 84 |
| Conflict in Daniel | 85 |
| Conflict in Zechariah | 86 |
| Conflict in the Gospels | 87 |
| Conflict in Paul's Epistles | 90 |
| The Reason for the Conflict | 92 |
| Conclusion | 95 |

PART TWO
COLLEGE COURSE IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

| | |
|--|-----|
| V. BASIC OUTLINE OF THE COURSE | 98 |
| Course Description | 98 |
| Course Objectives | 98 |
| Course Requirements | 99 |
| Reading | 99 |
| Class Activity | 100 |
| Attendance | 100 |
| Participation | 100 |
| Course Evaluation | 100 |
| Examination | 100 |
| Grading | 100 |
| Course Content | 101 |
| VI. STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS' PRIVATE STUDY | 104 |
| The Old Testament | 105 |
| Genesis | 105 |
| Exodus | 109 |
| Leviticus | 113 |
| Numbers | 117 |
| Deuteronomy | 122 |
| Joshua | 127 |
| Judges | 132 |
| Ruth | 135 |
| 1 Samuel | 137 |
| 2 Samuel | 142 |
| 1 Kings | 147 |
| 2 Kings | 151 |
| 1 Chronicles | 156 |
| 2 Chronicles | 160 |
| Ezra and Nehemiah | 165 |
| Esther | 170 |
| Job | 173 |
| Psalms | 177 |
| Proverbs | 181 |
| Ecclesiastes | 186 |
| Song of Solomon | 190 |
| Isaiah | 192 |
| Jeremiah | 197 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Lamentations | 201 |
| Ezekiel | 204 |
| Daniel | 209 |
| Hosea | 214 |
| Joel | 218 |
| Amos | 220 |
| Obadiah | 223 |
| Jonah | 225 |
| Micah | 229 |
| Nahum | 231 |
| Habakkuk | 234 |
| Zephaniah | 236 |
| Haggai | 239 |
| Zechariah | 242 |
| Malachi | 246 |
| The Intertestamental Period | 248 |
| The New Testament | 253 |
| Matthew | 253 |
| Mark | 257 |
| Luke | 261 |
| John | 265 |
| Acts | 269 |
| Romans | 274 |
| 1 and 2 Corinthians | 278 |
| Galatians | 283 |
| Ephesians and Colossians | 288 |
| Philippians | 292 |
| 1 and 2 Thessalonians | 295 |
| 1 and 2 Timothy | 298 |
| Titus | 302 |
| Philemon | 304 |
| Hebrews | 306 |
| James | 310 |
| 1 and 2 Peter | 313 |
| 1, 2, & 3 John | 317 |
| Jude | 322 |
| Revelation | 324 |

**VII. INTERPRETATION OF SELECTED PORTIONS
OF THE PENTATEUCH** 330

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| The Pentateuch | 330 |
| Genesis 1-11 | 331 |
| Genesis 1 and 2 | 333 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| The Universe-wide Perspective | 334 |
| The Sabbath | 338 |
| Genesis 3 | 341 |
| The Serpent's Words About God | 342 |
| God's Words to the Serpent | 345 |
| The Tree of Knowledge | 348 |
| Genesis 4-11 | 352 |
| The Flood Story | 353 |
| The Table of Nations | 362 |
| The Tower of Babel | 363 |
| Genesis 12:1-3 and the Rest of the Pentateuch | 364 |
| The Abrahamic Promise | 364 |
| Conclusion | 369 |
| | |
| VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS | 374 |
| | |
| Theological Summary and Conclusions | 374 |
| Practical Summary and Conclusions | 381 |
| | |
| APPENDIX: Some Relevant Ellen G. White Statements Regarding Bible Study and the Great Controversy | 384 |
| | |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 397 |
| | |
| VITA | 415 |

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------|---|
| <u>Conc</u> | <u>Concilium</u> |
| <u>EvT</u> | <u>Evangelische Theologie</u> |
| <u>HBT</u> | <u>Horizons in Biblical Theology</u> |
| <u>IDB</u> | <u>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</u> |
| <u>JATS</u> | <u>Journal of the Adventist Theological Society</u> |
| <u>JSOT</u> | <u>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</u> |
| <u>JTS</u> | <u>Journal of Theological Studies</u> |
| <u>LTI</u> | <u>Lutheran Theological Journal</u> |
| <u>RevExp</u> | <u>Review and Expositor</u> |
| <u>SJT</u> | <u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u> |
| <u>TZ</u> | <u>Theologische Zeitschrift</u> |

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I thank God for sending me to Andrews University and thus fulfilling my childhood dreams and youthful aspirations, as well as my prayers of more than fifteen years. I also thank Him for helping me to not only begin but also to complete this degree, along with all my other duties, in such unbelievable time.

I thank the Church for sending me to Andrews University (in spite of the many difficulties this meant before the fall of communism in 1989) and for entrusting me with the privilege of being the second individual from Czechoslovakia in history to study here at Andrews and the first to receive a doctoral degree.

I thank my parents who loved me so much. They taught me that those who lived before me were a source of inspiration and knowledge and that I can see much further if I learn from them and their books. But most importantly, they also taught me to value above all else that special Book "which is able to make one wise for salvation."

I thank my faithful wife, Viera, for her love and care in spite of extended separations for us all, even though she had already endured four years of separation in our nine years of marriage.

I thank my children, Mark and Roman, who sacrificed so much, without quite understanding the reason, first to lose their daddy beyond the ocean and then

each day to the library, never complaining. Their learning of English so efficiently and its mastery has made me happy and proud of them.

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And finally, I would like to thank Anne and Jerry Kantor, Nancy and Paul Kantor, and Shirley and Asa Thoresen, who made my stay here and that of my family, so pleasant.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry project was to develop a college course in Biblical Theology based on a book-by-book study of the Bible for use in the SDA Theological Seminary in Zaokski, Russia (formerly the USSR).

This Biblical Theology class was taught as a four credit course for two consecutive quarters during the school year 1990/91 and 1991/92. This means that 80 contact hours in a classroom setting were available.

The course was taught to second- and third-year students who had previously covered the historical and literary introductions to the Old and New Testaments. Thus it was possible to concentrate mainly on questions of theology in the different Bible books, their importance and unique contribution to an overall understanding of the Bible.

Certain books of the Bible (e. g., Daniel, the four Gospels, Acts, all epistles, and Revelation) were or would be covered more in-depth in other classes

during the course of four-year B. A. in Theology program.¹ Because of this, it was possible for me to put more emphasis on the remaining books of the Bible.

Justification for the Project

I taught a course in Biblical Theology in the newly opened SDA Seminary during the 1990/91 and 1991/92 school years in the former Soviet Union. The course was taught for the ministerial students taking training for the B. A. degree in Theology.

The SDA Church in the territory of the former USSR did not have any seminary or daily study seminary training for its ministers for more than half a century. Most of the five hundred ministers who are presently employed by the SDA Church have not had any formal training in theology. A three-year correspondence type of training was established four years ago, during which pastors already working in churches would come twice a year for fourteen-day sessions of lectures in basic areas of theology. Although this type of training is helping those who at the moment are not able to go into the full four year daily-study program, nevertheless it cannot adequately meet the demands placed on pastors in today's society. It was intended more to help those pastors who were already in the

¹In addition to teaching the *Biblical Theology* course, I also taught in parallel *Life and Teachings of Jesus* for one quarter (50 hours) which covered all four Gospels and *Acts and Epistles* for two quarters (80 hours) which covered the book of Acts and all the Epistles. The appropriate Study Guides for these books have been used in both classes and can be found in chapter 6 of Part Two. For this reason, the Biblical Theology classes covered only the Old Testament books (as seen from the course outline in chapter 5).

ministry, but not to be the primary means of education for those who will enter the ministry in the near future.

As we live in a secular society and can see increasing theological pluralism everywhere (even within the SDA church), it is imperative that pastors receive training in a solid, Bible-derived interpretation of Scripture.

The current enormous interest of people in the Bible in this part of the world puts high expectations and demands on the work of future pastors. Those who join the church in the 1990s are mainly young educated professionals. Being brought up in an atheistic spirit and steeped in militant propaganda intentionally tearing apart any notion that the Bible is more than a mere human book, the future pastors need to be able to show these people that the Bible is a living, reliable, and divinely inspired book that is relevant for contemporary people.

In the light of all this, the importance of a sound understanding of the Bible and a proper Biblical Theology for the future young pastors who come into the ministry in the 1990's in this part of the world cannot be overestimated.

The usual approach to teaching the subject of Biblical Theology is topical. This approach has its own merits and advantages, but I chose a book-by-book approach, or approach by blocks of books for the following reasons:

1. Since the Bible does not contain a systematic or topical study of different subjects, the tendency of our Western minds has been to take "the proof-text" approach to distill the doctrines from the Bible for adult believers. Some narrative sections or stories have been mostly used for children to keep them

attentive in their divisions of Sabbath school. Because of this, whole large sections of the Bible (narrative, poetic, wisdom) have been generally disregarded for use with adult members of the church. However, there is much meaningful insight in this material that needs to be addressed. Pastors need to have a wholistic approach to the Bible.

2. Because of the long repression of religion and also recent rapid sociological changes and unexpected political developments, no textbooks in the Russian language were available to the students. Translating and printing of new textbooks will take considerable time, possibly a few years. Under these circumstances, very little to almost no required reading could be assigned to the students, other than the Bible. The traditional topical approach to Biblical Theology under such circumstances would have to be completely based on the teacher's choice of study materials and his/her approach to the Bible. Students would have almost no opportunity to consult other materials or approaches in their language, as virtually none are available. To a large extent the Bible would have to be taught in an arbitrary-authoritarian mode. Under present political and sociological circumstances, I see this as a counter-productive approach to theology and people for the following reason:

For many years theological and political ideas in this part of the world have been authoritatively handed down from the "top" and ordinary people were expected to accept these without questions or thinking. If we are to reach modern thinking people in today's society who are fed to the teeth with this technique, we

need to use a different approach that allows the Bible to speak for itself, bringing as little as possible to it from the outside.

3. This method will also help to equip ministers to meet in a more effective way a very urgent need of the SDA Church in the territory of the former USSR to be regarded as a Bible-based religion, not an American-exported system of beliefs, foreign to the culture of native believers of this vast territory. Only living within the country for some time alerts one to the enormous extent of this pressing need.

4. The project can also be easily adapted by pastors or lay people for use in mid-week prayer meetings or Bible courses in our local churches and thus be of importance and wider use to all ministers, not only to seminarians. A few of my students are now using this approach with some groups of people who went through a basic Bible doctrines course because they expressed an ardent desire to continue studying the Bible in a group setting.¹

Of course, the material is relevant not only for the former USSR, but also for other Eastern European countries as well. I plan to use and further develop this approach in my future teaching work in the SDA Bible Seminary in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

¹However, I strongly discourage the use of Study Guide Questions found in Part Two without a previous thorough understanding of the underlying principles spelled out in Part One. The Study Guides without proper interpretative guidelines can be more harmful than useful. They are intended for seminarians and will be also discussed in a classroom setting where further guidance is provided. The Study Guides that I use for the group discussions have many more Bible texts added to show the direction in which the answer should be given.

Limitations of the Project

The course was developed for the undergraduate level of a four-year study program leading toward a B. A. degree in Theology in the SDA Theological Seminary in Zaokski, Russia. This institution was recently affiliated with Andrews University, of Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Part One is a theoretical background to show the biblical and theological basis for the methodology and material found in Part Two.

First, in chapter 2, I will look at Biblical Theology not only as a college curriculum subject, but also as a theological discipline. I note how this subcategory of theology was defined in the past, and how this influenced its present status. I briefly outline the difference between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology and touch upon how Systematic Theology is done in both Catholicism and modern Protestantism.

In chapter 3, I give my definition of Biblical Theology and show the relationship of this branch of theology to the related disciplines such as Exegesis and Systematic Theology. In chapter 4, I consider the methodology of Biblical Theology. I will classify those methods that have been used in the past, discuss various proposed centers for the Bible, and then propose my methodology for teaching Biblical Theology and give a suggestion for a "center" or "orientation point" of the Bible as I see it.

The extent and nature of a D.Min. project does not call for nor allow penetrating and original contributions and/or suggestions as far as material

covered in Part One is concerned. There is so much more that could be said and needs to be addressed in the area of contemporary Biblical Theology, but it would be a suitable topic for a Ph.D. or Th.D. dissertation, not for the theoretical background of a D.Min. project. Time and circumstances permitting, I would like to return to these matters more profoundly in the future.

Part Two is a practical development of a college course in Biblical Theology. The basic outline of the course, giving course objectives and a schedule for teaching of the course, is provided in chapter 5. I have developed the Study Guide Questions for each book of the Bible for students' private study. It is here, in chapter 6, where the greatest emphasis of this D.Min. project is placed.

The Study Guides are intended for students' home study in preparation for class discussions. Students are expected to be prepared to participate in discussion during the class periods and to be able to show that they have spent some time in reflection on this material and that their conclusions are consistent with the overall understanding of the Bible.

Finally, in chapter 7, I give some examples of interpretation of selected portions from the Pentateuch, (as this study was limited to the Pentateuch). However, the Study Guides cover the whole Bible and the class lectures cover the whole Old Testament. The fifty minute class period was divided into thirty minutes of lecture and twenty minutes of discussion of Study Guides questions.

PART ONE

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER II

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIBLICAL AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Biblical Theology

Biblical Theology as a College Subject

The term "Biblical Theology" is being used in a very confusing fashion. Although classes in Biblical Theology have been taught in Seventh-day Adventist colleges for decades, it was generally understood that this noble expression indicated a class in Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) doctrines. The adjective "biblical" was synonymous with "good," "true," or "faithful" to the Bible.¹

However, in the 1980s classes in Biblical Theology were less frequently taught in SDA colleges.² This can be explained by the fact that classes such as

¹Avondale College, Australia, in the 1968 Bulletin gives the following description under the subject of Biblical Theology: "A study of the underlying principles of SDA doctrines, with a view to ascertaining their value as a contribution to religion and vital Christianity. An examination of the history and teachings of present day denominations, sects and cults."

²Currently, only Avondale College has the subject in their undergraduate program and it is described as follows: "TH330 Theology IIIa (Biblical Theology): An in-depth study of the underlying principles of SDA Theology. Further systematic investigation of the doctrines of the Church, demonstrating the

"Fundamentals of Christian Beliefs" or "Doctrines of the Christian Church" have taken the place of Biblical Theology courses and also that such descriptions better describe what is actually being taught in a given course. Moreover, some exegetical classes are presently taught which deal with single books or blocks of material (e.g., Pentateuch). But exegetical work is often only lightly touched upon on the college level. Such classes are more the domain of the SDA Theological Seminary where master's degrees are offered.

Biblical Theology as a Theological Discipline

The situation outside of SDA circles is not much better. We can find encyclopedias of Biblical Theology,¹ journals and monograph series devoted to Biblical Theology.² Nevertheless, examination of the various uses of the term "Biblical Theology" rapidly exposes a widespread disagreement about this phrase. J. L. McKenzie correctly observed, "Biblical theology is the only discipline or sub-discipline in the field of theology that lacks generally accepted principles, methods

value of these doctrines as the constituent elements of a vital Christianity. Special consideration of those doctrines which the SDA Church believes to be its significant contribution to theology" (1980 Bulletin).

Newbold College, England, has recently changed the name of their Biblical Theology course to "Topics in Religion."

¹Johannes B. Bauer, Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology: The Complete Sacramentum Verbi (New York: Crossroad, 1981) and see also Xavier Léon-Dufour, ed., Dictionary of Biblical Theology (New York: Descléc Co. 1967).

²Biblical Theology Bulletin (1971-), Horizons in Biblical Theology (1979-), Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie (1986-) and also monograph series: Overtures to Biblical Theology, and Studies in Biblical Theology.

and structure. There is not even a generally accepted definition of its purpose and scope."¹ Krister Stendahl has said that "there is no one definition of this field on which biblical scholars can unanimously agree."² James Barr lists five different usages of the term "Biblical Theology."³ A quick look into history shows how this disorientation came about.

A Brief History of Biblical Theology

To understand the relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology, we need to look at the beginning of such distinction in the post-Reformation era. The separation of Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology came about two hundred years ago. In this chapter I will outline the basic developments only.⁴

¹John L. McKenzie, A Theology of the Old Testament (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 15.

²Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," IDB (1962), 1: 418.

³James Barr, "Biblische Theologie," Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon, ed. E. Faulbusch et al., (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1985), 1: 488-89.

⁴For a concise treatment of the history of the interpretation of Scripture see R. M. Grant and D. Tracy, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). For a history of Biblical Theology see Hans-Joachim Kraus, Die Biblische Theologie: Ihre Geschichte und Problematik (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970); Henning Graf Reventlow, Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); James D. Smart, The Past, Present and Future of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979).

After the death of the apostles as trustworthy interpreters of Scripture, an ever present need to appropriate and apply the teachings of the Bible became a pressing issue. There was a desire to bring into harmony a uniform and consistent set of beliefs in the Christian church with obvious diversity of religious practices in the Roman world. It was also possible to see a certain diversity in the Bible as well. In the early centuries interpreters of Scripture attempted to solve this by means of **allegory**, seeking a hidden spiritual meaning behind the literal meaning of various texts.¹ This, of course led to reading different meanings into passages, sometimes even contradictory to their original intent.

With the Reformation came the effort to return back to the plain sense of scriptural teaching and to "take seriously the demand for a theology based on holy scripture alone."² Yet even here, there was not an explicit differentiation between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology. With regard to the reformers, Biblical Theology was integrated with Dogmatic Theology.

It was in the Post-Reformation era that the way was prepared for a separate Biblical Theology. Three main developments contributed to this:

¹The Alexandrian school of interpretation with Origen, Clement and Cyril of Alexandria were the major proponents of this approach. See: "Alexandrian Interpretation," "Allegorical Interpretation," and "Allegory" in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden, A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation (London: SCM, 1990), 10-16.

²Gerhard Ebeling, "The Meaning of 'Biblical Theology'" JTS 6 (1955): 210-225. Reprinted in G. Ebeling, The Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 82.

1. Protestant Orthodoxy used a collection of proof texts (*dicta probantia*) which supported its Dogmatic Theology in order to demonstrate the biblical basis for its doctrines. The term "Biblical Theology" was for the first time used in this context.¹

2. Pietism, reacting against the barrenness of Protestant orthodoxy, came with its "back-to-Bible" emphasis. For Ph. J. Spener, C. Haymann, J. Deutschmann, and J. C. Weidner, "Biblical Theology" was a reform program to oppose the dry system of Protestant orthodoxy.

3. With the age of Enlightenment and Rationalism came an effort to escape from church dogmas, lifeless theories, and discover in the Bible universal and timeless truths in accordance with reason. The four-volume Biblische Theologie (1771-1775) by G. T. Zachariä and the works of A. F. Büsching are characteristic of this approach.

Thus a "decisive change occurred" so that "from being merely a subsidiary discipline of dogmatics, 'biblical theology' now became a rival of the prevailing dogmatics."²

It was under these circumstances that Johann Philipp Gabler, with his inaugural lecture on his appointment to the University of Altdorf on March 30, 1787, influenced theology from this point onward. He gave the classical definition

¹Wolfgang Jakob Christman, Teutsche biblische Theologie (1629). See G. F. Hasel, Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate (4th rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 11.

²Ebeling, 87.

for both Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology.¹ As explicitly shown in the title² of his lecture, this initial programmatic statement was structured in terms of a contrast between Biblical Theology and dogmatics. Gabler later distinguished between true (*wahre*) and pure (*reine*) Biblical Theology.³ Because of his influence, J. P. Gabler has been called the father of Biblical Theology.⁴

J. P. Gabler's Definition of Biblical Theology

According to Gabler, Biblical Theology is to be thought of as an historical and descriptive discipline, quite independent from Dogmatic Theology. True Biblical Theology was to be involved with the comprehensive presentation of the total religion of the Bible and the true meaning of what, in fact, the biblical writers thought and taught.⁵

In contrast to *true* Biblical Theology, Gabler calls the systematic exposition of God's eternal truths in the Bible *pure* Biblical Theology. These

¹An English translation appeared by J. Sandys-Wunsch and L. Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *SJT* 33 (1980): 133-58.

²De justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae reundisque recte utriusque finibus, (On the proper distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the correct delimitation of their boundaries).

³For example in Journal für Theologische Literatur 1 (1801): 403, as quoted by Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, 157.

⁴D. H. Wallace, "Historicism and Biblical Theology," Studia Evangelica 3 (1964): 223.

⁵Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, 137, 139.

eternal truths are valid for all times and represent the revelation of God. Here the descriptive task change to the normative task.¹ In Gabler's own words the biblical theologian must "distinguish carefully the divine from the human," to distinguish "those things which in the sacred books refer most immediately to their own times and to the men of those times from those pure notions which divine providence wished to be characteristic of all times and places."² The standard for judging revelation is philosophically grounded and is based on understanding that universal truths are more real than the particulars from which they are derived.³ It needs to be said that Gabler was deeply concerned about the meaning of the Bible for his day, but he had a strongly rationalist outlook.

So, after Gabler, Biblical Theology became a historical, purely descriptive discipline which aimed to give a description of the theological views of the biblical writings and the communities of their supposed origin. This assignment was to be done as objectively as possible.⁴ Moreover, this descriptive task could even be carried out by believers and unbelievers alike.⁵ Such a purely

¹John H. Hayes and Frederick Prussner, Old Testament Theology. Its History and Development (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 63-64.

²Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, 138.

³Ibid., 156.

⁴Cf. for example Stendahl, 418-425; P. D. Hanson, "Theology, Old Testament," Harper's Bible Dictionary, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 1058.

⁵Stendahl, 422.

historical descriptive method led Stendahl to his famous distinction between "what it meant," in biblical times and "what it means" today.¹

In this way Biblical Theology was emancipated from first being subordinate to, and later being a rival of, Dogmatic Theology to the status of an independent historical discipline having its own place alongside Systematic Theology. The latter, is a didactic or normative discipline, concerned with providing a contemporary statement of faith usually based on philosophy. Its task is to translate "from one pattern of thought into another,"² telling what the biblical materials of the past mean to the present situation of modern man.

History of Biblical Theology after J. P. Gabler

As a result of these trends a flood of "Biblical Theologies" was published in the following one hundred years. The rise of historical criticism overstressed the diversity of Scripture, differences between the Old and New Testaments, and the complex process of historical development of Bible material. Scholars have focused on what they considered to be contradictions in Scripture.³ Starting with G. L. Bauer, Biblical Theology was split into OT theology and NT

¹Stendahl, 419. Cf. a discussion on Stendahl's distinction between "what it meant" and "what it means" in Ben C. Ollenburger, "What Krister Stendahl 'Meant'--A Normative Critique of 'Descriptive Biblical Theology,'" HBT 8 (1986): 61-98.

²Stendahl, 427.

³Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward an Old Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 23.

theology. It was perfectly natural, and perhaps inevitable, consequence of the separation of the Testaments in our one Bible; but this separation has had tragic consequences for the understanding of Biblical Theology ever since. Biblical Theology must be a unified discipline however it may be divided.

The questions of authorship, date, and archeological findings on related subjects led to new historical reconstructions and so Biblical Theology changed into the study of the history of religion (*Religionsgeschichte*). This approach was sharply formulated by William Wrede in 1897, when he wrote in his work Concerning the Task and Method of So-called New Testament Theology:

Biblical Theology has to investigate something from given documents . . . it tries to grasp it as objectively, correctly, and sharply as possible. That is all. How the systematic theologian gets on with its results and deals with them--that is his own affair. Like every other real science, New Testament theology has its goal simply in itself, and is totally indifferent to all dogma and systematic theology.¹

This approach has continued to develop and flourish until the 1990s, mainly in academic circles. It is associated in Europe and North America with the blossoming of "departments of religious studies" within universities.

In spite of this and also to counter this trend, there appeared a broad trend in the English-speaking world that often became labeled "The Biblical Theology Movement" and which climaxed in the 1950s. Its goal was to overcome

¹W. Wrede, The Task and Methods of "New Testament Theology," quoted in Robert Morgan, ed., The Nature of New Testament Theology (London: SCM Press, 1973), 69. No wonder, that Charles Scobie called this period "independent Biblical Theology" in comparison with the period before Gabler which he labeled "integrated Biblical Theology". See Charles H. H. Scobie, "The Challenge of Biblical Theology," Tyndale Bulletin 42.1 (1991): 38-40.

the old rift between liberal and conservative wings of Christianity by combining a critical approach to the Scriptures with a confessional theology which emphasized the theological dimensions of the Bible, the unity of the Bible, revelation in history, the distinctive biblical mentality, and the contrast of the Bible to its environment.¹

The movement was heavily criticized by James Barr² and its weaknesses were also documented in retrospect by Brevard Childs.³ Childs believes that the Biblical Theology Movement failed because it could not demonstrate the basic relevance of Biblical Theology in confronting contemporary social issues and failed to come to grips with the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scripture.⁴

The following years saw unprecedented emphasis on diversity and development within Scripture. As a result the possibility of a Biblical Theology was denied;⁵ even the writing of a true Old or New Testament Theology was

¹cf. Gerhard F. Hasel, "Biblical Theology Movement," Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 149-52.

²James Barr, "Trends and Prospects in Biblical Theology," JTS 25 (1974): 265-282; idem, "Biblical Theology," IDB Supplement (Nashville, 1976) 104-111; idem, "The Problem of Old Testament Theology and the History of Religion," Canadian Journal of Theology 3 (1957): 141-149; idem, "Story and History in Biblical Theology," Journal of Religion 56 (1976): 1-17.

³Brevard S. Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

⁴*Ibid.*, 103.

⁵E. Käsemann, G. Strecker, and S. Schulz.

ruled out. At best one could speak of the Priestly theology or the Deuteronomic Theology, the theologies of Second Isaiah, Paul, John and so on. Many scholars would agree that "the tendency now is to say that there is no one theology, either of the Old Testament or of the New, and still less of the entire Bible."¹

If the work produced with such presuppositions is still called Biblical Theology, then we may legitimately ask whether such an approach is either "Biblical" or "Theology". When the limits of the biblical canon are totally disregarded, when the Book of Enoch is just as much source material as the Book of Jeremiah, it hardly makes sense to say that the discipline is concerned with the Bible, the canonical Scriptures of the Christian Church. Similarly, when the sole objective of the discipline is to describe the religion of various communities and no recognition is given to the documents as being in any way theologically normative, it is hard to see how 'theology' is an appropriate label.

The Historical-Critical Method

There is no question that the impasse in which Biblical Theology presently finds itself is caused mainly by the use of the historical-critical method.²

¹Barr, "Trends and Prospects in Biblical Theology," 270.

²See for example: Eric Osborne, "Exegesis and Theology," Australian Biblical Review 29 (1981): 32-37; Horace D. Hummel, "Biblical or Dogmatic Theology?" LTJ 16/1 (1982): 3-15.

This study method was classically formulated for use in theological disciplines by Ernst Troeltsch in 1898.¹ Troeltsch set out three principles: (1) the principle of criticism or methodological doubt, (2) the principle of analogy, and (3) the principle of correlation. Thus the principles and procedures of secular historical science are the external norm and proper method for evaluating the probability and truthfulness of the biblical account and also interpreting the final meaning of biblical data.

This approach to the Bible is by no means neutral nor objective as often heralded by its proponents and users, but is anthropocentric in its presuppositions. When the interpreter's own experience becomes the test of all historical truth, he begins with a narrow understanding of reality, whereby certain possibilities are excluded on an a priori basis.

Says Wayne E. Ward:

There is certainly an inherent contradiction in the application of the rationalistic historical methodology which grew out of the Enlightenment to the understanding of the religion of the Bible. By definition the rationalistic historical method rejects the concept of the supernatural, the idea of inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the category of revelation, and the understanding of history in any other way than a closed system of natural causation.²

¹Ernst Troeltsch, "Über die historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie," in Gesammelte Schriften (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1913), vol. 2: 729-53. For a clear and concise explanation of its principles, consequences, and helpful criticism, see Richard M. Davidson, "The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage," JATS 1/1 (1990): 39-56.

²Wayne E. Ward, "Towards a Biblical Theology," RevExp 74 (1977): 381.

The problems this creates in doing Biblical Theology are recognized by many scholars. John J. Collins says: "The reasons for the decline of Biblical Theology are manifold, but one of the most deep-rooted is the perennial tension between Biblical Theology and the historical critical method."¹

Walter Wink began his book The Bible in Human Transformation with the startling sentence: "Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt."² However, it needs to be emphasized that what is being questioned is not so much the **method** itself as the **use** that is made of it and especially the claims that have been made for it. W. Wink explains:

Biblical criticism is not bankrupt because it has run out of things to say or new ground to explore. It is bankrupt solely because it is incapable of achieving what most of its practitioners considered its purpose to be: so to interpret the Scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation.³

There have been some attempts to modify the method to remedy this stalemate. For example, Peter Stuhlmacher came with a "fourth principle," "a principle of consent to the biblical texts" marked by "a willingness to open

¹John J. Collins, "Is a Critical Biblical Theology Possible?" in The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters, ed. W. H. Propp, B. Halpern, and D. N. Freedman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 1.

²Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation: Towards a New Paradigm for Biblical Study, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 1.

³Ibid., 2.

ourselves anew to the claim of tradition, of the present, and of transcendence," thus allowing even for supernatural in-breaking.¹

Another attempt to by-pass the results of historical criticism is "the literary approach" that looks at the Bible as literature; it focuses on the final form of the text as it stands. An example of this approach is Northrop Frye who holds that while the Bible is "certainly the end product of a long and complex editorial process, the end product needs to be examined in its own right."²

Brevard Childs came with his "canonical approach" arguing that "the canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do biblical theology."³

However, Childs⁴ does not reject historical criticism, but seeks to go beyond it by focusing on the form of the text which has been accepted as canonical by the church.

But J. Collins shows that to keep the historical critical method and at the same time to limit the study of "Biblical Theology" to the biblical canon is

¹Peter Stuhlmacher, Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 83-89.

²Northrop Frye, The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (Toronto: Academic Press, 1981), xvii. Although critical scholars hold that Genesis 1 comes from the latest of the four Pentateuchal sources, Frye remarks: "A genuine higher criticism would observe that this account of creation stands at the beginning of Genesis, despite its late date, because it belongs at the beginning of Genesis."

³Childs, Biblical Theology, 99. See also his Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context (London: SCM, 1985).

⁴Nor Stuhlmacher.

inconsistent because "the theological presuppositions are inconsistent with the historical method on which [theologians] otherwise rely."¹ In other words, "dogmatic convictions undercut its avowedly historical method."²

Once the principles of the historical-critical method are accepted, the basis for doing a *Biblical* Theology is virtually destroyed. One can only engage in the history of religions, but there is no longer a rationale for accepting the biblical canon; for accepting supernatural revelation and inspiration or that all biblical writers are inspired in the same way; than there is for holding to a unity and harmony of the Bible. Many things thus become historically conditioned and limited and the historicity of crucial events is dubious.

Thus a Biblical Theology that takes historical criticism seriously ultimately destroys the Sola Scriptura principle and also itself.³

John Collins has captured the issue profoundly when he writes:

If, then, there is an inherent contradiction between historical criticism and theology . . . biblical theology can only proceed in one or other of two ways: by abandoning historical criticism, . . . or by reconceiving the theological aspect of the discipline. The issue is no longer the quest for a unifying

¹Collins, 5. See also his criticism of Childs's approach on pp. 5-7. For evaluation of Childs' contribution from another point of view, see Hasel, OT Theology, 103-11.

²Ibid., 4.

³Dietrich Ritschl speaks of the "fiction of a 'biblical theology'." The Logic of Theology: A Brief Account of the Relationship Between Basic Concepts in Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 68-69.

center within the Old Testament or the Bible, but the context within which biblical theology should be pursued and the nature of the pursuit itself.¹

Eta Linnemann, "a Bultmannian turned evangelical," was right in her conclusion about the impossibility to use the historical-critical method and remain true to biblical self-testimony: "One can no more be a little historical-critical than a little pregnant."²

Systematic Theology

I have already hinted at the method and function of Systematic Theology in the historic outline of developments of theology. The task of Systematic Theology is to give a systematic exposition of the beliefs of the church at a given point in its historical development.³ Eduard Schillebeeckx said it in the following way, "the dogmatic theologian has the continuing task, as once the apostolic church itself had, of reading Sacred Scripture again and again

¹Collins, 5. Of course, he argues for the second, but see the criticism of Hasel, OT Theology, 100, and also the work by Eta Linnemann.

²Eta Linnemann, Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology? trans. R. W. Yarbrough, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 123. See also, Gerhard Maier, The End of the Historical Critical Method (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977).

³The discipline is sometimes designated "Dogmatic Theology" (William H. T. Shedd, Karl Barth) or "Christian Theology" (Adam Clarke, Arthur C. Headlam, Thomas N. Finger) and "Christian Faith" (Karl Rahner, Hendrikus Berkhof). On some aspects of Systematic Theology see S. W. Sykes, "Systematic Theology," The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 560-62.

retrospectively; and in doing so, to presuppose the findings of Christian exegesis."¹

Systematic Theology is supposed to be a normative discipline of theology concerned with translating from one pattern of thought to another, not so much with "what it meant," as with "what it means" today. Stendahl has capsulized the task of Systematic Theology by saying that it

is by its nature one of translation from one pattern of thought into another, and every true and great translation is a *creative* effort, not just a painstaking and nearsighted exchange of the precise words of one language with its lexicographical equivalents in another language.²

For the systematic theologian, this means the theological interpretation of the Bible in the light of the contemporary challenges and the present situation. "The systematic theologian . . . always synthesizes on the basis of the existential problems of the contemporary world."³

Thus, Systematic Theology, although receiving its material from Biblical Theology, "is concerned with truth *per se*, regardless of its historical origin."⁴ Louis Berkhof affirms that Systematic Theology "may not rest satisfied

¹Eduard Schillebeeckx, "Exegesis, Dogmatics and the Development of Dogma," in Dogmatic versus Biblical Theology, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964), 142.

²Stendahl, 427.

³Piet Schoonenberg, "Notes of a Systematic Theologian" Concilium 10 (1971): 91.

⁴Roger Nicole, "The Relationship Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," in Evangelical Roots. A Tribute to Wilbur Smith, ed. K. S. Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 192.

with a description of what was at one time the content of the faith of the Church, but must aim at absolute or ideal truth. It is not a purely historical or descriptive science, but one that has normative significance."¹

Because systematic theologians are concerned with ultimate truth, they often approach the Bible with their own questions in mind in order to find an answer in it. Says Edgar McKnight:

Theologians use the Bible within a framework that is not derived from the Bible. Decisions of theologians as to how to construe the scriptures are 'decisively shaped by a theologian's prior judgment about how best to construe the mode in which God's presence among the faithful correlates with the use of scripture in the common life of the church.'²

Truly Stendahl could see that "there could be few philosophies, epistemologies, anthropologies, etc., which could not furnish the framework for a Systematic Theology, by which the meaning of the Christian scriptures could be stated."³

Roman Catholic Theology

In Roman Catholic theology, dogma is not confined to Scripture for its

¹Louis Berkhof, Introduction to Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 58.

²Edgar V. McKnight, Postmodern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-oriented Criticism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 98. See also David H. Kelsey, The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

³Stendahl, 427.

source.¹ In Catholic understanding the magisterium and tradition are considered together with the Bible as equal sources for theology and have a normative role for doctrine, so they have to be considered in any theological formulation.²

Although the Bible is called the foundation for theology, it is only the foundation on which a growing theology is being build. Even though without exegesis and Biblical Theology no dogmatics is possible, "the correct relationship between the two is not that dogmatics searches the Scriptures for 'proof texts' for its own theses."³ Under the "guidance of the Church" the divine revelation is offered "in Scripture and Tradition."⁴ Wilfried Harrington says:

The dogmatic theologian starts with the doctrine of the Church and looks back to Scripture to recognize there the starting points of the later more developed doctrines, . . . Of the two disciplines, we may say that 'biblical theology is, in comparison with the doctrines proposed by dogmatic theology, "poorer" in many instances where its utterances have since been deepened and clarified. . . . The dogmatic theologian may show how much more meaningful a text becomes when viewed in the whole context of Catholic teaching.⁵

¹Cf. Schillebeeckx, 123 and also s. v. "Theology;" Dictionary of Theology, 2d ed., Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, eds., (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 497-502.

²See Karl Rahner, "Biblische Theologie und Dogmatik in ihrem wechselseitigen Verhältnis," Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, 2: 450.

³Schillebeeckx, 123.

⁴Ibid., 128, 133.

⁵Wilfried J. Harrington, The Path of Biblical Theology (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1974), 382.

It becomes clear that the Roman Catholic Church denies the completeness, clarity,¹ and sufficiency of Scripture for the teaching of the Church. The validity of the dogmatic statements depends ultimately not on the proof from Scripture but on the sanction of the magisterium.

Protestant Theology

Protestantism with its emphasis on Sola Scriptura traditionally has strongly emphasized the foundational role of Scripture. Yet, this strong and safe position seems to be seriously weakened in Protestantism through the inclusion of other sources on which Systematic Theology constructs its doctrines besides the Bible. In this context we can see a kaleidoscope of different sources brought into Protestant Systematic Theology.

F. D. E. Schleiermacher is an example for whom experience rather than the word of God is the source of dogmas. Consequently, systematic theology is divorced from the external authority of the Bible and in the final analysis also has lost any normative significance.²

Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization was to serve the purpose of engaging in theological interpretation by means of existentialist philosophy. For Bultmann and Karl Barth the Bible is understood in functional

¹Traditions such as the Immaculate Conception, the bodily Assumption of Mary and papal infallibility are to be judged not by any appeal to Sola Scriptura and its clarity, but by the magisterium of the church.

²Cf. Louis Berkhof, 53-54.

terms.¹ For Paul Tillich, another source for Systematic Theology is "the history of religion and culture."² But the Bible is made available to the systematic theologian only "through a critical and ultimately concerned biblical theology," which is "historical-critical without any restrictions."³ Even Tillich himself admitted that his system "approaches theology from the starting point of man and not from revelation."⁴

Thus it is not the divine authority of God's inspired word but the importing of outside philosophical systems as additional sources to Systematic Theology which makes it normative for most modern Protestant theologians.

Consequently Systematic Theology follows the steps of Biblical Theology. As the former implemented the historical-critical method of studying the Bible, the latter also brought in a philosophy which is not compatible with the claims of the Bible authors. Troeltsch was correct when he said, "The historical method, once it is applied to biblical science . . . is a leaven which transforms everything and finally explodes the whole form of theological methods."⁵

¹Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Relationship Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," Trinity Journal 5NS (1984): 120. See also Kelsey, The Uses of Scripture, 39-50.

²Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951-1963), 1:38.

³Ibid., 1:36.

⁴Paul Tillich, Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology, (New York, Harper and Row, 1967), 242; quoted in Hasel, "Biblical and Systematic Theology," 122.

⁵Troeltsch, 730.

Hans Küng was consistent when he called for historical-critical responsible dogmatics based on historical-critical exegesis.¹ He would like to see this as the basis of an ecumenical theology for the third millennium.² Also J. Collins perceives the use of this method as a basis for dialogue and openness.³

It is ironic that through the use of the historical-critical method, which initially was introduced as a device against the powerful Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura*, the door for new and fruitful inter-faith dialogue is supposed to be opened. But this is not true and faithful to the Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura* and undermines and destroys the biblical foundation from which the Protestant church has gotten its identity and strength.

Wolfhart Pannenberg correctly observed: "The dissolution of the traditional doctrine of Scripture constitutes a crisis at the very foundations of modern Protestant theology."⁴ This unhappy situation in theology must be somehow resolved. As we have seen, the problems started with the definition of the discipline and the methods used in it. In the chapters 3 and 4, I address these issues.

¹Hans Küng, "Historisch-kritische Exegese als Provokation für die Dogmatik" Teologische Quartalschrift 159 (1979): 28.

²Hans Küng, Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 282.

³J. Collins, 8, 15.

⁴Wolfhart Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology, vol. 1, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 1:4.

CHAPTER III

THE DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

If real progress is to be made in the study of Biblical Theology the question of definition is clearly crucial. Most often the definition of the phrase "Biblical Theology" (*theologia biblica, biblische Theologie*) is linked with J. P. Gabler's inaugural lecture of 1787, in which he maintained:

There is truly a biblical theology, of historical origin, conveying what the holy writers felt about divine matters; on the other hand there is a dogmatic theology of didactic origin, teaching what each theologian philosophizes rationally about divine things, according to the measure of his ability or of the times, age, place, sect, school, and other similar factors.¹

So, Biblical Theology was defined as historical and descriptive enterprise in comparison with Dogmatic Theology which has the ever-new task of relating biblical truths to contemporary life and thought.

In Gerhard Ebeling's words, Biblical Theology is to be understood as "the theology contained in the Bible, the theology of the Bible itself," which is

¹Sandys-Wunsch and Eldredge, 137.

a "historical concept," not "the theology that accords with the Bible, scriptural theology," which is a "normative concept."¹

As I have shown in the preceding chapter, this separation of Biblical Theology as an independent, purely historical and descriptive discipline of theology did not lead to the development of Biblical Theology, but first to its division, then to its decline and virtual demise. Under the influence of historical-critical methodology, the theologians sawed the bough on which they were sitting. Much of what has been produced in the last and even this century under the label of Biblical Theology does not merit being thus designated, as it is neither "Biblical" nor "Theology."

Definition of Biblical Theology

A more satisfactory attempt would be to begin with an examination of the component terms of the phrase "Biblical Theology." Why cannot Biblical Theology just mean what it says?

The adjective "biblical" comes from the noun "Bible" which derives from the Greek "*ta biblia*" meaning "the books." We also need to remember that the term *biblia* passed to English (and to other languages also) from Greek through Latin. This transition brought a change from the neuter plural (Greek--the books) into feminine singular (Latin "*biblia*"--the book). In this context the very term "Bible" means the *books* of the OT and NT which are recognized as the

¹Ebeling, The Word and Faith, 79.

canonical "book" by the Christian church. This is a very vivid reminder of the tension between diversity and unity, having two Testaments within the one Bible.¹

"Theology" identifies the concern of the discipline as *theos*, God. As commonly accepted this includes God's relation to the world and to humankind.² So Biblical Theology will deal with God as He has revealed Himself in the biblical material.

"Theology" means the *logos of theos*. *Logos* (word, language, reason) in compounds of this type generally denotes the written, systematic, scientific study of a given subject area.

Of course, there are some who would argue that since the biblical material is so diverse, and with its varied literary forms (history, poetry, drama, epistles, and so on) actually contains very little "theology,"--therefore a Biblical Theology is virtually impossible.

Such an understanding, at least in my opinion, presupposes a very narrow conception of theology as rigid, systematized, and doctrinal in form.

¹On the relationship between the two Testaments, see D. L. Baker, Two Testaments: One Bible (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977); S. M. Mayo, The Relevance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith: Biblical Theology and Interpretative Methodology (Washington, DC: University Press, 1982); L. J. Kuyper, The Scripture Unbroken (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

²"Theology is a science of God and his relationship to man and the world" says B. B. Warfield, "The Idea of Systematic Theology," in Studies in Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 49-90. See also S. W. Sykes, "Theology" in The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 566-67; s. v. "Theology" in Dictionary of Theology, 497-502.

Through its diverse literary forms (which need to be recognized and taken into consideration) the Bible does give expression to an understanding of God and His relation to the world and to humankind. This understanding of God, though diverse and culturally-related, nevertheless is based on the revelation of God and thus, in human words, the Word of God is found.

However, it needs to be remembered that it is not God who is the object of our scientific study, but rather the understanding of God. Such a study, as in any discipline, must be ordered in some way. The proposed form of order is discussed and described in chapter 4.

Summarizing this part, we can recapitulate that Biblical Theology may be broadly defined as the ordered study of the understanding of the revelation of God contained in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and News Testaments. I ask the basic question: What does the Bible have to say about God and His relationship to the world and humankind?¹

All Christian Theology in a sense claims to be Biblical Theology (i.e., in accord with the Bible). But how should it be biblical, and how biblical should it be are questions that are answered differently in diverse theological systems and by numerous individual theologians.² The difference lies in the content of

¹See, e.g., Claus Westermann, Elements of Old Testament Theology (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982); Walther Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1978).

²See H. H. Schmid, "Was heisst 'Biblische Theologie'?" in H. F. Geisser and W. Mostert, eds., Wirkungen hermeneutischer Theologie (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1983), 35.

Biblical Theology, that is, in the presuppositions brought and methods used to study the Bible, as well as in the form, that organizes our findings of biblical research. We turn our attention now to the question of the content of Biblical Theology and then to the relationship of Biblical Theology to other theological disciplines. In chapter 4, I address questions of form.

The Source of Biblical Theology

Because this is a study of *Biblical* Theology, the source is the Bible, as I have defined the discipline in the preceding paragraphs. This means a belief in the divine inspiration, authority, necessity, clarity and sufficiency of the Scripture.

Inspiration means that the Bible is the inspired word of God and because of this, I accept at face value all its facts, claims, and the perspective of the biblical writers, and I identify with it. The Bible is the final arbiter of all doctrinal statements. I fully accept the biblical claim that the Bible is divinely inspired in all its parts and not just a mere human book. Because inspiration means a presence of the divine and the human aspects which are inseparable and indivisible, one cannot say this book or that part is more inspired, or another less. There are no degrees of inspiration.¹

The Bible carries a special authority because of its divine origin.

Those things presented by biblical authors are not a result of their own ingenuity,

¹Cf. Alden Thompson, Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), 46-57; see also Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, eds., Issues in Revelation and Inspiration (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992).

but, while the individuality of authors was safeguarded, their work bears a seal of divine approval. However, to protect against a misuse of one part over another, we need to see the Bible as a whole.

The authority of the Bible cannot be attributed primarily to the fact that it **contains** the Word of God, nor that it contains the gospel,¹ as this inevitably leads to a "canon within canon," but primarily to the fact that it is the Word of God. The authority of Scripture lies primarily in its divine origin, not in its content. However, this is not a question of an either/or approach, but a both/and approach because both aspects are true and must be kept in balance. Nevertheless, we need to distinguish between the Bible's historical authority (*auctoritas historica*) and normative authority (*auctoritas normativa*). Though all that the Scriptures relate is true, not all of that truth constitutes the Christian's credenda or agenda.

The necessity of an authoritative source of truth arises because the general revelation of God in nature and history is not perfect and it can be easily misunderstood since it itself is marred by sin and our perceptions are also weakened by sin.

I assume the clarity of Scripture--Scripture is its own interpreter (*Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). It is a basic Protestant hermeneutical principle that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. This is not to be taken as a declaration of the

¹As maintained by Carl E. Braaten, "Can We Still Hold the Principle of '*Sola Scriptura*'?" *Dialog* 20 (1981): 189-194.

superfluosity of interpretation, but that Scriptures are not to be interpreted against Scriptures and the obscure places in Scripture are to be interpreted by the clear ones. This hermeneutic assumes the unity, coherence, and internal consistency of Scripture, and yet recognizes that the clarity of Scripture needs nuancing. Some obscure places in the Scriptures are acknowledged (2 Pet 3:15-16).

The sufficiency of Scriptures can be interpreted in three possible nuances: (1) The "micro view" delimits Scripture's sufficiency to its role as the source and norm of salvation and gospel proclamation; (2) the "macro view" extends Scripture's sufficiency to include wider doctrine, and (3) the "mega view" subsumes both and adds a view of Scripture as the foundation of the Christian world view and of all human inquiry. I accept the mega view.

This does not mean that we will look to the Bible for the chemical structure of rocks, but I cannot interpret my data in such a way that clearly contradicts the revealed truths of Scripture. On the other hand we need to remember that not all truth is contained in Scripture; one of the Bible's chief contributors claimed to know only in part (1 Cor 13:2). In areas where Scripture is silent, our knowledge will have provisionality written over most of it. The Scriptures supply important control beliefs (e. g., six-day creation, man as image of God, etc.) to guide speculative thinking, but we need to remember, as much as we are only able, our need to view things *sub specie aeternitatis*, as much as we are only capable of it.

The Interpretation Method for Biblical Theology

All that was said in the preceding subheading about Bible as the source for Biblical Theology, has its implications for the method of interpreting the Bible. H.-J. Kraus said that "one of the most difficult questions confronting Biblical Theology today is that of the starting point, the meaning and function of historical-critical research."¹ The method of Bible interpretation that one uses is of crucial importance. To interpret the Scripture correctly, it is an imperative that the method must be in harmony with the presuppositions of the Bible. This, in my view, rules out any philosophical views which bring elements foreign to basic biblical philosophy, as, for example, the historical-critical method.

G. F. Hasel has argued for an approach to Biblical Theology "that seeks to do justice to all dimensions of reality to which the biblical texts testify."² Charles Davis has asserted that "historical criticism of the Bible, while it may still have a glorious future as a branch of history, would seem to be near the end of its career in theology."³

It is true that, like every other scientist, the Christian theologian brings some basic presuppositions to his/her research. There can be no interpretation of the texts without presuppositions. That is why it is not important that the

¹H.-J. Kraus, Die biblische Theologie, 377.

²Gerhard F. Hasel, "Biblical Theology: Then, Now and Tomorrow," HBT 4 (1982): 66.

³Charles Davis, "The Theological Career of Historical Criticism of the Bible," Cross Currents 32 (1982): 267.

interpreter brings none, for that is impossible. We all bring to the text our previous history, our previously accumulated knowledge, our individual concerns, and our pre-understanding of what the text or passage means.

It is important that the interpreter brings the right presuppositions, and that, so far as possible, they are explicitly recognized for what they are and how they came to be held. The right presuppositions for the biblical theologian would be those which grow out of the biblical material itself and/or are in harmony with its claims. This does not mean, however, that the interpreter's pre-judgments go unquestioned or that they determine the interpretation of the text. The presuppositions must be continually re-evaluated and corrected or rejected in the light of the results of exegesis. In this context, one also needs to be reminded of the eagerness of the Holy Spirit to "guide [us] into all truth," as long as we are and humble, teachable, and willing to have our presuppositions challenged, re-evaluated and changed (John 16:13).

Even if we bring our previous understanding to a text as we begin to interpret it, the text still possesses an autonomy which we should respect. The interpreter should allow the text to speak for itself. The text has its own voice and the interpreter needs first to learn to listen. This allows the text to set its own agenda. That is why the results of exegesis are descriptive, as it is characterized later in this chapter when discussing the exegesis. This bypasses the built-in barriers against persuasion that we all have and that are the cause of the

sad fact that coming to the text too often we hear what we want to hear--our own voice, not the voice of the text.

The Scope of Biblical Theology

On the basis of my definition of Biblical Theology, it follows that the scope of Biblical Theology must be the canon of Holy Scriptures. Brevard Childs is right when he says: "The canon of the Christian church is the most appropriate context from which to do biblical theology."¹ I propose that Biblical Theology is canonical theology in the following sense:

1. Biblical Theology is to be **limited** to the canonical books of the Bible. The intertestamental literature, Apostolic Fathers, and Near Eastern texts, however important they may be for the study of the history of religion, are not part of the Scripture which the church recognizes as the norm of its faith and life. Indeed, they are "profitable and good to read," as Martin Luther put it. There might be, no doubt, even much truth in such extra-biblical works, but Biblical Theology is concerned with those books which contain the norm by which value and truth are evaluated.

2. Next, it automatically follows from the previous paragraph that Biblical Theology is based on the **final** canonical form. There can be no dissecting, cutting, conjecturing, re-shuffling, or reconstructing of the biblical material. If for example, the book of Amos is in the biblical canon with "The

¹Childs, 99.

Appendix of Hope" and no manuscript we have is without it, then to venture that it is a late editorial addition is interesting fantasizing, but it has no place in Biblical Theology. This observation is valid not only for the method of Biblical Theology, but for its scope as well.

3. Biblical Theology is to be based on the **Christian form of the canon**. In the Hebrew order (Torah-Former Prophets-Latter Prophets-Writings) the emphasis is on Torah as God's supreme revelation. The Christian order (for the OT based on the Septuagint) is Torah-History-Writings-Prophets-Gospels-History-Epistles-Revelation. In this order, the Gospels are central. We start with God's special revelation, Torah, then the work and position of the prophets makes the OT open-ended, looking forward to the Christ event, while the books following the Gospels look back to it and also look forward to a final glorious consummation.¹ I do not want to imply by this that the order of books is inspired, but that there are certain significant hermeneutical implications of the way we view the canon.

4. Biblical Theology is to be based on the **entire canon**. This means that Biblical Theology is concerned with both the Old and New Testament together. There are two things that we need to keep in balance.

First, we must seek to do full justice to the Old Testament. All too often the separation of Biblical Theology into Old Testament and New Testament Theology has meant ignoring or downplaying of the OT. It has been regarded just

¹In this sense, the New Testament is open-ended too.

as "a lengthy introduction" to the NT. Samuel Terrien significantly observed, "the Old Testament is beginning to receive for the first time in the history of the church its rightful place and modern forms of Marcionism are at last being rejected as theological anti-Semitism."¹

Second, the Old Testament cannot be viewed on its own, but only from the perspective of the Christian canon as a whole. Old Testament Theology being part of Biblical Theology must be a Christian discipline.² Of course there can be a Jewish theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, but by definition it could not be "Old Testament" or "Biblical" Theology.³ It would be more properly designated perhaps as "Tanakh Theology" and its presuppositions would be different from those of Old Testament Theology.⁴

Biblical Theology Is a Christian Discipline

Several scholars have recently challenged the view that OT Theology has to be a Christian discipline. J. L. McKenzie claims that he has written his

¹Samuel Terrien, "The Play of Wisdom: Turning Point in Biblical Theology," HBT 3 (1981): 125.

²See W. E. Lemke, "Is Old Testament Theology An Essentially Christian Theological Discipline?" HBT 11 (1989): 60.

³Cf. M. Tsevat, "Theology of the Old Testament--A Jewish View," HBT 8 (1986): 36, 37; J. D. Levenson, "Why the Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," in J. Neusner et al., eds., Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

⁴M. Goshen-Gottstein, "Tanakh Theology: The Religion of the Old Testament and the Place of Jewish Biblical Theology," in P. D. Miller et al., eds. Ancient Israelite Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 617-44.

A Theology of the Old Testament "as if the New Testament did not exist."¹ Rolf Rendtorff has contended that "we should examine the theology of the Hebrew Bible independently of any later religious developments, whether Christian or Jewish."²

These scholars are reacting against a false "Christianizing" of the Old Testament and demonstrating a commendable desire to allow the authentic voice of the OT to be heard. Certainly, there is a false "christological" method which allegorizes and spiritualizes OT texts to fit preconceived "types of Christ." The OT as the history and record of God's salvific dealings with his covenant people is lost. This brings subjective speculation and reductionism. The intention of the text, the OT as canon in its own right, and the validity of the religious experiences of the Hebrews as the chosen people of Yahweh--all is sacrificed on the altar of "relevance."

This approach might be appropriate for historical study. However, Biblical Theology is concerned with the OT *along* with the NT as the two parts of canonical Scripture and hence inevitably involves Christian presuppositions. What I want to emphasize here is that Biblical Theology can *both* do justice to a historical study of the OT *and* hold that in the context of the canon the NT is its

¹J. L. McKenzie, 319.

²Rolf Rendtorff, "Must 'Biblical Theology' Be Christian Theology?" Bible Review 4 (1988): 42.

continuation and fulfillment. "Biblical Theology must integrate Old and New Testament theology in a dynamic way that overcomes the present juxtaposition."¹

Tota Scriptura

Finally, considering that Biblical Theology is based on the entire canon of Scripture, we need to stress that the *full range* of canonical materials must be used. In particular Biblical Theology must resist the temptation to adopt "a canon within the canon," which gives priority to certain themes, passages or books to the exclusion of others.

For example, to concentrate one's study of God's character on passages that deal solely with His love will not give a complete or accurate understanding of the person of God. Other characteristics of God, such as His holiness and justice, must also be considered. If we want to know the meaning of "God's wrath," we need to look at all occurrences of the phrase, especially those that are foreign to our pre-understanding, not so that we can explain them away, but to incorporate them into our picture. If the assimilation is not possible, then we need to change our understanding in such a way that it is in accordance with all biblical data.

Another example is that the Pauline epistles are of fundamental importance for Biblical Theology, but the Epistle of James is part of the canon also and must be given its place in a fully Biblical Theology.

¹G. Hasel, "Biblical Theology," 74.

From an early period of church history there have been those who have sought to interpret Scripture selectively, highlighting those parts which they found most congenial, while relegating to an inferior position those portions which do not accord with their chosen theological perspective.

In the second century, Marcion not only rejected the OT but accepted only Luke's Gospel and ten letters of Paul (and these only in an edited and expurgated version). Marcion's canon was certainly more compact and more unified than that eventually recognized by the Church, but it is highly significant that the Church decisively rejected such drastic "canon within the canon" and opted for a much more broadly based selection incorporating a considerably greater variety than Marcion was prepared to allow.

Luther's Christological dictum "*was Christum treibet*," an outgrowth of his hermeneutical principle "justification by faith," lead him to devalue the canonical status of books such as Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. But Biblical Theology must make every effort to do justice to the totality of biblical material. As P. D. Hanson puts it, "We are pleading for an openness to the total address of Scripture, lest we select only what reinforces our present views and exclude the possibility of growth."¹

¹P. D. Hanson, The Diversity of Scripture: Trajectories in the Confessional Heritage (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 4.

"Canon within a canon" is a unity purchased at a high price of "subjective arbitrariness."¹ It is always tempting to get a cheap unity, superficial consistency, neat system, and thus strong convictions by overlooking or interpreting away some significant data. It is good to remember that the Church did not canonize plurality, but unity. Nevertheless, this unity was much wider than the one narrowly perceived by Marcion, or later Luther, Bultmann, and others. To accept a "canon within a canon" means "to be more biblical than the Bible, more NT-like than the NT, more gospel-like than the Gospel and even more Pauline than Paul."²

To summarize, the canon must be taken as a whole. It demands a perspective on the unity of Scripture that allows neither community, scholar, nor method to predominate over the text itself.

Relationships to Other Disciplines of Theology

Biblical Theology is not an independent theological discipline, but it is closely intertwined with other areas of theology. The closest disciplines are Exegesis and Systematic Theology. I will now address the relationship of Biblical Theology to these two disciplines.

¹As Hans Küng called it in: H. Küng, "Der Frühkatholizismus im NT als kontroverstheologisches Problem, in Ernst Käsemann, ed. Das Neue Testament als Kanon (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 191.

²Ibid., 192.

Biblical Theology and Exegesis

The basic question asked in the process of exegesis is, What did the author say? What did the biblical author mean? It has to do with *what* he said (the content itself) and *why* he said it at any given point (the literary context). Furthermore, exegesis is primarily concerned with intentionality: What did the author *intend* his original readers to understand?¹ The exegete studies the author's meaning on the basis of literary considerations (grammar and thought development) and historical background (socioeconomic).² Exegesis deals with immediate context, discovering the meaning of the individual surface structure. The basic study unit is a text or a passage as defined by the exegete.³

The language is biblical, which means that it is related to a specific period. Time references are bound with the time of the writer. The significance of findings is descriptive, biblical categories are used. The results are not changing. Our understanding of what the author wanted to say may be enlarged with new data, facts, and information available, but the basic intent of the author

¹Gordon D. Fee, New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 21.

²For a concise introduction to the subject of exegesis see also: Douglas Stuart, Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980); John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982).

³For a Catholic point of view see Luis Alonso Schökel, "Is Exegesis Necessary?" Conc 10 (1971): 30-38; Roderick MacKenzie, "The Self-understanding of the Exegete," Conc 10 (1971): 11-19.

is not changing. What he wanted to say remains objectively the same, regardless of our subjective understanding of his written material.

On the other side, the basic question asked in Biblical Theology is, What did the biblical author believe? Why did he express his thoughts the way he did? The language is again biblical, and as we deal with the biblical author, the time references determined by the writer's period. The results of Biblical Theology are not changing. For example, Paul or Matthew did not have any new thoughts for almost two thousand years. The significance of material is descriptive as it tells us what the author believed, and how he answered the questions he wrestled with.

At the same time, however, it needs to be stressed that the significance of material is also prescriptive (*normative*), because the authors have been inspired by God.¹ They do not give just their own ideas, and/or answers. The explanations they give are not just any answers, thoughts, ideas, or explanations as good as anyone else's, but the best answers that could be provided for the situations they address. This is affirmed by the fact of inspiration; the authors are "holy men of God" used by the Holy Spirit in a special way. For this very reason, the authors stand in a class of their own and their writings have been classified

¹Also maintained by Dulles in his famous discussion with Stendahl. See Avery Dulles, "Response to Krister Stendahl's 'Method in the Study of Biblical Theology,'" in The Bible in Modern Scholarship, ed. J. P. Hyatt, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 210-219. Cf. article by B. C. Ollenburger referred to a few pages above.

and recognized as "canonical" by the Christian Church. The process of canonization represents not the creation, but the recognition of the authority.

Of course, critical scholars denigrate the authority of Biblical Theology since they perceive it as a purely descriptive science with no normative value. As James Barr put it:

It is less and less likely that biblical theology can be deemed to have said the last word about anything. . . On the one side, the authority of the Bible can no longer be taken for granted, but must be shown on sufficient grounds. On the other side, biblical theology cannot work in isolation, involved in historical judgements on the one hand, it is linked with logical, philosophical, and finally, systematic-theological judgements on the other.¹

For Biblical Theology, the basic unit of study is a theme, but we must consider the theme in its larger context (book, block of material, Testament, whole Bible).

Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

The basic question that one asks when doing Systematic Theology is, What is God's will for the church (me) today? What are we (am I) supposed to believe today?

Systematic theologians take the material of Biblical Theology and work with it, seeking to arrange it in a logically attractive and systematic way. The basic study unit is a theme. However, the language in Systematic Theology is not biblical, but philosophical. The time reference is not the original writer's (e.g.,

¹J. Barr, "Trends and Prospects in Biblical Theology," 282.

first century AD for the Gospels) but the twentieth century. The problems, or themes are addressed not in biblical, but in philosophical, logical, or dogmatic categories.¹ Systematic theologians seek to articulate the faith of each generation not only by relating it to previous formulations of the past, but also by formulating it in terms of the present. For this reason, the work of Systematic Theology has to be redone in each generation.²

The significance of findings are prescriptive, (normative) because we inquired for God's will--what we are supposed to believe and do. The only way to know God's will is to do what we understand Him to be telling us to do. This is the only guarantee that we will hear His voice tomorrow, and He can correct what we have misunderstood or misapplied in the process of interpreting/applying the Word of God.

The results of our findings are changing, because the questions we ask are changing and the circumstances in which we operate are changing. Of course, if we ask the same questions as the biblical writers asked, we have the basic key frame provided, but if we ask a question that was not dealt with by the biblical authors, we have to find the answer ourselves by applying the principles derived from the biblical writers answering similar situations, dealing with similar problems.

¹See Dulles, 215.

²See B. A. Demarest, "Systematic Theology," Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 1064-66; Daniel W. Hardy, "Systematic Theology," A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation, ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden, (London: SCM, 1990), 665-667.

There are certainly many realities in human life which do not change; but the thought-world of the twentieth century is not the thought-world of the Bible. Simple repetition of biblical words is not enough. They must be understood, really *understood*, in their historical context. Here, Biblical Theology is indispensable. If we do not understand something, we cannot translate it. Then that same understanding must be expressed effectively in the language, thought-forms, and experiences of the contemporary world. Here is the task of Systematic Theology. Then for those who acknowledge the authority of Holy Scripture, this biblical message will still have the same powerful appeal it has always had to the community of faith.

It is in this sense that Systematic Theology has the ever-new task of translating biblical truths to our contemporary life and thought. We do not preserve the faith of an earlier generation by simply repeating the formulas they developed. To make *their* faith *our* faith, we must think it through for ourselves. This means looking carefully at the Scriptures and trying to hear the Word of God anew in our time and place. Said Bernard Lonergan, "the theologian, then, has a contribution of his own to make." He is not "just a parrot with nothing to do but repeat what has already been said."¹

In this connection it needs to be said that the *source* for Systematic Theology is not only the Bible. As Systematic Theology is concerned with

¹Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 331.

ultimate truth,¹ it relates biblical truths to information available beyond Scriptural revelation, such as the findings of history, psychology, philosophy, sociology, astronomy, and other related sciences.² All that is contained in the Bible is truth, but not all truth is in the Bible. However, I hasten to add that all these additional sources are to be judged by the Scripture; they are not above it. All these sources are subject to the norms of biblical revelation and its truth claims.

The Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and the only true norm according to which all teachings are to be judged and evaluated. Scripture is therefore the *norma normans* (ruling norm). Other authorities such as tradition, reason, science, and religious experience are *norma normata* (ruled norms, i.e., ruled by Scripture).

It is true that historical and cultural conditions change and circumstances change too. The church does not formulate its doctrines in a cultural vacuum. Circumstances always contribute to it. A grasp of truth represents achievement as well as gift. It takes effort to acquire truth. It never comes to us in wrapped and sealed packages directly from its divine source. The forms of expression always reflect the cultural situation of its first recipients, and our perception of it always reflects to some degree the concrete circumstances

¹L. Berkhof, 58; see also D. W. Hardy, 665.

²Biblical Theology may be illuminated by them for a better understanding of biblical authors; Systematic Theology may use them as actual sources for arriving at the ultimate truth.

that surround us. As a result, the findings of Systematic Theology, in contradistinction to the findings of Biblical Theology, are changing; our doctrinal formulations are always provisional and open to revision.

So Systematic Theology is the expression of the Christian community's present understanding of the truth conveyed in Scripture. The notion of "present truth" has a venerable history in the SDA Church. For the church pioneers it was primarily a call to move beyond the accepted positions of the day and receive new light as it became available. For us today the expression serves as a reminder that our doctrinal achievements are subject to reconsideration and reformulation as new problems confront the church and new insights accumulate.¹

As a church and as individuals too, we need to be constantly in dialogue with all these aspects of hermeneutics, but the Bible must be the basis for this dialogue. The historical influence in Scripture does not entail a relativism that destroys the uniqueness of the revealed truths of the Christian faith.

We need to recognize that the human element is present in Scriptures. This, however, in no way vitiates the divine element which is central. While some conservatives are too docetic when they ignore the human side, many liberals are too Arian when they ignore the divine side. We all need to acknowledge the

¹Revision of these statements [27 Fundamental Beliefs] may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word." Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1992 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1992), 5. Sadly, this preamble is completely missing in Seventh-day Adventists Believe... (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association General Conference of SDAs, 1988).

bottom line: God has spoken to humanity. The biblical revelation is not so relative or culturally conditioned as to be inaccessible to modern people. We can get back to the intended meaning of the original propositions, and Biblical Theology is definitely part of the process whereby we allow that authoritative message to address us today.

Implications for Doing Biblical Theology

Biblical Theology is concerned with tracing different themes and individual emphases through the diverse sections of the Bible books, but it also seeks to unify the themes together in a way that unifies the Testaments. Biblical Theology helps to show that although there may be some differences between biblical writers, this does not remove the basis for a deeper theological unity between them. Biblical Theology properly done helps one to see that the writers used different terms and phrases for similar biblical concepts and stressed one side or another of a larger theological reality that needed to be emphasized for that particular period. This means that there is a two-way relationship between Biblical Theology and exegesis. Exegesis provides the data, Biblical Theology provides the categories and overall scriptural unity behind one's interpretation of individual passages. In other words the two are interdependent.¹

¹See also Gerhard Voss, "The Relationship between Exegesis and Dogmatic Theology," *Conc* 10 (1971): 20-29; Gotthold Hasenhüttl, "Dialogue between the Dogmatic Theologian and the Exegete," *Conc* 10 (1971): 39-46; Meinard Limbeck, "The Exegete's Answer," *Conc* 10 (1971): 47-55.

Concerning the relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology, I submit that they are also inseparable and interdependent in a very real sense.¹ Systematic theologians collect the material generated by Biblical Theology and restate or reshape it into a modern, logically attractive pattern, integrating these aspects into a confessional statement for the church today.

In summary, we can say that Exegesis, Biblical Theology, and Systematic Theology stand together in an ongoing dialogue; they coexist in a conceptual unity. In one sense they flow in a straight line, as each forms the foundation for and flows into the next. In another sense Systematic Theology provides a mental framework for exegetical study. We have to distinguish between them because each has its specific objectives, approaches, and goals. However, we must not separate them because it takes all three to understand and apply the Word of God for today's living. By the same token, we cannot confuse them, because each seeks to answer different questions, and failure to realize this lies behind many problems that we encounter in theology and in local churches today.

In terms of methodology, however, each discipline also has a certain functional autonomy, and to this methodology we will now turn our attention in the chapter 4.

¹On relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology see Richard B. Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," Westminster Theological Journal 38 (1976): 281-299; Harrington, The Path of Biblical Theology; Hummel, "Biblical or Dogmatic Theology?"; Nicole, 185-194; Etienne Trocme, "Bible a Teologie," Křestanská Revue 51/7 (1984): 156-159.

CHAPTER IV

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR TEACHING BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The Need for a Proper Methodology

One of the major issues in Biblical Theology is the debate concerning an adequate methodology in biblical interpretation. Certainly the tracing of themes through both the OT and NT, study of passages, individual books and/or authors, is an important part of Biblical Theology, but such fragmented study is definitely not sufficient. It raises the question of how the various biblical themes and books are interrelated and what constitutes the interrelationship between the Testaments. Such questions are impossible to answer without an understanding of the structure of biblical revelation as a whole.

Historically, all studies in the area of Biblical Theology, or Old and New Testament Theology,¹ have adopted some form of structure. This structure is more than simply a question of suitable titles and of the order of book chapters; it goes to the very heart of the understanding of the nature of Biblical

¹On the relationship between Old Testament, New Testament Theologies and Biblical Theology, see the preceding chapter, *The Scope of Biblical Theology*.

Theology, and to a significant degree, affects the way in which the biblical material is presented.

It will be helpful to look at how the problem of structure has been handled in the past. In the latest edition of G. Hasel's Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate, he distinguishes ten various methods that have been employed. I have opted for a simplified three types which may be broadly distinguished: systematic, historical, and thematic approach.

The Systematic Approach

The oldest approach to Biblical Theology methodology may be classified as "systematic." This means that the structure of Biblical Theology was taken from subject divisions or headings of Dogmatic Theology. This approach followed such sequence as God-Man-Salvation or Theology-Anthropology-Soteriology.¹

The first Theology of Old Testament ever published under this name by Georg L. Bauer followed this outline,² as well as works by H. G. A. Ewald,³

¹Hasel calls this approach Dogmatic-Didactic; see his OT, 22-24, 39-41, 158-159.

²Old Testament in 1796 and New Testament in four volumes 1800-1802; see H.-J. Kraus, Biblische Theologie, 87-91.

³H. G. A. Ewald, Die Lehre der Bibel von Gott, oder Theologie des Alten und Neuen Bundes, 4 vols. (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1871-76).

A. B. Davidson,¹ L. Köhler,² O. J. Baab,³ E. Jacob,⁴ R. C. Dentan,⁵ and M. Burrows⁶ in the area of OT theology, and F. C. Grant,⁷ A. Richardson,⁸ and K. H. Schelkle's⁹ work in NT theology. It is clear that this approach is still popular. R. Dentan argues that this simple and logical scheme is as good as any other, and although it is derived from Dogmatic Theology, Dogmatic Theology derived it from the biblical material in the first place.¹⁰

S. Terrien asserts, "It is now recognized that such attempts, inherited in

¹A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1904) follows a scheme of God, Man, Sin, Redemption, and the Last Things.

²Ludwig Köhler, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1935); ET, Old Testament Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957).

³Otto J. Baab, The Theology of the Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon, 1949).

⁴Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1958).

⁵R. C. Dentan, Preface to Old Testament Theology, 2d ed. (New York: Seabury, 1963); see Hasel, OT, 39-41 for a useful discussion.

⁶Millar Burrows, An Outline of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946).

⁷F. C. Grant, The Thought of the New Testament (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950).

⁸A. Richardson, The Theology of the New Testament (London: SCM, 1958).

⁹K. H. Schelkle, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, 4 vols. (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1968-76); ET, Theology of the New Testament (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1971-78).

¹⁰R. C. Dentan, 119-120.

part from Platonic conceptual thinking of Aristotelian logic, were bound to translate the *sui generis* thrust of biblical faith into the alien idiom of didactic exposition."¹ It must be recognized that it not only imposes categories which are alien to biblical thought² (this perhaps could be avoided), but it also fails to include important themes of the Bible, as for example "Wisdom."

The Historical Approach

The advance of the historical-critical method led to a totally different method of ordering the material: the Bible began to look less and less like a text book of Systematic Theology and increasingly more like a history book. So a historical outline was adopted which traced the development of biblical faith in a chronological sequence which was a product of scholarly reconstruction. Examples of this approach are W. M. L. De Wette,³ W. Vatke,⁴ and recently G. von Rad⁵ for OT, and also W. Beyschlag, R. Bultmann,⁶ and H. Conzelmann,⁷

¹Samuel Terrien, The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology (San Francisco: Harper and Row 1978), 34.

²Walther Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments, 3 vols. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1933, 35, 39); ET: Theology of the Old Testament, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:32-33.

³H.-J. Kraus, 72.

⁴See Hasel, OT, 19.

⁵Gerhard von Rad, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1957, 60); ET, Theology of the Old Testament (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962, 65).

W. G. Kümmel,¹ and L. Goppelt² for NT.³

It should be noted that many of these "historical" theologies are really hybrid types because within the treatment of particular books, periods, or authors, a systematic order of some kind is followed. A good example is D. Guthrie's New Testament Theology which opts for a basic systematic structure, but within each section takes a historic approach.⁴

A sub-category of this approach would be those works which deal with books and sections of OT and NT approaching the canonical order as G. F.

⁶Rudolf Bultmann, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, 2 vols. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1948, 53); ET, Theology of the New Testament (London: SCM, 1952-55).

⁷Hans Conzelmann, Grundriss der Theologie des Neuen Testaments (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1967); ET, Theology of the New Testament (London: SCM, 1969).

¹W. G. Kümmel, Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969); ET, The Theology of the New Testament (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

²L. Goppelt, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975, 76); ET, Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981, 82).

³All "History of Religions" scholars would be in this category. From Hasel's classification could be included here also representatives of "Genetic-Progressive," "Diachronic," and "Formation of Tradition" methods.

⁴Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1981) with the sequence: the synoptic gospels, the Johanne literature, Acts, Paul, Hebrews, the Petrine epistles, the rest of the NT, and Revelation.

Oehler,¹ S. Terrien, G. Vos,² and G. E. Ladd.³

The strength of the historical approach is that, to a certain degree, it does justice to the diversity of Scripture and demonstrates the development of biblical thought. If done properly, it can be a great contribution toward a unified understanding of the Bible. However, many works in this category, using historical criticism, are not based on the historical order of development or on Jewish and Christian tradition, but on an order which is a product of scholarly reconstruction. Such an approach has its place in historical study, but hardly does justice to the theology of the Bible. Even if the historical-critical presuppositions are taken out, this approach however, does not lend itself so well to the treatment of the Wisdom Literature or Psalms which were written over a period of time.

The Thematic Approach

A thematic approach to Biblical Theology seeks to structure the material around themes or topics which arise from the biblical material itself. J. L. McKenzie contends that OT Theology should be based on "those themes which occur most frequently in which appear to be decisive in giving Old

¹G. F. Oehler, Theologie des Alten Testaments, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Heckenhauer, 1873, 74); ET, Theology of the Old Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874, 75).

²Geerhardus Vos, Biblical Theology: Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948). Unfortunately incomplete.

³G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) strictly follows canonical order.

Testament belief its distinctive identity."¹ Once again, this approach is sometimes very close to systematic, especially when the theme, or center is artificially forced on all Bible material.²

In this category are the works of W. Eichrodt,³ Th. C. Vriezen,⁴ J. L. McKenzie, G. Fohrer,⁵ W. Zimmerli,⁶ W. A. Dyrness,⁷ and Claus Westermann.⁸

The modern discussion of thematic structure took a new turn with W. Eichrodt's impressive Theology of the Old Testament in which he rejected both the systematic and historical approach and took the concept of "covenant" as his organizing principle. This sparked off a long debate on the appropriate center

¹J. L. McKenzie, 24, 25.

²"Cross-section," "Thematic-topical," and "Thematic-dialectic" categories in Hasel's classification would fall into this category. See Hasel, OT, 47-103.

³W. Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments presents the "covenant" as a cross-section (*Querschnitt*) of OT thought.

⁴Th. C. Vriezen, An Outline of Old Testament Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970).

⁵Georg Fohrer, Theologische Grundstrukturen des Alten Testaments (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972).

⁶Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline.

⁷W. A. Dyrness, Themes in Old Testament Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979).

⁸C. Westermann, Elements of Old Testament Theology.

(*Mitte*) of OT, NT, and the whole Bible. To this vexing discussion we will now turn our attention.

The Center of the Bible

The subject of the center of the Bible is related to many important aspects of biblical studies, such as the unity of the Bible and the relationship between the Testaments. We could justly say that in contemporary Biblical Theology this debate about the center is at the center of the theological and hermeneutical issues. It deals with the purpose of the Bible and what is essentially described in it. A center in this perspective is a key to understanding the meaning of both Testaments individually, but also the link that binds them together. We will consider now the major propositions for an Old Testament center.

The Major Propositions for an OT Center

The major proposition for an OT center can be divided into single concept proposals, formulas proposals, and literary units proposals. I will describe each of them in order.

Single concept proposal

W. Eichrodt proposed that the covenant holds a central position. The covenant is not only the center, but the unifying concept that allows us to consider

the OT as a whole. Thus the structural unity of the OT becomes evident from this perspective.¹

Frederick C. Prussner suggested that the faith of Israel derives its essential unity from the conjunction of the Sinaitic and Davidic covenants. This attempt aimed to include the wisdom literature in this covenantal unifying concept.²

According to H. Wildberger, the central concept of the Old Testament is Israel's "election" as the people of God.³ Th. C. Vriezen postulates that "the communion" is the underlying idea, the essential root idea, the fundamental idea or keystone of the OT's message.⁴ Walter Kaiser, Jr. proposed "the promise" which he discerns as "the true and only centre or Mitte of an OT theology."⁵

E. Sellin proposed the "holiness of God" as the deepest and innermost nature of the OT God.⁶ H. Seebass claimed that the center of the OT is "the

¹Eichrodt, 1:13-17.

²Frederick C. Prussner, "The Covenant of David and the Problem of Unity in the Old Testament Theology," in Transitions in Biblical Scholarship, ed. J. C. Rylaarsdam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 17-44.

³H. Wildberger, "Auf dem Wege zu einer Biblischen Theologie," EvT 19 (1959): 77.

⁴Th. C. Vriezen, 8, 160, 164, 170.

⁵W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Centre of OT Theology: The Promise," Themelios, 10 (1974): 9; see also his Toward an Old Testament Theology, 23.

⁶E. Sellin, Theologie des Alten Testaments, 2d ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1936), 19.

rulership of God."¹ Günter Klein, on the other hand, favors the concept of the "kingdom of God" as central.² For Ludwig Köhler, the rulership and kingship of God, namely "God is Lord," is the backbone of OT Theology.³

Formulas proposals

Apparently because a single concept does not seem to do justice as a center or a unifying principle to the manifold and multiform aspects of the Old Testament, a formula has been proposed by R. Smend, "Yahweh the God of Israel, Israel the people of Yahweh."⁴

Another attempt in this direction is that of G. Fohrer's, who suggests "the rule of God and communion between God and man."⁵ In the same line, N. W. Porteus sees "God and people" as two axes around which the theology of the OT revolves.⁶

S. Terrien postulates that "the reality of the presence of God" stands at the center of biblical faith. This approach brings into debate dialectical categories

¹H. Seebass, "Der Beitrag des AT zum Entwurf einer biblischen Theologie," Wort und Dienst 8 (1965): 20-49.

²G. Klein, "'Reich Gottes' als biblischer Zentralbegriff," EvT 30 (1970): 642-670.

³L. Köhler, Old Testament Theology, 30.

⁴Rudolf Smend, Die Mitte des AT Theologische Studien, 101. (Zürich: EVZ Verlag, 1970), 49.

⁵G. Fohrer, Theologische Grundstrukturen des Alten Testaments, 98.

⁶N. W. Porteus, "Towards a Theology of the Old Testament," SJT 1 (1948): 141.

(i.e., ethical/aesthetic).¹ W. Brueggeman, a supporter of Terrien's proposal, suggested another dialectical category: providence/election.² Related to this is also C. Westermann's dialectic between "The Saving God and History" and "The Blessing God and Creation".³

Literary units proposals

The following proposals are of a different nature. W. H. Schmidt stressed God's self-presentation in Exod 20:2, "I am Yahweh your God,"⁴ to which Walter Zimmerli adds Israel's responding praise, "You . . . Yahweh" (Deut 26:1)⁵ S. Herrmann suggested that the book of Deuteronomy is the center of Biblical Theology. According to him, here "the basic issues of the Old Testament theology

¹Terrien, 278, 422, 449. According to this view, the "ethical" is present in the historical-covenantal materials while the "aesthetic" in the wisdom and psalmic materials. The latter is concerned with the emotional, spiritual or simply beauty.

²W. Brueggeman, "Canon and Dialectic," in God and His Temple, ed. L. E. Frizzell, (S. Orange, NJ: Seton Hall University, 1981), 25.

³See C. Westermann, Blessing in the Bible and in the Life of the Church (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

⁴W. H. Schmidt, "The Problem of the 'Centre' of the Old Testament in the Perspective of the Relationship Between History of Religion and Theology," Old Testament Essays 4 (1986): 46-64.

⁵W. Zimmerli, "Zum Problem der 'Mitte des Alten Testaments'," EvT 35 (1975): 102, 108.

are concentrated *in nuce*.¹ Although von Rad says "no" to a center of the OT, his secret "deuteronomistic theology of history" would also fall into this category.²

We can see that the proposals are numerous and divergent, and after considering the major proposals for a NT center, these proposals are evaluated.

The Major Propositions for an NT Center

In the New Testament, as in the OT, there is no consensus as to what is the center of the NT. The quest of a center is closely and essentially related to the possibility and relevance of NT theology.

F. C. Fensham and also D. R. Hillers have proposed the covenant as the unifying center of the NT.³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. proposed "the promise," which he discerns as being the flow of continuity between OT and NT.⁴ One of the commonest is the theme of "the Kingdom of God."⁵

¹S. Herrmann, "Die Konstruktive Restauration. Das Deuteronomium als Mitte biblischer Theologie," in Probleme biblischer Theologie. Gerhard von Rad zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. H. W. Wolff. (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1971), 156.

²See Hasel, OT, 145-151.

³F. C. Fensham, "Promise and Expectation in the Bible," TZ 23 (1967): 305-322; D. R. Hillers, Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 178-188.

⁴W. C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward an Old Testament Theology, 266-69.

⁵G. Klein, 642-70. See also G. Goldsworthy, Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981).

Rudolf Bultmann opted for a kerygmatic anthropology as a center; his student H. Braun introduced the concept of theological anthropology.¹ A new proposal for a central leading idea (*Leitgedanke*) for Biblical Theology has been made by Hans Klein.² Klein's proposal is to discuss the OT under the rubric of "Life," and the NT under that of "New Life." Klein speaks of "Life" and "New Life" not as the center (*Mitte*) of the OT and NT respectively, but rather as the goal (*Zielpunkt*) which they envisage.

Oscar Cullmann considered the "salvation history" to be the center of the NT as well as the OT.³ He wrote: "It seems to be impossible to justify the canon apart from salvation history and it is not by accident that its justification is inevitably questioned whenever salvation history is rejected."⁴ In this group also belong L. Goppelt, G. E. Ladd, and H. Conzelmann. James Barr argues for plurality of 'centers' which make many different organizations and structures of NT theology possible.⁵

Then there is a group of Christological proposals as expressed by Donald Guthrie:

¹R. Bultmann, 251.

²Hans Klein, "Leben - neues Leben: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer gesamtbiblischen Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments," *EvT* 43 (1983): 91-107.

³Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 44-47.

⁴*Ibid.*, 294.

⁵J. Barr, "Trends and Prospects in Biblical Theology," 272.

It requires little effort to demonstrate that he [Jesus Christ] is the main binding force throughout the NT. . . No part of the NT is intelligible apart from an understanding of Christ as portrayed in it.

Every part makes some contribution although some are slight on Christology (as, for instance, James).¹

However, when one considers the revelation of God in the NT as a triune God, the limitation of this statement becomes obvious. Moreover, although many scholars agree with the Christological principle, various proposals are made such as the Christ event,² the Christological theme,³ Jesus Christ.⁴

For E. Käsemann, admitting his Lutheran bias, the center of the NT is the justification of the godless.⁵ Similarly, Peter Stuhlmacher has maintained that "the gospel of reconciliation must be the center of a Biblical Theology of the NT."⁶ U. Luz suggests that the theology of the cross is the center of the NT.⁷

¹D. Guthrie, 54.

²Bo Reicke, "Einheitlichkeit oder verschiedene 'Lehrbegriffe' in der neutestamentliche Theologie," TZ 9 (1953): 405.

³O. Palmer Robertson, "The Outlook for Biblical Theology," in Toward a Theology of the Future, ed. D. F. Wells and C. H. Pinnock (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1971), 65-91.

⁴Among others, H. W. von Balthasar, "Einigung in Christus," Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie 15 (1968): 187; for a comprehensive list see Gerhard F. Hasel, New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 155, n. 90.

⁵E. Käsemann, "Kritische Analyse," in Das Neue Testament als Kanon (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 369.

⁶P. Stuhlmacher, "The Gospel of Reconciliation in Christ: Basic Features and Issues of a Biblical Theology of the New Testament," HBT 1 (1979): 161-190.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ has also been proposed as a center.¹

Gerhard Hasel is in favor of a Christological center, but he broadens the picture and specifies that "God's gracious saving activity comes to expression in the life and activity, the suffering, death and resurrection as well as in the exaltation and heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the beginning, center and end of the NT."²

Evaluation of the Quest for Center

No consensus has been reached regarding the question of the center of the OT and NT. On the contrary, it is widely held today that the quest for a single center has failed.³ It seems to me that to resolve this hotly debated issue, it needs clarification as to terminology, because there is a fundamental difference in the concepts that lay behind the language being used. This issue has been the most frustrating part of my study, due to the divergent use of various terms which are loaded with concepts often alien to the Bible.

Why are scholars looking for a center of the OT, NT, and the whole Bible? The insight of Jesper Høgenhaven is particularly pertinent here:

⁷U. Luz, "Theologia crucis als Mitte der Theologie des Neuen Testaments," EyT 34 (1974): 116-41.

¹W. Künneth, M. Kwiran, R. Baumann, J. Guillet, and F. Courth; for bibliography, see Hasel, NT, 154, n. 85.

²Hasel, NT, 164.

³Manfred Oeming, Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart. Das Verhältnis von AT und NT in der hermeneutischen Diskussion seit Gerhard von Rad, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1987), 182-85.

The first motive to look for a "centre" of the OT is the need to organize a systematic presentation of the main content of the OT documents. There can be little doubt however that another motive is involved as well. That motive is the desire to establish the theological relevance of the OT by asserting its centre.¹

None of the proposed centers is comprehensive enough to include within it the totality of biblical revelation. If one is looking for a center to organize a systematic presentation of the OT, NT, or of the whole Bible, whatever center is chosen, inevitably there will be parts of the Bible which will not fit into the scheme. There is a great richness in the variety of Bible material which must not be sacrificed. At the same time, there is a basic internal unity which must not be overlooked. This is given by the fact of inspiration, not because of an artificial organizing center.

A fundamental problem linked to the matter of a center is the inconsistency of the philosophies, the presuppositions, and preconceived ideas that influence or motivate the hypothesis and that are obviously opposed to the biblical claim of inspiration, unity, and consistency.

If a scholar is employing the historical-critical method, he/she is left with various documents with no apparent interrelationship. By principle this method stresses the diversity. But then one must find a way to correlate these various strata into one unified body. So there must be a "center" in which the material finds its source and which gives it a certain *raison d'être*, justification for

¹Jesper Høgenhaven, Problems and Prospects of Old Testament Theology (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 42, 43.

its inclusion into the corpus. This "center" then functions as a restrictive center and is used as a cutting knife to distinguish between the "central" and "peripheral" parts of the Bible. If one gets the center, which is the most important aspect of the OT, NT, or Bible, then one supposedly has achieved unity, and the inherent unity that characterizes the Bible is no longer needed.

On the other hand, using the historical-grammatical method, one presupposes the basic unity of the Bible as it has one author, God, behind various materials. So the center is not an organizing theme or systematizing center to show structural unity,¹ nor a restrictive center relegating some portions into a status of inferiority. This center functions as an unfolding center, showing the relationship and coherency of different materials, books, and authors. The first approach inevitably leads to a very questionable principle of selectivity on a purely subjective basis and ends up with the principle of a "canon within canon," the second one to *tota Scriptura* which is coherent with the inspiration of the whole Bible.

A Proposal for Methodology

My proposed methodology for doing and especially teaching Biblical Theology can be summarized in the premises expressed in the preceding chapter where I have already discussed some aspects of Biblical Theology. Now, after

¹However, this is not true of all theologians, who reject the critical presuppositions. Some, e.g. Walter Kaiser, Jr. and Elmer A. Martens still have the center as the organizing principle.

having previously considered and described the source, interpretation method, and the scope of Biblical Theology, we need to turn our attention to the structure, or principle of organization.

The Structure of Biblical Theology

We have just looked at the main samples of structure of Biblical Theology that were used in the past and we have seen how much this has been influenced by the basic presuppositions of writers and in turn how the presuppositions affected the way in which the biblical material was presented.

We have seen that the *systematic approach* imposes categories which are alien to biblical thought. While some of the traditional categories may correspond to important biblical themes, a major charge against the systematic approach is that it fails to include important aspects of the biblical material. The Bible cannot speak for itself, because outside interests seem to dominate.

Although the *thematic approach* seeks to structure the material around themes or topics which arise from the biblical material itself, as we have seen from our discussion of various proposed centers, it too often deteriorates into imposing alien thought-forms and themes on all Bible material. Practically the same words can be used to describe its deficiencies as of the systematic approach.

In the *historical approach* as used by the advocates of historical criticism, the order was increasingly an outgrowth of scholarly reconstruction and frequently changed with changing critical opinion on authorship and dating of the

books and sources. Thus not only the structure of Biblical Theology was in disarray,¹ but also the internal unity was lost.

Says W. Pannenberg: "The assertion of a doctrinal unity of the biblical witnesses has been made impossible by the work of critical historical research."² My countryman Petr Pokorný from Prague calls the diverse streams of tradition an almost insurmountable problem for establishing continuity between biblical traditions. Since biblical material is for him circumstantial and linked to an irreversible historical development, he maintains that it becomes virtually impossible to derive a united theology.³ Ernst Käsemann concludes from his presuppositions that "a biblical theology which is developed from one single root and maintained in unbroken continuity is an illusion and a phantom."⁴

On the other side, rejecting those presuppositions, Eta Linnemann testifies: "God's inspired Word, which has many human authors but ultimately only one divine originator, exhibits a wonderful unity. As soon as I accept by

¹For example in the NT first the teaching of the (rediscovered and reconstructed) historical Jesus was used as a hermeneutical key which correspondingly devaluated Paul and the later books of the NT as a progressive "theologizing" and "Hellenizing" of the simple message of Jesus. Later, Rudolf Bultmann's NT Theology does not even deal directly with Jesus at all, listing "The Message of Jesus" only as a "presupposition" of NT Theology. (R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament.

²Pannenberg, 194.

³Petr Pokorný, "Probleme biblischer Theologie," Theologische Literaturzeitung 106 (1981): 1-7.

⁴Ernst Käsemann, "Neutestamentliche Frage von heute," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 54 (1957): 18.

faith the self-testimony of the Word of God regarding the inspiration of Scripture, I begin to realize this wonderful unity.¹ Diversity by no means connotes disunity, and a deeper level of unity can be discovered.

However, the strength of the historical approach to organizing Biblical Theology lies in the fact that it does justice to the diversity of Scripture and demonstrates the development of biblical thought. This definitely should be kept. So, it seems to me, we need to take advantage of all three approaches and combine them, yet do it in such a way that we still will remain faithful to the Bible witness. But how do we do it? Here is a suggestion.

A book-by-book approach

If we accept as a basic presupposition that the *source* of Biblical Theology is the divinely inspired Word of God, then it logically follows that the appropriate *method* for its study is exegesis, which is without presuppositions foreign to Scripture and so takes the biblical texts as they stand in their literary connections.

The next logical step is to recognize that the *scope* of Biblical Theology is determined by the definition of the Bible canon. Then, considering the *organization* of material, it seems to me, logically we must conclude that the structure for Biblical Theology must be based on literary units found in the Old and New Testaments themselves.

¹Linnemann, 151.

G. F. Hasel affirms: "A degree of systematizing the material content of the biblical books and groups of writing is inevitable, but the principles for systematizing must derive inductively from Scripture itself."¹ And Wayne E. Ward says: "The *structure*, or principle of *organization*, for a biblical theology should be determined by the literary units within the Old and New Testament canons."²

So, I conclude that the most natural literary unit in both the Old and New Testaments are the individual books of the Bible. This transcends the disadvantage of having a multiplicity of themes without proper correlation, or forcing a single theme upon a book, because the biblical books are usually not mono-thematic. This book-by-book approach then ensures, so far as it is humanly possible, that the structure arises from the biblical material itself rather than being imposed from the outside. It allows full scope for dealing with various biblical genres and topics (e.g., the theme of Wisdom) which tend to be seriously under-represented, if not excluded, from more traditional schemes. It allows for variety of themes derived from a particular book and relating the themes to each other.

¹G. Hasel, "The Relationship Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," 126.

²Ward, 383, 384: "If the method is to be historical exegesis and the scope is to be canonical scriptures, there is a valid reason for applying the historical method to the natural literary units which have developed in the history of the canon."

At the same time it keeps the advantage of the historical approach, preserving the richness and variety of biblical material and numerous authors. Each can speak on its own terms, and yet the canonical unity is preserved. Individual books are not treated in isolation, but in the total canonical context. No option is closed off in advance.

The remaining problem to be solved is the orientation point (or a center) which will bind all sixty-six books into one whole. To this we will now turn our attention.

A Proposal for Center

None of the centers proposed from (1) a single-centered proposal such as "covenant," "election," "communion," the holiness of God," "kingdom of God," "the rulership of God," "promise," or (2) from formulas with a dual perspective such as "Yahweh the God of Israel, Israel the people of Yahweh," "the rule of God and communion with God," "God and people," or (3) from literary unit categories such as the first commandment or the book of Deuteronomy, does justice to the manifold aspects, richness, and diversity of the Bible.

These categories are reductionist in nature; their scope is too narrow and sometimes even mixed with thought-forms alien to the Bible. On the other hand, a refusal of the quest for a center can well be determined by presuppositions that minimize or refuse to consider the wholeness of the Bible, not seeing or denying its basic unity.

The hotly debated issue of the center proves that there is a decisive need to be biblically grounded and to think anew about some aspects of Biblical Theology, freed from preconceived ideas established by historical-critical presuppositions.

Any quest for a center of the OT, NT, or the Bible to be successful and relevant must take into consideration the character of the Bible and the fact of revelation and inspiration. The center cannot be found in terms of an organizing theme, motif, idea, principle, or formula. The nature of the biblical center must be unique as the Book itself is unique. If one holds to a wholistic view of the Bible, no predetermined center would fit its richness except its very source--God.

I can basically agree that

that which binds together the manifoldness of the OT testimonies from the beginning to the end is nothing less than the God who has revealed himself in diverse and varied ways; covenant, election rulership, kingship, etc. This center is a dynamic one which binds together the manifold parts into a unified whole, without silencing considerable portions of the OT.¹

However, it is very important to distinguish the meaning and the use of this word "center" from the "center" as used by critical scholars generally. It is not a center as an organizing principle, but an undergirding aspect on the basis by which the unity of the Bible can be discerned in spite of all its diversity. It is of crucial importance to understand this difference.

¹Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Problem of the Center in the OT Theology Debate," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 86 (1974): 79.

Orientation Point

Because the word "center" is so heavily loaded and carries so much of pre-understanding in today's theological world, I prefer to use the designation "orientation point."

Each of the various Bible themes, different books, or even blocks of books, all incorporate the language, concepts, and motifs crucial to their own book, and yet they have a common orientation point that gives them a sense of unity, togetherness. However, this orientation point does not serve as an umbrella to encompass all material, but rather as a focal point to illumine everything else and give it ultimate meaning. The term "center" in its usual connotation as understood by critical scholars is an all-encompassing umbrella; the orientation point does not suggest that. It encompasses all the data; but it does serve to provide ultimate reference to all the data.

Now, with regard to the actual center proposal, it seems that to propose God as a dynamic "center" or "orientation point" is too generic, too general. A more precise concept is needed, otherwise almost any religious writing can be categorized under such a broad and universal concept.

Cosmic Conflict Between God And Satan

I want to propose the cosmic conflict between God and Satan as the basic "orientation point" of the Bible. This proposal is based mainly on the following reasons:

A View of Both God and Satan

It is interesting to note that those prophets, who have been given a special vision of God, have also been given a special perception or insight into an understanding of the origin of evil and/or the work of God's enemy, Satan. It seems as if God wanted to tell His people that it is impossible to understand fully His person and character unless we take into consideration how He deals with His opponent, the devil.

Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah describes in chap. 6:1-8 his famous encounter with God that consequently led to a realization of his sinfulness, his cleansing, and then to an acceptance of his special prophetic office. All of Isaiah's ministry was influenced and shaped by this vision of God.

This prophet also has in his book a prominent section which is actually a taunt against the king of Babylon in chap. 14:4-15. This part is written in the form of poetry. However, from vs. 12-15 it seems that the prophet abandoned the historical or earthly realm and began to describe events in a different sphere, and so the king of Babylon personifies Satan who is defying God's divinity when he asserts himself to raise his throne "above the stars of God" and to make himself "like the Most High."¹

¹José M. Bertoluci has proved this satisfactorily in his unpublished Th.D. dissertation The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1985), 146-166, 289-291, 297-303. Among other evidences for this he

Ezekiel

Similarly, the prophet Ezekiel begins his prophetic book with a complex vision of God, His glory, cherubim, and wheels (Ezek 1:1-28). Then in chaps. 8:1-11:25 he has a vision of the temple and in the midst of this is found a section (10:1-22) that parallels the vision of chap. 1 very extensively. The message of these visions is that God is in control and is bringing down judgment on the city of Jerusalem, specifically, and the nation, generally.

Then in chap. 28:1-19, the prophet Ezekiel gives his two oracles against the prince and king of Tyre (vss. 1-10 and 11-19). Especially the lament (*qinah*) of vss. 12-19 talks about a once perfect being who lived in Eden, the Garden of God. The figure described in this lament is more than human and is described as one who lived in a higher place than the earthly realm. Thus this figure can be identified as a vertical type of Satan and his activities.¹

John in the Revelation

The New Testament's only prophetic book, the book of Revelation, starts, similarly to Ezekiel, with a vision of God in chap. 1:4-20. In this vision, Jesus Christ is portrayed as a celestial King who is at the same time gently caring

gives the context, structure, and the use of the words "*masha!*" and "*babhel.*"

¹Bertoluci, 220-303. For additional discussion see also: R. M. Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament" in Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, eds., Issues in Revelation and Inspiration (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), 118-119.

for His earthly church. Then in chap. 12:7-9 another vision incredibly describes a conflict that broke out in God's family, even to the extent of war in heaven.

This portrayal of a conflict between Michael and the dragon which resulted in a war in heaven is the only time that war is mentioned in all sixty-six Bible books. It is clear from this description that Satan rebelled against God's sovereignty and seduced one third of the stars--angels¹ with him. The vision also indicates that Satan demands worship (Rev 13:3, 4, 7, 8, 15) and that he will finally succeed in getting it when "the whole world" worships him through the two beasts, except for the faithful, God's "remnant" (Rev 14:12).

Other Cosmic Conflict Allusions

Conflict in Genesis

There are also other allusions to the cosmic conflict between God and Satan in the Bible. The first mention of an accusing Satan is in the garden of Eden in Gen 3 (compare Rev 12:9 with Gen 3:1). He has accused God of lying about death as being the result of sin (Gen 3:4). In this way, and because God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Satan practically accused God of being selfish, arbitrary, exacting, and severe in His dealing with humankind (Gen 3:4-5). So the activity of Satan here is in full harmony with the description of his activities elsewhere.² It is highly significant

¹Compare vs. 3, 4, with vs. 9 and Job 38:7.

²Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12-19; Job 1, 2; Zech 3:1-5; Rev 12:7-12. More on Gen 3 is in chapter 7. For arguments that Gen 3 does not speak just about an

that the Scriptures begin, both canonically and chronologically, with an introduction to this conflict. This sets the tone to what the Bible is all about.¹

The Day of Atonement ritual

Another hint of a cosmic conflict is found in Lev 16, the chapter that describes the Day of Atonement ritual. Part of this ritual was a scapegoat named "for Azazel."² It has been successfully demonstrated that this goat, that was not sacrificed during the ceremony but driven away, cannot be a type of Christ, but must be in a sense a representative of His opponent, the Devil. This very name, Azazel, was used by an unknown author of the intertestamental book 1 Enoch for the leader of the fallen angelic spirits.³ Thus Azazel represents a type of Satan.⁴

In light of this, it can be said that the Levitical Day of Atonement foreshadowed the ultimate and final triumph of Christ over Satan. The ritual of the two goats teaches the definitive destruction of evil and its originator and its

ordinary snake, but that there is a personal being behind, see Walter Kaiser, Jr., 77-79.

¹The last three chapters of Scriptures close with the same themes as the ones found in Gen 1-3 (see Rev 20-22).

²In Hebrew and also in RSV.

³6:7; 8:1; 9:6; 10:4; 13:1; 54:5; 55:4, 69:2.

⁴For elaboration see: Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 391-395; Gerhard F. Hasel, "Studies in Biblical Atonement II: The Day of Atonement," in Arnold Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner, eds., The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Theological Studies (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 120-133; Angel Rodriguez, Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982), 112-120.

eradication or removal from the camp (the universe). The role of the second goat is not redemptive since no blood is shed. The bearing of sin by the second goat reveals how sin is to be finally eradicated, for the goat was never to be seen again.¹ With the transfer of sin from the sanctuary, all responsibility for sin now belonged to the scapegoat. Therefore, the Day of Atonement taught the basic truth about the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan plus the fact that Christ's ministration goes beyond Calvary to the final solution of the sin problem.

Conflict in Job

The author of Job describes a similar picture in his prologue (Job 1 and 2).² Here Satan not only accused Job, but primarily accused God of bribing Job, thus indicating that God was not really worthy of Job's trust. Satan tries to prove that if God would stop favoring Job, he would distrust Him and curse Him to His face. Satan accuses Job by impugning his motives for being faithful. But,

¹At the cross Christ paid the price for everyone's sins, but the cross does not eradicate sin. It laid the foundation for its ultimate annihilation. Satan is still active; sin still reigns throughout the world. Satan is far from being isolated from the world of men and events, but he knows that his time is short (Rev 12:12). For elaboration on this, see below under the heading *Conflict in Paul's epistles*.

²If Moses is the author of the book of Job, then the relationship between Satan from Job 1, 2 and the serpent of Gen 3 is even more obvious. On Job's authorship see *Seventh-day Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, F. D. Nichol, ed., (Washington: DC: Review and Herald, 1954), 493-494; Edwin Thiele and Margaret Thiele, *Job and the Devil* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1988), 13-26; cf. J. F. A. Sawyer, "The Authorship and Structure of the Book of Job" in *Studia Biblica* 1978 I, ed. E. A. Livingstone, Supplement Series 11. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979), 253-57.

by this, Satan accuses God Himself, implying that no one would ever serve Him just because of His character; there may be only two reasons why someone might serve God: either from fear or because of a considerable reward. It is sobering to ponder how much of religion in the history of mankind has been based either on fear or on a promise of a reward. Of course, in Job's case it finally did not turn out that way, and Job had proved that not only did he not have any ulterior motives for serving God, but also that he possessed a fairly good grasp of God's character and God's dealings with people (see Job 42:7).

The additional significance of this story lies also in the fact that the macrocosmic conflict between God and Satan is fought over every individual in the microcosm of our lives. Jesus himself confirmed this fact,¹ as well as the apostles Paul² and Peter.³

Conflict in Daniel

The setting of the scene of judgment in Dan 7:9, 10 closely parallels the image from Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6, showing that God gathers his celestial family in order to conduct important business. In this and the following chapter, the investigative judgment is on the little horn, but the accent is also on the

¹Matt 12:29; Mark 3:24-27; Luke 11:21-26; Matt 12:43-45.

²1 Cor 4:9; Eph 6:12-18; see treatment of Paul's epistles later in this chapter.

³"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet 5:8, 9; NKJV).

vindication of God's people¹ and the vindication of God's character and His dealings with evil.² The book of Daniel is in this way similar to the book of Ezekiel, which also stresses the theme of the investigative judgment and the vindication of God saying, "through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes."³

Conflict in Zechariah

Another OT prophet, Zechariah, saw Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan accusing (Zech 3:1-5). It is of great significance to see Satan standing at God's right hand as accuser,⁴ this time impeaching Joshua the high priest, who represented God's people.⁵ This is in full

¹"Given in favor of the saints of the Most High" (Dan 7:22, NIV).

²On the investigative judgment in Daniel, see William H. Shea, "Theological Importance of the Preadvent Judgment," in Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy, Frank Holbrook, ed., Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1986), 323-32; William H. Shea, Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 1-24; 94-131. See also Frank Holbrook, ed., Symposium on Daniel, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1986).

³Ezek 36:23, RSV; cf. 39:27, 28. On the investigative judgment in Ezekiel, see Richard M. Davidson, "In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message," JATS, 2/1 (Spring 1991): 96-100.

⁴The position of standing at the right side was the place of accusation under the law (Ps 109:6).

⁵Ralph L. Smith, Micah-Malachi Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32., (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 199.

harmony with his activity as described in Job 1 and 2¹ and also Rev 12:10. The angel of the Lord--Christ who is often called an angel² (Michael the archangel) --is seen defending.³ It is noteworthy that Satan is always accusing; God is always defending His people.

Elaborating on this, Paul in Rom 8 says "if God be for us who can be against us?" (vs. 31). He makes it very plain that the Father is not against us (vss. 32, 33), nor is the Son against us (vs. 34), nor is the Holy Spirit against us, for He too "intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (vs. 26). That should lead to the proper understanding of who then really is against us,⁴ and thus of what is going on at the pre-advent judgment, as already described in Dan 7.

Conflict in the Gospels

Both Matthew and Luke record the personal confrontation between Jesus and the Adversary in the wilderness (Matt 4:8-11; Luke 4:6-8). This is clearly a continuation of the war that began in heaven when Satan was cast out.

¹In both instances Satan appears before the Lord as an accuser, God speaks to him and it is in the presence of others.

²For identification of Christ as Michael the archangel, see Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, 71-86.

³The angel of the Lord must be deity, for in vs. 2 He is specifically called "the Lord, Yahweh". "'Standing before the Lord' is a technical designation for priestly ministry." Kenneth Barker, "Zechariah," The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 7., Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 623.

⁴How often I have heard that Christ is interceding for us with the Father! Compare, "I am *not* saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you. . ." (John 16:26, 27, NIV; emphasis supplied).

Both accounts hint at a cosmic significance of this encounter when the devil offers the world to Jesus, if He will fall down and worship him. The result of Satan's rebellion and its absurdity are here clearly portrayed when the Adversary asked even his own Creator to get down on His knees and worship His creature! Satan's insatiable demand for worship is the same recurring theme that is also very clearly stressed in Rev 12-14, 20, and hinted at in Isa 14, and Ezek 28.

When the seventy disciples returned from their successful mission, Luke records that Jesus remarked: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18), which is a clear allusion to the Isa 14 and Ezek 28 passages discussed above.

In the light of this heavenly conflict, we can clearly see the meaning of certain statements of Jesus. For example, He spoke in John 12:31, 32, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me" (KJV). We notice that Christ's work is seen as a judgment on Satan and his rebellion ("prince of this world").¹

A noteworthy and significant fact in this context is the inclusion of the whole cosmic family in the results of Christ's death in vs. 32: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all" (not "men", that is supplied), "I will draw everyone

¹Christ also called Satan "the prince of this world" in John 14:30 and 16:11; cf. 1 John 3:8, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (also cf. Heb 2:14-15).

to me."¹ That is the real meaning of the original.² All--everyone--includes not just people on this planet, but even the loyal angels through the universe who were drawn closer to God by His costly sacrifice, as Paul also understood it and wrote in his letters to Colossians and Ephesians.³

From all this it seems clear that the problem of sin in heaven, or the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, and the necessity and extent of God's redemption are closely tied together. Christ's whole work of redemption is a response to this great controversy. That is why redemption cannot be done by a universal decree from heaven. Jesus Christ must come down on this planet to confront Satan and defeat the prince of this world in the arena of human temptation and suffering. His purpose in the incarnation and the whole work of salvation was to disclose to the universe the malicious character of Satan while vindicating the true character of God.

Through Christ's life of self-sacrifice and service, He vindicated God before the angels and the universe, and brought redemption to man. The self-sacrificing-servant spirit is the way of God. The self-centered, self-exalting life is the way of Satan--a life without God. Thus redemption must take into consideration and bring solution to the problem of sin and deal with its originator.

¹"All men" in KJV, RSV, and NIV; NRSV has "all people". But the Revised English Bible as well as The Living Bible and The Good News Bible have "draw everyone" which is more faithful to the Greek original.

²Greek has "*panta*."

³See below the following subheading.

Conflict in Paul's epistles

There are three clear passages where Paul makes this point so forcibly. In Col 1:19, 20, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile" (to atone, to bring to unity) "to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross."¹ It is noteworthy where and how the peace is made:

For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's death on the cross, and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.²

Truly, that is a description of the ending of the war. Christ's death did not only deal with personal sins; it also brings unity into the universe. Why is there a need for peace and reunification throughout the universe? Because there was a war in heaven (Rev 12:7-9). The purpose of Christ's death is clearly more than just bringing forgiveness of sins to humans, however important that is.

Two other passages in Ephesians make the same point: Eph 1:9, 10, "For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to His purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."³ The other text, Eph 3:9, 10 says, ". . . and to make all men see what is the plan of the

¹RSV, parentheses supplied.

²Col 1:19, 20; Good News Bible.

³RSV.

mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities in the heavenly places."¹

In this context, there is one more text showing that God has worked through the church in a dramatic way in 1 Cor 4:9, ". . . we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men."²

So all this together shows that the death of Christ on the cross was far more than a mere gesture of love, to exercise a moral influence on an on-looking universe. It had the purpose of breaking the power of Satan and sin in the whole cosmos of God. Christ's death, however, did not end the controversy with demonic powers; the conflict continued after Christ's ascension to heaven. After the cross Satan refused to concede defeat; thus, the battle continues with aggravated fury.

Christ now directs events not from the cross but from the heavenly sanctuary. The cosmic conflict between Him and Satan has entered another phase. Thus the final "at-one-ment" still remains to be realized, not only in each believer, but also in the world and the universe. In one sense, the atonement has been made. In the sense of universal harmony, it is still to be realized.

¹Both texts quoted from RSV.

²RSV. The Greek word used here for "spectacle" is "*theatron*," from which we get "theater" in English.

Mentioning the concept of Christ's mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary, stressed in Hebrews (8:1-3 and other places),¹ we can conclude that it has, among other objectives, to crush Satan's revolt, his hosts, and his followers (Rom 16:20). Christ's intercessory work protects His people against the temptations and accusations of Satan.

One last text shows that the battle is a supernatural struggle between good and evil, right and wrong, and goes on in the life of every individual: "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."²

All this material from Paul's epistles is plainly additional evidence that this controversy between God and Satan has both human and cosmic dimensions, as we have already seen from Genesis, Job, Zechariah, and the Gospels. The struggle is leading toward a final encounter between Christ and His people and Satan and his followers. This will occur and culminate just prior to and at the second coming of Christ (Rev 16-20).

The Reason for the Conflict

The idea of conflict or struggle between the forces of good and evil

¹For useful study see Frank Holbrook, ed., Issues in the Book of Hebrews, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 4, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989).

²Eph 6:12, NKJV; cf. 1 Pet 5:8, 9.

taking place in the universe is well established in Scripture. However, the reason for Satan's rebellion is not explicitly stated. Nevertheless, by implication from certain clues, it seems that Satan is especially attacking Christ, the second member of the Godhead.

During Christ's temptation in the wilderness, Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the world, "if you bow down and worship me." This implies that Satan, in claim of his superiority, did not recognize Christ's divinity if he wanted Christ to adore him (Matt 4; Luke 4). Also in Paul's epistles Christ's preeminence is often stressed.¹

A legitimate question may be raised: Why was Christ's and not God's supremacy stressed? Is there any problem with recognition of Christ's divinity and supremacy? In 1 Cor 15:20-28, Paul applies to Christ the passage of Ps 110:1, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet," implying that the rebellion was in some way connected with Christ's position in the Godhead. The same aspect is observed in Phil 2:5-11, where after His humiliation, God exalted Christ to "the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."²

¹See Eph 1:9-10; 1:20-23; Phil 2:9-11; Col 1:15-20; 3:1.

²NIV, emphasis supplied.

In the book of Revelation, as I have already mentioned, the controversy is between the satanic powers opposing Christ's authority. This controversy helps us to answer the question: Why did Christ have to overcome to have the right to be seated on His Father's throne (Rev 3:21)? Why in Rev 4 and 5 is Christ asked, Who is worthy to open the books and to read thereon (Rev 5:2)? In the songs following this scene, one can pinpoint the reasons: At first, in the song of the four beasts and the twenty-four elders, it is mentioned that Christ's sacrifice made possible a kingdom of priests with all the redeemed (Rev 5:8-9). Later, the angels sang that because He was slain, Christ was worthy "to receive power," and subsequently, all living creatures said: "blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto God and the Lamb" (Rev 5:11-13).¹

With a background of the cosmic struggle firmly established, it seems obvious that the Father's place in the Godhead was not questioned, but Christ's was. It was through Christ's redemptive sacrifice that He vindicated God's character and made Himself "worthy" before those who questioned His authority to receive the power and the right to be one with God. When He comes to destroy the evil forces, He is described in Rev 19:16 as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Because Christ has won the battle against the forces that opposed His authority, He is called "King of Kings," and "Lord of Lords." In God's eternal kingdom, the throne of God and the Lamb are mentioned to stress Christ's equality with the Father (Rev 22:3). It seems that with all these passages and

¹NIV, emphasis supplied.

clues, we can safely assume that Christ's place in the Godhead was one of Satan's arguments for his rebellion in heaven. So the cosmic struggle is not only between God and Satan generally, but primarily between Christ and Satan as two personal beings.¹

Conclusion

Is there any justification for another new center to be added to more than two dozen that we already have? I would propose, yes, but only if we keep in mind that this one is not intended as a critical scalpel to cut away the supposedly dead flesh of Scripture, but rather to help us to get orientated and to provide ultimate reference and meaning to all the biblical data.² This center can also serve as a hermeneutical help for distinguishing between the weightier and lighter matters--a distinction our Lord himself used in reading his own Scripture (Matt 23:23).

This "orientation point" is not a center in a sense of a unifying, structuring, or organizing principle, but rather a pointer to the subject of the Scripture--the triune God, who reveals Himself to demonstrate and clear His misunderstood character, to end the cosmic conflict, to solve the problem of sin, to graciously bring salvation to sinful, fallen mankind, and to bring about a true

¹In words of Rev 12:7-9, Michael versus Dragon.

²See Richard M. Davidson, "The Good News of Yom Kippur," JATS 2/2 (1991): 13-20 for an example of a balanced approach to some aspects of Christian lifestyle using the cosmic conflict as an orientation point.

and eternal at-one-ment in the whole vast universe. He is the only one who can be linked to any biblical theme beginning with creation, covenant, cult, through wisdom, redemption, and judgment, even to eternal fellowship. But we need to see and properly understand His ways and dealings with all created beings only against the background of the cosmic conflict between Him and His opponent, Satan.¹

¹Ellen G. White wrote extensively on this issue. The most important works dealing with the concept of the "great controversy" are the following: The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1922); The Story of Prophets and Kings (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917); The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898); The Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911); The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1888); The Story of Redemption (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1947). For a sample of her views on this topic, see Appendix. For further information on the whole issue in her writings, see Joseph J. Battistone The Great Controversy Theme in E. G. White Writings (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978).

I am also acquainted with Gustaf Aulén's concept of Christ's victorious struggle against the evil forces in the process of reconciliation. However, Aulén does not present the perspective of starting the conflict between God and Satan in heaven, an aspect that for me is basic in the understanding of the Bible. He presents the concept of the struggle of Christ with the evil forces from the Incarnation to the atonement and its consequent application to the believer, while my view of cosmic struggle starts with the origin of sin before the fall of man and extends to the final eradication of Satan and sin. See Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1969), 4-7.

PART TWO

COLLEGE COURSE IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

CHAPTER V

BASIC OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

Course Description

This course is a concentrated study of Biblical Theology. Various approaches to doing Biblical Theology are studied and their historical developments highlighted. A major part of the course concentrates on individual Bible books and their distinctive theological concepts and contributions.

Concerns such as various approaches to studying the Bible and the diversity of biblical material are discussed with special attention given to the overall unity between the two Testaments and of the whole Bible. The question of Biblical authority and its extent for modern-day persons is addressed.

Course Objectives

The course objectives are:

1. To provide a definition of Exegesis, Biblical Theology, and Systematic Theology and explain their basic scope, similarities and differences
2. To outline the historical development of the discipline and describe the differences in both Catholic and modern Protestant theology

3. To identify the main blocks of material in the Bible and various forms of studying the Bible
4. To expand and deepen the student's knowledge of Bible material and individual books; to help him/her in understanding how to interpret the Bible and apply its material to various issues facing the ministry in 1990s
5. To provide some opportunity to discuss various questions arising from reading the Bible material
6. To help the student to formulate and write out his/her personal philosophy of approaching the Bible and understand its implication for biblical hermeneutics
7. To renew an appreciation of the Bible as the living and powerful Word of God able to change one's life
8. To develop a better appreciation for the way our freedom-loving God runs His universe and to impress upon the mind the necessity to deliberately choose to stand on His side.

Course Requirements

Reading

An extensive reading of the Bible is required. The student is expected to read the complete Bible book under discussion before the class lecture. In addition, he/she is expected to spend quality time in reflection on the Study Guides questions.

Class Activity*Attendance*

Attendance is mandatory due to the nature of study and the fact that the Church is paying the student's college tuition along with a stipend. Unexcused absences are not allowed. Please note that tardiness also counts. Being late three times is considered equivalent to one absence. In the case of an **unexcused absence**, the final grade will be lowered.

Participation

The student is expected to participate in class discussions and also to take notes of material presented in class, both in lectures and in discussions.

Course Evaluation**Examination**

There will be a one-hour mid-term examination during the last class period at the end of the fourth week and a two-hour final examination during the final examinations week. Examinations will cover the lectures presented in class and may include questions from the Study Guides. Material from the first half of the class will not be repeated in the final examination.

Grading

The student's grade for the quarter will be based on his/her class attendance, contribution to the class discussions, and the two examinations. The two examinations count for 90 percent of the final grade.

The final letter grade will be based on the following percentages:

A = 92 - 100 percent

B = 80 - 91

C = 60 - 79

F = < 59

(There may be a slight adjustment of the percentage bracket at the discretion of the teacher if a considerable number of students fall into an unusual grading pattern.)

Course Content

Week 1

Class period 1: Orientation and introduction; course requirements

Class period 2: Exegesis, Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology;
their History, Similarities, and Differences

Class period 3: Methodology and Importance of Biblical Theology

Class period 4: Center--Orientation Point

Week 2

Class period 1: Genesis 1-9

Class period 2: Genesis 10-50

Class period 3: Exodus 1-20

Class period 4: Exodus 21-40

Week 3

Class period 1: Leviticus

Class period 2: Numbers

Class period 3: Deuteronomy

Class period 4: Joshua

Week 4

Class period 1: Judges

Class period 2: Ruth

Class period 3: Questions and Answers, Discussion

Class period 4: Mid-term examination

Week 5

Class period 1: 1 Samuel

Class period 2: 2 Samuel

Class period 3: 1 Kings

Class period 4: 2 Kings

Week 6

Class period 1: 1 & 2 Chronicles

Class period 2: Ezra, Nehemiah

Class period 3: Esther

Class period 4: Job

Week 7

Class period 1: Psalms

Class period 2: Psalms

Class period 3: Proverbs

Class period 4: Ecclesiastes

Week 8

Class period 1: Song of Solomon

Class period 2: Isaiah

Class period 3: Jeremiah

Class period 4: Ezekiel

Week 9

Class period 1: Hosea

Class period 2: Joel, Amos

Class period 3: Obadiah, Jonah

Class period 4: Nahum, Micah

Week 10

Class period 1: Zephaniah, Habakkuk

Class period 2: Haggai, Zechariah

Class period 3: Malachi, Intertestamental Period

Class period 4: Questions and Answers, Discussion

Final Examinations Week:

Final examination, 2 hours

CHAPTER VI

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR

STUDENTS' PRIVATE STUDY

The following Study Guides are by no means to be considered an exhaustive list of questions for each Bible book. Much more will be covered by the teacher during the class lectures. Nevertheless, the questions are intended for students' home study to help them prepare for class discussions of various theological subjects and also to give them a general orientation of diverse directions in which it is necessary to consider each Bible book.¹

Students are expected to be prepared to participate in discussions on the subsequent questions during the class period in an active and substantial way and to be able to manifest that they have spent some time in reflection on this material. Moreover, the answer that a student is able to provide, however significant, is not to be considered the most important aspect of study preparation, but the ability to be able to show how he/she came to his/her conclusions and how these conclusions are consistent with the overall understanding of the Bible.

¹For many ideas found in the Study Guides, I am indebted to Dr. A. Graham Maxwell and Dr. Kenneth Hart.

GENESIS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. The book of Genesis is the only inspired record we have for almost one-half of this world's history. Does this seem adequate? What would be your understanding of God if the only testimony you had was Genesis?

2. Why would God create Lucifer--and this earth--if He had foreknowledge of sin, the flood, etc.? (Why did He give Solomon wisdom, and Samson strength?)

3. What does the creation story say about God? Does the story seem too childish or simple (Gen 1 & 2)?

4. What is the theological meaning of Genesis, chaps. 1-3? What were Satan's charges against God at the very beginning (cf. Job 1&2)? Do you think it is significant that this planet became the center of the great controversy almost immediately after it was created (Gen 3; Rev 12:7-9)?

5. Why did God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden near the tree of life (Gen 3:3)? Was that fair? God said they would die if they ate of the tree (Gen 2:17) and Satan said they wouldn't. Who appeared to be right? When did man first see that ultimate death that God had spoken about in Eden?

6. What does Eve's experience with the serpent tell us about our situation and what we need to be aware of? What would you understand is so bad about what she did? Why would God expel Adam and Eve on their very first offense? Was God being unfairly harsh in this experience? Shouldn't we desire to be like God as Eve tried to do?

7. When God came down to talk to them, why did He call out, "Where are you" (Gen 3:9)? Didn't He know? Compare the story of Babel (Gen 11:5), Abraham and Sodom (Gen 18:20).

8. How do you think Adam felt as he tried to kill that first lamb? (How did he do it?)

9. Does the flood tell us that God is not forgiving? Why would God destroy all: women, children, babies, animals, except eight people in a flood? What do you think would have happened if God had not stepped in? Why did He not just let everything go bad and self-destruct at this time? Would not that prove to the universe the self-destructive results of sin? Don't you think the Pharisees based on this story their prayers for a "flood" to destroy all the "wicked people" (especially Romans) so they could control the world?

10. Why has God apparently done almost nothing for so many millennia since then (cf. 2 Pet 3)? In the light of the flood, what does it say about God that He continues to wait now? Does it bother us that He continues to wait, especially for the last 150 years since we have been announcing His soon return (cf. Jonah, Esther)?

11. In what way was God pleased by the odor of Noah's sacrifice (Gen 8:21)? Did what Ham did really result in the destruction of his descendants the Canaanites (Gen 9:23)? Is this fair?

12. Was God partial in picking Abraham's family? Why do you think God called Abraham (cf. Melchizedek, Jethro)? Why did He wait for Abraham to cook meat for Him when He could have created anything for their meal? Why did He then participate in a meal that was not the healthiest (Gen 18:8)?

13. Why did God use a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch to pass between cut pieces of animals to confirm His relationship with one of His best friends (Gen 15:17)? What is the significance of the covenant that God entered into with Abraham and his descendants?

14. Was the heavenly reporting system inadequate (cf. Eden, Babel, flood, Sodom)? Isn't God omniscient? Couldn't He believe what He heard, why did He come to check things? Would you dare to say to God, "Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do what is right" (Gen 18:25)? Would you dare to talk to God as Abraham did (cf. Moses, Peter, David)? What do you think of his conversation with God over Sodom?

15. Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? Did Abraham ask any questions (PP 148-155)? Pay special attention to what this story says to the on-looking universe. Is it a story about Abraham's great unwavering faith and a capricious God, or about a loving God sharing with His best friend the meaning of the plan of salvation?

16. What does it mean for God to say He has confidence in Abraham (Gen 15:6)? How could Abraham be credited with trusting God when he twice lacked the faith even to tell the truth about his wife (12:10-20; 20:1-13)? Please note that Isaac did the same (26:1-11). If God had foreknowledge, what is the meaning of "confidence?"

17. Why did God give them the rite of circumcision, when He foreknew that it would eventually lead to so much conflict and misunderstanding (Gen 17:11-12)?

18. Why would God turn Lot's wife into a pillar of salt just because she glanced back (Gen 19:26)? Why would Lot offer his virgin daughters to that crowd instead of the angels (Gen 19:7)?

19. Why would the chosen man of God offer nose rings and bracelets to a potential wife for Isaac (Gen 24:22)? Would Peter (1 Pet 3:3) and Paul (1 Tim 2:9) agree with this or condemn it?

20. How do you think God regarded Jacob's many wives, and their stealing from and deceiving their own relatives as they departed (Gen 31:19-21)?

21. If God chose the tribe of Judah as the future kings of Israel, why did He kill off Judah's sons (Gen 38:1-30)? Why do you think God chose Judah and Tamar (a Canaanite teenage bride, one-time prostitute) as the ancestors of Christ (cf. Rahab)? Why did He choose to mention her specifically by name (Matt 1:3)?

EXODUS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. After picking out Abraham's family to be His representatives to the world, why did God leave them in Egypt for so long, until they had apparently forgotten everything they had ever known about Him, and had been brought to such grinding slavery? Do you think the other nations in Moses' day would have respected the "God" of a nation of slaves? Did God choose the children of Israel for special privileges or special responsibilities?

2. What is the purpose of the genealogies? Were these just for the benefit of the Israelites? Why are so few women mentioned in these genealogies?

3. Why do you think there was a decree to kill all the male children? If you could have asked one of the Israelites about their God as all the male babies were being killed, how do you think they would have described Him?

4. Why did God ask Moses to take off his shoes before approaching the bush (Exod 3:5)?

5. What are the implications of God choosing the name "I AM WHO I AM" for Himself? Why would God choose a verb rather than a noun as a name? The same name is used in the book of Genesis. Had Moses already heard of this name or was the book of Genesis written after this disclosure?

6. Why did Moses apparently not tell Jethro, his father-in-law, the truth about his plans for going to Egypt (Exod 4:18)? Why did Moses apparently lie to Pharaoh in requesting permission for only three days to go into the wilderness to worship their God (Exod 5:3)?

7. What is the meaning of or reason for the incident with Moses' son on the way to Egypt (Exod 4:24-26)? What is the meaning of "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses" (Exod 4:14)?

8. How would you respond today if someone appeared to you as Moses did showing the three miraculous "signs" as proof of his divine mission? If this is a good kind of proof or evidence, should God be using more of it today?

9. What was the purpose of the ten plagues? Why is God apparently using might and power to get the children of Israel out of Egypt? Who killed the firstborn in Egypt, and why? Did God harden Pharaoh's heart or did Pharaoh harden his own heart (Exod 9:34-10:1)? If so what does that mean?

10. Why could God only help the children of Israel win the battle against the Amalekites when Moses' arms were up (Exod 17:11)? Was this some kind of magic?

11. Why did God give the children of Israel meat to eat, if He knew it was not good for them (Exod 16:1-15; compare Num 11:4-34)?

12. At Mt. Sinai, was it the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit that was manifested on top of the mountain? Why did God consider it necessary to come down on Mt. Sinai as He did? What was He trying to teach them (us) about

Himself? What do you think God actually accomplished by this display of power? Why did He behave so differently 1500 years later on the Mt. of Olives?

13. How do you explain what was happening after 40 days while Moses was still on the Mount? Why do you think the Israelites were so terrified after the Sinai experience? Why wasn't Moses afraid (see 20:19, 20)? Or was he (Heb 12:18-21)?

14. Why is God so arbitrary as to say, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:3)? Is He not unduly, extremely jealous? Should He not allow for some more freedom?

15. Is it fair that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations (Exod 20:5; Num 14:18)? How do you think this actually happens?

16. Do you think the ten commandments are descriptive laws or prescriptive laws?

17. What is the meaning of "he shall serve him forever" (Exod 21:6)?

18. What were the people asking for in Exod 20:18, 19?

19. After reading through the entire experience of the Israelites while they were camped at the base of Mt. Sinai, do you think God wants us to fear Him, to be His obedient servants, or to be His understanding friends (Exod 33:11; John 15:15)? Is it clear to you that God's dealings at Mt. Sinai were His emergency methods, not His ideal (Heb 1:1-3)?

20. How could the Israelites be kind to strangers and foreigners if they were to utterly destroy anyone who offered any sacrifice to any "god" except the Lord (Exod 22:20, 21)?

21. What is wrong with boiling a kid in its mother's milk (Exod 23:19, Exod 34:26, Deut 14:21)?

22. Why are only the men asked to attend the annual festivals to worship God (Exod 23:17)?

23. What is the meaning and purpose of "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; cf. Deut 19:21; see Matt 5:38-42)? Do you think this was ever God's ideal?

24. Why was it necessary for Moses and the others who were called up into the mount to wait for extended periods of time before they were ready to approach God? What changes actually took place during this time? What do you think happened to Moses that caused his face to shine (Exod 34:29-35)?

25. What was God's original plan for the conquest of the land of Canaan (Exod 23:27, 28)?

26. Why couldn't Moses see God's face (Exod 33:20)? Was God saying, "If I catch you peeking at Me, I'll kill you?" Or was there some other reason why Moses couldn't look at Him?

27. Why did God who said, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Exod 20:4), immediately make the ark with its two golden angels (Exod 25:10-22)?

LEVITICUS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What would be your understanding of God and religion if you had only the book of Leviticus? Is **anything** about God clearly revealed in this book or in the ceremonial law? What is the structure of this book? What is the significance of the structure for our interpretation of this book?

2. Abraham married his sister, Isaac married the daughter of his first cousin, Jacob married two of his cousins who were also sisters, and Amram (Moses' father) married his aunt (Num 26:59). Yet Lev 18:6, 8, 9, 11, 18; 20:11, 17 forbids such marriages. How can God bless those who break His rules?

3. What do you think of all the ceremonies and sacrifices? What was actually accomplished by all that blood (Heb 9:22; 10:1-4)? What did the ceremonial system do for the Jews? In Christ's day how were they observing these ceremonies (cf. John 2:13-22)? What meaning were they getting out of them? Is there any explanation in Leviticus as to the meaning of each of the symbols and sacrifices? In the time of Christ, why were they offering sacrifices and how were they understood? If they understood the meaning of the ceremonial system, why didn't they recognize Christ? What does or should it mean to us? Or should we interpret Col 2:14 to mean that it was nailed to the

cross and we shouldn't waste time studying it anymore? Is there anything in the Bible that is without meaning for us at the present time? When we say that "All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable" (2 Tim 3:16), do we really mean **all**, even Leviticus?

4. Why does God give us so much detail about the tabernacle, the offerings, even the clothing of the priests and not give us any explanation about what it all means? How did God intend for those people to get the meaning of it all? [For proof that a mere mechanical offering of sacrifices is not what God wants look at Ps 51:10-19; Isa 1:11-18, Jer 7:21-26; 3:14-16; 31:31-34, Amos 5:21-24, Mic 6:1-8, Hos 6:4-6, and Heb 10:1-4.] Because all these sacrifices are useless without the meaning, is there any evidence that God made provision for the people to be instructed?

5. Heb 9:22 says that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." Does this suggest that **the blood** solves the problem of sin? If yes, which blood and how?

6. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that butchers are brutalized by their constant killing. Don't you think that God knew that this would happen to the Israelites too? How did God expect them to maintain their reverence for life? Does this partially explain their apparent casual attitude even toward human life?

7. Today we have a ceremony that points back to what all these ceremonies pointed forward to (Luke 22:7-18), but we only drink grape juice and eat small unleavened crackers. Why didn't God come quietly down on Mt. Sinai, give the

Sermon on the Mount, and introduce something like our communion service back then?

8. Were these laws, which we often call "the law of Moses" (Dan 9:11; Mal 4:4; Matt 19:7, 22:24; Mark 7:10; John 1:17), actually thought up by Moses, or were they given by God (look at Lev 26:46; 27:34)? Doesn't 1 Cor 10:4 suggest that Christ was actually the One who gave these regulations? Why then did He say what He said about these ceremonies when He was here in person (cf. Matt 5-7)?

9. Today Christians look forward to, even long for, the coming of "the kingdom of God" where God will be the true ruler. How would you feel living under the rules given by God himself in Exodus and Leviticus where murderers (Lev 24:17), adulterers (Lev 18 & 20), people who use bad language (Lev 24:16), and sabbath-breakers (Num 15:32-36) are killed on the spot? Is this the way God wants to rule His people?

10. Is there any value for us in looking back to see how God chose to reveal Himself to a group of recent ex-slaves at the foot of Mt. Sinai? Is it important for us to understand the difference between the sin offering, the guilt offering, the cleansing offering? Do we need to know about the blood, the fat, the kidneys, and the thigh, etc.? If yes, why? If no, why?

11. What is the meaning and purpose of "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Lev 24:20; cf. Deut 19:21; see Matt 5:38-42)? Do you think this was ever God's ideal?

12. Why did God feel it was necessary to send fire down from heaven to burn up Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-11)? What was so bad about what they did? Is this what God would really like to do when we are irreverent?

13. Why did God give them such a list of clean and unclean animals (Lev 11), if He knew that meat of any kind wasn't good for them? Why didn't He simply say that the best food is the fruits, nuts, and grains that He gave Adam and Eve (Gen 1:29), but if they needed more than this they could eat the vegetables that were given later (Gen 3:18)? What is the purpose of all the rules about "uncleanness" (Lev 5:2, 3; 7:19-21; 10:10; 11; 13:1-15:33)? Why does having a baby girl make you more unclean (or at least for a longer time) than having a baby boy? What was God trying to tell them through the elaborate ceremonies for cleansing?

14. Be sure to read Leviticus 19! Although there are many "New Testament" rules in this chapter, why does God keep telling them, "do it because I say so?" Is this the best reason that God could find?

15. What is implied by the expression, "an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9, 12, etc.)? Why are leaven and yeast never to be offered on the altar (Lev 2:12)? Why did the Lord tell the children of Israel not to eat any fat or any blood (Lev 3:17)? Is that a good health rule even today?

16. How can a person be held guilty for doing something that he didn't realize was wrong (Lev 4:14, 23, 28; 5:1, 3, 4, 17)? Is this fair? Why was God so particular about all these Levitical rules?

NUMBERS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. How would you perceive God if you had only the book of Numbers?

Where and when did Moses write it down (see Num 36:13)?

2. Why did God instruct them to number the men of war if He didn't want them to fight (Num 1 and 26)? Why weren't the mixed multitude counted? Or did they become integrated into the different tribes? Why do you think the Levites were counted from age 1 month, while other tribes were counted beginning at age twenty?

3. If the Tent of Meeting was intended as a place of worship, why did He instruct them to put to death anyone who came near it (Num 1:51; 3:10, 38; 17:12, 13; 18:7; cf. Deut 25:5; Hos 5:7; Exod 29:33)? How were the people to present their offerings if they couldn't come near the Tent (Lev 1:1-5)? If only Aaron and the Levites were to go in it, what happened in Exod 33:7-11?

4. Why did God forbid even the Kohathites, whose responsibility it was to carry all the sacred furniture, to even look on it or touch it lest they die (Num 4:15, 20; 18:1-3, 7)? What had to be done to take care of the tabernacle that could possibly have occupied 8, 580 men (Num 4:34-48)?

5. What is the meaning and the purpose of the "test for jealousy" or the "test for unfaithfulness" (Num 5:11-31)? Do you think that perhaps the way this test was actually carried out would have caused a person either through fear or guilt to reveal the truth? Knowing the characteristics of males and females, it is more likely that the husband would be unfaithful. Was there a test for the husband if the wife became jealous? Why were the women so often treated as "property?" By contrast what about the "rights" accorded to the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1-11) and God's directions regarding the inheritance laws?

6. What was the purpose of the Nazirite vows as outlined in Num 6:1-21? What is sinful about being in the presence of a dead body? How could that possibly contaminate someone (Lev 11:31, 32; Num 5:2; 6:11; 19:11-18)?

7. We are told that a disaster would have struck if the Levites had not been dedicated to the Lord. What could possibly be the source of such a disaster (Num 8:19; cf. 16:41-50)? Do you get the impression that God is watching every move that the people made and if anyone did anything wrong God would strike him?

8. We have a record of three times when the children of Israel complained about the food. On the first occasion God gave them quails to eat for a day or two and then began to feed them with manna (Exod 16:1-36). On the next occasion, they were complaining about the manna itself and God sent them enough quail to last a month (Num 11:4-34), but many of them died in a plague. On the third occasion God didn't give them any food but sent them fiery serpents

instead, followed by a bronze serpent so they could be preserved from death (Num 21:4-9). Was God losing His patience? Did God miraculously provide food for all the animals as well?

9. What do you think of God's way of reacting to the request for meat in Num 11 (see vs. 18-20)? Doesn't this sound like a pouting child? Why would God allow Himself to be pictured like this?

10. What do you think of Moses' complaint to the Lord in Num 11? What does this imply about the relationship between them?

11. Why can't God speak to all His people as He did to Moses, clearly face-to-face, instead of in riddles (Num 12:6-8)?

12. Why did the Israelites later become so exclusive and so "us-versus-them" in their thinking, when God clearly says that the native-born and the stranger are to be treated the same (Exod 12:49; 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Num 15:14-16)?

13. Why was God so harsh on the man gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num 15:32-36)? Was the man given a chance to repent? Why did God ask the people to stone the man? If he needed to be destroyed, why didn't God Himself do it (as He did to Nadab and Abihu)? What affect do you think this had on the people?

14. What would we do if we were told to follow the advice regarding deliberate sins as found in Num 15:30-31? What percentage of our sins are deliberate? If sin is "rebelliousness" (1 John 3:4) isn't that always deliberate?

15. Would you dare to speak out against the Lord after seeing His glory appear, then watching Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families being swallowed up by the earth and fire burning up 250 men before your eyes (Num 16:16-35)? What kind of mental state do you think the people were in that allowed them to act so rebelliously at that point? How would you feel if you had been promised the opportunity to be one of the "conquering nation" that was to inherit and enjoy a land "flowing with milk and honey" and then were suddenly told that you would spend the rest of your life in a hot, dry desert and would never see the "Promised land?"

16. What do you think of the method God used to identify the tribe of Levi as His priests (Num 17)? Why don't we use "budding rods" today? Wouldn't that be a more sure way of electing church officers?

17. Why were only the males allowed to eat the most holy offerings (Num 18:8-10)?

18. What was so serious about Moses' sin when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it (Num 20:2-13; Deut 3:23-28)? Moses had reacted so well many times before (Exod 32:10-14; Num 14:13-25), why did this one incident of apparent passion disqualify him from entering the Promised Land? Why was Aaron also punished?

19. What is the meaning of the whole story of Balaam (Num 22-25 and 31)? Is this a story we should quote as evidence that we should "persevere in prayer?" Why did God "change His mind" and let Balaam go to curse Israel after He had

told him not to earlier? What was Balaam's motive for wanting to go? Can you imagine asking permission from God to go and curse His people? What was the final end of Balaam (Num 31:8)?

20. When destroying the Midianites, why would God tell them to utterly destroy men, women, even baby boys, but leave alive the unmarried women and girls (Num 31:7, 17, 18)? Wasn't it these same "unmarried women" that had gotten them into such trouble already (Num 25:1-9; 31:16)? What do you think the 12,000 soldiers would do with their 16,000 "virgins" and what would be done with the 32 who were a "tax for the Lord" (vss. 36-46)? Compare the experience with Sihon and the Amorites and Og and his people (Num 21:21-35) when they killed everyone (Num 21:34-35). Why were the Midianites treated differently?

DEUTERONOMY

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. How is your understanding of God different, because we have the book of Deuteronomy? Where and when was the book written down and given by Moses (see Deut 1:1)? What is the form and structure of this book?

2. Deuteronomy seems to have a kind of "kinder, gentler" approach to almost everything. Why would the previous books be written in harsher language? Why the change? Did God change, did Moses change, or had the people changed?

3. Why does Moses give a completely different reason for keeping the Sabbath in Deut 5:12-15 than what he had said in Exod 20:8-11? Which form of the commandment do you think was given by God and written on the tables of stone (Deut 5:22)? Does this suggest that God is not too particular about the reasons why we are to worship Him?

4. Why did Moses wait until Deuteronomy for giving the "great commandment" (Deut 6:4-6)? Shouldn't he have started with this commandment?

5. What is the purpose of the whole theme of "obey Me and I will bless you, disobey Me and I will curse/destroy you" in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 8:18-20; 27:11-28:68)?

6. What are the real reasons why God destroyed the inhabitants of Canaan and gave their land to the Israelites (Deut 9:1-6; cf. 9:27-29; cf. Exod 23:27-31; 34:10-17; Lev 18; Num 14:13-19; 33:50-56; Deut 12:29-31; 13:12-16)? Doesn't God seem very paranoid about any of the Israelites worshipping any other gods (Deut 17:2-5; cf. vss. 6, 7)?

7. In light of God's statements that He wanted Moses to step aside and allow Him to destroy the Israelites, why does Moses say, "It was not His will to destroy you" (Deut 10:10; NIV)? What was really going on between God and Moses? Had Moses succeeded in convincing God to change His mind?

8. Why did God take so long to say exactly what it was that He wanted of the people--reverence, love, obedience, faithfulness (trust), and worshipful praise (Deut 10:12-22)? Is there anything in these verses that we do not like today?

9. What was God really asking them to do when He said, "Remember these commands and cherish them. Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder" (Deut 11:18)? If He really commanded them to do this, why did He speak against it in Matt 23:5?

10. How could Moses make the statement, "When that time comes, you must not do as you have been doing. Until now you have all been worshipping as you please" (Deut 12:8)?

11. Why does God forbid the eating of blood (Deut 12:16, 23, 24)? Why is it that if you live in the original part of the promised land, you are not to kill and eat any of the sacrifices at home, but if the land is expanded and you live in an

outlying area, it is permissible to kill and eat the sacrifices at home (Deut 12:14; cf. 12:20-21)?

12. What do you think about the advice in Deut 13:1-3? God Himself seemed to use miracles to convince even Pharaoh to believe in Him, but now He says, "A prophet or an interpreter of dreams may promise a miracle or a wonder, in order to lead you to worship and serve gods that you have not worshiped before. Even if what he promises comes true, do not pay any attention to him" (GNB). What criteria is God suggesting that we should use to judge miracle workers?

13. Why would God forbid them to shave the forehead (the front of the head) as a sign of mourning (Deut 14:1)?

14. Why does God say to them, you are free to "spend (the tithe) on whatever you want--beef, lamb, wine, beer . . . eat and enjoy yourself" (Deut 14:22-27; GNB)? Should we return to this custom today? (Please note that these are the strongest forms of alcoholic beverage mentioned in the Bible.)

15. How long is the "forever" in Deut 15:17 (cf. Exod 21:6)? Does this shed any light on other uses of the word forever in the Bible (cf. Rev 14:9-11)?

16. What do you think of the uncannily precise predictions of what would happen to the children of Israel if they turned away from God to serve other gods (e.g. Deut 7:3-6; 11:16-17; 28:15-68)? Did not virtually all these predictions come to pass almost exactly as He had predicted?

17. What was the purpose of all the detailed instructions about going to war, if they were not supposed to fight (Deut 20)? Why do you suppose they were to treat the peoples of Canaan differently than the peoples of other areas that they might conquer in later years? Did they give the people of Jericho or Ai a chance to surrender as they were instructed (Deut 20:10-12)?

18. Why would God ask them to exclude from the assembly for 10 generations any child born illegitimately (Deut 23:2)? Why were sexually deformed males also excluded (Deut 23:1)? Why were women excluded? Do we have any information about how some of these illegitimate children may have been conceived (Deut 23:17, 18)?

19. How could they spare the family of Rahab after all that God had said about Canaanites, prostitutes, etc.? After the specific instructions regarding Moabites and Ammonites given in Deut 23:3-6, how could they elect David as their most famous king when his great-grandmother was a Moabitess and his great-great-grandmother was a Canaanite prostitute (Matt 1:5, 6)? Why didn't they at least keep quiet about it? Does it sometimes seem like God is saying, "Do as I say, and not as I do?" Why would Jesus then choose this exact family as the ancestors of King David and later of Himself? Is He taking delight in breaking His own rules?

20. Why did Moses give them the divorce laws (Deut 24:1-4; cf. Matt 5:31, 32; 19:3-10; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18, but note Mal 2:16)?

21. What was the purpose of the Levirate marriage law (Deut 25:5-10)? If it were in force today, do you think you would comply?

22. Does Deut 29:17-21 and 29:24, 27, 28 make you think of a kind and loving God who is forgiveness personified?

23. What do you think of Moses' final words to the people in Deut 31:1-33:29? Does it sound like a parent speaking to his children?

24. Who wrote Deut 34--the account of Moses' death? If it was not written by Moses, does that mean it is not inspired?

JOSHUA

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What understanding of God would you have if you had only the book of Joshua? Who do you think wrote this book which includes events even after Joshua's death (see Josh 24:29-33)?

2. Why do you think Moses changed Joshua's name from Hoshea (Num 13:8, 16)? Do you know anyone else in the Bible named Joshua (Heb 4:8; KJV)?

3. With a promise such as the Lord gave him (Josh 1:5), why didn't he continue the conquest of the land until there were no Canaanites left?

4. If you had been Joshua would you have been encouraged by the people's promise, "We will obey you, just as we always obeyed Moses" (Josh 1:16, 17)? Was Joshua being honest when he said, "be faithful to the Lord, as you have been till now" (Josh 23:8)?

5. Does the people's statement in Josh 1:18--"Whoever questions your authority or disobeys any of your orders will be put to death"--give us any idea of their attitude toward the value of human life?

6. Why do you think the spies went into Rahab's house (Josh 2:1)? Did God save Rahab and all her family because she did such a good job of lying (Josh

2:1-16; 6:22, 23)? What does lying have to do with faith (Heb 11:30, 31)? Why was this woman chosen as an ancestor of King David and of Christ (Matt 1:5)?

7. On what basis do you think Rahab decided that these Israelites were the people of God? Do you think Rahab and her family were the only ones in Jericho that believed in the God of Israel and therefore the only ones who could be saved? Do we have any evidence that any of the other members of her family were believers in God? Or were they saved because they came inside her house (Josh 6:22-25; cf. Noah and the ark)? How could the spies be so confident that they would be able to preserve her and her family (Josh 2:14)?

8. Why did the angel that appeared to Joshua present a very military appearance and seem to suggest an approach of war or battle if he really wanted them not to fight (Josh 5:13-15)?

9. Why do you think the angel asked Joshua to take off his sandals? Are bare feet more respectful in some way (Josh 5:15)?

10. What was the purpose of the elaborate seven-day process to conquer Jericho? Why do you think God demanded that everything of value in Jericho be kept for the temple, when He didn't make the same demand regarding other cities they conquered (Josh 6:1-25)?

11. Why would God order the stoning of Achan, his wife, his children, and all his animals (Josh 7:15)? Why would God ask the Israelites themselves to do it (Josh 7)? Was that the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Could this have been "gentle Jesus, meek and mild?"

12. What do you think of Joshua's speech after the Ai incident (Josh 7:7-9)? Was he just as bad as the people? Why do you think Joshua failed to inquire of the Lord before he sent the troops up to Ai?

13. Why did God apparently use the casting of lots in the case of Achan and other Bible stories (e.g. choosing Judas' replacement)? Why don't we choose church leaders this way nowadays? Would we not feel more confident that we had gotten the right man? Why not use it to identify sinners (Josh 7:13-26; 14:2; Judg 20:9; 1 Sam 10:20; 1 Chr 6:54, 61; Jonah 1:7; Matt 27:35; Act 1:26)?

14. What do think of the fact that Joshua made the treaty with the Gibeonites based on lies? Should he have been bound by it (Josh 9)? Again the Canaanites were blessed for lying! Why didn't Joshua inquire of the Lord first? What would have happened if the Gibeonites had come and told the truth and said they wanted to worship the true God?

15. What do you think of the victory at the battle of Gibeah (Josh 10:1-15)? Was God helping them fight? Who sent the hailstones (vs. 11) and held back the sun (vs. 15)? Is this an example of the "hornets" mentioned in Exod 23:28 and Deut 7:20 (1 Sam 5:9; 14:15)? What do you think Joshua was referring to when he said, "I sent the hornets before you" (Josh 24:12)? Why did he say, "your swords and bows had nothing to do with it" [the conquest of the land]?

16. Was the fact that Joshua hamstringed the horses and destroyed the chariots evidence that he at least was trying to follow God's directions in avoiding fighting (Josh 11:9)?

17. Why did they sometimes totally destroy everybody as in Josh 10:28-41; 11:8, 11-14, 18?

18. In what way did the Lord harden the hearts of the people who were fighting against Israel (Deut 2:3; Josh 11:20)?

19. Why didn't Joshua go down and conquer the land of Philistia (Josh 13:2, 3)? Think how much trouble it would have saved later!

20. What kind of relationship do you think existed between the Israelites and all the cities of Canaan that were not conquered but continued to exist among them (Josh 13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:13, 18; cf. 23:13)? How do you explain the statements that Jerusalem was conquered several times, but it was still ruled by the Jebusites (Josh 10:1-5, 23; 12:10; 15:63; 18:28; Judg 1:27-34)?

21. Was it true that "the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he had solemnly promised their ancestors" and that "not one of all their enemies had been able to stand against them, because the Lord gave the Israelites the victory over all their enemies" (Josh 21:43, 44, 45; 23:9)? Did they then have peace (Josh 21:44; 22:4)? Did Israel actually have "security from their enemies around them" (Josh 23:1)?

22. Why were some of the Israelite tribes so reluctant to move in and conquer their enemies if "any one of you can make a thousand men run away" (Josh 23:10; cf. Deut 32:30)? How can you reconcile this with the statement that they were not able to conquer the people of the plain because of their iron

chariots (Judg 1:18, 19; cf. Josh 17:18)? Couldn't they be driven out by "the forces of nature" (Exod 23:20-33)?

23. What do you think is implied by the warning against intermarrying with the Canaanites (Josh 23:12, 13)? Joshua obviously warned them very strongly against worshipping other gods (Josh 23:15, 16). Does this seem to have had a very long-lasting effect? Do you think that some of the Israelites were still worshipping the gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt as Joshua seemed to imply (Josh 24:14, 23)?

24. After the people had promised to serve the Lord, why do you think Joshua said they could not (Josh 24:18, 19)?

25. What does Josh 24:31 imply about the leadership of Joshua? Were they really serving the Lord all those years? How does this fit with vss. 14, 23?

JUDGES

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What would be your understanding of God if you had only the book of Judges? Who do you think wrote this book which includes events scattered over 300 years?
2. Why would God's people carry on a practice of cutting off the big toes and thumbs of conquered kings (Judg 1:6, 7)? We expect the heathen to be cruel, but shouldn't God's people "love their enemies?"
3. Was it right for the man of Bethel to betray his whole city to save himself (Judg 1:22-26)? Should God's people reward him for this (cf. Rahab, Josh 2)?
4. What do you think of God's going back on His word (Judg 2:1-5)? Or did He (Exod 23:32, 33)?
5. Are the first two chapters of Judges plagiarized from the end of Joshua?
6. What happened to the next generation after Joshua that they "knew neither the Lord, nor what He had done for them" (Judg 2:10)?
7. What does the Lord's anger have to do with the actions of the other peoples conquering Israel (Judg 2:14; 2:20-23; 3:8; 10:7 etc.)? What does it mean when it says that the Lord left these enemy nations in the land to test the

Israelites who did not know war (Judg 3:2)? Does "the Lord's anger" have anything to do with the progress of God's people today?

8. Why do you think the Angel addressed Gideon as a "brave and mighty warrior" when he was secretly hiding in a wine press trying to thresh some wheat? Why do you think Gideon's father had altars to Baal and Asherah (Judg 6:25)? Is the story of Gideon and his fleece a story of great faith or very weak faith (Judg 6:36-40)? Should we be asking for such signs today? Shouldn't Gideon have put away his many wives, a concubine, and his idols before God blessed him (Judg 8:27-31)? Why did God allow him to kill the people of Penuel (Judg 8:8-17)?

9. Of what value is the story of Abimelech (Judg 9:1-57)? Why was it included?

10. How would you have responded if you had been Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:31, 34-40)? Don't you think Jephthah's promise was rash? Did God expect him to abide by it after he had made it?

11. What do we learn from the massive wars between the different tribes of Israel (Judg 20:1-3, 18, 21, 25)?

12. What is implied by the angel's response when Manoah asked for his name (Judg 13:17, 18)? Do you think that Samson was actually led by the Lord to choose a Philistine bride (Judg 14:3, 4)? Did God actually bless Samson to kill a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass? What do you think was Samson's actual source of power (Judg 15:15)? What do you expect to happen when the Holy Spirit is poured out in our day?

13. Did God actually lead the people in those days to do things that He would later tell them He didn't want them to do?

14. Why did God use precious space in the Scripture to include the incredible story of the Levite and his concubine (Judg 19-21)? Are you glad that this story is included in the Bible? Does it increase your faith? Do you find any verses that say that God was happy about what was done?

15. Would it still be correct to think of this period as a "theocracy" where God is the real ruler? If so what is implied by Judg 17:6 and 21:25? Who were supposed to be the religious leaders to keep them loyal to the true God? Does the story of Micah help us to understand what was going on (Judg 17, 18)?

16. The Bible is supposed to give answers to Satan's charges against God in the great controversy. Do the books of Joshua and Judges help very much? Is it clear from these two books what exactly God is trying to accomplish? Why didn't God move in on a few occasions and clean up the mess (compare Hab 1:2 and Mic 4:8)? Why is it important for our understanding of what God is trying to accomplish within history to have these two books right after the Pentateuch?

17. Of all the people in the Bible (e.g. David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea) who could have been included in the list of heroes of faith in Heb 11, why do you think so many people from the period of the judges are included (Heb 11:31)?

18. Would you agree with Heb 4:8? Did the people enter the kind of relationship of rest and peace that God wanted?

RUTH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. How is your understanding of God different, because we have the book of Ruth?

2. This is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman--and she was a Moabitess. Why do you think it was included? When did the events of this book occur (Ruth 1:1-2)?

3. Why did some of "God's true people" have to flee to the heathen to find food to eat (Ruth 1:2)? Why do you suppose the famine came?

4. Why did Ruth become so devoted to Naomi her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:6-18)?

5. When Naomi said, "Almighty God has made my life bitter," was she expressing a lack of faith in God's goodness and providence (Ruth 1:20; GNB)? She obviously loved God and led Ruth to do the same! How can you explain this?

6. What do Boaz's statements to Ruth imply about conditions in those days (Ruth 2:8, 9; cf. 2:22)?

7. Why do you think Boaz took such an interest in Ruth (Ruth 2:4-7, 10-16)?

8. Would you want your daughter to do what Ruth did in Ruth 3? Should we recommend this for our academies and colleges? If someone from a girl's dormitory did this today, would the dean call her "a virtuous woman" (Ruth 3:11; Douay-Confraternity), or "a woman of noble character" (NIV)?

9. Why is there such a detailed telling of the negotiations for buying Elimelech's property (Ruth 4:12)?

10. Do you think the Levirate marriage rule should be followed today? Why, or why not? Was it still followed in the times of Christ (Deut 25:5-10; Matt 22:25; cf. Lev 18:16; 20:21)?

1 SAMUEL

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Who do you think wrote this book? Why we are not given the name of the author? Does that lessen its authority?
2. What was meant when it says that the Lord closed Hannah's womb (1 Sam 1:5)? Did Hannah make a wise choice in giving her son to be raised by Eli? After seeing Eli's sons, would you (1 Sam 2:12-17)? If you had been Eli would you have accepted this "gift"? If you had been Elkanah would you have accepted Hannah's decision?
3. What do you think of the way Eli's sons were treating the worshipers and even their respect for the sacrifices that were being offered? Was it really the Lord's will that they be put to death (1 Sam 2:12-17, 22, 25)?
4. Who was the "man of God" who came to bear the message to Eli (1 Sam 2:27)? Who was the faithful priest predicted in the prophecy spoken to Eli (1 Sam 2:35)? Are there other unnamed "prophets" in the Scripture?
5. Why do you think the soldiers, including Hophni and Phineas, decided to bring the ark into battle (1 Sam 4:3)? Are they the only ones who did it (1 Sam 14:3, 18)?

6. What do we learn from the whole story of the "ark versus Dagon"? Try to imagine yourself as a Philistine there observing all this. Could you kneel down and worship a glued-together "god" (1 Sam 5:1-5)? What do you think of the Philistine's comments about Pharaoh's hardening of his heart (1 Sam 6:6)?

7. Why does God appear to give the impression that the ark was some sort of Magical Box with mysterious powers? Why were so many Israelites killed for looking into the ark (1 Sam 6:19)?

8. Notice that the Lord threw the Philistines into a "panic" and caused a "great destruction" (1 Sam 5:9; cf. 14:15). How does this relate to the "hornets" in Exod 23:27, 28?

9. What were the people asking for and what choices did they have when they asked for a king? Where did Samuel get his information about what a king would do to them? Considering the story of the Levite and his concubine (Judg 19-21) and what happened subsequently, would you as an Israelite have been happy to appoint a Benjaminite as the first king (1 Sam 8)? Why was the idea of kingship bad (1 Sam 8:5; cf. Ps 72)?

10. Why did not every adult male in Israel, including Saul, know Samuel when he saw him (1 Sam 9:17-19)? Hadn't he been attending the ceremonies (Deut 16)?

11. If God was able to change Saul into a different person, why didn't He make the change a little more permanent (1 Sam 10:9)? Why would God choose someone like Saul if He knew what he would do?

12. What was the reason or purpose for giving all the apparently miraculous signs at the time of Saul's anointing (1 Sam 10:2-16)? Why did God communicate so often by the use of "signs" in those days (Saul--1 Sam 10:1-13; Jonathan and his armor-bearer--1 Sam 14:6-15)? If we had more faith, would God give us more signs today? Why would God use such unusual methods to defeat the purposes of Saul as those found in 1 Sam 19:18-24? Would you respect a king who acted in this way?

13. Notice the big difference between Samuel's attitude towards bribes etc. and that of his sons (1 Sam 12:1-5; 1 Sam 8:1-3). What do you think of Samuel's entire speech (1 Sam 12)? Why didn't Samuel arrive at Gilgal on time (1 Sam 13:8)? Was the Lord involved in this?

14. What do you think of Saul's rash demand that they eat no food (1 Sam 14:28)? What was the ultimate result when they actually got some food (1 Sam 14:31-33)?

15. If the Lord refused to answer Saul's prayer earlier, why did He apparently guide the casting of lots to choose the one who had eaten (1 Sam 14:37-43)? Notice the response of the people in saving Jonathan (1 Sam 14:45; cf. Jephthah's daughter; Herod and Salome when she requested the head of John the Baptist)?

16. Compare Samuel's predictions about what a king would do (1 Sam 8:11-18) with what Saul actually did (1 Sam 14:52). Why do you think Saul failed to carry out the specific orders of God? Was it just greed?

17. What do you think of Samuel's and Saul's conversation at Gilgal and the rejection of Saul (1 Sam 15:10-35)? How do you evaluate Saul's political capabilities and Samuel's perception of the real meaning of offerings (vss. 15, 22, 23)? With His foreknowledge, why did God choose Saul in the first place?

18. How do you understand Samuel's comments about God in the light of all that had been happening? Is it true that God does not change His mind (1 Sam 15:29)? If so, how do you explain 1 Sam 15:11; 15:35--"The Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king" and "the Lord changed his mind about punishing the people" (2 Sam 24:16, 25; compare the flood, Joshua and Judges)?

19. What should we conclude from the question that the people of Bethlehem asked Samuel when he came to anoint David (1 Sam 16:4)? What do you think they were expecting?

20. If the Lord doesn't look at the outward appearance, but only at the heart, why did He choose Saul (1 Sam 16:7)? Why did Samuel anoint David fairly openly, when he had anointed Saul secretly (1 Sam 9:24-10:1)?

21. What is the meaning of the expression: "an evil spirit from the Lord tormented Saul" (1 Sam 16:14, 16; 19:9)? Does God have a battalion of evil spirits to do His "dirty work" for Him?

22. What was the army of Israel doing for 40 days listening to Goliath's speech every day (1 Sam 17:16)? What do you think of David's speech to Goliath (1 Sam 17:45)? Who do you think inspired the ladies to sing that song which led

to such jealousy on the part of Saul (1 Sam 18:7; 21:11)? It was obviously an exaggeration--David was just a young boy!

23. What do you think of the price that Saul asked for the hand of his daughter (1 Sam 18:25-27)? How should young men prove their capabilities to be able to care for their brides nowadays?

24. Why were there idols in David's home (1 Sam 19:9-17)? What about Michal's lying (vs. 17)? What about David's lying to the priests (1 Sam 21:1-2)? What about David's lying to the king of Ziklag on multiple occasions (1 Sam 27:8-12)? Why was lying apparently done so frequently and so casually?

25. Was it right for David to eat the "consecrated bread" (1 Sam 21:1-6; cf. Matt 12:1-7)?

26. Did David trust God enough to take care of him? Why did he have to feign madness (1 Sam 21:10-15)?

27. Why did the Lord refuse to answer Saul and thus drive him to seek the "witch of Endor" to call up "Samuel" for him, and then punished him for this (1 Sam 28:6-16; cf. 1 Chr 10:13, 14)?

2 SAMUEL

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What picture of God would you have if you had only the book of 2 Samuel? How would your understanding of Israel's history be changed if this were the only book available? Who do you think wrote this book which includes events scattered over many years, long after the death of Samuel?

2. In some of these stories, God seems to dialogue with David, in others He dialogues with David through a prophet--Nathan or Gad--and eventually someone writes the account down (2 Sam 7:1-17; 12:1-15; 2 Sam 24:11-13). How was inspiration operating in all this? Was David inspired, or was his prophet inspired, or was the one writing it down inspired, or all of them?

3. What was revealed about God to the universe and to us by His dealings with David? If God has foreknowledge, how could He at any point choose David as "a man after His own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; cf. Acts 13:22)? What is it about David that made him a "man after God's own heart"? Later we are told "David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kgs 15:5; RSV). Would you agree with these statements? Does God have a very short-term memory?

4. In the context of all that David was doing for God and the ark transfer at this point, why did God strike Uzzah dead just for stepping forward to stabilize the ark (2 Sam 6:6; cf. 1 Chr 13:9-14; 26:4, 5)? Doesn't it seem that God acts with incredible severity over sins that we consider insignificant, while other sins that we consider to be really bad, seem to be ignored? What effect did Uzzah's death have on the onlookers, and on David (2 Sam 6:8)? If God consumed every sinner, there would be no one left--so why does God seem to make such an issue of "irreverence"? Compare she-bears in 2 Kgs 2:24; Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10:1-11, but contrast David and the shewbread and Adonijah taking hold of the altar (1 Sam 21:1-6; 1 Kgs 1:50, 51).

5. Is it possible that irreverence is more dangerous than other sins? Why? How is God to get our reverence and respect, while not scaring us to death?

6. After Uzzah's death, David apparently offered sacrifices every six paces to get the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:13)! Compare also Solomon's sacrifices at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8). Is it true that in order to impress God, one should try to offer an enormous number of sacrifices? Samuel had already said: "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22). Even David recognized in Ps 51:16, 17 that this was true. Essentially the same thing was said later by Amos, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea and Micah. So why did they do it?

7. Who changed Nathan's message to King David and why (2 Sam 7:1-17)? Does this mean that Nathan was actually not a very reliable prophet?

8. What connection do you see between Michal's despising of David's dancing in the streets and her not having children? Did God curse her? Why hadn't she had any before this? (She had already had two husbands!) (2 Sam 6:14, 16, 20-23)

9. Why would an anointed King of God's people measure off his enemies and kill two-thirds of them (2 Sam 8:2)? Remember, these were his great-grandmother's kinsmen!

10. What is implied by the expression "the time of the year when kings usually go to war" (2 Sam 11:1)?

11. There is plenty of evidence that David had many wives and many concubines (1 Sam 25:43, 44; 2 Sam 2:1, 2; 3:2; 5:13; 12:8; 15:16; 1 Chr 3:1-9; 14:3-7). What is a concubine? In light of all these wives why did God make such an issue about Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:1-15)?

12. Did the evils that befell David after his sin with Bathsheba occur as a natural result of what he had done, or was God specifically punishing David (2 Sam 11-18)? Was it David's sin that led to the death of that first child (2 Sam 12:14-23), the rape of Tamar and the death of Amnon (2 Sam 13), and the whole conflict with Absalom (2 Sam 14-18)? Why are these events largely ignored in 1 Chronicles?

13. How would you feel about your new king Absalom, if you saw him lying with his father's concubines on the roof (2 Sam 16:20-23)? How well did Ahithophel's advice represent his understanding of religion and politics? Do you

think God had anything to do with this advice? Was this an intentional ploy to lead to Absalom's eventual destruction? What could possibly be the lesson for us on use of the mixed and conflicting advice of Ahithophel and Hushai (2 Sam 17:1-14)? What could possibly be the purpose of recording the whole story of Absalom and his rebellion for us?

14. What is suggested by the statement that more men died in the forest than fell in battle by the sword (2 Sam 18:8)?

15. What do you think of David's understanding of God as presented in the victory song (2 Sam 22)? Can God be our gentle Savior and at the same time also have "smoke pour out of his nostrils and a consuming flame and burning coals from his mouth" (2 Sam 22:2-13)? Was David really "of clean hands" and "innocent" (2 Sam 22:21-25)? Does it not seem more like David when he says, "You make my enemies run from me; I destroy those who hate me. . . I crush them. . . I trample them like mud in the streets" (2 Sam 22:41-43)? What do you think David was actually thinking about when he talked about "my Rock," "my salvation," and "my Savior" (2 Sam 22:2-4)?

16. In the list of David's strong men it states that the greatest hero was one man who got 800 souls in one campaign--killed 800 men in one battle (2 Sam 23:8). How is this even possible? Compare Samson with the jawbone, and Shamgar with his oxgoad ((Judg 15:15, 16; 3:31).

17. What caused the Lord's anger to burn against Israel to incite them to take a census (2 Sam 24:1; cf. 1 Chr 21:1)? Why should all those people die

because of David's sin? Even David recognized that he was the one who had sinned (2 Sam 24:10, 17)!

18. What do you think led to the eventual division into "Israel" and "Judah"? Who was included in each?

19. Has the Bible been written the way God really wanted it to be written or was He limited by the understanding and language of humans?

"Every chapter and every verse of the Bible is a communication from God to men. We should bind its precepts as signs upon our hands and as frontlets between our eyes. If studied and obeyed, it would lead God's people, as the Israelites were led, by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night" Patriarchs and Prophets, 504 (1890).

1 KINGS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. How would you look at God if you had only the book of 1 Kings? Would He just be one among many other gods? Was there a great deal of "faith" exhibited during the times of 1 Kings?

2. What do you think of David's "hot water bottle" (1 Kgs 1:1-4)? What would happen if we followed this custom with church or even government leaders today? What is implied by the statement, "but the king knew her not" (vs. 4)? How does this statement relate to, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt 7:23)?

3. What is the reason God gave so much wealth and wisdom to Solomon (1 Kgs 3:1-15; 2 Chr 1:3-12)? Why do you think God offered to give Solomon essentially anything he asked for (1 Kgs 3:5)? Why did God make so many promises to Solomon (1 Kgs 3:10-15; cf. 9:1-9)?

4. What do you think Solomon had in mind when he sacrificed so many sheep and cattle that they could not even be counted (1 Kgs 8:5, 62-64)?

5. In Solomon's dedicatory prayer he describes very well what happened later when they turned away from God (1 Kgs 8:46-51). Where do you think he got these insights, and if he already understood them, how could he as the wisest

man who ever lived, later turn away from God? Why would Solomon be attracted to the "gods" of his other wives (1 Kgs 11:1-13)?

6. What actually led to Solomon's downfall? In what way did he differ from David, his father (1 Kgs 3:3; 11:6, 33, 34)? How could God say about David, "if you will serve me in honesty and integrity, as your father David did" (1 Kgs 15:5; 3:14; 9:4; cf. 3:6)?

7. Solomon suggests that the sins of the people may prevent the rains from coming (1 Kgs 8:35). What does this imply about God? What is suggested about Solomon's attitude toward foreigners by his prayer (1 Kgs 8:41-43)?

8. How would you measure wisdom to determine if someone was the wisest man (1 Kgs 4:29-34; notice that Solomon was a great scientist)? If Solomon was so wise, why was his son apparently so foolish (1 Kgs 12:1-20; 2 Chr 10:1-19)?

9. Was it wise for Solomon to say that he would pay whatever wages the people of Lebanon asked (1 Kgs 5:6)?

10. What does it mean when it says that God became angry with Solomon (1 Kgs 11:10)?

11. Why did God give ten of the tribes to Jeroboam if He had foreknowledge of how wicked he was going to be (1 Kgs 11:31)? How could God have talked to Jeroboam about walking in His ways, if He already knew what Jeroboam was going to do (1 Kgs 11:38)?

12. What is the purpose of the story of the older prophet and the "man of God" in 1 Kgs 13? In what sense did the younger prophet defy the word of the

Lord (1 Kgs 13:20-22)? Did the younger prophet do anything wrong? What should we learn from this story today?

13. What was the purpose for including the curse against the house of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14:10-16)? Notice the incredible list of sins committed during Jeroboam's time. Is it fair that Jeroboam's whole line should be punished because of his sins (Deut 24:16; Ezek 18:1-32, see especially vss. 19, 20)?

14. Who was Asherah (1 Kgs 15:13; 16:33; 18:19; 2 Kgs 13:6; 21:3, 7; 23:4, 7; cf. Judg 3:7; 1 Kgs 10:25; 2 Chr 19:3; 24:18; 33:3)? Why were there so many "high places" and "Asherah poles" (1 Kgs 11:7; 12:31, 32; 13:32, 33; 14:23; 22:43)? What was an "Asherah pole" and how was it used?

15. If you had been God, what would you have done with these kings of 1 Kgs 16? Did God have anything to do with what took place, or is the Bible just giving a "national history" of the children of Abraham? Did these events take place because God caused them to happen or because of human "might and power"? Was God powerless to change the course of events we have recorded here?

16. What would you think if your pastor (apparently not married) went off to live for some time with a widow in another land as Elijah did (1 Kgs 17:8-16)?

17. Why was Obadiah, a faithful servant of God, working for Ahab (1 Kgs 18:1-4)?

18. Why did God send the long period of drought on Israel (1 Kgs 17:1)? How do you think Elijah felt facing the 850 prophets of Jezebel on top of Mt.

Carmel? Why would God use this dramatic method of challenging their "gods" (1 Kgs 18:1-40)? How understanding of historical circumstances and facts about Baal worship helps us to understand this story?

19. How could Elijah claim to be the only one left who was serving the Lord, if he knew about Obadiah and his 100 prophets (1 Kgs 19:10)?

20. What is the Lord trying to teach us from the experience of Elijah on Mt. Sinai? Would you rather have Elijah's experience on Mt. Carmel or his experience at the "mouth of the cave" on Mt. Sinai (1 Kgs 19:11, 12)? Who caused the wind, earthquake and fire if the Lord was not in them? What is the importance of both of these experiences for us today?

21. Why would God send Elijah to anoint Hazael as king of Syria--Israel's worst enemy? What is implied by 1 Kgs 19:17, 18?

22. Why did Benhadad's officials claim that Israel's "gods" were mountain "gods" (1 Kgs 20:23)?

23. How did God bring about such an enormous slaughter of Syrians with just a relatively few Israelites (1 Kgs 20:29, 30)?

24. Why would the Bible include a story like the story of Micaiah and the "lying prophets" (1 Kgs 22:1-18; cf. 2 Chr 18:2-27)? What do you think of Micaiah's explanation of the source of their lying (1 Kgs 22:19-28)? Any lesson for us today?

2 KINGS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Why would God's true prophet call down fire from God on the messengers who were sent to call him to see the king (2 Kgs 1:9-17)? Why did the Lord strike these men dead? Is this what it means to come "in the spirit and power of Elijah"? What is implied by the statement, "But before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah" (Mal 4:5)? Some have suggested that the entire church of the last days is to serve as an "Elijah." In what way would this be true (Matt 17:1-13)?

2. Of all the prophets we have read about, why would God choose to translate Elijah (2 Kgs 2:1-12)? Having translated Elijah, why would God leave Elisha to die a slow death (2 Kgs 13:14-21)? To what extent is our earthly fate a barometer of our spirituality? Having translated Elijah, why would God send him back here to encourage His Son on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)?

3. Why would God go to all the effort of dividing the Jordan River just so Elijah and Elisha could cross (2 Kgs 2:8, 14)? Is the reason why similar things are not repeated today, a lack of "faith" on our part?

4. Why do you think the young men were so anxious to try to find Elijah (2 Kgs 2:15-18)?
5. Why would God's prophet be cursing a group of young people and why did God send the she-bears to "tear them" (2 Kgs 2:23-25)? Should a pastor be so sensitive and vulnerable about his hair as to behave like that? What was the spiritual environment at the time (2 Kgs 1:2-6)?
6. What is the purpose of the story of Elisha's death and the sudden resurrection of the corpse thrown into that cave where Elisha was buried (2 Kgs 13:20, 21)? Can you picture this whole story in your imagination? What did God want to accomplish through this?
7. Why do you think the heathen "gods" were so attractive to the people of Israel?
8. Who were closer to being "savable"--the people in the times of Elijah and Elisha with all their heathen practices, or the Sadducees and Pharisees in the time of Christ? Does this have anything to do with the "fullness of time," when Jesus was to come (Gal 4:4, 5)? Which of these groups is more like us? What are the implications of this for us?
9. Did not the people of Israel have a mind of their own? It seems that whenever the king did evil, the people would do the same, and when the king did what was right, they followed that. Explain.
10. We read that the King of Moab sacrificed his first-born son on the wall of the city to try to stop the battle from completely destroying his kingdom. What

relation was there between this barbaric practice and the end of the battle (2 Kgs 3:26, 27)? How many others offered their sons or daughters (2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17, 31)?

11. Why were there so many miracles in the days of Elijah and Elisha? If we had more faith, would we see more miracles today? What do you think of a God who would go to such lengths to reach people in such difficult times? Having used all these methods in the Old Testament, why was Jesus so reluctant to use them at key points in His earthly ministry?

12. Look at the description of the people in 2 Kgs 17:7-23. How could God's people possibly have fallen so far? What else could God do with such people? They (1) worshiped other gods, (2) followed the customs of the Canaanites, (3) built pagan places of worship in all their towns, on top of every hill and in every shady place, (4) put up Asherah poles, (5) burned incense on all the pagan altars, (6) disobeyed the Lord's command not to worship idols, (7) worshiped the stars, (8) served Baal, (9) sacrificed their sons and daughters as burnt offerings to pagan gods, (10) consulted mediums and fortunetellers, (11) devoted themselves completely to doing what is wrong in the Lord's sight. "They worshiped worthless idols and became worthless themselves" (vs. 15). What could God do to make an impression on such people?

13. Compare 2 Kgs 19 and Isa 37--who borrowed from whom? If prophets who borrow are not inspired, which of these books are we going to throw out? How do you think Kings and Chronicles were actually written?

14. Is 2 Kgs 19:35 an example of what God would have done to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan if Israel had allowed Him?

15. How do you explain what happened to the people who were imported into "Samaria" to take the place of the Israelites who were exported (2 Kgs 17:24-41)? These are the ancestors of the Samaritans. Notice how they tried to mix different religions, even offering their children as sacrifices (vs. 31).

16. What do you think of Isaiah changing his statement about King Hezekiah's death (2 Kgs 20:1-11)? Did Isaiah change his mind, or did God change His mind? If Isaiah did, does this make him a false prophet? If God did, how then can Mal 3:6 and Heb 13:8 be true?

17. Why did Hezekiah show all his wealth to the Babylonians (2 Kgs 20:13-15)? What do you think Hezekiah said to the emissaries as he was showing them around? Do you think he probably said, "Look at how **the Lord** has blessed me"? In 2 Chr 32:31 it suggests that God allowed the Babylonian emissaries to come as a test for Hezekiah. How many of our messages to the world sound like "look how God has blessed us"?

18. Look at the story of Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:1-18; 2 Chr 33:1-20). After living such a wicked life, including putting Isaiah into a hollow log and sawing him in half ("The Assumption of Isaiah"; cf. Heb 11:37; Patriarchs and Prophets, 281, 382), notice the apparently genuine repentance that he showed at the end of his life. Did this repentance reverse all the effects of those years of sinning (2 Chr 33:10-25)? What do you think Isaiah will think and say when he sees Manasseh in

the kingdom before he has a chance to learn the "rest of the story"? Will Isaiah be able to remember everything that took place and say, "I am so happy to see you, we were such good friends all our lives"? Or will Isaiah walk up to Manasseh and say, "I remember all that you did to me, but I just have one question, Has God changed you? If so I'll be glad to have you as my neighbor"? What does it take to be safe to live next door to Manasseh, being really changed, or only forgiven? What are the implications of this for the justification-sanctification debate?

19. Why do we have all these stories, many of them repeated twice? Why didn't God just give us a well-worded, brief theological summary statement about Himself? How can God expect us to get anything of real spiritual significance out of these detailed accounts in Kings and Chronicles?

1 CHRONICLES

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Who do you think wrote 1 & 2 Chronicles (1 Chr 29:29; cf. 2 Chr 32:32; 33:18-20)? Do these books have a significantly different perspective than 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings? Do 1 & 2 Chronicles look like a "biased" report? Why should there be so much repetition? How do you explain the differences? Is there any value in these small differences? What about the Gospels? How did Luke get the information for writing his book (Luke 1:1-4)? Does God "inspire" people to "compile" books to be put in Scripture?

2. What is the purpose of all the genealogies in 1 Chr 1-9? Who kept track of all these names of the earlier generations when they became scattered all over the world?

3. What is the meaning of "in Peleg's time the earth was divided" (1 Chr 1:19)?

4. Is it clear whether Saul committed suicide? How could the Bible writer say, "thus God slew Saul" (1 Chr 10:13, 14)? Do you think that the same writer, if he were to describe the death of Judas Iscariot, would say, "thus God slew Judas"?

5. Who was it that actually made David's kingdom strong (1 Chr 11:9, 10)?

6. Notice the position of Uriah the Hittite (1 Chr 11:41; cf. 1 Kgs 11:4, 6). If God treated David so generously after what he did to one of his best friends and supporters, what does it mean when we say that Jesus is our Mediator with the Father? Or did Jesus manipulate the Father somehow even in David's case, so that the Father would be nice to him?

7. Why was there so much joy and celebration when David became king (1 Chr 12:38-40)?

8. Why do you think the Philistines started carrying their "gods" into battle (1 Chr 4:8-12; compare 2 Chr 13:8)?

9. Note David's comments about why Uzzah died. "David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah" (1 Chr 13:10-12; cf. 15:2). Did David learn anything from the Uzzah experience?

10. Why do you think David was numbering Israel? 1 Chr 21:1 (NIV) says, "Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel." But 2 Sam 24:1 (NIV) says, "Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go and count Israel and Judah.'" Is there any way in which these two could be compatible? Do we have to reject one in order to accept the other? Can you think of parallel passages elsewhere? Could both 2 Sam 24:1 and 1 Chr 21:1 be correct? Try to look through the eyes of someone from that time to understand how they would understand this passage. In most cases, who actually causes us to sin (Jas 1:13-15)? How should we

explain passages that state "God did this or that" when elsewhere we have confirmation that actually Satan or someone else did it?

11. Why did the census totals for the fighting men come out different in 2 Sam 24:9 and 1 Chr 21:5? Shouldn't the Bible writers be consistent in reporting such details?

12. How and why would the Lord "repent of the evil" (RSV) of destroying Israel and Jerusalem (1 Chr 21:14, 15)? Since the main cause of the "plague" was the sins of the people in Jerusalem, why did God spare it?

13. How do you explain 1 Chr 21:30: "David. . . was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord?" Was this the response that God wanted as a result of His punishment of David and the people of Israel?

14. How do you explain God's statement to David about Solomon as recorded in 1 Chr 17:13? "I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor [Saul]." Did God stop loving Saul? Didn't Solomon do things that were just as evil as what Saul did? Compare this with the statement "I have loved Jacob and his descendants, and have hated Esau and his descendants" (Mal 1:2, 3). Do these statements suggest that God only loves His good children? Or does He love His bad children as well? Is this true only since New Testament times (Matt 5:45)?

15. What did all those Levites actually do each day? Notice their duties (1 Chr 23:2-5).

16. Why was David choosing "prophets"? Doesn't God choose prophets? What was the relation between these "prophets" and the harp-players (1 Chr 25:1)?

17. Look at David's magnificent prayer as he handed over the government and the materials for the temple to Solomon his son (1 Chr 29:10-19). Do these words sound familiar? Why do many of our modern translations not have the doxology at the end of the Lord's prayer in Matt 6:9-13 (cf. Luke 11:2-4)?

18. Look at 1 Chr 29:17 (RSV)--"in the uprightness of my heart I have given these gifts to you." How could David make such a statement in front of all the people of Israel after what he did to Uriah and Bathsheba and with Solomon standing next to him? David repeatedly mentions doing things with the (whole) heart (vss. 9, 17, 18, 19; compare Ps 51:10). Had David finally learned what God really wants? Did he understand Rom 8:1? Notice how much different the end of David's life was compared to the end of Saul's.

2 CHRONICLES

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Who do you think wrote 1 & 2 Chronicles (1 Chr 29:29; cf. 2 Chr 32:32; 33:18-20)? Does God "inspire" people to "compile" books to put in Scripture (see SSG for 1 Chr)? Do 1 & 2 Chronicles have a significantly different perspective than 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings? Do 1 & 2 Chronicles look like a "biased" report? Where did the books of Chronicles stand in the Hebrew Bible? What is the implication of this for its (and our) interpretation of the period of the monarchy?

2. Solomon's Temple was probably the most impressive house of worship ever built. Do you think God wanted the Israelites to go to that degree of expense in decorating His house with gold and silver and precious stones? We seem to discourage the use of these things today. Why did Solomon think everything needed to be done on such a grandiose scale? Why were so many sheep and cattle sacrificed (2 Chr 5:6)? Why did God fill the temple with "a cloud . . . [of] the glory of the Lord" (2 Chr 5:13, 14)? What do you think the universe looking on thought of this building?

3. After the Babylonian captivity, when the temple was rebuilt on a much smaller scale by Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, and Nehemiah, God told them that this

new temple would be much more glorious than the old one (see Ezra 3:12, 13; Hag 2:3-9)! How could this be true?

4. Notice Solomon's prayer in detail (2 Chr 6:12-42). Did David always obey the law (2 Chr 6:16 GNB)? Does God hold back the rain (vs. 26; cf. Matt 5:45)? Does God send the famine, or epidemics (vs. 28)? Does God send the scorching winds or locusts (vs. 28)? Can you forgive someone, and still deal with him as he deserves (vs. 30)? Why did not Solomon follow his own suggestion in the treatment of foreigners instead of building all those heathen temples for his many wives (2 Chr 6:32, 33; 1 Kgs 11:1-11)? Solomon seemed to show a clear understanding of our sinful condition--"there is no one who does not sin" (2 Chr 6:36; cf. Rom 3:23). Did he recognize that he was a sinner also and was capable to sin even more?

5. Does the list of blessings and curses in 2 Chr 7:11-22 make it clear that God's promises and threatenings alike are conditional? Notice how God is involved (cf. Deut 8:18-20, 27:11-28:68; cf. Job's story).

6. Why did Jeroboam and his army of 800,000 take their golden calf "gods" to war with them (2 Chr 13:8)? Why do you think the Philistines started carrying their "gods" into battle (1 Chr 14:8-12; cf. 1 Sam 4:1-11; 2 Chr 25:14, 15)? Doesn't it appear that these "gods" were carried along as "good luck charms"? Did they ever help?

7. Could God have been responsible for helping Asa kill one million Sudanese (2 Chr 14:9-15)? Who actually did the killing (vs. 12)? Was it right for Judah's army to do all that looting (vss. 13-15)?

8. Asa removed all the detestable idols from Judah and Benjamin and the captured territory of Ephraim (2 Chr 14:2; 15:8, 16). Why were they there in the first place? What do you think was the attraction of these "idols"?

9. Why would they say, "All who would not seek the Lord, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman" (2 Chr 15:13)? Has the attitude and understanding of the people significantly improved or changed since the time of Joshua (see Josh 1:18)?

10. We have studied at least two stories (1 Kgs 13 & 2 Chr 18; cf. 1 Kgs 22) where "prophets" have lied. Why doesn't God communicate directly with each one of us and thus eliminate this risk? Why does He pick out a prophet here and a prophet there and then tell the kings of Israel to inquire of them? What if Ahab had not questioned Micaiah, being left with Micaiah's first message and going off to battle and getting slaughtered? What kind of prophets were these who were prophesying for Ahab? Were they recognized as bringing words from Jehovah, Baal, Asherah, or whom? Does God ever convene the heavenly council to try to decide how to tempt someone to do something wrong--even to get them killed? Can you think of any other stories in the Bible that might compare in "incredulity" with this one?

11. Notice the context of 2 Chr 20:20, our key text for believing the prophets. If God could so easily send a message through the prophet and then "miraculously" defeat the enemies of His people, why didn't He do it many times before and after this?

12. Why was it that as long as Jehoiada was alive, sacrifices were offered continuously at the temple (2 Chr 24:14)? Why did they so soon abandon this practice after he died (vs. 15)? What caused the tremendous reversal in the life history of Joash (2 Chr 24)?

13. Why did God strike Uzziah with leprosy because he tried to offer incense on the altar in the temple (2 Chr 26:16-21; cf. Uzzah; Nadab and Abihu; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram)?

14. Most of the time it seemed that when the king did what was right the people followed, and vice versa, but not always. Occasionally the people ignored the king. Look at Jotham, who did what was right, while the people worshiped other "gods" (2 Chr 27:2).

15. Why do you think the Israelites returned the Judean prisoners in the times of Ahaz (2 Chr 28:8-15)? Who was more wicked at the time, Israel or Judah? Why did God allow Israel to win? King Ahaz offered sacrifices to the "gods" of Damascus because they had beaten him in war (2 Chr 28:22, 23). He went on to become very wicked (vss. 24, 25).

16. Why is there so much space devoted to Hezekiah's reform and Passover celebration (chaps. 29-31)? What does the fact that the Passover had to be

delayed say about the spiritual morale of people and priests at that time? How long did the effects of this reform last (chap. 34)? How come the priest and king were ignorant of the book of the law so soon after Hezekiah's great reform (34:19)?

17. Look at the incredible sins that Manasseh did--offering his children in the fire, putting heathen idols and altars in the temple, consulting mediums and spiritists, rebuilding the high places, making altars to Baal and Asherah, bowing down to the starry host, Manasseh even put Isaiah in a hollow log and sawed him in two (2 Chr 33; Heb 11:37; PK 382; 4BC 1137; "The Martyrdom of Isaiah"). Can God take such a person to heaven after this history?

18. What is implied by God's summary of why He had to let the people go off to Babylonian captivity (2 Chr 36:15-16)? When God's people are so bad that they hold God up to open shame, is God losing in the great controversy? Why do you suppose God decided at this point that He had to "let them go"? What is He waiting for in our day?

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Did the reading of Ezra and Nehemiah contribute anything to your understanding of God and the Bible? Would we be just as well off without these two small books? Do you remember any "key texts" from Ezra or Nehemiah?

2. The first conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar took place in 605 BC. The return of the first group of exiles under Zerubbabel was in 536 BC (70 years later). More than 80 years passed until the times of Ezra (457 BC) and Nehemiah (444 BC). Did the people apparently learn anything from their exile experiences? Was there any significant difference between the behavior of these exiles and the behavior of their ancestors just before the exile? If their behavior had not improved any as a result of the exile, why did God bother to bring them back to Jerusalem?

3. What is the significance of Ezra 7?

4. Why do you think the people began almost immediately to intermarry with the surrounding nations (Ezra 9 & 10)? Were these heathen nations even supposed to be alive at this time in history (Exod 23:20-33; 34:24; Lev 18:24; 26:6, 7; Deut 4:38; 7:1-26; 9:1-6; 11:23; 12:29-31; **20:16-18**; 31:3; 23:3-6; Josh 1:1-9; 10 & 11; 23:4, 5; cf. Judg 2:11-23)?

5. What do you think of the demand by Ezra and later Nehemiah that the Jews separate themselves from their foreign wives and the children of these wives (Ezra 10:1-17; Neh 13:1-3, 23-27)? Should Ezra and Nehemiah have been so hard on these strangers (Ezra 9:12)? Why did they not treat them as "new converts" (Num 15:14-16)? Did they forget the experience of Hosea and Ruth--how she was accepted? Were not the Jews given the responsibility to spread the gospel to all people around them? How can one "banish" someone and "convert" them at the same time?

6. Shouldn't Ezra and Nehemiah have had a "campmeeting" or an evangelistic series to convert these people who had already decided to "join" the Jews (cf. 1 Cor 7:12-14)? After these women were sent away, what do you think happened to them?

7. How do you think the individual cases of the foreign wives were actually handled (Ezra 10:16-17)?

8. Did Ezra think that this harsh treatment was necessary and that God was even merciful in His "punishment" (Ezra 9:13-15)? Do you think that Ezra overdid it?

9. Was such harsh treatment of these foreign wives necessary? If yes, why? What was the situation when Ezra passed from the scene and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem some twelve years later (read Neh 13)?

10. Does their treatment of these "foreigners" suggest that in order to maintain the purity of His select group of people, God is willing to treat all others

as "disposable" (cf. Jonah)? Is it any surprise that the Jews later began to feel so much superior to others?

11. Do we have any other biblical accounts that would suggest (when God sends foreign wives away) how He feels about them and their children? Do you think God approved this apparently harsh treatment of these foreign wives and their children? Do you think Jesus would have done it? Could such harsh treatment of sinners only take place in the "old dispensation" (Acts 5:1-11; cf. Rev 14:10-11)?

12. What do you think the Universe looking on thought of these experiences?

13. What would we think today if someone, learning of some terrible thing that had happened, reacted as Ezra did (Ezra 9:3-5)? Compare Nehemiah's reaction when he learned of such sins (Neh 13:25)! Should administrators nowadays use more of "Nehemiah's methods"? What do you think about Nehemiah's constant, "remember me, O my God" (chap.13)?

14. What do you think was the reason for the great revival that took place under Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh 8; cf. 2 Chr 34:14-33)? What do you think the Levites who were assisting Ezra were actually doing (Neh 8:4-12)? Since the Bible so far had been written in Hebrew (except for a short section in Daniel which was in Aramaic) and the common people had stopped speaking Hebrew when they were taken to Babylon, it was necessary to translate the passages into

Aramaic so the common people could understand them. Can we think of this as the first "modern speech translation" of the Bible?

15. What portions of the "Law" would you have read to the people if you had been in Ezra's place?

16. When the people first heard the reading of the "Law" they wept, but with encouragement from Ezra and the Levites they turned it into a great celebration, feasting and giving gifts (Neh 8:9-12). Why do you think there was such a response from the people?

17. Who do you think had been keeping the copies of the "sacred scrolls" since Moses began to write them approximately 1000 years prior to this time?

18. Why do you think that the "feast of tabernacles" had been ignored or improperly celebrated for all those years (Neh 8:13-18)?

19. What do you think of Nehemiah's treatment of Sabbath breakers (Neh 13:15-22; cf. Num 15:32-36)? After such experiences is it any surprise that the Pharisees were so strict about Sabbath-keeping? What about tithe paying (Neh 13:10-13)?

20. As a result of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people appeared to change their behavior, and as far as we know historically, they never went back to "idolatry" and "fertility cult worship" again. (Did Jesus have to speak out against "golden calves" or images of Dagon, Moloch, Baal or Asherah?) Instead they became very strict about keeping the law and eventually the priests and leaders became the Pharisees and Sadducees of the New Testament. What do you think

caused this tremendous shift in thinking and behavior for the entire group? Were the Pharisees and the Sadducees much more "religious" than the people in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah? Were they more "righteous" in God's eyes? Were they actually more "savable" (Matt 11:20-24; Luke 10:13-15)?

21. Ezra and Nehemiah are the last historical books in the Old Testament. Only the prophetic book of Malachi comes a short time later. What do you think God accomplished through the first 3500 years of history? Why do you think He waited an additional 450 years before Christ came? We are told that He came at the "right time" (Gal 4:4). What do you think God is waiting for now--2000 years after Jesus?

ESTHER

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Would you think that God had anything to do with the events of Esther if all you knew was what you can read in the book itself? What is the purpose of having a book in the Bible that never mentions God or prayer? Where, when, and by whom, do you think, was this book written? Should we accept the apocryphal additions to Esther where God and prayer are mentioned? Why do you think the Jews preserved this book and how did they use it? Did you find Esther inspiring in any way? How is your understanding of God different, because we have the book of Esther? What is the value of Esther? Would you feel a loss if it were not in the Bible?

2. Where were most of the Jews in the days of Esther? Why do you think so many of the Jews stayed in Susa rather than going back to Jerusalem or Canaan? Is this where God wanted them to be? Why did they get into this predicament? Was it ever God's plan for them to be in Babylon or Susa? How many opportunities had they had to go back to Canaan? Does Esther give us any help in understanding how God feels about His children even when they don't care enough to come "home?" What do you think of a God who goes to such great lengths to preserve such a group? Does this book help you to understand and

explain how God treats the righteous and how He treats the wicked, or does it make it more difficult?

3. In the apocrypha there is a book by the name of Judith that has a story and a theme, even an outcome, quite similar to that of the book of Esther. Read this book! On what basis would you accept Esther as inspired and say Judith is not?

4. How many times in the Bible were death decrees issued? What was the purpose of these decrees? Who do you think was behind them and why? Would the Jews, as a people, have disappeared if Esther had not done what she did? Was Esther partly responsible for the kind treatment of Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah by the authorities?

5. Why do you think Esther and her friends fasted? Was it to get God's attention, or what?

6. Should God not solved the problems in the book of Esther by means of a prophet or prophetess instead of by a beautiful, young woman who ended up "committing adultery" as one of the many "wives" of a heathen king? By our standards, should not Vashti have been the heroine of the book? Could God not have used some other person or method to solve this problem without breaking so many moral codes, even commandments, by our standards? Would you want your daughter to do what Esther did? Do you think Esther had any choice?

7. Did God keep King Ahasuerus from sleeping that night so that he would hear about Mordecai's saving his life?

8. Why was Esther so vengeful, asking for another day of bloodshed, and then requesting the hanging of the ten sons of Haman? Was Esther's request for a second day to kill the enemies of the Jews just self-preservation? Is this the first time the Israelites were granted extra time to kill?

9. Esther seemed to have been placed by God in a key place and position at the right time. Can you think of any others? How does God do this without violating people's freedom?

10. In the past, we have sometimes suggested to our children and youth that if they go to a place where God does not want them to be, their guardian angels will wait until they leave that place before they take up their protecting role again. Is this born out by the theology of Esther? What about the parable of the lost sheep?

11. Did the universe love and worship God more or less after the events of the book of Esther? What do you think they learned from the course of events recorded in this book? Does the book have any usefulness for those living through the last-day events? How do you fit Esther in with Jesus' statement in John 5:39, 40 which suggests that the Old Testament writings were to teach us about Him?

JOB

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Who do you think wrote the book of Job? Do you think Job ever knew that a book of the Bible was written about him? Did Job ever find out why all those things happened to him? Did he ever read or learn about the information in chaps. 1 and 2 of the book? Where did the information in those two chapters come from? What about the surprise ending in Job 42:7-10? Would you have trouble understanding the book if you had only the dialogue and the ending (chap. 42) and didn't know about chaps. 1 and 2?

2. Conservative scholars have believed that Moses was the author of the book of Job. If so, why isn't Job mentioned somewhere in the books of Moses (the Pentateuch)? Is it easier to understand how Moses could be so close to God and know Him so well, if he knew about the story of Job? On the other hand, why would Moses, knowing about Job, write such things as "if you're good, you'll be blessed, but if you're bad, you'll be cursed" (Deut 8:18-20; 27:1-28:68)?

3. In Esther and Job God seems to end up revealing something important about Himself, but what about the people involved? Was Job used just as a pawn? What about Job's children?

4. Job said, "The Lord gave, and now the Lord has taken away. May his name be praised" (Job 1:21; GNB). But is it not clear in the earlier verses that Satan was the one who "took away"? Was this a serious error on Job's part (Job 1:22)? How should we explain passages that state "God did this or that" when elsewhere we have confirmation that actually Satan or someone else did it? When someone has a horrible accident we sometimes say, "It must have been God's will." What do we mean by this? Are death and sickness God's will?

5. Is it be correct to say that the death of Job's first children and the loss of all his wealth was God's will? In what sense? Which important truth in the great controversy is this demonstrating? Could anything happen if God did not permit it? If I eat lots of candy and get holes in my teeth, would it be correct to say that it is God's will, because He didn't stop me? What about lung cancer and fatal accidents? If a student neglects to study all quarter and then fails, is that God's responsibility? This world is full of diseases, disasters, and drunk drivers. Is that God's fault?

6. Why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper? We like to tell stories suggesting that if we faithfully pay our tithe and obey God, God will protect us. But what about Job? Job trusted God even when all the evidence seemed to be against him, and even Job's wife said "curse God and die" (Job 2:9)! Which shows greater faith: (1) You have nothing to eat, you pray, and miraculously food is provided ("Bedtime Stories faith"), or (2) You have nothing to eat, you pray, and no food is provided, but you still trust God anyway (like Job)? Is the story of Job a "bedtime

story," or is it a story for grownups? What faith is needed to survive the end-time trouble and deception: "Bedtime Stories" faith, or "grownups" faith?

7. On what basis do you think Job was able to say: "though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15; KJV)? Or should this be stated as a question, as in some versions, "should I trust Him, though he slay me" (see GNB)?

8. How do we relate these grand, universe-wide issues in Job with our day-by-day battles with evil? Should we daily ask God to look after us, or should we not bother God, and assume that whatever happens is according to His plan? Is God too busy to pay attention to our little day-by-day needs? Give examples from the life of Jesus.

9. Is it safe to freely pick key texts from the book of Job? In what sense is such a book "inspired"? If as God Himself suggests, Job's three friends had not said what is right about Him (Job 42:7-10), can we call their speeches "inspired"? Should we consider this book as being only partly "inspired"--that is, chaps. 1 and 2, Job's speeches, and God's speeches are "inspired," but the rest is not? What about some of the things that Job says in his depression (Job 1:21; 6:4, 13; 12:16-25; 16:8-14; 17:11-16)? Why is it that sometimes in church when some "speech" material from the book of Job is being quoted (besides the prologue and epilogue), we quote more from Job's friends than Job?

10. Considering all the books of the Bible up to Job, is there anything really new that we learn in the book of Job? Is it true that God holds councils at which Satan actually comes to accuse us? Who are the "sons of God" or "heavenly beings"

referred to in Job 1:6 and 2:1? If Adam had not sinned, would he have been one of these "sons of God" (see Luke 3:38)? Are there other places in the Bible where we read about similar councils or conflicts?

11. What was Job's greatest trial? Was it the loss of his children, his wealth, and his health (Job 1:13-19; 2:7), or was it the statements (=bad theology) of his friends, who were wrong (Job 42:7-9)? In the last days, God's people will go through the "time of trouble" (Matt 24:21-22). What are the implications from Job's experience for us?

12. What is the structure of the book of Job? Where is the center of the book? What are the implications of this?

PSALMS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/psalm say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. How many different people do you think contributed to the Psalms? How long a time span do you think is covered by the Psalms? Do you consider them all inspired? Who wrote the most? Do you consider the hymns in our hymnbooks as being inspired? Why would the Psalms be different? If they are inspired, is it safe to pick a verse from any portion of the Psalms and use it by itself apart from its context?

2. Do you think some of the Psalms were actually more like prayers? If a psalmist is discouraged or depressed and cries out to God, should we consider his cry, including the words of despair or discouragement as "inspired"? In what sense? Is it all right to express feelings of depression? What about Jesus' cry at the cross or in Gethsemane?

3. The Psalms were a form of Hebrew poetry. We sometimes speak of "poetic license." When David spoke of soaking his bed with his tears (Ps 6:6, 7), don't you think this was a little exaggerated? Is it okay for someone to use hyperbole under inspiration (cf. John 21:25)?

4. Is everything that we sing in our hymns today theologically accurate? If prayer is "conversation with God as with a friend," how could we "sing while

passing through the air, farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer"? Is it that we never plan to speak to God again? Do we feel comfortable singing about one of God's children as "such a worm as I"?

5. What should we do with passages in the Psalms which appear to be contrary to our Christian understanding of God? For example: "It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed" (Ps 77:10; RSV). "Serve the Lord with fear. . . lest he be angry. . . for his wrath is quickly kindled" (Ps 2:11; RSV).

6. Under what circumstances would it ever be proper to describe the wrath of God as "quickly kindled"? We have many verses that say God is "slow to anger" (Ps 103:8; 148:8; Prov 15:18; 16:32; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3; Neh 9:17). What should we do with such conflicts? Should we collect all the verses and "weigh" them somehow? Or count them? Or should we just admit that this is a biblical contradiction? After reading the second Psalm for worship, what would you pray about? What do we do with passages which appear to be shocking, or harsh, or authoritarian? Would it be all right for a mother to cry out as her child is dying? Was David still loyal and totally committed despite all these cries?

7. Should we just read the Psalms that we like and which express uplifting thoughts--like Pss 19 and 23 and try to ignore the others?

8. What should we do with "inspired prayers" that seem to call down God's wrath and vengeance on all of Israel's enemies? For example:

"He trains my hands for war, . . . I pursued my enemies and overtook them; and did not turn back till they were consumed. . . I thrust them through . . . they fell under my feet. For thou didst gird me with strength for the battle . . . those who hated me I destroyed. They cried for help, but there was

none to save, They cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them" (Ps 18:34-50; RSV).

"O God, break the teeth in their mouths. . ." (Ps 58:6-9; RSV).

"But God will shatter the heads of His enemies. . ." (Ps 68:21-23; RSV).

"Add to them punishment upon punishment, . . . Let them be blotted out of the book of the living" (Ps 69:22-28; RSV).

"Happy is the man who. . . takes your babies and smashes them against a rock" (Ps 137:8, 9; GNB).

9. Does Ps 69:22-28 sound like the prayer of an evangelist (cf. Exod 32:32; cf. Rom 12:14-21)? What do you think of such language? Is such language all right, if you are under the direction of God? In David's first great battle, was David praying for the stone to go straight to the giant's forehead? How do you think he prayed before and after this experience? Is it easier to see after reading these Psalms and looking in on David's thoughts, why God never wanted them to fight in the first place (Exod 23:27, 28)?

10. Have you ever thanked God for helping you to do something and later realized that it was not what God wanted you to do at all? Does God ever "wince" at the methods we sometimes use in "evangelism"? When He blesses us anyway, doesn't He look even more gracious?

11. What do you think about David's understanding of the place and purpose of sacrifices and offerings (Ps 40:6-8; 51:16-19)? Does it contradict what is written in the book of Leviticus?

12. Why would the Bible say "Wake up Lord!" (Ps 44:23; cf. 1 Kgs 18:27--Elijah and the priests of Baal)? How does this fit with Ps 121:3, 4?

13. Which of the Psalms would you say reveals more than any other, that David was a man after God's own heart? The 23rd Psalm? The 51st Psalm? If

you had just done what David did, how would you pray? He went to God in confidence that he could be forgiven. Had David gone too far? How could he say, "Against thee, **thee only**, have I sinned" (Ps 51:4)?

14. The Holy Spirit through the Psalms helps us to see ourselves as we really are. If I hate brother Jones, I am not telling the truth if I kneel at night and say, "Dear Lord, how I love brother Jones. Do bless brother Jones." Could we be led to say to God, "Lord, I hate brother Jones"? Could we then ask for healing and cleansing (Ps 51:10; Ps 19:14; Ps 139)? How does the Holy Spirit "help us in our weakness" and "intercede for us" (Rom 8:26)? What actually is His work in relation to our prayers?

15. Notice how many different types of Psalms we have. How does the type of Psalm influence our interpretation of it?

16. How do you understand the many predictions about the Messiah in different Psalms? Could you see that this is a Messianic "prophecy" (Pss 16; 22; 69 and others)?

PROVERBS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/proverb say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Why is there a book full of pithy, down-to-earth sayings right in the middle of the Bible? Did Solomon write all the Proverbs? Or did he just collect them, assess them, and put them together? 1 Kgs 4:32 says "He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five." "Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true" (see Eccl 12:9). But apparently the present book of Proverbs was not put together until some time after Solomon's death because Hezekiah's men added chapters later (25:1). Who do you suppose was inspired in all this? Solomon? Hezekiah? Someone else? What do you think Solomon thought of all these sayings after he found himself in rebellion and worshipping all those false "gods"?

2. What type of literature is the book of Proverbs? What is a "proverb"? Was it all "advice to young Jewish boys," or just the wise sayings of an old man? Are there other "proverbs" in the Bible besides those of Solomon? In the New Testament? In the Apocrypha? Why are a number of the proverbs repeated

verbatim or nearly so (see 1:7 and 9:10; 19:13 and 27:15; 21:9 and 25:24; 6:10, 11 and 24:33, 34; 14:12 and 16:25)? Do these proverbs have particularly important ideas?

3. How does God give wisdom? When God blesses a man with wisdom, does this deprive him of his freedom? Can the person use that wisdom to make a fool of himself? Would it not be better to be "controlled" by God a little more so that such danger would be eliminated? Would you be willing to give up your freedom? If you were a little bit more sanctified, would you give it up? Would God be happy about such "devotion" (Gal 5:22, 23)? The only thing that would make God in any way responsible for our troubles is that He created us free. Do we want to fault God for that? What would the universe look like if there were no free creatures?

4. How did God treat Solomon when he finally came back? Why is it that God did not tell him to hide on the back row when he came to "church," but asked Solomon to write another book of the Bible, Ecclesiastes? Were not only "holy men of God" supposed to write the Bible (2 Pet 1:21)? Would we have treated Solomon like this?

5. When trouble comes, does it mean that God is punishing (Prov 3:11, 12; see Heb 12:5, 6)? In Rev 3:19 God says that He reproveth and chastens those whom He loves (cf. Prov 13:24; 22:15). Is Solomon strongly recommending physical punishment here? What is the main difference between the historical books and the wisdom literature (cf. Deut 27:11-28:68; Prov 5:21-23, etc.)?

6. Why did the wisest man who ever lived spend so much time talking about fools? What do you think is implied by Prov 26:4, 5? Do Prov 17:28 and 18:2 suggest that we should never ask questions? If we do so, shall we not end up like Prov 26:12? Who is wise and who is foolish, according to this book?

7. There are several passages in Proverbs suggesting that "the fear of the Lord" brings wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge/wisdom"). Must we "fear" God to have wisdom? Does God want us to be "scared to death" of Him? How does this fit with Exod 20:20; 1 John 4:18; Pss 112:1; 128:1, 4; and Prov 28:14? Does the Bible make a distinction between the fear that is "reverence" and the fear that is "terror"? If you had been standing with the children of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai, do you think you would have experienced "reverence" or "terror" or both? Were the disciples afraid of Jesus? Jesus said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). Prov 8:13 says that "to fear the Lord is to hate evil." How does that fit in?

8. What does Prov 16:4 mean (cf. Rom 8:28; 9:14-29)? Do different versions help our understanding?

9. What do you do with Prov 22:6: "Train (or educate) up a child in the way he should go. . . ." Does this mean that when any child apostatizes it is a failure on the part of the parents? What about God? Didn't He lose Lucifer and one third of the angels? If a family loses all their children, have they done a bad job? Should we deprive our children of their freedom and try to control them? If I realize my freedom, does it mean that I will not misuse it? What then does this

verse mean? What are some basic hermeneutical rules for interpreting the proverbs?

10. There are many comments in Proverbs about the use of wine (see 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4, 5). Is it safe for us to use these verses and ignore Prov 31:6, 7? How many people can you think of from the Bible who were specifically told not to use alcohol for some reason? Did alcohol have any medicinal uses in Solomon's day?

11. Could we use Prov 31:6, 7: "Give beer to those who are perishing. . . wine to those who are in anguish" as a key text for inner city ministry? Because this approach to evangelism would be more expensive than to give away Steps to Christ, would we dare put it together with Deut 14:25, 26 (take the tithe and buy strong drink with it and rejoice before the Lord) to get a source of funds? Why do we not say to those depressed in the inner city, "You're hopeless, degraded--take wine?" How did Jesus relate to the poor? What would Christ do for a terminally ill cancer patient, if He had our limitations? Would you dare to give wine in a bottle? What about in a "pill"? What is the real issue involved here? Could you give a coherent "temperance talk" on Prov 31:4-7?

12. What about the description of the ideal wife (Prov 31:10-31)? While this woman was working so hard, where was her husband (Prov 31:23)? Is there any theology in this passage? Does it tell us anything about God (cf.: 18:22: "He who finds a wife, finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord"; 19:14: "Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord")?

13. By contrast there are many "proverbs" about the problems of bad wives/women including prostitutes and adulteresses (Prov 5 and 7). How should we put all these ideas together? Look at 19:13 and 27:15: "A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is a constant dripping"; 21:9 and 25:24: "Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife"; 21:19: "Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife." What is the purpose of these texts?

14. Do you think Solomon (Paul, and the rest of the Bible) is too hard on women or too generous? Should Christians be using some of these passages either to promote or hinder the "women's liberation" movement? Are there any chapters in the Bible on good husbands?

15. What is the relation between Proverbs and the great controversy theme in the Bible? How does the Book of Proverbs fit in?

ECCLESIASTES

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. To what type of biblical literature does Ecclesiastes belong? What are the key words in this book?

2. Ecclesiastes means "The Preacher." Why do you think this book would have a name like that? Does this book, as a whole, contribute anything of significance to our understanding of God? Do you think it may have helped the on-looking universe? What did the universe learn? Why would the Holy Spirit inspire the writing of the feelings of this tired old king? Do you think Abraham, Moses, or Daniel would have written a book like this? Did it take courage and inspiration for Solomon to tell the truth without hiding or glossing over it? How different would Solomon's testimony have been, if he had been faithful all his life? Is there any "good news" in Ecclesiastes?

3. Is it actually true that the sun rises and sets (Eccl 1:5)? Considering all that is being invented now, was Solomon right in saying there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1:9, 10)? Is it true that "God has laid a miserable fate upon us" (1:13)? Is it true that "all is vanity and a striving after wind" (1:14)? Is it true that "what is crooked cannot be made straight" (1:15)? Is it true that "Everything that happens was already determined long ago" (6:10)? Is it true that the wise

and the foolish end up in the same place--and the wise will not long be remembered (2:14-17 and 3:19)? How could those who have already died be happier than those who are still living (4:2)? Is it true that the more knowledge, the more grief (1:18)?

4. What is the meaning of Eccl 7:16, 17--"So don't be too good or too wise--why kill yourself? But don't be too wicked or too foolish, either--why die before you have to" (GNB)? Is it safe to go through the Bible and make selections of what we like or what is "right" and what we think is "not right"? Doesn't this book conclusively show us the dangers of plucking texts from here and there? Why would Solomon say so many things that are just not true?

5. In Eccl 2:1 and following, Solomon says that he would make a test of certain pleasures and things, but found them all to be vanity. He tried wine, sensual pleasure, great works of architecture, pools, and parks. He bought many slaves, great possessions, he gathered silver and gold, he got many concubines. He says, "My wisdom remained with me and I kept my heart from no pleasure. Behold all was vanity!" Was everything that Solomon tried to pursue in this record inherently evil? In order to really enjoy something, do you have to be the very first human to try it? How can we use material like this? In what sense is it inspired?

6. If we reach old age without being able to show "any worthy action done," will God treat us any differently? In contrast to Solomon, who did not remember God all through his life, can you think of anyone in the Bible who did?

7. How would you have ended the book? Are we terrified that "God will bring every work into judgment, whether it be good or evil" (Eccl 12:14)? What does it mean to really "fear God and keep His commandments"?

8. Are we afraid to have our lives come up in review by our gracious God? What are we afraid of? Is it what we know about ourselves that makes us afraid? Is it what we know about God that makes us afraid? Even if our final diagnosis is "unsavable," do we have anything to fear (cf. 1 John 4:17, 18)?

9. Some are afraid to sin because it will make God angry. Others are afraid to sin because it grieves God. Still others are afraid to sin because of what sin does to people. Should we be afraid to sin? If so, why? How do you evaluate all these reasons?

10. God not only forgave Solomon but honored him by having him write another book of the Bible. Did God not know the details of Solomon's life? God watched Solomon do all the things that he did, and yet when he came back, a tired old king, but genuinely repentant, God didn't just forgive him, He honored him and treated him like "a holy man of God" (2 Pet 1:21). Did God's forgiveness give him back the wasted years? What is the relationship between forgiveness and the consequences of sin? Isn't the story of the life of Solomon a living illustration of the "prodigal son"? What made Solomon finally come back to the true God?

11. Would you agree with these conclusions from Solomon? "So I am convinced that a man should enjoy himself, because the only pleasure he has in

this life is eating and drinking and enjoying himself. He can at least do this as he labors during the life that God has given him in this world" (Eccl 8:15 GNB).

"Go ahead--eat your food and be happy; drink your wine and be cheerful. It's all right with God" (Eccl 9:7 GNB, see also Eccl 2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:18).

12. What does it say to you about God that He gave all that wisdom to Solomon, but did not take away his freedom even to misuse God's gifts?

SONG OF SOLOMON

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Do you think Solomon wrote this book? Which one of his many wives does this "song" refer to (1 Kgs 11:1-3)? What evidence do we have that Solomon wrote it? At what time in Solomon's life was the book written?

2. Why does Song of Solomon, which is apparently a story of youthful human love, come after Ecclesiastes? Can you see a similar kind of contrast somewhere else in the Bible? Does it provide a nice balance after reading Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes?

3. Can we truly learn anything about God from a book that never mentions God's name (cf. Esther)?

4. There are allusions in the Bible to 24 other books that are not preserved in our current Bibles. Why did the Jewish fathers who first put together the Hebrew Canon include the Song of Solomon? Why do we keep it today? Does it say something about God, something about us, and of the feelings God wishes people to have about each other?

5. If Solomon wrote 1005 songs (1 Kgs 4:32) and this is the best of them all (this is suggested by the Hebrew name of the book), why don't we sing it or at

least use it more often? Is this the only "song" from Solomon that we have preserved (cf. Pss 72 and 127)? Why are we even embarrassed to read it out loud? Why did the Jews refuse to let anyone under 30 read it (according to the early church fathers)? Why did the ancient Jews read it on the 8th day of Passover? To whom?

6. Is it true that God's love for His people is illustrated by marriage? Give Scripture references!

7. How can we safely use the Song of Solomon? Verse by verse? Is there a special meaning in many of the details? If you allegorize every detail, what would you do with text in 6:8? Who are the "sixty queens and eighty concubines"? Do we not really seem to be invited to find hidden meanings in all this (cf. 3:6-10)?

8. Do you think it is right that a book about human love should have a place almost in the center of the Bible? How could it be so exalted in the Scriptures? Is it all right to love the beautiful? Did the Holy Spirit inspire Solomon to describe his feelings for this girl that he loved? Is God a highly personal individual Himself? Does He want our relationship to be of this quality? How is your understanding of God and human sexuality different because of the Song of Solomon? What is the value of Song of Solomon? Would you feel a loss if it were not in the Bible?

9. What would happen if you read this book to your family for worship and then asked your 15-year-old son to pray? What do you think he would say? What would God want him to say?

ISAIAH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What was new, outstanding, or especially emphasized in the book of Isaiah? Does reading this through one more time enhance our understanding of God, the plan of salvation, and the Bible generally? What were the major events of the time that precipitated the prophecies in the book? Why do you think Isaiah is called the "gospel" prophet?
2. Why would God say He is disgusted and tired of their religious festivals and sacrifices when He Himself had given them (Isa 1:14-20)?
3. Is it apparent from this book how God feels about a people who would rather go to diviners and soothsayers, consulting the "dead" on behalf of the living, than come to Him? What does God do with such people (Isa 8:11-9:7)?
4. As we begin to look at the prophets of the Bible, most of them seemed to work mainly for Judah. Doesn't God seem partial?
5. Isa 5:1-7 gives a magnificent description of a vineyard (cf. Matt 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19), but something went wrong. What was it? Isa 5:12, 13 suggests there was a lack of "knowledge." What knowledge was it that they lacked and how essential is this knowledge (Isa 1:3; 11:9)?

6. What is suggested by Isa 29:13 as to the kind of worship that God wants (cf. Matt 15:7-9; Rom 12:1, 2)? What is the relationship between the quality of our worship and our perception of what kind of Person we believe our God to be? If God is the extremely intelligent Being described in Isa 40:10-31, how can you approach such a God?

7. Who is the baby referred to in Isa 7:14? Look at the context of this verse in 7:1, 10-16; 8:1-3. Who is the baby referred to in Isa 9:6? Do we have two virgin births in the Bible? How could Matthew explicitly say that Mary's giving birth was to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy? Have we lost our best key text for the birth of the Messiah? Or could this prophecy have two different fulfillments? Are there other places where Isaiah and others begin by describing a local individual and then expand their prophecy to someone much greater?

8. Isaiah had a tremendous vision of God in His glory and a contrasting vision of Satan and his goals (Isa 6:1-8; 14:4-15). Who else saw such contrast between God and Satan? What do all these prophets who saw both God and Satan teach us about the issues that face us? What was Lucifer's original position? What has he been primarily trying to accomplish since the very beginning of his rebellion (see Isa 14:13, 14; Matt 4:8, 9; Rev 13:5-8)?

9. Compare Isa 11:6, 7 and 65:25 with Isa 35:9. Will there be any lions in the New Earth or not? How do we explain these apparent "direct contradictions?"

10. Do you believe that "Israel's sins will be forgiven only when the stones of pagan altars are ground up like chalk, and no more symbols of the goddess

Asherah or incense altars are left" (Isa 27:9 GNB)? How can our sins be atoned for?

11. What is the meaning of Isa 28:10-13, 16: "here a little and there a little"? Is this intended to be a hermeneutical guide for how to use key texts in Scripture?

12. What will be the ultimate basis for peace, freedom, and security (Isa 32:17; GNB; Isa 64:5; GNB; cf. COL 97-98)?

13. What are the implications of Isa 33:14-16 for the final end of sin and sinners? Who is going to be put into the everlasting fires in the end? What is this fire (Isa 33:14-16; cf. 6:6, 7; Exod 24:17; Ezek 1:26-28)?

14. Do "inspired" writers ever indulge in plagiarism (cf. Isa 2:2-4 with Mic 4:2, 3; Isa 36:1 with 2 Kgs 18:13; Isa 37 with 2 Kgs 19)? Does this invalidate their inspiration?

15. Why did God feel it was necessary to step in at the time of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem and slay the 185,000 Assyrians (Isa 37:36)? Do you think Sennacherib's insults had anything to do with it (Isa 37:17, 23, 35)?

16. Is it our mission, as suggested by Isaiah, to proclaim to the world, "Behold our God" (Isa 40:9-11)? What are we actually saying about our God today? Are we not projecting a picture that says more about ourselves than our God? What are we known for? What do we want to be known for?

17. Look at Isa 43:25: "I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (RSV). Is that good news? Does this mean that God is senile? Will we be comfortable in the hereafter only

because God has forgotten? Or what does it mean? Is God the kind of Person who could be trusted with the detailed knowledge of all the things we have ever done? When we get to heaven, will we remember events from this life? How will Uriah treat David? Only those people can go to heaven that can be trusted not to gossip about the sins of others (Rom 1:29-31). Do you think that God wants to embarrass His children? Could He? Should we?

18. What could possibly lead people to practice the folly of making a "god" out of something that you would normally use to warm your food (Isa 44:9-20; cf. 46:5-7; Ps 115:1-8)? Contrast this with the true God, what He wants, and what He does (Isa 1:10-31; Isa 40).

19. See Isa 48:9, 11. In what sense does God do things "for His own name's sake"? Is not this rather selfish of Him? What does it mean, "for My own name's sake"?

20. What is the significance of Isa 53? Who was the "suffering servant of the Lord"? What important aspects of Christ's atoning death are found here? What is the meaning of vs. 11? Who was the first to connect Isa 53 and Dan 7?

21. What does Isa 58:13, 14 imply about keeping the Sabbath? Would a parent say to a child, "You have to eat your spinach! Smile when you eat your spinach! You must enjoy your spinach!"? What is God saying about the Sabbath here? Is legalistic observance what He wants? If I do not enjoy the Sabbath, do I really keep it?

22. What does Isa 66:23 say about Sabbath observance in eternity? What function could it possibly serve after the judgment is over and the righteous are in heaven? Will God actually continue to test our obedience forever? Will the New Moon festivals be kept also?

JEREMIAH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Does Jeremiah contribute significantly to our understanding of God? Did his ministry contribute something to the universe looking on? In what way is Jeremiah outstanding, compared with other books we have studied? Does he belong to "major prophets" only because of the extent of his writing? Are there some things uniquely emphasized in Jeremiah? What were the circumstances under which Jeremiah wrote? What was Jeremiah's position in society?

2. Jeremiah spends a great deal of time discussing the worship of different "gods" and how the people had left the true God to go after other "gods" (Jer 2:11; 3:23; 7:16-19). How did this happen? Can you think of any other nation that changed its "gods"? Was Israel irreligious during this period? What could possibly have been so attractive in those heathen religions? Why does God have such a hard time holding His people and getting them to worship Him? Doesn't He have the power? Can you produce what God wants most by power and force? How could God have lost one-third of the angels (Rev 12:4)?

3. What does it do to your mind to worship a "glued-together god" (1 Sam 5:1-5), or a "piece-of-firewood god" (Isa 44:9-20; Jer 10:2-16)? What do you think the children of Israel were thinking when they worshipped the Baal and then

rushed to the temple (Jer 7:9, 10)? Did they think two "gods" were better than one--like having extra fire insurance? Did they not recognize the incompatibility of these other religions with their religion?

4. Is God angry when we worship other "gods," or do we just lose by becoming like them (Jer 2:5, 19; 7:19; Hos 9:10; Rom 1:18-31; 2 Cor 3:18)? How many different "gods" were the Israelites worshipping (Jer 2:32, 33; 3:9, 12, 13, 23; 10:14; 11:13; see also Ps 121)?

5. God had appointed Israel to evangelize the world (Jer 3:17). How hard did He have to push them to try to get them to do this? What did he have to do to Jonah, Daniel, and his friends? Jonah was certainly no "Missionary Volunteer"--under his "duress," did he deliver a good, clear message about God? Most of the Jews apparently knew so little of the truth about God that even if they had been sent to a place to witness they would have done a terrible job. What about us?

6. Now that we have come to where the prophets actually describe God letting His people go off into captivity, how do you think God felt about this (Jer 8:18-9:1; 14:19-15:2; 23:1-8)?

7. When did the children of Israel behave as well as suggested in Jer 2:1-3 (cf. 31:18-20)? Or is God just being very generous here? Didn't that whole generation who passed through the wilderness have to die because of their rebellion?

8. Why do you think God told people not to pray even for their friends and family who had been taken off into captivity (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 1 John 5:16; Jer 14:19-15:2)? Why would God not want to forgive? Will such a thing ever happen again?

9. Does God seem less gracious in Jeremiah than in some other books where all is "good news" (Jer 3:12; 23:1-8)?

10. Did the darkened minds of the people really comprehend what Jeremiah was saying to them (Jer 7:27)? Did they really understand that they were at the end of their options (Jer 23:1-8)? Did they, in retrospect, understand the reason for their captivity (see Dan 9:1-21)? When God said that they should acknowledge their "rebellion," what was He talking about specifically (Jer 3:13)?

11. What is God saying about Judah and about Himself in Jer 3:11-16; 7:23-28; 9:23-26; 31:31-34 (cf. John 13:34, 35; Rom 1:16)? Have you ever gloried that you understand and know God? Are we surprised to find such insights about God in the **Old Testament**? What was the actual covenant that God wanted to have with His people? Is God asking for something more than a ceremonial religion? What does it mean to "know the Lord" or to "be His people" (Jer 31:31-34; 32:38)?

12. Jeremiah talks a lot about knowing the Lord. What do you think is implied by this expression? Why do you think the use of reason and careful use of the mind have been made fun of in religious circles down through the years? Who do you suppose would lose if everyone would carefully examine the reasons

for his faith? It is often suggested that religion is a matter of the heart and not of the mind, but is not the heart really only good for pumping blood? What do we mean by these expressions? In Jeremiah's day, the heart was thought to be the seat of thinking and reason, and the bowels the seat of the emotions (Jer 4:19; 31:20--see KJV).

13. Do you see the perception of God as given by these prophets getting more and more obscure and confused or more and more clear as we approach the end of their kingdom? Does it not seem almost like the darker the background (the general condition of the people), the brighter the picture appears? Jer 9:23, 24 suggests that we could even come to the place of boasting about God. What would this mean? Paul knew and understood God very well, and he was proud of this (Rom 1:16, 17). Does our knowledge of God make us feel different--give us an exhilarating sense of freedom? There is no worse loss of freedom than to feel fear. Are you afraid of the future, or what God may do to you?

14. Is it fair for the good to suffer with the bad? Jeremiah suffered, even though he was good and had done his best to warn the people of what would come if they did not repent. How honored was Jeremiah?

15. What hope did Jeremiah leave for the captives (Jer 25:11, 12; 29:10-14; see Dan 9:1-2; but cf. Jer 30:3; 31:16, 17)?

LAMENTATIONS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. If you had been on the committee to pick the books of the Bible would you have included Lamentations? Did you find Lamentations inspiring? Helpful? Does Lamentations add something to our understanding of God and the Bible?

2. Lamentations is in poetic verse form, but of an unusual pattern. Each stanza begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet. (There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.) Such a poem is known as an acrostic. Imagine creating this literary masterpiece with the first stanza beginning with Aleph, the next with Beth, the third with Gimel and so on, while Jerusalem was under siege by Nebuchadnezzar! Chaps. 1, 2, and 4 are like this. Chap. 3 is even more complicated. There are 66 verses, and the first three begin with Aleph, the second three with Beth, and the third three with Gimel, etc. Only chap. 5 doesn't exactly follow this pattern (but still has 22 verses). Do you have any idea as to why Jeremiah did this? Why would he write such a sad message in such a mathematically balanced form? Did they pass copies of the Bible around, as we do now?

3. Who seems to be causing all of Jerusalem's and Jeremiah's suffering (see Lam 1:5, 12, 15, 16; 2:1-12, 16)? Is God actively involved in doing these things, or is there another explanation for such wording (cf. Ps 77)?

4. Do you think Jeremiah's experience was similar to David's (Ps 6:6 and Lam 1:16)? Is Jeremiah complaining? Did David do the same thing?

5. Do you think you could become so hungry that you could eat your own child? Did the Jews actually reach such a state (Lam 2:12; 4:10; 2:20)?

6. What understanding of God is Jeremiah reflecting in Lam 3:7, 8? How could he speak of God like this under inspiration?

7. Whose experience is being referred to in 3:13-15 and 3:61-63?

8. How can Jeremiah speak the words of the first part of this book and then say what he does in Lam 3:21-33 and 3:55-60? Would you feel comfortable saying all these things about your God under similar circumstances?

9. Is Lam 3:37-39 an explanation for the apparent conflicts that precede it? Is it true that both "calamities and good things come" from "the mouth of the Most High" (Lam 3:38; NIV)? What do you think should be our interpretation of these verses? The Jews were anxious to acknowledge the total sovereignty of God. Is it true that nothing could happen without His will, or permission?

10. In the New English Bible, Lam 2:5 says "The Lord played an enemy's part." The New International Version says, "The Lord has become like an enemy." Why would he write like this? Does a child think his parent has turned against him when he/she spansks him?

11. Lam 3:44 says, "Thou has wrapped Thyself in a cloud so that no prayer can pass through." Is there ever a time when God does not hear our prayers? In Isa 1:15 (NIV) we are told, "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you. . . I will not listen" (cf. Jer 7:16; Ps 77:10). Are these statements true? If they are not true, why would God allow Himself to be pictured like this (cf. Matt 27:46)? Is God offended if we feel moved to cry out like this?

12. When moral evil is rampant, does God build a "backfire" of physical evil to control the moral evil?

13. Do you notice that all through the book the prophet seems to swing from his grief at what is happening, to his trust of God and His mercy and love?

14. How could Jeremiah end with the questions in 5:19-22? Can you think of parallel passages elsewhere?

EZEKIEL

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. How did you react to the book of Ezekiel? Maybe you have sometimes heard its name used to refer to things which are very mysterious. Did you find it complicated? What about the "wheels within the wheels"? Was it inspiring? Did you learn anything new in this book? Does it take a Ph.D. in the Old Testament studies to understand it? Did it take this level of knowledge in Ezekiel times?

2. What do you think was the general understanding of the Old Testament God in Ezekiel's time? Was the perception different in Jerusalem (where Jeremiah was) than it was beside the Kebar River (in captivity where Ezekiel was), in Babylon (where Daniel was), or throughout the universe (among the angels)? Why do you think these visions were given (especially chap. 1)?

3. Why would Ezekiel have to use expressions like "such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezek 1:28; KJV)? Is not this the way John spoke in trying to describe his visions in Revelation? Did Ellen White ever use such words, or was this just a problem for ancient prophets with a limited vocabulary?

4. What if we cannot explain in every detail the vision of Ezek 1:4-28 (see also 8:2-4; 10:1-22)? What effect did it have on Ezekiel? Do you think he

understood it all? What do you think he actually saw? Would it help us, in this modern age, if the Lord would appear and give us some glimpse of His infinite power and majesty? How would we walk into church and how would we worship if the "appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" was up at the front of the sanctuary?

5. Were the Jews accustomed to having revelations of God's power? How could the pillar of fire (the Shekinah) become commonplace to the Jews? How could they complain about the manna and the water while God's power was so apparent nearby? Would you dare to build a golden calf at the foot of the mountain with God's power still apparent on the top? What about the garden of Eden before the flood? Did seeing it impress the antediluvians? Was this God the Father or God the Son, whom Ezekiel saw (see Exod 24:17; 1 Cor 10:4)?

6. Is there any sense in which God's people could be considered even worse than the heathen nations around them (Ezek 5:5, 6; cf. Isa 52:5; Ezek 36:22; Rom 2:17)?

7. Why is idolatry so bad? Why would the Adversary love to have us worship anything or anybody, other than our intelligent, gracious God? Does idolatry represent a definite decision against God in the great controversy?

8. Can you find an investigative judgment somewhere in the book of Ezekiel?

9. How does God propose to deal with the problem that seems to be afflicting the Jews (Ezek 11:19)? Can God do this? How does He go about doing it? Do we have to cooperate?

10. What is the purpose of the terrible picture of idolatry and immorality in Ezek 16? Compare this language with the language of Hosea--contrast it with the way God feels about them--Ezek 18:1-4, 8, 23, 31, 32; 33:11; cf. Jer 31:29-34.

11. Does Ezekiel give us any new insights into the meaning of the Sabbath (Ezek 20:12, 20; cf. Heb 4:9-11; Isa 66:23)? What did Ezekiel say was the purpose of the Sabbath? Is it primarily a reminder of an event(s)? Or of a relationship? Did the Jews get Ezekiel's message about the Sabbath? In Jesus' day were they keeping it for the right reason?

12. What is Ezekiel (and God) trying to say to us in Ezek 20? What about Ezek 36? Do you have a simple explanation for Ezek 20:25, 26? Or does it require a "procedure" developed by working your way through many such passages? Does reading the rest of the chapter help?

13. Why did God cut off the righteous with the wicked (Ezek 21:3, 4)? Did the invaders carefully distinguish between saints and sinners? Is this fair? How were Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel treated?

14. Are you quite certain that Ezek 28 is talking about Lucifer/Satan? What about Isa 14? Would you dare to use these passages when discussing the subject with someone who did not believe in Satan?

15. Why were some prophets given views of both God and Lucifer? Is there anything special about these messages and the messengers or the times in which they lived that might explain why? Which prophets actually received such messages?

16. Where does the fire come from that finally consumes the Devil (Ezek 28:18; NIV; RSV)? Does this suggest that the fire that will consume the wicked at the end come forth from within them? What kind of fire could this be?

17. Compare Lucifer/Satan's statements in Isa 14 and Ezek 28 with Christ's attitude in Phil 2:5-8. Who would you rather live with?

18. What do you think is implied by the following commonly used expressions in Ezekiel:

- a. "Son of man"--93 occurrences;
- b. "Rebellious house" (people)--21 times (see especially Ezek 2, 12, 20);
- c. "Then they will know that I am the Lord"--more than 70 times;
- d. "For my name's sake"--Ezek 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 36:20-23, 31, 32, 36, 38?

19. How do you understand all the references to wrath and anger in Ezekiel?

20. Considering all that God has said about them, why does God finally restore Judah (Ezek 36:22-38)?

21. Why would God take them into captivity by stages? Much of the trouble they got into was because of the priests, rulers, and even prophets (Jer 23:1-4; 16; 21). How do you think the people were supposed to distinguish between these false prophets and Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the true prophets? Compare Jer 23:25-32. Do we hear similar claims today?

DANIEL

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What picture of God do you see in Daniel? Is it important to get the historical setting for Daniel? Where were God's people at this time? What do you think the neighboring nations thought of the God of Israel, since He did not (or could not) prevent their being taken captive? God had said again and again that He would have to let His people go. Does it seem that He had let Daniel go?

2. What do you think of first when you think of the book of Daniel? Do you think of the "stories" (the history) or the prophecies? Do you believe that God has a full knowledge of all our past, present, and future choices? Even our moral choices? If so, is it still possible to have human freedom? On what basis do we assert our belief in the "supernatural" or the "divine" origin of the book of Daniel?

3. Most modern Old Testament scholars reject the idea of God's foreknowledge on philosophical grounds, and believe, therefore, that "Daniel" was not written by Daniel at all, but by someone in the early second century BC claiming to be Daniel. This would make most of the book historical and not "prophetic." How would you answer such a person? Why would God bother to predict the future when we so often fail to understand it until the prediction has

already come to pass (see John 13:19)? Does it do anything for us to know that God knows the future? Would it have been an encouragement to the Jews to know that God is not caught by surprise in the affairs of men?

4. There is a great deal of argument about the interpretation of Daniel, even about the size of the book. Should it include the longer version of chap. 3 (vss. 24-90 in Roman Catholic Bibles) and the two stories of Susanna and Bel and the Dragon (chaps. 13 and 14)? The earliest copies of these passages are available today only in Greek and not in the original Hebrew or Aramaic in which the rest of the book is written. On what basis would you accept the Jewish/Protestant/Orthodox version and reject the Roman Catholic version? Does this make you a "critic" of the Bible?

5. When were Daniel and his three friends taken into Babylonian captivity? Do we have any hints as to their ages at the time? What kind of background did these young men have (Dan 1:3)? What do you think was the main reason Daniel and his friends did not want to eat the "food and wine from the king's table" (Dan 1:5; cf. Dan 10:2 and Rom 14:1-5)? Why do you think Daniel and his friends did so much better than the rest after the three-year "university course" (Dan 1:17)? Why do you think the King brought these young "prisoners" into his own service? Why were their names changed?

6. Why do you think God worked so directly and repeatedly with Nebuchadnezzar? What kind of person was Nebuchadnezzar? Was he accustomed to being obeyed even when he made apparently unreasonable

demands (Dan 2:3-12)? After several unusual experiences with Daniel and his companions, Nebuchadnezzar developed considerable respect for their God.

What do you think of Nebuchadnezzar's new approach to worshipping God (Dan 3:29)? Had his "understanding of God" really changed? Did it ever change (Dan 4:34-37)? Do you expect to see Nebuchadnezzar in heaven?

7. How would you like to live in a country where the king demanded that you worship his "god" in the way and at the time he commanded or he would throw you into a burning, fiery furnace? What would you think of such a king? How would you answer an objection that God actually said, "Either obey Me, or I will throw you into an eternally burning hell," or "Either obey Me, or I will torture and burn you as long as you deserve"? Is God a kind of "heavenly Nebuchadnezzar"?

8. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace, who was the fourth person that appeared there with them? Was it "the Son of God" or "a son of the gods" (Dan 3:25, cf. KJV and RSV)? Did Nebuchadnezzar have a "photo" of "the Son of God" in his possession? What do you think made him say what he did?

9. What do you think happened to Nebuchadnezzar during those seven years of "exile" (Dan 4:29-33)? Doesn't the punishment seem a little harsh? Why do you think this brought Nebuchadnezzar to his senses? Was God responsible for this experience? Do you think God does this to people in our day?

10. Do you think Daniel was foolish to pray so openly to his God during the time of the king's decree forbidding it (Dan 6:10)? Would you tend to use more "discretion"? Was Daniel so "stuck in a rut" that he couldn't change or was he boldly challenging the king's decree, or did he have other reasons for his behavior? Would it bother you to work with someone like Daniel? Why do you think the king was willing to sign such a decree? If you were being tried for being a "Christian," would there be enough evidence to declare you "deserving of capital punishment," "guilty in the first degree," "guilty in the second degree," or "not guilty"?

11. Who are the participants in the judgment scene in Dan 7:9-14 (cf. Job 1 and 2, Zech 3:1-5, and Rev 12:10)? At what time in history do you think this is taking place? How many are observing all of God's actions? Who is being judged in Dan 7 (cf. Rom 3:4)? Why is there a need for a pre-advent judgment? Does this idea of pre-advent judgment take away our security of salvation?

12. Could you explain in very plain, simple language what Dan 8:14 means? What is "the cleansing of heavenly sanctuary"? How is it done?

13. What does Daniel's prayer tell us about him and his attitude toward God and his understanding of why they were in captivity (Dan 9:4-19)? How does Daniel identify his fellow saints (Dan 9:4; cf. Rev 12:17 and 14:12)?

14. What do you understand was happening in the struggle with Cyrus? Who was the "man dressed in linen"? Was it Gabriel (see Dan 8:16 and 9:21; DA 234)? Who was "the prince of Persia" (Dan 10:13)? Who was "Michael" who

came to help him (Dan 10:13, 21; see 1 Thess 4:16 and cf. John 5:25)? What does the name Michael mean? What do all the occurrences of the name "Michael" have in common? Were Gabriel and Michael pressuring Cyrus or were they protecting Cyrus from the Devil's pressure, so that he could make up his mind without force?

15. Where do you think we are right now in the prophecies of the book of Daniel?

16. Ellen White suggests that "When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience" (TM 114). What would it take to bring this about, and what kind of religious experience would be the result? How could the study of books like Daniel and Revelation produce a great revival (TM 113)? If we were to work out the time schedule of each prophecy and could identify each prophetic element in detail, would this guarantee a great revival? Does the Devil know all these details? If yes, did it help him?

HOSEA

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What picture of God would you have if you had only Hosea? What were the circumstances of Hosea's writing? When did he live and prophesy? Who were his best-known contemporaries? What relationship is there between the first three chapters and the rest of the book? How many children did Hosea have? How many did his wife have? What was your general reaction to Hosea? If you had been Hosea's neighbor, how would you have treated him? Would you be embarrassed to discuss his story with your children? If you had only the book of Hosea to tell you about God, could you explain how God deals with His rebellious people? How is your understanding of God different because of the book of Hosea? Would you feel a loss if it were not in the Bible?

2. Do you think that God would ever ask a human being to marry a prostitute? Are we not as Christians only allowed to marry perfect saints (2 Cor 6:14-18; Matt 5:32b)? Peter refused to "rise and eat" saying, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" (Acts 10:9-16). Should Hosea have done the same thing and refused to marry such a woman? Should God have abandoned Israel while they were still slaves in Egypt? Was God wrong in adopting Israel, considering how they were behaving?

3. Why would God ever ask a person to participate with Him in a "lived out" parable (Job; Isa 7 & 8; Jer 27, 32; Ezek 5; 24:15-27)? If this was an actual "lived out" parable, was it fair to the children involved? What about Job's children? Is it fair to talk about God's relationship with us as comparable to this marriage? This woman took Hosea's name and "blackened it." What about us, when we take God's name, what do we do to it? Who takes all the risk here?

4. What about the sad names of the three children of Hosea--how must those children have felt with names like those (Hos 1:3-9)?

5. If this had been your story would you have followed through with the experience in chap. 3? What if you saw your pastor wandering around in the "red light" district, entering brothel after brothel "looking for his wife"? What would you think? What if Hosea's wife had refused to go home? Do you think Hosea should then have grabbed her by her hair and dragged her home against her will, and chained her to the bedpost? As you understand God's character, is that what He would do?

6. Do you think Hosea was a man of God and recognized as such in the community? Did people look up to him? Was Hosea living a life of scandalous self-indulgence and inviting other people to follow his example? What about Salmon marrying Rahab? In Christian marriages today, if people followed Hosea's example, would they be better off or worse off?

7. When Hosea's wife left him, did he say, "now I have church grounds for divorce, let me go and find another wife"? What do you think his wife thought

when Hosea appeared "downtown" to ask her to come home? Was she "owned" by a pimp and sold to Hosea who then had a right to "demand" that she come home with him? Is this the way that God relates to us?

8. Which picture of God do you see in Hosea? (a) Jilted lover? (b) Angry bully? (c) Jealous husband? (d) Determined "dad"? (e) Frustrated father? Is it clear from this OT book what kind of relationship God really wants (Hos 2:16; cf. John 15:15)?

9. Compare Rev 13 and 14 with the book of Hosea. Had the children of Israel become irreligious at this time? Is the whole world going to become irreligious at the end or is it rather a question of how and what kind of God the people will worship? Does calling God by the right name guarantee that you are truly worshipping Him?

10. Do you think we should read Hos 4 literally or figuratively? Do you think the references to immorality throughout the book are literal or spiritual?

11. What if God had turned to the universe and said, "Do you see how much evil there is down on planet earth? It is not safe for Me to go down and associate with those people! I'm just going to leave them to reap the consequences of their own behavior!" Would the universe have understood and agreed with such an action? What would be the best illustration God could give to the universe about how he was trying to bring back his erring people?

12. How do you relate this story to the later story of Ezra and Nehemiah who forcibly separated such marriages and sent the women and their children

away? Why were they doing such a thing? Can you imagine the enormous risk that God ran in associating with us, even coming and living and being born as one of us? Could you think of a more dramatic way for God to illustrate how He has related to the entire human race than this story?

13. What was missing in the land because they did not know God very well (Hos 4:1; 6:6)? What would the universe say about our world today?

14. How do you understand what God's wrath is (Hos 4:16, 17; 11:1-11; Rom 1:16, 18, 24, 26, 28; 4:25; Matt 27:46; cf. Rev 14:10)? If God is the source of life and someone is "separated" from that source, what is the result (Rom 6:23)?

15. What happens to people who worship idols? What does God do to people who insist on ignoring Him (Hos 7:14; 8:13; 9:10; 4:17; cf. 2 Chr 36:16)? What does He do with people who are very religious, take God's name, but never really get to "know Him" (Matt 7:22, 23)?

JOEL

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. If Joel were missing from the Bible would it affect you in any way? What is the main message of Joel (see Joel 1:4, 15; 2:1, 2, 10, 13, 17, 27, 28; 3:1-2, 12, 17)? When do you think Joel prophesied? To whom?

2. What is the meaning of "the day of the Lord" (1:15; 2:1, 2)? What events are connected with the "great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:11, 31)? Is the day of the Lord the day of His triumphant return? The day of His judgment? A time when everyone will recognize God as the Lord? How long a time is included in "the day of the Lord" (cf. 2 Pet 3:8)? Could an individual or a particular nation have their own "day of the Lord" or is there just one final "day of the Lord"? Will the final day of the Lord be a day of terror for everybody or just for the wicked? What does it mean when it says that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thess 5:2)?

3. How will you feel when you come face-to-face with God who has unlimited power, and also knows every tiny detail of your life? Are you not afraid that He could even lose control of some of that power so that it would strike you and destroy you? Can you ever be at peace with such a God? Will there be a permanent, eternal fear that God might abuse His infinite power or His infinite

knowledge of us? Is there any way to throw light on this problem from the Bible? What is more convincing--to look at a statement (a claim) or to look many examples of how God treats his erring children (sinners)?

4. In the Scriptures what usually happens when someone suddenly gets a revelation of God? What does God immediately do and say (Ezek 1:28-2:2, 6; Dan 8:17, 18; 10:4-12; cf. Exod 20:20; Deut 9:7-21; Heb 12:21)? What does this suggest about the kind of relationship He wants to have with us?

5. "The day of the Lord" is always described as very near (1 John 2:18; cf. Joel 1:15; 2:1, 2; 3:14; contrast Amos 5:18-20; 2 Thess 2:1-6). Do you feel that God has been misleading us by these statements? What does "near" mean to you? To God? What did it mean to the people in Joel's day?

6. Is the day of the Lord going to be a day of brightness for everybody (Matt 7:22, 23)? What was the quality of worship of those who were mistakenly looking forward to the "day of the Lord" (Amos 5:20-24)?

7. What do think is the connection between the pouring out of God's Spirit, and the signs in the sun, moon, and stars (Joel 2:28-32; 3:14-17)? What does pouring out of God's spirit "upon all flesh" mean? Does it mean today what it meant at Pentecost?

8. What is the "valley of decision"? What is taking place there (Joel 3:2, 14)? What do you expect to take place during the last moments of earth history?

AMOS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What understanding of God would you have if you only had Amos? What does this book teach us about civil rights, social justice, human cruelty, and what God wants from us? Are there any important "key texts" in Amos? Where does Amos come from and to whom does he address his messages? What was Amos' profession (1:1; 7:14)? When did he live and prophesy? Who were his best known contemporaries? What other book(s) are similar to Amos in content and purpose?

2. Do you think Amos won any popularity by beginning his book condemning the sins of everyone around him (Amos 1 & 2)? Is it ever a good idea to approach someone and immediately begin pointing out his/her sins? How do people usually react? How did the people of Israel react (Amos 7:10-13)? Have you ever met anyone who wants to preach the "straight testimony" by pointing out the sins of all around him/her?

3. Is it true that "the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7; cf. Deut 29:29)?

4. What do you think of Amos' description of the sins of God's people? Had they become irreligious (Amos 4:4, 5; 5:21-24)? Can you think of any later

groups who might fit these descriptions? Do we ever boast that we give generous offerings and pay a faithful tithe (Amos 4:5)? Does God cringe as we sing our hymns (5:23)?

5. Why do you think the people of the northern tribes to whom Amos spoke were longing for the day of the Lord (Amos 5:18)? What are the implications of this for us? Notice God's attitude to the people who were religious for the wrong reason (Amos 5:21-24).

6. How could Amos say, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet" (Amos 7:14, Phillips)? What did he mean? Why did Ellen White make a similar statement (1 SM 32)? When Paul says, "I am the least of the apostles," was he right (1 Cor 15:9)? Was he "the worst of all sinners" (1 Tim 1:15)?

7. Weren't the people in Amos' day faithfully keeping the Sabbath (Amos 8:5)? Did it do them any good (Amos 5:21-24; 8:5, 6)? Is it possible for a certain kind of Sabbath-keeping to turn us against God?

8. In Amos 8:11, 12 there is a prediction of a famine of the Word. What kind of a famine would this be (Job 1:7; 2:2; Dan 12:4; Zech 4:10; cf. DA 234, 235; GC 356)? Is there a place in the world today where, if a person wants the Word, he cannot find it? Are Bibles available everywhere in the world? Could this "famine" still be future?

9. Notice the last words of Amos in 9:11-15. So often God warns His children and then adds words of hope. Israel seemed to think that because they were "children of Abraham" disaster could not touch them. Was God's final

promise to Israel in these verses ever fulfilled? Is the fulfillment possibly still in future? Do you think that what is happening in the state of Israel these days fulfills these words?

10. Note the chiasmic structure of the book. Try to analyze the book to see what might be the center. What are the implications of this for the theology of Amos?

OBADIAH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What is the message in this short book? Does it add anything of consequence to our understanding of God? Would it say much about God, that He would use some precious space in Scripture to give us this one page of correction for those who gloat? Does that say anything to us in our day? What kind of a person gloats over the discipline of another? Do we have many key texts out of Obadiah?

2. Do you think that this might have been written to encourage the Jews? Encourage in what way (Deut 32:35, 41, 43; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30)? How is it that the Jews were being disciplined and these descendants of Esau were not? The Jews at least had made a profession of being God's people. What about these Edomites?

3. What do you think of this "golden rule" in reverse--"As you have done, it shall be done to you" (Obad 15)? Is this not the way many people act in our world?

4. Did not the Edomites know a lot about God's purposes? Do we have any evidence that the Edomites had been long-term rivals and enemies of the Jews

(Ps 137:7, 8)? What was the general feeling between the Jews and the Edomites throughout the Old Testament (see Obad 10; Ezek 25:12; Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11)?

5. What is implied about the state of the dead by Obad 16: "They shall be as though they had not been"? Is that our key text for everything coming completely to an end, and there is no such thing as an eternally burning hell? Or is that a poetic way of saying they will simply be eliminated? What is your strongest evidence for believing that in the end the wicked will be totally destroyed, and be as though they had never been? How do you fit this with "their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched" (Isa 66:24, NRSV; see also Isa 43:17; Mal 4:1; Rev 14:9-11, 20:7-10)? Do we have any demonstration of what happens to the wicked in the end anywhere in the Bible?

6. What if your mother were out there burning in the fire for eternity? Could you look out there, wave, maybe, and go back to your lunch? Do you think that God's whole attitude toward vengeance is implicated here in the book of Obadiah? Are bad people God's children, just as much as good people? Will God eventually lose some of His own children? Will He ever see them again?

7. What do you think of God's sending a message of warning to the Edomites? Does God bless people outside of the main line? Do we have some books dealing with this? Which ones? Have there been messages to others in the past that were not of the Jewish line? For what purpose were they given all those warnings?

JONAH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Would you feel more comfortable among modern scientific friends if the book of Jonah were not in the Bible? Does the story seem a little "unrealistic"? What perception of God did Jonah have? Was he happy and proud of how God treated him or the Ninevites? Does the book of Jonah contribute anything of importance to your understanding of God?

2. Is the story of Jonah and the "whale" just another miracle story? Is it possible to believe that this story actually happened as it says? Did Jesus believe it (Matt 12:40)? Is Jonah mentioned as a historical character elsewhere in the Bible?

3. On what basis did Jonah know that throwing him into the sea would stop the storm? Was it his prophetic gift? Did God actually send the storm against the ship that Jonah was in (Jonah 1:4)? Or is this just a general understanding that whatever happens, God is behind it?

4. "Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale" (Jonah 1:17). How long would that be? Does it have to be 72 hours? If Jesus was in the tomb three days and three nights as we reckon time, when was He then crucified?

5. What do you think of the appeal made by the king of Nineveh (Jonah 3:6-9)? What kind of understanding of God did he have?

6. What gave Jonah such authority? Was it his recounting of the "whale" story? Have you ever heard of an evangelist who won a whole city?

7. How do we go to the world with a serious message about what's going to happen, and tell them at the same time that God is infinitely gracious? Is there a way we can express this so that it won't confuse people?

8. What is the real message of Jonah? Look at Jonah 3:9, 10. God seems to change His mind about destroying Nineveh. Why is Jonah upset by God's kindness toward the Ninevites? Look at Jonah 4. Doesn't this imply that there was a rather extended conversation between Jonah and God earlier? Can you imagine how that conversation may have gone?

9. What about Jonah's complaint? Is it fair for God to send one of His prophets so far to give such a message and then make him look like a false prophet?

10. Is this just a message about Jonah being disobedient by not at first doing what God had asked him to do, or is there a really significant theological matter involved here regarding Jonah's attitude toward God?

11. In light of Jonah's comments about God, do you think he did his preaching with real conviction? Or did he have in the back of his mind that God would probably not carry out this threatened punishment?

12. What do you think of Jonah's attitude about God? What about God's attitude toward these number one enemies of Israel? If Jonah understood that God is the kind of God that is implied in Jonah 4:2, why wouldn't he be proud of it and want to share that message?

13. What was Jonah really afraid of? Is it not apparent that Jonah didn't really care much about God's reputation, nor about the heathen inhabitants of Nineveh, but only his own reputation? How can he still be a true prophet? Why did God bless this "evangelist" so much and not bless as well those today, who have much better motives, theology, and a relationship to God?

14. Think about sermons that you have heard on the "signs of the end" with all the dates being given and a stress that these signs are proof of the nearness of the end. Could we even today preach with conviction about the nearness of the end? What explanation should we give of the reasons for the delay? Would a study of this matter--the reason for the delay in the second coming--help us to reorient our thinking toward a more correct understanding of God? Are we Adventists proud or distressed that God has waited 200 years? Are we being true friends of God, concerned about His reputation and correctly representing Him?

15. Compare the response of the Ninevites to Jonah's message and the final comment about Israel and Judah themselves given much later at the end of 2 Chr 36:15, 16. Who seems the most "Christian" or savable? This book is a heavy blow to the exclusivism of Israel. What does it mean to your understanding of the "remnant" today?

16. Do you expect to see Jonah in the kingdom? If so, what do you think he will have to say about this whole experience? Do you suppose that he will reevaluate his attitudes? How?

MICAH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Does the book of Micah add anything significant to your understanding of God and the nature of religion? Would the Bible message be just as clear without this small book? Who were Micah's contemporaries? Do you see any similarities in their writings?

2. Compare Mic 4:2, 3 with Isa 2:2-4. Who do you think borrowed from whom? Does this example of "plagiarism" destroy your confidence in either of these prophets? Does original material mean that the author is inspired and borrowed material that he/she is not?

3. What do you think of the description of preaching in Mic 2:11? Can you imagine the condition of people preferring this type of preaching?

4. What is implied by Mic 4:11, 12? What experiences do you think are being referred to? What did the heathen nations looking on think when it was necessary for God to discipline His people?

5. What do you understand is the context of the famous Messianic prophecy in Mic 5:2? Why would God give such a message of promise or warning to people who were acting as they were acting at this time?

6. Is it clear what God really wants of us as described in Mic 6 & 7? What does the language of Mic 6 imply? According to Micah, what is the meaning and purpose of the whole ceremonial system? Does not this suggest that without understanding the real meaning of the ceremonial system, it has no value in itself? How do you fit these verses with Amos 5:21-24 and Ps 51:16-19? What does this mean to us living in the NT era? Why did Jesus say to Nicodemus, "Unless you are born again you will not see the kingdom of God" (John 3:5)?

7. Is not the whole purpose of religion to do something to us and with us? the Israelites often misunderstood their system and thought it did something to God, not to them. What does this mean for our present understanding of the meaning of prayer, systematic benevolence, keeping the Sabbath, Christ's ministry as our Mediator, etc.? All this is a failure unless it leads us back to God, and a better understanding of who He is and what He really wants! Religious forms and doctrines do not save--God saves by changing sinful people into ones that are safe to save, live next door to in heaven!

8. It is absolutely essential to understand the meaning here, because we know historically that the ceremonial system can be turned into a terrible burden, just as the Sabbath can be turned into a burden. On the other hand, the ceremonial system and the Sabbath, properly understood, can be a tremendous blessing. What would make the difference between the Sabbath or the law being a blessing or a burden even in our day?

NAHUM

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What would be missing from your perception of God if Nahum were left out of the Bible? Does it seem to you that these few books are especially full of violence? Could it be that the Jews who put them in the Canon cherished these books as promises that God would wipe out their enemies?

2. Does God sometimes punish His children by just allowing them to reap the consequences, while other times He has to actually bring on the punishment? Or is it only one or the other?

3. When children go wrong, is it their fault, or the parents' fault, or both? How do you describe God's so-called "emotional reaction" to sin? Should we call this "divine displeasure"? Is it "wrath"? Why would the Bible so often call it "wrath"? Can you think of a better word? How do you think God should react to sin? How should He portray Himself as reacting to sin? Is it possible that God sometimes uses this type of language or action to startle us or to wake us up to realize the seriousness of what is going on? Does God always do as He did in Nahum and almost immediately describe His love and His fairness (Nah 1:7)?

4. Is it not likely that if Nahum had spoken in kind, gentle words to the people of Nineveh who were so cruel, that they would have despised the Hebrew

prophet and the Hebrew God? Considering the story of Jonah, (which took place about 150 years earlier), is it possible that the Ninevites now thought, "We do not have to take this God too seriously. After all, He did not do anything the last time He threatened us"? Don't we have other references of people taking advantage of God's kindness (see Rom 2:4)?

5. Is it possible that God cared enough about the Assyrians that He hoped that His captive children might bear a witness to them? Is God just working on, century after century, to win a few Assyrians, to win a few Babylonians, to win a few Jews, to win a few Egyptians; and after He has won enough, then He will say the work is done?

6. How can God inspire reverence without fear? If people come to understand how loving and kind God really is and how He feels about them, how is He supposed to maintain reverence?

7. How often do we feel that everything that happens is a result of something that we are doing? If suddenly we realized that a great revival was taking place in the world, would we stop to ask why it was happening? Maybe God finally had to give up on us and do something for His own name's sake, or would we immediately assume that the revival was a result of our own efforts?

8. I am returning home after spending a whole Sabbath in revival preaching. Suddenly a car in front of me stops unexpectedly. I do not manage to stop my car at the given distance, so I damage my bumper and headlights. How will I interpret the incident?

- a. God is trying to tell me that I did not confess some sin that I had committed last week and I should clean my life first before I can expect His blessing on my revival preaching.
- b. The devil is angry with my preaching because he does not want people to be revived, so he is trying to discourage and intimidate me.
- c. I was too tired after the whole day of preaching, so my reaction time was too long. Neither God nor the devil were directly involved. How can I know for sure which one of these three is true?

9. Is it true that the closer God's children come to the point where He can no longer help them, the louder He raises His voice, the more seriously He speaks? Can you imagine Jesus speaking in the words of these books? Or was it the Father? The Holy Spirit?

10. If the children of Israel had done what God wanted them to do in the first place, would there ever have been the need of messages and messengers like Jonah and Nahum? What did the angels learn from Jonah and Nahum?

11. What is Nah 2:4 referring to?

HABAKKUK

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

- a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Habakkuk is unique among prophets in that his entire book seems to be a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. Who do you think initiated this dialogue and why? What does such a book say to us about God?

2. What do you think the beings in the rest of the universe thought as they watched generation after generation go by and things get progressively worse? Would it not be natural for them to say to God, "Why are you wasting your time with these people? Why don't you just let them go?"

3. Is it true that if God really told us what He is doing, we would not believe it (Hab 1:5)? Could such a thing be true in our day? How does this fit with Dan 9:19--"For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name"? Did God rebuke Habakkuk for asking, "Why?" Did He say, "You are supposed to have faith, not ask 'Why?!'?"

4. Does not the prophet here express the fear that God may in some way be losing control? That He might not be able to actually carry out what He said? What is revealed by how we worship our God (Hab 2:20)? What does it say about God that He would give us such a message? Did Baal talk like this? Did Molech? Dagon?

5. Did the prophets have a clear understanding of the impotence of idols (see Ps 115:1-8; Isa 44:9-20)? If it is folly to worship anything created, what kind of folly is it to worship something you have created yourself (Rom 1:20-23; Hab 2:18)?

6. When God finally felt it was necessary to allow His children to be punished, why did He allow what appeared to be the most wicked nations of times (Assyrian and Babylon) to do the punishing?

7. What is the meaning of the last phrase of Hab 2:4--"the just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38)? What does it mean in its context here? What do you think Paul was thinking when he used it? What did it mean to Martin Luther when he started a reformation with it? What does it mean to us today?

8. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14; NIV). When do you think this will be fulfilled? When do you think Habakkuk expected it to be fulfilled?

8. Could you comfortably agree with Habakkuk's conclusion in Hab 3:16-19? What kind of faith is that--"Bedtime Story" or "grownup" faith?

ZEPHANIAH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What would be missing from your understanding of God if the book of Zephaniah were left out from the Bible? Why do you think the Jews included it? Was it because it was written by a prince, a great grandson of Hezekiah?

2. Zephaniah uses some very strong language to describe the future "day of the Lord." What do you think Zephaniah had in mind when he repeatedly referred to "the day of the Lord" (Zeph 1:7-18; 2:1-4; 3:16-20; cf. Joel)? In the days of Zephaniah people were apparently saying, "God will not do anything, either good or bad" (Zeph 1:12; cf. 2 Pet 3)!

3. How could the children of Israel say, after all that the Lord had done for their ancestors down through the years, "The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad"? Was this wishful thinking on their part? Were they aware of their evil condition and hoping God would just leave them alone, or did they really think God was so powerless?

4. How do you think the Israelis today feel about Zeph 2:9? Is this reason for them to think that eventually much of the Middle East will belong to the Jews? Can you see that judgments against the surrounding nations as God's expression of His love towards them? Does God love only Israel or all nations?

5. When they repented, God waited over 100 years to bring destruction on the Ninevites, but finally He had to do something. What could God do at such a point? Think of all the prophets God sent through the years, even His own Son, and think of the parables that Jesus gave and how they mocked and scoffed, and how they treated Him. Imagine God's people telling His Son that He was demon-possessed! How much further could God's people go in rejecting Him? At such a point what else could God do but let them go? Isn't this the same message that is being given to our generation?

6. If a SDA is a Christian who has accepted the "third angel's message," how can we give this message in such a way as to be useful and meaningful to the world at this point in time? How many people in our world are worried about what is described in the third angel's message? Do you see people being very concerned about this message?

7. What does God ultimately want here? How can He be able to speak to us very plainly, yet quietly, without a great display of "human emotions", and yet have us take what He says very respectfully and reverently? How can God accomplish this balance?

8. How much nicer would the Bible be to read, if all the way through, people had been eager to listen quietly and reverently to what God had said? Even if He had to give some very serious messages, He could do so quietly and plainly and people would realize the import of those messages. Could God have made the gospel as clear to such a group of people long ago as we understand it

now? Could they have come to know God as we describe Him today? Do you think that when Jesus came with His Sermon on the Mount it was because people changed and were ready for it, or because He realized that without it our understanding of God would be one-sided--distorted?

9. Amidst all the woes declared on different peoples notice that God still asks His people to turn and seek Him (Zeph 2:3). Isn't this what God has always wanted?

10. Read carefully Zeph 3:17. What does this verse say about God? What does this mean for your relationship with God and everyday living?

HAGGAI

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. If Haggai were left out of the Bible would it make any difference to your understanding of God's character, His government, or what He is doing to try to save men? What other biblical books were written about the same time as Haggai? How long did it take for the people to respond to Haggai's appeals (Hag 1:1, 15; 2:1, 10, 20)?

2. Why do you think God sent Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, Joshua the high priest, Ezra, and Nehemiah, to urge the people to get on with the building of the temple, the rebuilding of the walls, and inspire this great revival and reformation, if He knew that not too many years in the future, when His Son came, they would reject Him? What do you understand God to be trying to accomplish during this whole period? And what would this say about God?

3. What were God's objectives in rebuilding the temple if He knew what was coming? If an angel had stopped to ask, "God, what are You planning to accomplish through this rebuilding of the temple? Will you succeed?" How do you think God would have answered? What would be success in the eyes of an angel at this point in history? What was God waiting for? What is He waiting for now?

4. Is God saying here, "If you don't worship Me, and put Me first, I can't bless you" (Hag 1:5-7)? If so, would that suggest that God is selfish? Who stands to gain the most if we put God first? Why are people blessed when they put God first? Is it because God doesn't like it when we don't put Him first and therefore He withholds His blessings? Or, by putting God first, do we open up ways for God to bless us that would not otherwise be open?

5. In what sense could this latter temple be more "glorious" than the former (Hag 2:9)? Which is more impressive to you--the power, glory, fire, and cloud that were manifested in the first temple, or the friendship and humble humanity manifested in the second temple? Which would God prefer to use? Which should stir us more--the infinite power and majesty, or the fact that God seems to want to talk to us through the still small voice? Are you moved more by the meekness and humility of Jesus as He allowed Himself to be accused and crucified, or by the tremendous show of power at the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chr 5:11-14 and 7:1-10)? How do you expect God to work at the end?

6. If the Holy Spirit did not come until Pentecost, what is the meaning of Hag 2:5 and Zech 7:12 (cf. Gen 1:2; Ps 51:11; John 7:39)? Why did Jesus in His time feel it was necessary to say that He must go away so the Holy Spirit could come (John 14:16, 17, 26; 15:26; 16:7)?

7. God has now been working with the descendants of Abraham for about 1200 years, and yet He still does not seem to have accomplished what He really

wants. Why not? What about our day, did He accomplish it with the Christian Church? (SDA Church?)

8. Is God continually working toward some sort of long-term goal? If so, what would that be? What is implied when Jesus, after His life here on earth, says, "It is finished"? What would "finished" mean to an eternal God who is omnipresent? Is success for God measured in terms of numbers of loyal followers? Would the universe be inclined to think that in the times of Haggai God had lost His influence?

ZECHARIAH

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Is there anything special about the book of Zechariah? Why was it included in the Bible? Would you have voted for it?

2. What is implied by the statement made about the conquerors of Israel, "I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity" (Zech 1:15; cf. 2:8)? How could God talk about Israel as He does in Zech 2:8, considering how they were behaving at the time? What about us?

3. In the judgment scene depicted in Zech 3, who are the main actors in this drama? Who is accusing (cf. Rev 12:9, 10)? Who is defending? What role is the Father playing? Who is the "angel of the Lord"? If Satan were allowed to arise and rehearse all the sins he has successfully tempted you to commit throughout your life, and your case was put to a vote, could you honestly vote for yourself?

4. Why does God seem to conduct the business of His government in an open way like this, apparently before the entire universe? Do we have similar scenes elsewhere in the Bible? In order to accuse God as he did back in the beginning, Satan had to be a deceiver and a liar. What does he need to tell in order to accuse us? Do we then have a chance of withstanding him? How?

5. On what basis does God finally admit some to the kingdom and reject others? What is the ultimately crucial information about us that the universe (even our guardian angels) must see in order to feel it would be safe to live next door to us without keeping their golden doors locked all the time? What do the angels want to know about us (cf. Ps 51:10; John 3:3-8)?

6. In light of the fact that the investigative judgment is going on at the present time, is there any reason that you can think of that really makes sense for committing sin? Is there any sin that makes things better or more pleasant for a person, even here on this earth?

7. How can we be comfortable living forever with God and our guardian angels, realizing that they know everything that we have ever done? Does it help to know how Jesus treated Judas up to the very end? Is it not easier in light of this to understand why Rom 1:29 includes "gossips" with the worst of sinners-- people who are unsavable? Would God ever make someone uncomfortable by discussing some of his former sins in public?

8. Why do we need an intercessor (John 16:25-27)? Do we need an intercessor to plead with the Father for us? Do we need an intercessor to protect us from the accusations of the Adversary? How did this whole mediatory system get started (Exod 20:18, 19)?

9. Who is able to read the human heart? Can angels, or only God?

10. What is God trying to say to us in Zech 4:6--"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty"? How does the Spirit work?

Could God win the great controversy with might and power? Does He finally win because He has more power than Satan? Does Satan admit God has more power (Jas 2:19)? If might and power was all that need to be demonstrated, what has God been waiting for? Can God's show of might and power win people and keep them faithful for all eternity? Give examples from the Bible to support your answer.

11. What do you think--when Jesus was here on this earth, did He demonstrate a lot of "might and power"? Jesus sometimes worked miracles and fed the crowds, but as soon as He perceived that they were following Him for this reason, what did He do?

12. What is implied about the nature of all these prophecies by Zech 6:15?

13. How could Jerusalem be called "the faithful city" (RSV) or "the city of truth" (NIV) in Zech 8:3, 8? Did this already happen, or only will in the future? When?

14. Who are the people and what is the time period being referred to in Zech 8:4--"men and women of ripe old age. . . each with cane in hand because of his age" and "boys and girls playing in the streets"? If this refers to heaven as we often suggest, why are these people getting old? How can anyone get old and need a cane in the New Jerusalem? Will some remain children forever? If this prophecy was not fulfilled in ancient times, does that mean it will never be fulfilled (cf. this to the statements in Isa 11:6-9, 35:1-10, and 65:17-25)?

15. At what time in history do you think the prophecy of Zech 8:20-23 was fulfilled or will be fulfilled? What time period is being referred to in Zech 14:4?
16. Is Zech 9:9 clearly a Messianic prophecy?
17. What is implied about the responsibility of leadership in Zech 10:2-4?
18. Why are most of these Messianic prophecies so mixed up with other equally impressive prophecies which apparently were never fulfilled? Do you think you could have written a research paper back in Zechariah's day and clearly picked out the prophecies that referred to the Messiah to come? Why did the Jews seem to fail to put most of these verses together before they actually were fulfilled?

MALACHI

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Are you encouraged or discouraged after reading the book of Malachi?

How much difference do you see between these people of Malachi's time and the people four hundred years later in the time of Christ? Does Malachi add anything important to your understanding of God?

2. At this point in human history (about 425 BC) why are the people complaining about everything that God says or wants them to do (Mal 1:6)? How do they respond when God suggests that they get back together (Mal 3:7)?

3. Why does God say, "cursed be the cheat" (Mal 1:14)? Is the "cheat" a worse sinner than any other?

4. How does God feel about divorce (Mal 2:16)? If this is how God really feels about divorce, why did He then give the divorce laws (Deut 24:1-4; cf. Matt 5:31, 32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18)?

5. Who is being referred to in Mal 3:16? What scroll is this? Is this referring to God's records in heaven or is this scroll here on this earth?

6. What does it mean to be one of God's "jewels" or His "peculiar people" (Mal 3:17)? Does this mean that we are to be "strange"?

7. How will it be possible to "see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not" (Mal 3:18)?

The verse suggests that this has been possible some time in the past. If you were asked to set up the criteria to distinguish between the two groups in our day, what would you suggest?

8. What does Mal 4:1, 3 suggest is the final end of sin and sinners? Do these verses suggest an ever-burning hell? Does the expression "they will be ashes under the soles of your feet" suggest a conscious suffering?

9. Is there to be an "Elijah message" (Mal 4:5, 6) for our day? If so, what is the message and who is to bear it?

10. Knowing what the people of Malachi's day had available, do you think you would be able to get the understanding of God that Jesus developed?

THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

THE CENTRAL QUESTIONS:

Where was God during this time period of about 400 years?

Are there any major developments that took place that affect our understanding of the New Testament?

Should we interpret the New Testament differently than we do the Old?

Do we see a different kind of God in the Old Testament than we do in the New?

1. Why do you think there was a 400-year gap without any direct communication from God between the Old and the New Testaments? Or was there? Would you be more confident in your Christianity if there were a generally recognized "prophet" alive in our world today? In these difficult times in which we live, why doesn't God supply such guidance to help us? Do you feel more comfortable receiving your spiritual guidance mostly from the writings of ancient prophets from another culture that are somewhat remote from our times, or would you be more comfortable having a living prophet in your time and culture? How do you think having a living prophet around would affect your life? Why have there been long periods of time with God apparently remaining "silent" since the New Testament was written? Are we in one of those times now? Why? How would you recognize a prophet if one appeared?

2. Are there any important teachings found in the New Testament that cannot be found in the Old Testament? Why do you think the "scholars" of Christ's time so generally misinterpreted the Old Testament? Do we ever do this to the Old or the New Testament?

3. Looking over the Old Testament do you see times of apparently great spiritual depravity, and other times of great spiritual enlightenment? Do you think it was easier to understand the truth and be saved in the times of the Old Testament, the New Testament, or now?

4. As the Old Testament drew to a close in the times of Malachi, what do you think was the general understanding among God's chosen people about what was coming in the future? What did they expect to see at the coming of the Messiah? Were they aware of the possibility of a second coming or even a third? Where in the Bible do we first learn of these events?

5. What was it about the times of Jesus that made it the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4)?

6. How many "Messianic" Old Testament prophecies do you think you could identify? How many of these do you think were understood by the people before the coming of Christ the first time?

7. Why was it that when the Messiah actually came, He was so violently opposed and so seriously misunderstood? Had He arrived in the days of Malachi, might He have been misunderstood? Or in the days of Isaiah, or any of the other writers?

8. Are there any records that we can look at that would tell us what had happened in the intertestamental period? What was the origin of the "apocrypha"? Are these books which Catholics and the Russian Orthodox include in their Bibles, and Protestants usually leave out, "inspired"? Why do Catholics include them? Why do Protestants leave them out? What perception of God do you find in these extra books? If you have a Catholic edition of the Bible, read the stories in Dan 13 and 14. Would you want these stories to be included in your Bible? Why or why not?

9. Where did the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Zealots and the Essenes come from? When and why did they begin using synagogues? Did they ever go back to pagan idol worship again? If not, why not? What are the Mishnah, the Talmud, and the Pseudoepigrapha? Where did they come from?

10. If God gave an examination over the most important key ideas of the Old Testament, would you pass?

An Old Testament Review

11. Where would you look in the Bible to find out what went wrong in God's universe? What was the very first thing that happened that could be described as "wrong" or "sinful"? What is "wrong" with sin? Did it actually change Lucifer and later Adam and Eve? At what point were they changed? What has sin done to us or what does sin do to us today: mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, genetically, and spiritually? Has sin changed our earth? If so, how have all these

changes actually been brought about? Are they a result of some action by God? By the Devil? Or have they come about through some natural process(es)?

12. What are the main issues that have been raised in the universe? What statements, even accusations, have been made about God by the Devil?

13. Could God have established trust (faith) for eternity without sin having ever entered the universe? How did two-thirds of the angels decide to trust God? On what basis did Abraham, Job, and Moses trust God?--none of the Bible had been written yet! Were they just taking a leap in the dark?

14. As we go through the Bible doesn't it look like God may have had a plan, let us call it Plan A, that seems to have failed and then God is forced to move to Plan B, etc.? Doesn't the whole Bible seem to be a record of God having to try and try again to reach men and communicate with them? Or is such a thing not possible for an Omniscient God? Does God ever have to use "emergency measures"?

15. Which are more important to your understanding of God, the "key texts" or the stories/events where we see "God in action"?

16. Did God really have to go to such lengths to convince us to love and trust Him? Does trustworthiness under very difficult circumstances have more meaning to us than trustworthiness under more pleasant circumstances?

17. Looking through the entire Bible, what did God actually accomplish by the use of force of any kind (consider the flood, the tower of Babel, the death of the firstborn in Egypt, the Mt. Sinai experience, etc.)? Was God able to answer

or deal with any of the questions raised in the great controversy through the use of force or power? After each of these experiences, did human beings trust God more or less as a result? Do you think God has tended to use too much power or too little? Would you like to see God use more power or less power in our time?

18. Why is there so much killing in the Old Testament?

19. Why does God take up so much space in Scripture describing minute details of ceremonies, etc., and yet usually does not give even one verse of explanation as to what it all means?

20. How would you explain the purpose of the sanctuary to a child? Could you explain at least the general ceremonies that took place and explain what they were supposed to represent?

21. Would you be comfortable worshipping the God of the Old Testament as you understand Him? Do you see any significant differences between this portrait of God and the portrait of God that you get in the New Testament?

22. What are some of the most important principles to understand when interpreting the events and statements of the Old Testament? Are these different than the principles we use in understanding the New Testament?

MATTHEW

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Jesus is the only Person ever born in our world with the privilege of choosing His ancestors! Would you have chosen this ancestry and mentioned Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba by name (Matt 1:3-6)? Why were the genealogies traced to Joseph and not to Mary? Do we know who were Mary's ancestors?

2. Why did God go to such trouble to guide the three Magi to see baby Jesus? Why did God allow them to approach Herod and inquire of him about the Child if He knew that the result would be the death of all those children? Where did the Wise Men get their information about Jesus? Why did God bring these heathen strangers hundreds of miles to see Jesus, while He made apparently no effort to guide any of the Jewish religious leaders from Jerusalem just a few miles away?

3. Why would God send His Son as a baby with Mary and Joseph all the way down to Egypt instead of just hiding them somewhere in Galilee?

4. Matthew refers to many OT prophecies about the Messiah and shows their fulfillment in Jesus. How do you explain the fact that many of these prophecies seem to have had distinctly different meanings when they were

originally given in the OT (See Isa 7:14; Jer 31:15; Hos 11:1; cf. Matt 1:23; 2:15; 2:18)? Did Matthew use a valid hermeneutical approach to the OT or did he twist the Scriptures according to his purposes? But could he do it since he was inspired?

5. Do you think the sermon on the Mount recorded in Matt 5-7 was given originally as one single sermon? Does it seem to you that Jesus, as the best teacher, would suddenly launch into a sermon in which He attacks many of people's most cherished religious traditions, one after another? What do you think was the reaction of His hearers? Were they amused, annoyed, disturbed, shocked, or angry? Did Jesus have some way of saying these things that would not be so upsetting? How many of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon of the Mount were actually "new" (not taught in the Old Testament)?

6. Why would Jesus start off by saying, "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor" (Matt 5:3; GNB)? This seemed to contradict logic and many passages in the Old Testament! Is it not true that if you are good, you will be blessed, and if you are blessed, you will be rich? Would Matt 5:3 describe "Laodiceans" living in our day? What is the meaning of "poor in spirit"?

7. Why do you think Jesus found it necessary to say, "Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true" (Matt 5:17; GNB)? What was He referring to when He mentioned "the law and the prophets"?

8. Is it reasonable for Jesus to ask us to "love your enemies" (Matt 5:44)? In what sense could we do such a thing? What kind of love is this?

9. Who are the people to whom Jesus will finally have to say, "Go away, I never knew you" (Matt 7:21-23)? Doesn't God know everything about everybody? If so, what does it mean?

10. Why did Jesus make so much use of parables (Matt 13:10-17;34, 35)? Was He trying to hide something?

11. What was God trying to teach us through the experience of the transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13; cf. Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)?

12. Matthew describes Jesus as being particularly kind and considerate of children. This seems to be a new teaching, or at least a new emphasis not found in the Old Testament. Why did Jesus talk about becoming like children and what does this imply about God's attitude toward us (Matt 18:1-5; 19:13-15)?

13. Why does Jesus seem to contradict the OT teaching about divorce (Matt 5:31, 32; 19:1-12; Deut 24:1-4)? How does God really feel about divorce (Mal 2:16)?

14. What do you think of the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16)? Doesn't it appear that this vineyard owner was intentionally provoking those who began working earliest in the morning? Why couldn't he have at least paid them first and dismissed them before paying the others? What do you think this teaches about God? How would you regard those who were hired first?

15. What is Matthew's understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death and His resurrection? What was different about His death and that of any ordinary human? Was His death a murder (Matt 17:22, 23--if so, who killed Him?), a suicide (John 10:17, 18), or a result of some process (Matt 20:28; 27:46; Rom 4:25; 6:23)? Why was Jesus' death **necessary** for our salvation?

MARK

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Who was Mark and why did he write a "gospel"? Where did he get his information? What picture of Jesus' life would you have if you had only Mark? How do you feel about the fact that approximately ninety percent of Mark is borrowed by either Matthew or Luke? Did Mark know Jesus? Peter? Paul? One of the early church fathers, Papias, suggests that Mark wrote out Peter's gospel. Do we have any hint from the New Testament that this might be true?

2. Was the Sabbath really made for man (Mark 2:27, 28)? Would you not be happier if God would just eliminate the Sabbath commandment? What does this imply? What about choosing just one day out of the seven? Is not the Sabbath commandment arbitrary, insisting on the seventh day? For what reasons have people down through the years generally kept the Sabbath? If we just keep it because God has commanded it, what does this do to our relationship to God?

3. Why would Jesus say, "whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:29)? What is an eternal sin, and why can it not be forgiven?

4. Why was Jesus concerned about people being hungry (Mark 5:43; 6:31, 37; 8:2, 3)? Shouldn't He have left such small details to others?

5. What did Jesus mean by saying, "There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him" (Mark 7:15)?

6. Why did Jesus so often tell those He healed not to tell anyone (Mark 7:36; 8:26, 30; 9:9; cf. 5:19)? What does this imply for our witnessing?

7. Why would Jesus say, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25; NIV)?

8. How could Jesus suggest that the most important "commandments" are found in Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18 and not in Exod 20 (Mark 12:28-31)?

9. In what sense did the widow, when she gave her two "mites" or "copper coins" "put more into the treasury than all the others" (Mark 12:42-44; NIV)?

10. What do we learn about God from the story of Peter's denial (Mark 14:30, 66-72; cf. Matt 26:34, 35, 69-75; Luke 22:34, 54-62; John 13:38; 18:15-18, 25-27)? How do you think Peter felt when he looked up at Christ? What do you think Peter expected to see in the face of Christ? How do you think Jesus looked at Judas as he threw the coins down on the floor? How did Judas react and why? How does God feel about each one of His erring children?

11. Why does Mark say, "Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear"? Why omit Peter's name (Mark 14:47; NIV)? What about leaving also the name in vs. 51? Who was this? Why would he refer to Mary Magdalene as "a woman" who came with a

flask of ointment (Mark 14:3)? Why would he even fail to identify Judas as the betrayer (Mark 14:18-21)?

12. Mark 15:40 suggests that a group of women remained loyal to Jesus right to the end without running away. Why were they "braver" than even the disciples? Why have Adventists and churches in general had more evangelistic success with women than men? Why are women apparently more attracted to the gospel than men?

13. Why would the women say "nothing to anyone, because they were afraid" after receiving the news of the resurrection (Mark 16:8)? How do you reconcile Mark 16:1-3 and 16:9? Why do you think the angel said "go, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he is going before you to Galilee" (Mark 16:7)? Why was Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils (Mark 16:10) and who had been known as "a wicked woman in the town" (Luke 7:37) chosen to carry the best "good news" of all time to the members of the first "General Conference Executive Committee"? Would you have chosen her? Why do you think God chose her?

14. Repeatedly throughout His ministry Jesus taught and did things that negated the strict requirements of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Why do you think this made them so upset? What would we SDA's say if Jesus came today and said, "Excuse Me, but you're wrong about this or that other doctrine"? What if Jesus announced that SDA's have been keeping the Sabbath too strictly? Wouldn't we begin talking about warnings of false prophets to come? Might we

say, "to the law and to the testimony"--if He doesn't agree with our interpretation of these, He is wrong? Wasn't Jesus destroying what they considered to be their guarantee of salvation? Didn't they have some positive proofs that they were going to heaven (their genealogy and their riches)? Could we develop similar attitudes? Can God say to me something that is significantly different from my present understanding? If yes, how?

LUKE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. Who was the author of Luke and Acts? What was his profession? Was he a Jew? Did he write primarily for Jews? Who was Theophilus? Was Luke a first-hand witness of the events about which he wrote (Luke 1:2, 3)? Where did he get his information? Where did he do his research? Why would this prosperous Greek physician suddenly apparently give up everything and cast his lot with this little known group of Jewish "believers"? What understanding of God would you have if you had only Luke?

2. How do you feel about the fact that an estimated 90% of Mark is apparently copied in either Matthew or Luke? If there were so many things to write about in the life of Christ that "if every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25), why is there so much repetition, even apparent copying in the three "Synoptic" Gospels--Matthew, Mark, and Luke?

3. Why are there differences between the genealogies in Matt 1 and Luke 3? Why would Matthew start with Abraham and Luke start with Adam? Why would Luke be the one who recorded the most about the events connected with the birth, the childhood, and the youth of Jesus?

4. What is the difference between Jesus' temptations and ours (Luke 4:1-13; Heb 4:15)? Why was it not legitimate for Jesus to perform a miracle in answer to the Devil's challenges?

5. Why do you think Jesus was rejected when He came back to His home town at Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30)?

6. If Jesus planned for us to recite together the "Lord's Prayer" why does He give a different version in Luke 11:2-4 than in Matt 6:9-13?

7. What miracles, parables, or events are recorded only in Luke? Do you recognize any pattern in this group of stories? Where did Luke learn about them?

8. What does the parable of the prodigal son tell us about God (Luke 15:11-32)? How could the other gospel writers have left out such a significant story? Why does Luke include the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)? What was Jesus' main point in the context? How would you prove that it is actually a parable and not an account of what happens after death?

9. What do you think about the approach Jesus used when He was talking to the men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)? Why did He not tell them how things were supposed to be on His own authority?

10. Ultimately, what was the real reason for Jesus to come and die? What if Jesus, having lived His life here, decided to return to heaven at the last minute before dying? Why was the death of Jesus really necessary? What did Jesus actually die of? Is He our Savior because He was crucified? Did He die of crucifixion?

11. Jesus said that He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). In what sense would the life and death of Christ be a ransom? The idea of ransom suggests that a price is paid to an "enemy" to retrieve something of value. The **ransom theory** suggests that when man fell from grace he became the devil's possession and a just God could not ignore it. In order to free man from this bondage, He agreed to pay a price, the death of His own Son. Since the Son's value was more than that of all the damned souls together, Satan willingly entered into the arrangement. But, in accepting the payment, he was deceived. Satan, unable to hold the Son of God in his power, thus lost both the souls of the damned and the soul of the Son of God. Do you believe that God could practice deceit, even on the devil? If not, what does the idea of ransom suggest? If this ransom theory of the atonement is correct, why can't God save all sinners?

12. According to the **forensic theory** of atonement, justice demands the death of the sinner. God the Father, in order to save sinners, agrees to accept the death of His Son in payment of the price of sin and pronounces that thus justice is satisfied, ergo removing the legal barrier so He can accept sinners back again. How would you answer the following two objections: A human judge would be worthy of condemnation if He condemned the innocent in order to free the guilty! What justice could there possibly be in accepting the death of the most innocent Man who ever lived to die for the guilty? Does this understanding suggest that this "legal" transaction makes it possible for God to save sinners because they are

"covered with the righteousness of Christ," thus brought into heaven without God the Father realizing that they are still sinners?

13. Was the life of Christ and His death primarily to be a **"moral influence"** on humans to convince them to live better lives? Was Christ's death necessary for God to be able to forgive us? Why was Christ's death necessary? Why, as SDAs, cannot we agree with Abelard's "moral influence theory"?

JOHN

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. How would you look at God if you had only the gospel of John? Why is John's gospel so different from the others? Why did the other gospel writers leave out some of the amazing stories in John's gospel? When and why did John write this gospel (John 20:30, 31)? Why did he wait so long?

2. Matthew and Luke talk about Jesus' human heritage, and Mark doesn't discuss the question. What does John say about where Jesus came from (John 1:1-3)?

3. After working with the descendants of Abraham for almost 2000 years, at last God has a people who do not worship idols, are Sabbath-keepers, tithe payers, health reformers, Bible students, and were "adventists" (waiting for the coming of the Messiah); but when He came to His "home," His "family" did not receive Him (John 1:11). Could this ever happen again? What do you suppose this said to the universe? If God knew in advance that this would happen, what was He waiting for? What was there so unique about coming at this time that would make it the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4)?

4. What was it about Jesus that so upset the Pharisees and Sadducees? Weren't they obeying the "blueprint"? Has any group ever obeyed God's laws

more carefully? Is it possible to spend your whole life striving to obey God, and hate Him when He appears? How could this happen to them? Could it happen to us?

5. What about Jesus' words to His mother, at the marriage in Cana (John 2:4; cf. Luke 2:49 and John 19:26)? Is this the way a young man should talk to His mother? Do you think Jesus would produce fermented or unfermented wine (see Prov 31:4-6)?

6. What is the basis for God's final judgment (John 3:17, 18; 12:47, 48)? Who or what actually does the judging? Is it true that we have a condemning God the Father, and are grateful for the kind, interceding Son? How does Rev 22:11 fit with our understanding of the judgment?

7. Why do you suppose the Samaritans believed on Jesus (John 4:39-42) and so many of the Jews who saw much greater things did not?

8. What does the story of the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath say to us about God (John 5:1-15)? What is implied by vs. 4? Do you think God would send an angel to heal only the winner of the race to get in the pool?

9. What do you think of God's treatment of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11)? If she was caught "in the very act" (vs. 4) why didn't they bring the man as required in the law (see Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22-24)? Do we have to be afraid of a God who would treat sinners the way Jesus treated the woman and especially the way He treated those who brought her? Shouldn't Jesus have

exposed them? What does this imply about how God feels about His sinful children? What does this imply about the judgment?

10. Why would Jesus, right after being so considerate to all the sinners in the adultery case in John 8:1-11, find it necessary to say to the religious leaders, "You are of your father, the Devil" (John 8:44)?

11. What is implied by John 8:32, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"?

12. Why did Jesus wait four days to raise Lazarus? What is implied about death by Jesus' statements about Lazarus (John 11:11-14)? Was everyone thrilled to see this miracle?

13. How did Jesus treat Judas even on the last night of his life, when he had already agreed to betray Jesus? Why didn't Jesus expose him as a thief and tell the others what his plans were (John 13:18-30; cf. 12:4-6)?

14. Why did John call himself the "beloved"? Were the others not beloved, or was John just being very proud?

15. When the disciples finally realized who Jesus was (Matt 16:13-16; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-20), why didn't they ask Him about all their questions from the Old Testament? Did they really believe that Jesus was just like His Father (John 12:45; 14:8, 9)? Do we have answers to all our questions in the Old Testament? What question(s) would you have asked Jesus?

16. What is implied in John 15:15 about the relationship that God wants with us? Is it reasonable for us to think that we could be "friends" of God? What is the difference between the "servants" He talks about and the "friends"?

17. What should we do with John 16:25-27? Could this really be true? After all the verses about intercession and all the work of the priests in the Old Testament, what could Jesus be saying about His role as a mediator or intercessor? In light of these verses, what do you think Jesus is actually doing in heaven? What is His part in the judgment?

18. In what sense can "knowing God" be life eternal (John 17:3)?

19. Why did Jesus say to Mary after the resurrection, "Don't touch Me" (John 20:17)? If Mary had "touched" Him would it have been impossible for Jesus to ascend to heaven, thus spoiling the plan of salvation?

20. Why would Jesus prepare fish for the disciples to eat at His last breakfast with them (John 21:9)? Since He created it Himself, why didn't He give them something really healthful? What does it say to us about God?

ACTS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

a. Why did God do it/allow it? b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. How does the book of Acts broaden your understanding of God and the Bible? Who wrote the book? Where did he get his information? Why do you think the book ends so abruptly?

2. In the book of Acts we come to the time in history when God is forced to abandon His people, the Jews, as His special messengers to the world (see Acts 8:1, 4). Thinking back over their history what had God accomplished with and through them? Should God have just ignored them and sent His Son to Tibet or Australia or the Incas instead?

3. What was it that the disciples were still expecting as Jesus was on His way to heaven (Acts 1:6; cf. Luke 24:21)? Would you have entrusted the work of spreading the gospel throughout the entire world to such a group with their current thinking? What happened in the upper room and at Pentecost that changed them?

4. What do you think about the practice of casting lots to find out who should be the twelfth apostle? Do you suppose the two men they chose to take Judas' place were very carefully selected? They prayed over both of them. Would it have been a mistake if the lot had fallen on the other one? If our

church officers were chosen today by "casting lots" could you then be certain that they were the right choices? Should we not use this method at General Conference Sessions? Think how much time we could save!

5. What was it about the life and message of Jesus that most offended the Jews? Why do you suppose it was that the Jews who should have been God's best friends seemed to be the ones who opposed the spread of Christianity almost wherever it went (Acts 13:50)?

6. Did the Holy Spirit start working only in Acts and since Pentecost? What about Gen 1:2; Ps 51:11; John 7:39; 14:15-27; 16:5-15? Where is the clearest explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit? Why did Jesus say, "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7; NIV)? Why would it be good for Jesus to go? Was it necessary for Jesus to be at the right hand of His Father? If so, why? Could it be that the Father was unable to handle things in heaven Himself?

7. What is the meaning of Acts 4:12? Would this mean that we must come pronouncing the right "name," because if we pronounce the wrong name, the "Father" would not listen? If this is true, what language does God require? What are the implications of this text for our Christian missions?

8. If we are supposed to pray in the name of Jesus, would this suggest that if we had prayed a wonderful prayer that God was already planning to answer, but we forget to say at the conclusion, "in Jesus name we pray," would God have to

cancel out the whole prayer? Or might it mean that someone could approach God and just as he is about to speak, God hastens to say, "That is no good! Go back! You didn't come to Me in the right way, and I can accept only those who come to me in the right way"? If not, what does it mean?

9. What did Stephen say was God's response when the people at Sinai turned from God to worship and celebrate around a fertility cult symbol (Acts 7:42)? Where do you suppose he got such understanding of things? What is the meaning and form of Stephen's speech?

10. Why were Ananias and Sapphira struck dead for falsifying their report (Acts 5:1-11)? Shouldn't Peter have worked with them to get them to repent and reform their ways? Why doesn't God use more of the "early church methods" now? If someone who had cheated on their tithes or offerings dropped dead on the church floor, don't you think the offerings would pick up? Why not perform a few miracles to improve attendance and participation?

11. Is it possible that some people who have died as "examples" are actually savable and will be in heaven? Achan's children? The firstborn of Egypt? The children who died in the flood? Even Ananias and Sapphira? Is there a check-point showing that God's judgment was just?

12. What should the experience of the choosing of deacons (Acts 6:1-7) tell us about church organization today? Did the handing over of a portion of the work to more lay people hinder the work? In light of this experience, what are the implications for our church pastors and "lay" leaders today?

13. Can you imagine a conference committee at the time of the Damascus road experience appointing Saul (Paul) as the church's main evangelist to the Gentiles? Does it need to take a long time to "grow up spiritually"?

14. What was it about Paul's theology that changed on the Damascus road and immediately thereafter (Acts 9:1-31)? Did he change "gods" or even the name of his God? Did he change his Bible, his law, or his Sabbath? What made the difference in Paul that caused him to stop killing and imprisoning saints and finally write, "let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom 14:5)? Had Paul gone "soft" on all doctrine (see Gal 1:8, 9)?

15. How should we handle apparent contradictions in Scripture such as Acts 9:7 and 22:9? Did the companions of Saul hear the voice or not?

16. Does the vision which Peter saw on the rooftop in Joppa (Acts 10:9-23; cf. 1 Cor 10:25) mean that we are now free to eat whatever we like (cf. Mark 7:19; Rom 14:14, 20)?

17. At the conference on evangelism of the Gentiles held at Jerusalem (Acts 15) it was finally decided that "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things" (Acts 15:28, 29; NIV). How could Paul later say, "Eat anything sold in the meat market (in Corinth) without raising questions of conscience" (1 Cor 10:25; NIV)? Was Paul disagreeing with the Holy Spirit? Who inspired Paul to write this?

18. How could Paul tell the jailer simply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31; NIV)? Is it not also necessary to live a faithful Christian life, know the doctrines of the church, etc? Was it not "a cheap" answer?

ROMANS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. When and from where was the book of Romans written? Were any other books written by Paul about the same time? Do you think Paul knew any of the Christians in Rome personally (Rom 16)? Why would Paul write a book to a church he had never visited? How much of Romans would you understand if you had to sit in church while someone read it through from beginning to end? Is Romans the first book that Paul wrote? If not, why do you think it is the first epistle in the Bible?

2. Paul starts his book by calling himself, "Paul, a slave. . ." (slave is the real meaning of the Greek word). Why would he consider himself a slave? Isn't the truth supposed to set us free (John 8:32)?

3. Paul seems to have been really "proud" of the "good news" or "gospel" (Rom 1:16; cf. Jer 9:23). What do you think Paul was thinking of when he said "good news"? Are you proud to be a Christian? Proud enough to die for it? Do you know anybody--perhaps even a Bible writer--who seemed to know the truth, but was apparently embarrassed by it and certainly not anxious to speak about his/her God? What was Paul actually "proud" of? Rom 1:17 says the gospel

reveals the "righteousness of God." Why would that need to be revealed? Rom 3:4 suggests that God is on trial. What would this mean?

4. What do you think Paul meant when he quoted Hab 2:4, "the just shall live by faith"? Was his understanding different than Martin Luther's?

5. Why would Paul apparently begin his discussion of the "good news" (see Rom 1:16) by talking about God's wrath (Rom 1:18)? What does God do to people on whom He "pours out His wrath" (Rom 1:24, 26, 28; 4:25)? What do you suppose this means? Should we be afraid of God's wrath? What's so serious about God letting us go? Does God always do that, or does He sometimes act differently? Why?

6. What happens to the mind of a person who chooses to worship a frog, or a fly, or a beetle instead of our infinitely powerful and gracious Creator-God (Rom 1:20, 21)? What would you do with such people if you were God?

7. What does Paul say, categorically, is the condition of all men (Rom 3:10-12, 23)? What is the natural result of this condition (Rom 6:23)?

8. Rom 3:25, 26 specifically talks about the meaning of Christ's death. Why would it be necessary through Christ's death for God first to demonstrate that He, Himself, is righteous before He can "justify" those who trust in Jesus? Has anyone ever questioned God's righteousness, or His truthfulness (see Gen 3:4)?

9. If we can actually be "justified" with God through faith (Rom 3:26, 28) is there any further use for the "law" (see vs. 31)? If we have already been put right with God through trusting Him, what would be the function of the law?

10. What is the meaning of "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous" (Rom 4:3; GNB)? Did any real change take place in Abraham? Why do you think God "accepted" him?

11. When Adam sinned did it make you a sinner (Rom 5:12)? Did His sin make you "guilty"?

12. What is supposed to be the meaning of baptism (Rom 6:1-4)? What are the three great things that must happen in a Christian's experience that Paul is speaking about in Rom 6-8?

13. At what time in Paul's life did he face the struggle in Rom 7:14-25? Was this before conversion, at the time of conversion, or after conversion? What was it that led Paul finally to understand the real meaning of the commandments? What changed in his thinking? What should be the function of the commandments?

14. Does God know everything, even the number of hairs on our heads (Matt 10:30)? Rom 8:29, 30 suggests that those whom God foreknew (knew in advance) will be saved. Does this suggest that everyone will be saved? If not, how should these verses be understood?

15. Does Rom 9:1-21, especially 19-21, suggest that we are predestined either to be saved or to be lost? Does this mean that God's will is completely sovereign and our will and our decision really counts for nothing? Is this the way God runs His universe?

16. Where does Paul say faith (trust) comes from (Rom 10:17)? Why would he say that it comes from "hearing" instead of "reading" or "studying"? How did the church members learn about the contents of this letter written to them (cf. Rev 1:3)?

17. What kind of worship does God really want of us (Rom 12:1, 2)? The words translated "reasonable service" in the King James really mean, "intelligent, spiritual worship." What would this imply about us, and about the character and government of God (cf. Isa 29:13)?

18. We know that at the end of time God's true people will be persecuted by virtually all others around them. How should we relate this information to what Paul says about obeying state authorities (Rom 13:1-7)?

19. What would happen in a church if the members really acted as suggested in Rom 14:1-23? What is the main point of this chapter? Do you feel comfortable in saying to someone who disagrees with you, "Each one should firmly make up his own mind" (Rom 14:5; GNB)? Does Rom 14:3-6 mean we should give up our health practices and the Sabbath? Why would Paul conclude by saying, "And anything that is not based on faith is sin" (Rom 14:23; GNB)? If this is true, what really is sin--an action (Exod 20:1-17), an attitude (Jas 4:17), a broken relationship (Num 20:12)?

1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. As you read through the letters to the church in Corinth, do you learn anything significantly different or new about God? Don't these letters represent a true Christian gentleman trying to deal with the complex problems of the Corinthian church, and becoming so involved that he actually suffered as he did so? Does 1 Cor 13 sound like the Saul (Paul) who persecuted Christians before the Damascus road experience? How could he write 1 Cor 13:4, 5 and also 10:12-13; 11:5, 6, 21-33; 12:1, 11?

2. How many letters did Paul write to the church at Corinth? What letter is referred to in 1 Cor 5:9? Do we have this letter? Where does he deal with the subject of sexual immorality? Could it be 2 Cor 6:14-7:1? Compare also 1 Cor 1:11; 5:1. Is there a third letter and perhaps even a fourth (2 Cor 2:3; 7:8, 12; 10:9-11)? Do these verses sound like he is referring to 1 Corinthians? Does 2 Cor 10:1 and the following sound like Paul is beginning a new letter? Why do you think the Corinthians would say such things as in this verse and in 10:10 about their former pastor?

3. How many visits did Paul make to Corinth (2 Cor 1:23; cf. 2 Cor 10:9, 10; 12:14; 13:1)? Can you reconstruct the historical sequence of his letters and his visits? What was the conclusion of this experience with Paul, Titus, and the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:6, 12-16)?

4. What were the main problems in Corinth (1 Cor 7:1, 2, 25; 8:1; 11:17; 12:1)?

5. How do you reconcile the following verses:

a. "The Holy Spirit and we have agreed not to put any other burden on you besides these necessary rules: eat no food that has been offered to idols." (Acts 15:28, 29; GNB; cf. 1 Tim 4:1-5).

b. "One person's faith allows him to eat anything, but the person who is weak in the faith eats only vegetables" (Rom 14:2; GNB).

c. "You are free to eat anything sold in the meat market, without asking any questions because of your conscience" (1 Cor 10:25; GNB; cf. Mark 7:14-19; 1 Cor 8:1).

Is Paul directly contradicting what he and the other apostles as well as the Holy Spirit had agreed upon? What is the general principle being taught here (see 1 Cor 10:27-11:1)?

6. How did Paul feel about his personal freedom in Christ (1 Cor 9:1, 2, 19-22; 10:23, 24)? How does a person who feels he is perfectly free in the gospel act? Do you think that Paul would do, or eat, or wear, or say anything that would offend another church member, especially a new one (see Rom 14:13-18)? Could a person be truly free and still keep the commandments?

7. Do we really believe that love is the fulfillment of all law (Rom 13:8, 10)? If we love God and love our fellow men have we really kept all the

commandments (Matt 22:34-40)? Would it be safe to live forever next door to someone who could be described by the words of 1 Cor 13, or at least wants to be and chooses to be truly loving? Would it really be safe for God to let into heaven anyone who could not be described by those words?

8. Considering Paul's behavior toward the Corinthian church, how should a truly mature Christian behave toward others? What is the relationship between my freedom and freedom or conscience of my brother/sister? How many things did Jesus do just to meet people where they were?

9. How many of the following passages do you consider inspired? Are they all equally inspired?

a. "For married people I have a command which is not my own but the Lord's. . ." (1 Cor 7:10; GNB).

b. "To the others I say (I, myself, not the Lord). . ." (1 Cor 7:12; GNB).

c. "Now, concerning what you wrote about unmarried people: I do not have a command from the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is worthy of trust" (1 Cor 7:25; GNB).

d. "That is my opinion, and I think that I too have God's Spirit" (1 Cor 7:40; GNB).

Why would Paul make such statements? In this chapter, is Paul speaking truth that is consistent with the rest of Scripture?

10. Do you agree with Paul when he said, "For I am the least of all the apostles--I do not even deserve to be called an apostle. . ." (1 Cor 15:9; GNB; cf. 2 Cor 11:5)? How would this statement compare with Ellen White's statement

that she is a "lesser light" (4RH 486:2;1; CM 125; Ey 257)? Should Paul be given the lowest position among inspired writers?

11. On what basis does Paul suggest that we might "speak in tongues"? Is this experience, in which no one else could understand what was being said (1 Cor 14:2), the same as the pentecostal experience in which "all of us hear them speaking in our own languages about the great things that God has done!" (Acts 2:11; GNB)? How much "speaking in tongues" would take place if we insisted that "everything must be done in a proper and orderly way" (1 Cor 14:40, 33; GNB); if we "would rather speak five words that can be understood, in order to teach others, than speak thousands of words in strange tongues" (1 Cor 14:19; GNB); if "two or three at the most should speak, one after the other, and someone else must explain what is being said" (1 Cor 14:27; GNB); if "the women should keep quiet in the meetings, they are not allowed to speak" (1 Cor 14:34; GNB); if we always recognized that "best of all, however, is the following way: I may be able to speak the languages of men and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell" (1 Cor 12:31-13:1; GNB); if we recognize that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13); so that everything said must be weighed and tested by the truth (Scripture); and if we realize that the gifts of the Spirit will lead to "self-control" (Gal 5:23)?

12. What would happen to the church if all the members were constantly striving to behold the Lord and were being changed as described in 2 Cor 3:18?

13. What does it mean to carry within our bodies the death of Jesus (1 Cor 4:10)?

14. Is our message still the same as Paul's, "that God was making all mankind his friends through Christ" (2 Cor 5:19; GNB)? How would this affect our day-by-day living?

15. Why does Paul say, "for God loves the one who gives gladly" (2 Cor 9:7; GNB)?

16. Who do you think were the "very special so-called 'apostles' of yours" (2 Cor 11:5; GNB)?

GALATIANS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

a. What did it mean to the original readers?

b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. How would you understand God and religion if all you had was the book of Galatians? Or only the writings of Paul? What do we know about the churches of Galatia? What other New Testament books were written about the same time? What other book seems to talk about many of the same subjects? What was happening in Galatia that led to the writing of this book? How do you suppose Paul found out about it?

2. Do you think the false teachers whom Paul refers to knew Paul personally (Gal 1:7; 3:1; 4:17; 5:7, 12)? Where do you think they came from? What kind of people were they? What do you think was attractive about what they were preaching? Why would anybody want to return to the legalistic and ceremonial requirements of the Jews? What were these false teachers saying about Paul and about what it means to be a Christian?

3. What was it that changed Paul from being the foremost proponent of Judaism, and a strict supporter of the ceremonial requirements of the law, to being a Christian apostle who could speak so strongly against those requirements and emphasize faith?

4. How could Paul be so confident about his version of the gospel that he could say: "We have said it before, and now I say it again: if anyone preaches to you a gospel that is different from the one you accepted, may he be condemned to hell!" (Gal 1:9; GNB)?

5. Is it possible for us today to be so confident about our understanding of the gospel? What did Paul mean by it? What do you mean when you say "gospel"? Did Paul lose his temper here? Is it ever justified for Christians to use such language?

6. Could you stand in the pulpit and preach a sermon, and at the end say, "If anyone disagrees with what I have just preached, may he be condemned to hell" (Gal 1:9)? What would you do if your pastor did this? In Rom 14:5-10, Paul seems to be so gracious in allowing differences of opinion. Why would he not extend the same courtesy to the man who comes with a different gospel?

7. If an angel appeared and said he had come from heaven to bring us the "good news," should we hesitate at all in accepting what he had to say? Can he possibly be wrong (1 Cor 11:13, 14)? Are not some contemporary preachers making similar claims? What criteria would you set up to determine what is the real "gospel" or "good news"? Where did Paul learn his version of the "good news"?

8. Why would Paul go to Jerusalem and explain his "gospel" to the church leaders (Gal 2:1, 2)? Did he want their agreement, or did he want to make sure

he had the "good news" straight? Did he want to win them to the same view point?

9. Could you write out your understanding of the "good news" or "gospel" in a paragraph or two? What are the essential truths that would have to be included? Does Paul say, in Galatians, what he believed the "good news" was? Does he describe it in any of his other books?

10. Did Paul have adequate respect for the church leaders? How could he say, "But those who seemed to be the leaders--I say this because it makes no difference to me what they were. . ." (Gal 2:6; GNB)? Would you feel comfortable speaking like this about your pastor or the conference leaders?

11. How could Paul rebuke Peter "in front of them all" (Gal 2:14)? Is this the way a real Christian should act? How did Peter react? How did he feel about Paul later (2 Pet 3:15)? Is there a time for us to stand up and "call sin by its right name"? How would you know when it is all right to do that?

12. What do you think led Paul to raise the question, "Why then the law?" or "What was the purpose of the law?" (Gal 3:19)? Do we know the purpose behind giving the law?

13. If the truth is supposed to make us free (John 8:32), why does God make so much use of the law? What does it mean to say, "The truth will set you free"? How can the truth set someone free?

14. What did Paul mean when he said, "the law was in charge of us until Christ came" or "to bring us to Christ" (Gal 3:24; GNB)? What is implied here about the purpose of the law?

15. In 1888, Seventh-day Adventists held a General Conference at Minneapolis, Minnesota at which this was a much discussed question. Does this mean that Paul didn't answer the question adequately? Why do you think that the delegates at that 1888 conference spent most of their time arguing, not about the main purpose of the law, but about "which law was added, the moral (or ten commandment) law or the ceremonial law"?

16. What is the significance of the whole idea of "covenant" that is so richly used in the Bible? What is the meaning of the "old" and "new" covenant (cf. Gal 4:21-31)?

17. Why had Paul become so opposed to circumcision? He was circumcised himself! How could he possibly say what he did in Gal 5:12?

18. Paul talks a great deal about freedom in the book of Galatians. What do you think he meant by this? How free does God want us to be, actually? What is the relationship between freedom and consequences? Why does Paul say, "A person will reap exactly what he plants" (Gal 6:7; GNB)? Is it safe to allow a two-year-old to do whatever he wants?

19. When someone is fully a Christian isn't he supposed to be "controlled by the Spirit"? If so, why does Paul say that the "Spirit produces. . . self-control" (Gal

5:22, 23; GNB)? As we grow to be more and more like Christ, will we have more "self-control" or less (1 Cor 11:1)?

20. Why do you think Paul said, "See what big letters I make as I write to you now with my own hand!" (Gal 6:11; GNB)? Didn't he write all of his letters? Could this have had anything to do with his poor eyesight, which some think was his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:7; see Gal 4:15; cf. Rom 16:22)?

21. Would you agree with Paul in Gal 6:15? How many other Christian issues would fall into the same category as circumcision does in this verse? Does anything ultimately matter if it doesn't lead to "being a new creature"?

EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Where was Paul and what was he doing when he wrote Ephesians and Colossians? Why do some translations of the Bible not mention Ephesus in Eph 1:1? Are there any really new insights into our understanding of God, His character, and His way of governing the universe found in these two books? If you had only Ephesians and Colossians, what understanding of God would you have?

2. What is the "handwriting of ordinances" that was against us? Could this refer to the moral law (the ten commandments)? Could it be the ceremonial law? If Eph 2:15, 16 and Col 2:14 speaks about cessation of all the laws that were added and were not in the Old Testament (traditions), then how would we explain the reference to the new moons, Sabbaths, and questions of food and drink (Col 2:16)?

3. What was nailed to the cross? When we read about the law in Romans and Galatians, we learn that all it asks for is love (Rom 13:10; Gal 5:14). How could love bring enmity? How would eliminating or removing the Jewish

traditions make peace among the angels (Col 1:19, 20)? How would that bring reunification throughout the universe?

4. Did Christ die for the sinless angels (Eph 1:9, 10; 3:9, 10; Col 1:19, 20)? They didn't need any forgiveness. They had not rebelled. What would Christ's death accomplish for them? How would it bring peace? How does the death of Christ protect the angels against the hazards of apostasy, defection, hostility, alienation, disunity, and distrust for eternity? What did they learn at the cross?

5. Was there not a dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:14) even in heaven among the angels? And what was the issue? Has it always been over God's law? Is it the fault of the law, or a misunderstanding of the law? What kind of misunderstanding?

6. Ellen White suggests that the central issue in the great controversy is God's law (ST, Dec. 22, 1914). What is so controversial about the law not only on this earth but also in the universe? Is it just the question of obedience to the law, or is it also a question about God who would make such extensive use of the law, and why? How could the cross make peace among the angels (Col 1:19, 20)? Did the angels need a clarification of God's use of the law, and the quality of life that He wants in His universe? Did even the loyal ones need better understanding?

7. Which has caused greater hostility?--the ceremonial Sabbaths, or the seventh-day Sabbath? Does everybody understand clearly how to observe it and what attitude to have toward it? How about Jews, crucifying Christ and rushing

home to keep the Sabbath? Was the ceremonial law ever against us? What was the ceremonial law given to teach?

8. Where did the Jews get their misunderstanding of circumcision? Is it possible even to take the Sabbath and misunderstand it, and turn it into a dividing thing, rather than a uniting thing?

9. Were the ten commandments terminated at the cross?--the law of love (Matt 22:34-40) and liberty (Jas 1:25)? Do the ten commandments limit our freedom? Is the cross meant to be the end of the ten commandments? Can you show the ten commandments still have authority?

10. Do you think that God regards our freedom higher than anything else? If yes, how can God maintain freedom and peace forever? Will He need to use law? Is there any other way to maintain order and harmony?

11. How could looking at the cross make me want to love God? How would Jesus dying on the cross lead me to love God? Does the cross tell us something about law, and the God who has used law so much?

12. Is the church built on Peter (Matt 16:18; cf. Eph 2:19-22)? Did Peter recognize who was the "Chief Cornerstone" (1 Pet 2:4-8)?

13. What is the significance and purpose of spiritual gifts (Eph 4; Rom 12; 1 Cor 12)? Why do we have such a variety of them? What is God's ultimate goal for each one of us (Eph 4:13)? How does the church contribute to this?

14. How do you reconcile Matt 18:2-4, 1 Cor 13:11, and Eph 4:13, 14?

15. What is the meaning of "Do not make God's Holy Spirit sad" (Eph 4:30; GNB)? Does that mean, "Don't make Him angry, or He won't help you"? If not, what then? Suppose I do whatever it is that brings great sorrow to the Spirit of God. What am I actually doing?

16. Why would Paul say, "Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18)? Does the Holy Spirit have anything in common with alcoholic "spirits"?

17. What kind of relationship does God want in marriage? If we each treated our spouses as suggested by Eph 5:21-33, what would be the result? Why is this so hard to do? Or is it? Why is there so much misunderstanding of these verses?

18. Why doesn't Paul condemn slavery (Eph 6:5-9)?

19. We believe that Christ is One with the Father, and that He has no beginning. Why then would Paul call Him the "first-born Son" (Col 1:15)? Is it really important that we believe that Christ was fully God? Why? Was there ever a time when Christ was "born" (Col 1:18)? What could it mean to be "firstborn from the dead"?

PHILIPPIANS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. What does the book of Philippians tell us about God? Why do you suppose Paul wrote it? How much experience had Paul had with the church at Philippi? Where was Paul when he wrote this book? What other books were written about the same time?

2. What led Paul to go to Philippi and what happened to him there? What was unique about the relationship between Paul and the Philippians? How was Philippi different from other places where Paul had worked in the past? Why would Paul cast out the devil from the slave girl at Philippi (See Acts 16:8-10, 11-40; 20:1-6; Phil 2:25, 28; 1:13; 4:14-17)? Was it a mistake?

3. How do you suppose Paul, a prisoner, managed to convert some of Caesar's workers (Phil 1:13; 4:22)?

4. What is the meaning of "some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry" (Phil 1:15)?

5. What does Paul mean by, "I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is

more necessary on your account" (Phil 1:23, 24, NRSV)? Did he plan to go directly to heaven when he died?

6. Why would the Sovereign God of the universe step down and "empty himself," even dying "the death of a common criminal" (Phil 2:5-8, Phillips) while Lucifer, a created being, be so determined to exalt himself above the throne of God (Isa 14:12-14; Matt 4:8, 9)? What does this imply to us about the nature of the great controversy between these two? Which of these attitudes seems to be more like ours? Does this have anything to do with the "mystery of godliness" (1 Tim 3:16) and the "mystery of iniquity" (2 Thess 2:7)?

7. Why would God inspire Paul to write Phil 2:25-27? Or is this inspired? Would you need to be inspired to make such a statement? What is theology about? Would God take time out of His busy schedule to be concerned about the illness of a friend?

8. What would move Paul to use such strong language as he does in Phil 3:2-8? What issues have led Paul to use similar strong language before?

9. What would it mean to say, "their god is the belly" (Phil 3:19)? How could you be sure that this is not your case? Would such a person have to be a glutton, or could he be even someone who is extremely concerned about what he eats?

10. What is the meaning of "our conversation is in heaven" (Phil 3:20; KJV)?

11. Do you think Paul, while in prison, was able to follow his own advice in Phil 4:8, 9? Now, what about reading some Bible material? Is it "noble," "pure,"

"lovely," "admirable," or "praiseworthy"? If not, why is it in God's Word? How are we then supposed to follow Paul's advice?

12. What is implied by Phil 4:10-13? What is Paul talking about when he says he can do "all things through Christ"?

1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Is there any important truth found in Thessalonians that is not found elsewhere in the Bible? Would we be any worse off if these two letters were left out of the canon? Why do you think the church included these two short letters? When were these letters written? Was there anything unusual or unique about the church at Thessalonica? From where were these letters written? Had other portions of the New Testament already been written (see Acts 17:1-15; 18:5; 1 Thess 3:1-6)?

2. Should we come to the place where one could say ". . . holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed" (1 Thess 2:10; NIV)? Did Paul think he was already perfect? What do you think he was referring to here?

3. Paul suggests that there were forged letters circulating. Who do you think would stoop to use such methods (see 2 Thess 2:2; 3:17; Gal 6:11)?

4. What do you think happened that might have led Paul to say, "we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, again and again--but Satan hindered us" (1 Thess 2:18; RSV)? How might Satan actually do this? If Satan was working through the

Jews, why does not Paul mention them (cf. Matt 16:23)? Why is Satan mentioned so few times in the Scripture?

5. From Paul's answers in 1 Thess 4 and 5 what do you think was the main question in the minds of the Thessalonians? What important details of truth do we learn from 4:13-18? What else does Paul want them to know about the second coming (1 Thess 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 5:23)?

6. Does 1 Thess 4:14 prove that the dead saints are with Jesus in heaven now? How could the New English Bible say, "God will bring them to life with Jesus" (cf. the Good News Bible)? Is this verse primarily referring to the death and resurrection of Jesus, or events at the second coming? What would be the purpose of a resurrection of the body if the saints have been enjoying heavenly bliss for many years already?

7. Having read 1 and 2 Thessalonians, do you feel that those who are alive and remain to see Jesus come will have any special advantages or privileges over those who have "fallen asleep" (see 1 Thess 4:13-18)?

8. How could the Thessalonians be apparently upset by the "delay" in the return of Jesus in AD 51? What would lead them to think that He was coming back so soon? Why did not God, through Paul, clearly explain to them that thousands of years would have to pass first? Was God dishonest in suggesting through the apostles that time was almost over, 2000 years ago (see 1 John 2:18; Rev 22:20)?

9. Who is Paul referring to when he says, "the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess 2:3, 4; RSV; cf. Isa 14:12-14)? Could this refer to more than one individual?

10. When will the events of 2 Thess 2:8 take place? Is he speaking here of the second or the third coming? Does he differentiate between the two? Who is "holding back" the power of lawlessness" (vss. 6-8; NIV)?

11. Why would Paul feel it necessary to say "test everything" (1 Thess 5:21)? Do you have to prove everything? Can you test "spiritual things" with the intellect? If not, how do you test them? Do we need to test things coming from God (Matt 24:24)?

1 AND 2 TIMOTHY

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Do you learn anything new about God from these books? What was the historical background of these two letters? How would you feel as a young pastor getting such a letter from a conference official? Where was Paul and what do you think he was doing when he wrote these letters (1 Tim 3:14, 15; 2 Tim 4:6, 18; RSV)? What was Timothy doing (1 Tim 1:3; RSV)?

2. What were some of the problems that Timothy faced, about which Paul was deeply concerned (1 Tim 1:3-7; RSV)? What seems to be the main emphasis of Paul's advice?

3. What is the proper use of "law" (1 Tim 1:8-11)? How do you compare these verses with Gal 3:19-25; Col 2:14, 15; Rom 7:12? Who is it that seems to need the law? On the basis of this verse, was there any need for law before sin arose? Would it be correct to say that the law was "added" because of sin (Gal 3:19)? Would this include the ten commandment law? Why would the God who wants so much freedom make so much use of law? What does it tell us about Him and His way of governing the universe? Do those who "do what is right because it is right" have to worry about the law?

4. Is it clear from 1 Tim 2:4 what God has always wanted (cf. 2 Pet 3:9; Rom 2:4)? If God really wants everyone to be saved, then why do we need a Mediator to plead with Him (1 Tim 2:5)? Who is "God, our Savior" in vs. 3? In what sense was Christ Jesus a "ransom for all men" (1 Tim 2:6)? Have we been kidnapped? What did God have to do to buy us back? From whom?

5. Does 1 Tim 2:9, 10 forbid Christian women from wearing "jewelry"? Why do you think Paul wrote these verses?

6. In the light of 1 Tim 2:11-15 do you think Paul would agree to ordain women to be elders or pastors in the church today? Will women be saved by "works" (vs. 15)? Can childbirth "make up" for a sin?

7. Do you think anyone would qualify to be a church leader if we strictly applied the criteria of 1 Tim 3:1-13?

8. Are we concerned with Paul's advice, "attend to the public reading of scripture" (1 Tim 4:13; RSV)?

9. Why would Paul give such detailed advice about who are "true" or "real" widows (1 Tim 5:3-17; RSV)?

10. What do you think was Paul's intention when he said, "The elders who do good work as leaders should be considered worthy of receiving double pay" (1 Tim 5:17; GNB)? Could the church ever apply such a suggestion? How would you like to be on a committee to decide who was eligible?

11. Why does Paul seem to condone the practice of slavery (1 Tim 6:1, 2; Titus 2:9, 10; Philemon)?

12. Is it true that "the love of money is the root of all evils" (1 Tim 6:10; RSV)? Is it not in contradiction with, "Money is the answer for everything" (Eccl 10:19; NIV)? What about the other sins mentioned in 2 Tim 3:1-5--do they spring from "the love of money"? Do these verses suggest that we are living in the "last days"?

13. How soon did heresies begin creeping into the early Christian church? Did Paul or Timothy have to deal with any heresies (2 Thess 2:7; 2 Tim 2:16-18)?

14. What is the original intention of "study to show thyself approved unto God" (2 Tim 2:15; KJV)? Did Timothy have the facilities to "study" as we do today? Does this verse have anything to do with the use of manuscripts or books (to compare several versions)?

15. What do we learn from 2 Tim 3:16? Do all versions translate it the same (see the New English Bible)? Is this a proof that the "entire Bible" is inspired? What does "inspired" actually mean? This verse is found in many versions of the Bible that include the Apocrypha (the original 1611 King James Version and all Roman Catholic versions, for example). Does this prove that the Apocrypha is inspired? Did Timothy's Bible include the Apocrypha? (Note that this is the key text used by the Roman Catholic church to prove that the Apocrypha is "inspired.") Did Paul ever have to deal with letters claiming to be inspired, which were actually fakes (1 Thess 2:2)?

16. Would one need to be inspired to say, "Do your best to come to me soon--before winter" (2 Tim 4:9, 21; RSV) or "bring the cloak that I left" (2 Tim 4:13; RSV)? Why are these bits included in the Bible?

17. What do you suppose Paul did with the "books and above all the parchments" (2 Tim 4:13; RSV) that he asked to be brought to him? Was Paul studying other authors? Poetry (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12)? The Old Testament?

18. How could Paul say, "And the Lord will rescue me from every attempt to do me harm, and keep me safe until his heavenly reign begins" (2 Tim 4:18; RSV) when he apparently knew very well what was about to happen to him (vs. 6)? Was Paul trying to deceive himself?

TITUS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original reader?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Are there any important ideas about God found in the book of Titus?

Where was Titus working when he received this letter (Titus 1:5)? What was Titus doing there? Was Titus a Jew or a Gentile? What else do we know about Titus (Gal 2:1-10; 2 Cor 8:16-20; 2 Tim 4:10)?

2. Why do you suppose the letter to Titus is so much like 1 Timothy? Why did the church preserve both books in the New Testament?

3. Do you know any church leaders who are "blameless" (Titus 1:7)? Does it appear that it would be impossible to get any church leaders from among the people of Crete (Titus 1:12, 13)? Does this mean that if a minister has one bad child in his family, he cannot serve? Should he resign immediately? Or when he has two bad children? After a while how many would we have left?

4. Why would Paul quote an obviously uninspired writer to say something so disparaging about the people of Crete as this, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons'" (Titus 1:12; NIV)? Do you consider these words to be "kind," "not proud," "not rude" (1 Cor 13:4-7)? Was this book only for the private encouragement of Titus? Would

Titus dare to read this passage to his congregation? After having heard these words would the audience listen to anything else that Paul said?

PHILEMON

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original reader?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. What does the book of Philemon add to your understanding of God?

Why do you think the early church fathers included this book in the canon? Who was Philemon? Who was Onesimus? Where did Paul meet Onesimus? Is Onesimus mentioned elsewhere?

2. In light of the fact that Onesimus was a runaway slave, did Paul really have anything to do with sending him back to Philemon (Phlm 1:12)? Wouldn't Onesimus be sent back to Philemon by the authorities to be punished or killed? In Paul's time there were an estimated 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. In fact, there were considerably more "slaves" than there were "free men." Thus it was considered essential that the "slaves" be severely punished if they tried to run away or rebel in any way. Slavery was not a lifelong condition based on "race," but often a way of paying back debts. A slave could buy his way out of slavery if he had the money, or he would be released when his obligation was complete.

3. Why didn't Paul use this opportunity to say that slavery was a terrible sin and that no Christian should be involved in it (cf. Eph 6:5; Col 3:22-23)?

4. Would slavery continue if all slaves did what Paul told Onesimus to do and if Philemon did what Paul suggested he should do (see also Col 3:11)?

5. Why do some translations have Paul calling himself an "ambassador" while others have "an old man" (Phlm 1:9)?

6. Do we have any idea what the outcome was of Paul's writing of this letter? What happened to Onesimus? It is interesting that about 110 AD Bishop Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to the Bishop of Ephesus who was a man named Onesimus. Do you think this could have been the same Onesimus? Is it possible that Onesimus may even have helped to collect all of Paul's letters together to form the New Testament? Many scholars believe that this may have taken place in Ephesus.

HEBREWS

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. What picture of God would you have if you had only the book of Hebrews? If you had only the ceremonial law to go by? Who do you think wrote Hebrews? To whom was it written, when, and why? Why would the author of Hebrews, when quoting the Old Testament, quote the Greek Septuagint (LXX) almost word for word? Do you think Paul could have written such a book to some of the people who had been going around trying to make his Gentile converts into Jews (see Gal 1:6-10; 3:1)?

2. Was there ever a time when Jesus did not exist? What event or time period is being referred to in Heb 1:5 and 5:5, "You are my Son, today I have become your Father" (cf. Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13)? Was there ever a time when Jesus was "born" as suggested in Heb 1:6? What does first-born mean in this verse? If worshipping a creature (a created being) is a serious sin (Rom 1:25), would God tell the angels to worship His Son if He were a created being (Heb 1:6)?

3. In the light of Heb 2:17, 18 and 4:14, 15, should we believe that there are some things about us humans that Jesus understands better than the Father and

that is why Christ has been chosen as our High Priest? Does Christ need to plead with the Father to get Him to accept us humans into heaven (see John 16:26)? If not, what do these texts mean? Did Jesus come to this earth to bring news about us to the Father, or news about the Father to us?

4. What is the Sabbath-like rest that the Hebrews failed to enter into, but which is still available to us (Heb 4:8-10)? What barrier exists between God and man that is most likely to prevent rest and peace? Is there anything you know about God, or He knows about you, that makes you uneasy?

5. Was Melchizedek (Heb 5:6-7:22; cf. Gen 14:17-24) an ordinary man? If so, why does Hebrews say what it does about him? Where do you suppose this "man" came from?

6. How can the Bible say that Jesus was "made perfect" and "learned obedience" (Heb 5:8)? Is there anything that God needs to learn? What does it mean to be "made perfect through suffering" (Heb 2:10)? How did Jesus develop the "perfection" that He had?

7. In light of the comments in Heb 5:11-6:3, and 12:7-11, what does God want us to do in our Christian lives? Does this seem to fit with Jesus' statement, "I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:2-4; GNB)? In what sense are we supposed to be like little children and in what ways are we supposed to grow up? What does Christian maturity or "perfection" actually mean? Which would be the most serious--to fail to grow physically, mentally, or spiritually?

8. Does Heb 6:4-6 suggest that once a person has been converted and then apostatizes it is impossible to come back (see also Heb 10:26; 1 John 3:9, 10; Matt 12:43-45)?

9. Does Hebrews actually tell us what Christ is doing in the heavenly sanctuary right now? The Old Testament ceremonial system suggests that by placing one's hands over the head of an animal and confessing one's sins, one's sins are transferred to the animal, which is then sacrificed and the sins are transferred to the altar, and then into the sanctuary. Later, on the day of Atonement, these sins are removed by the High Priest, who then places them on the head of a goat which is led away to die in the wilderness. Hebrews suggests that all of this was a type of the actual events that are taking place in heaven. How are my sins transferred to Jesus? What does He do with them? After my sins have been "removed" (Heb 9:26) from me, how am I really different?

10. In the light of Hebrews, what do you think we were supposed to have learned from the Old Testament ceremonial system?

11. Why is it that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness) of sin" (Heb 9:22; KJV; cf. 10:4)? What is being referred to here (See Heb 9:9-10:10)? Do you see any connections between the sanctuary inauguration ceremony and Heb 9?

12. What relationship do you see between the original "sanctuary and its services," and "the heavenly sanctuary and its services" as portrayed by Hebrews?

Do either one of these pictures represent the actual "transactions" that are taking place in heaven right now (see Heb 10:1-4)?

13. Why is it that "the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins" (Heb 10:4, 8, 11; GNB), but Christ's blood does? Why would God give them a system that didn't work? If the ceremonial system could not take away sin, what was its purpose?

14. How are the three members of the Godhead involved in the process of salvation (Heb 10:12-18)? After the Holy Spirit has finished His job, it seems there is no need for any further sacrifice. What does the Holy Spirit actually do about our sins?

15. Why would God say, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Heb 10:30; Rom 12:19; Deut 32:35)?

16. Does Heb 11:1 tell us what faith is, or does it tell us what faith does? In what sense is faith "substance" or "evidence"?

17. How could so many people from Judges be included in Heb 11? Why would the author pick these people as examples of faith: Rahab? Gideon? Samson? Jephthah?

18. What kind of worship is promoted by the idea that "our God is indeed a destroying fire" (Heb 12:28, 29; GNB)? Does it make you comfortable to think that, "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31; GNB)!? How can we reconcile this with 1 Cor 13 and 1 John 4:8, "God is love"?

JAMES

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Who was this James? James is a Greek name equivalent to the Hebrew name Jacob and thus was very common among the Jews. Do we read about him elsewhere in the Bible (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; Acts 15:13, 19; Gal 1:19; 2:9)?

What do you think is the main message of James? Does James tell us anything unique about God? Does it add anything not found elsewhere? What picture of God would you have if you had only James? James belongs to a part of the New Testament sometimes called the "catholic epistles." What does that mean?

2. How do you think God gives wisdom (Jas 1:5)? Does it come in pills, larger or smaller doses, or how? Have you received any from Him? What does it mean to have wisdom? Can you think of anyone who received a lot of wisdom and made terrible use of it?

3. Who or what does James suggest is the main source of our temptations (Jas 1:13)? How does this relate to the work of the Devil? What is the final result (or consequence) of this sin that seems to come forth from within us (Jas 1:15; Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23)?

4. Does James contradict Paul, as Luther seems to suggest? Does James contradict Luther's theme that we are saved by "faith alone" (cf. Jas 1:22 and Rom 2:13)? Why would Luther call it a "straw epistle"? Did Paul ever suggest that the faith he spoke of would not be expressed in appropriate actions?

5. What is the ultimate purpose of the law? Did James regard the law as something that keeps us in bondage? What do you think he meant by "the perfect law that sets people free" (Jas 1:25; GNB)? How does this relate to "the truth that sets us free" (John 8:32)? How could a law (apparently the ten commandments--Jas 2:11) set us free (Jas 2:12)? Would keeping "the perfect law that sets people free" make you safe to have in heaven? How could the angels have been surprised to discover that there was a law (MB, 109; Maranatha, 79)?

6. Would you agree with James' definition of "pure and genuine religion" (Jas 1:27; GNB)? Does this not seem an awful lot like works? How would you cf. Mic 6:8; Amos 5:21-24; 1 Cor 13:3? Or maybe it is not a definition after all?

7. Does Jas 2:10 seem fair to you? How could this verse be true? Could telling a "white lie" make you as guilty as a murderer?

8. How would you describe the difference between the faith of a true Christian and the faith of a "demon" (Jas 2:19)? Or should we say that the "demons" do not "have faith," they only "believe"? What does the "demons' faith" do for them? What would you like your faith to do for you? Could you write out a clear definition of "faith" that would distinguish between your faith and the faith of a "demon"?

9. When James starts talking about the tongue in chap. 3, do you think he has changed the subject? What does the tongue have to do with keeping the commandments (see also Rom 1:29)? As an early church leader do you think James ever had to deal with the problem of "gossip"?

10. How do you fit the definition of sin in Jas 4:17 with the definition of sin in 1 John 3:4 and Rom 14:23? Are these definitions in contradiction? Is a sin of omission just as serious as a sin of commission?

1 AND 2 PETER

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. What would be your understanding of God if you had only the letters of Peter? When and where do you think these letters were written? What was Peter's main reason for writing these letters? Do they add anything significantly new to our understanding of God or the plan of salvation? Did Peter have any help in writing these letters (1 Pet 5:12)? Where is the "Babylon" that he refers to in 1 Pet 5:13? Who else was with him there?

2. How would you compare the Peter of the gospels with the Peter who writes these letters?

3. Many have believed that Peter (whose name means "rock") was the one designated to be the first leader of the new Christian church and that Jesus Himself gave him this position (see Matt 16:18, 19). Who does Peter himself seem to understand the church is "built upon" (1 Pet 2:4-8)?

4. Are you happy to be one of God's "peculiar" people (1 Pet 2:9; KJV)? What does this really mean?

5. As you remember the story of Peter, did he always answer with "gentleness and respect" as he recommends in 1 Pet 3:14-16?

6. Are you "ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you" (1 Pet 3:15; GNB)? What does it take to be confident enough to say that? Would it be possible for even a young Christian to do this? What would be the best place and way for new Christians to get practice in doing this?

7. What do you think of Peter's attitude toward suffering for Christ (1 Pet 4:12-16)? On what basis could one be "happy" that he is being persecuted?

8. How do you feel about Peter's description of the Devil and what he is doing (1 Pet 5:8)? Is this how you feel about the Devil?

9. How do you think Peter intended to "provide a way for you to remember these matters at all times after my death" (2 Pet 1:15; GNB)? He goes on to suggest that he would give a genuine "eyewitness" account of what Jesus did (2 Pet 1:16). Do we have any record of this "account"? Who may have helped him in making this account available (1 Pet 5:13)?

10. How do you understand 2 Pet 1:20? Does this mean that we have to wait for the "organized church" to give us the interpretation of every part of the Bible?

11. How far does 2 Pet 1:20, 21 suggest that the process of inspiration reaches? How many steps are necessary for the "words" of God to accomplish an understanding response in my heart and life? Does each one of these steps need to be inspired? Does the Holy Spirit need to "inspire" us for us to be able to understand the true meaning of the Bible?

12. Think of all the varied ways and unexpected people God has used to communicate with us. Do you think of all of these people as "holy men of God"? What about David after his sin with Bathsheba? What about Solomon at the time of writing Ecclesiastes? Moses was a murderer before he wrote a single word of Scripture! Were Jonah and Hosea saints? Many parts of the Old Testament were written by unnamed people. Were these men also "holy men of God"?

13. What do we learn from 2 Pet 3 about the reasons for the delay in the second coming of Christ? Can you think of any modern scientific theories that are suggested by 2 Pet 3:4-6? What reason does Peter give for God's waiting? If God is waiting for us, will there ever come a time when "we" will be ready? What specifically do you think God is waiting for? Do we have any control over whether Christ's coming is hastened or delayed (2 Pet 3:9-12)?

14. Peter talks about Paul writing some things that are difficult to understand (2 Pet 3:15, 16). Did Peter write anything that is difficult to understand? How do you explain 1 Pet 3:18, 19? Who were these "spirits" (1 Pet 3:20)? There is an interesting story in the Pseudoepigraphical book of Enoch that says something similar to what Peter is saying here, and says Enoch preached to the "spirits in prison." Do you think these two stories are related in any way? What could Peter possibly be referring to here?

15. There appears to have been some rather remarkable changes that took place in the lives of some of the New Testament writers--Saul became Paul, the impetuous fisherman Peter became the writer of these epistles, John "the Son of

Thunder" became "John the beloved." What actually caused the changes in their lives? What forces brought about these changes? What about us today?

1, 2, & 3 JOHN

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Do these three short letters from John the Beloved add anything to your understanding of God, His character, or His government? Why and when do you think John wrote them? 1 John was apparently written to the church at Ephesus where John had been pastor for a long time, because a breakaway group (see 1 John 2:19) was trying to convince others to join them (2:26). We can guess that the breakaway group did not believe Jesus was the Messiah (2:22; 5:1) nor that He had come in the flesh (4:2). They felt no need of the mediatorial services of Jesus since they claimed to have direct knowledge of and fellowship with God (1:6; 2:4). Practical Christian living, morality, and love were not as important to them as visions and spiritual revelations (4:1-4).

2. What is the meaning of 1 John 1:8-10 (cf. Rom 3:4)? How do you fit this with what follows immediately in 1 John 2:1? How do you understand that Jesus is there to "speak to the Father in our defense" (NIV)? Compare John 16:26.

3. What is the meaning of "Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven" (1 John 2:2; GNB; "atoning sacrifice for our sins," NIV)? If Christ dealt with all the sins of every person, as suggested, why are all not saved?

4. What is the relationship between "knowing God" and "keeping the commandments" (1 John 2:3, 4)?

5. How do you explain John's statement, "Children, it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18)? How could he make such a statement in the 90s less than 70 years after Christ died? Was he wrong? Does it mean that for those people it was the last hour, but for the rest of the world it was not? How do you think the people who actually received the letter understood it? What would people do if God said, "Don't worry, it's not the last hour, you've got plenty of time left"? Did God inspire John to write this just to "keep us on our toes"?

6. Did John believe that the end was very near? Are you embarrassed to mention the "signs of the end" such as "the dark day," and "the moon turning to blood," which happened on May 19, 1780, and "the falling of the stars" which occurred on Nov. 13, 1833, because it seems that such a long time has passed since then? How do you interpret the prophecy, "This generation shall not pass away until all is fulfilled" (Matt 24:34)?

7. What do you think of John's explanation of why some people leave the church (1 John 2:19)?

8. What is suggested by, ". . . we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is" (1 John 3:2 GNB)? What is the purpose of our studies/education?

9. Does 1 John 3:8 explain why Jesus came? What would be suggested by this explanation? Without the great controversy perspective, what would this verse mean?

10. What is the meaning of 1 John 3:9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; . . . and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (KJV; cf. 3:6)? Some have suggested that this is a response to the Gnostic notion that there is no relation between the body and the soul. If the soul is "born again," can the body do whatever it likes, and the soul will still be saved?

11. Does 1 John 3:9 mean that if we catch ourselves falling into sin, we were not truly converted? How do you fit this with 1 John 2:1? Was Moses not converted throughout his life—even though he spoke to God "face-to-face" and God called him His friend—because he sinned at the rock near the end of his life? What is the real issue here? What does 1 John 3:4 teach us about the real nature of sin?

12. Would you be ready to lay down your life for the brethren (1 John 3:16)?

13. How should we "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1-3)? Would you feel comfortable "testing" the Holy Spirit? John suggests that they should already have known that the Antichrist was coming. Who had already talked about the Antichrist and testing all things?

14. Is 1 John 4:8 the most convincing evidence in your mind that "God is love"? Do you need a key text to tell you this after having read through the Old

Testament and the New Testament? In your mind, what is the most convincing evidence of all that "God is love"?

15. How do you understand, "There is no fear in love, perfect love drives out all fear" (1 John 4:18; GNB)? Can you fit this in with Prov 9:10 and Rev 14:6-11, the three angel's messages written by the same author? How would you feel if God, the Father, walked into your home right now to visit you? If fear has to do with punishment, should we be afraid of God (cf. 1 SM 235)?

16. Do you agree with the logic in 1 John 4:20 and 5:1?

17. Have you ever felt that you would like to pray for a friend, but could not because they had committed a "mortal" sin (1 John 5:16)? If the Holy Spirit could be forced upon someone with 100 times greater intensity, would it not convert him/her or make him/her a fit subject for God's kingdom? What kind of sin "leads to death" (NIV) and what kind of sin "does not lead to death" (NIV)? Are not all sins in God's eyes alike? Does John give us a clear way to distinguish between the two types of sin? Compare Heb 6:4-6 and 10:26. Is there a type of sin that even God cannot "forgive" and "deal with"? What makes a sin "unpardonable"? If prayer is "conversation with God as with a friend" should we not talk to God about anything that concerns us?

18. How many ways does God have of winning us over to His side (Acts 4:12)? If we reject the Holy Spirit, what other means does God have to draw us? What would it mean to reject the Holy Spirit? How does a person do that? Can

we be sure that we have not committed the "unpardonable sin"? What about our brother?

19. Why do none of the modern versions include 1 John 5:7 (KJV)? This appears to be an excellent trinity verse! Do the modern versions leave it out because the translators no longer believe in the Trinity?

20. Do you think the "Elect Lady" mentioned in 2 John 1 and 5 was a particular woman or does she represent a whole church?

21. Who are the deceivers referred to in 2 John 7 (cf. 1 John 4:1-3)?

22. How could John who spoke of laying down one's life for the brethren (1 John 3:16) say, "So then, if someone comes to you who does not bring this teaching, do not welcome him in your homes; do not even say, 'Peace be with you.' For anyone who wishes him peace becomes his partner in the evil things he does" (2 John 10, 11; GNB)? Does this remind you of Paul's statements in Gal 1:6-10?

23. Do 2 John 12 and 3 John 13 suggest that John had to do his own writing rather than using a secretary?

JUDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. Does the tiny book of Jude add anything to your understanding of God's character or the way He runs His government and universe?

2. Who was Jude? Is he mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3)?

3. Why are the writings of Jude so much like Peter's writings? Who do you think wrote first? Did one of these authors borrow from the other (cf. Jude 4-18 with 2 Pet 2:1-3:3)? An estimated 90% of the writings of Mark are in either Matthew or Luke (cf. also 2 Kgs 19 and Isa 37; Isa 2:2-4 and Mic 4:2, 3; Isa 36:1 and 2 Kgs 18:13). Could a Bible writer be accused of plagiarism?

4. Conservative Christian scholars have often contended that one argument against the inspiration of the Apocrypha and the Pseudoepigrapha is that they are not quoted in the New Testament. How do we explain then that Jude 9 (cf. 2 Pet 2:11) seems to refer to "The Assumption of Moses," a pseudoepigraphical book probably written in the first century? Three early church fathers, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Didymus, all assert that Jude 9 is a quotation from this

other book. (It should be noted however, that this verse is not found in the portions of "The Assumption of Moses" that we have available today.)

5. Jude 6 (cf. 2 Pet 2:4, 9) seems to be a reference to the pseudoepigraphical book Enoch 48:10 and 60:8. If the "New York Times" or even the "National Inquirer" should say something that an inspired writer has already said, would this fact give it greater or less authority? Would it have any effect on its inspiration at all? What are the only things that really matter?

6. The pseudoepigraphical book, 1 Enoch 1:9 says, "And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly: and to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (R. H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudoepigrapha of the Old Testament, vol. 2, p. 189.) This book was probably written in the first century BC, but it claims to have been written by Enoch himself! Why would Jude apparently quote this passage in Jude 14, 15?

7. In what sense was the fire that burned Sodom and Gomorrah everlasting (Jude 7)?

8. Should we use a little bit of fear, or scare people so that they will believe in God and take their preparation for the second coming more seriously (Jude 23; KJV)?

9. What do you think of the great "doxology" in Jude 24, 25? What is the meaning of vs. 24?

REVELATION

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book say to us about God?

- a. What did it mean to the original readers?
- b. Why did God preserve it for our study?

1. What unique contributions does the book of Revelation make to your understanding of God, the plan of salvation, and the issues in the great controversy? What picture of God would you have if you had only this book? Is there a central theme of the book of Revelation? What is it that God was trying to say to His people in this book?

2. Do you look at the book of Revelation as being truly a "revelation" (apocalypse) of Jesus Christ, or an "apocryphal" (hidden) book whose meaning cannot be understood, or as a "mystery," which in the biblical sense would mean that it could only be understood by those who have been especially initiated into an understanding of it? If you believe that Revelation is truly a "revelation," what is actually revealed?

3. Where, when, and under what circumstances was the book of Revelation written? John is clearly identified as the author. Did he write any other books about the same time? To whom and for whom do you think this book was primarily written?—for the people alive in John's day? For Christians down through the centuries? For Seventh-day Adventists and other advent Christians at

the end of time? What were the main concerns in the church that John was writing to at the end of the first century?

4. According to Luther, the books of Hebrews, James, Jude, and the Revelation do not measure up to the standard of the rest of the Bible and should be given a "lesser" status. He in fact placed them at the end of his New Testament, just as he placed the Apocrypha at the end of the Old Testament, not even including them in the table of contents! He felt they had no legitimate place in the New Testament because they did not "teach Christ." Seventh-day Adventists, on the other hand, have traditionally considered this book as a very essential part of their Bibles. Why the big difference between these two views? Ellen White obviously used the book of Revelation very extensively. Does that make her more "biblical" than Luther? Do we consider Luther today "evangelical" or "liberal"?

5. As a result of her study of Revelation and the companion book of Daniel, Ellen White was led to say, "When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience" (TM 114). What about these two books could give one "an entirely different religious experience"? If we could identify every symbol in these books, would that give us a new experience?

6. John expected this manuscript scroll to be carried from church to church and read out loud to the congregation. Initially it was probably read aloud from

beginning to end in one session. Would such a reading be an encouragement, a discouragement, or a confusion to the early Christians?

7. Rev 1:12-18 and 14:14 suggest that Christ will keep His human form forever. What value would there be in His keeping His human form if all memory of the story of sin and salvation was wiped out?

8. Seven different types of religious experiences are described under the symbols of the seven churches (Rev 2 and 3). Which of these experiences do you think best describes you? We have often suggested that we are in the Laodicean period. Is every Christian today a "Laodicean"? Why do you think that the "lukewarmness" of this last church makes God nauseated? What is suggested as the remedy for "lukewarmness"?

9. Rev 4 and 5 seem to be a description of activities surrounding God's throne in heaven. How does this picture compare to the one in chaps. 2 and 3 of things on this earth? Do the beings surrounding God's throne appear to be in a "lukewarm" condition? Does our intelligent God ever get tired of endless repetitions of His creatures saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty." (Rev 4:8; RSV)?

10. Does this book give us any clues about why God waits (Rev 7:1-3)? Who or what seems to be responsible for the delay? What would it mean to be sealed?

11. Is it possible that the symbolism of Revelation is strange to us because we are not as familiar with the rest of the Bible as we should be?

12. Rev 12, 13, and 14 describe a war in heaven which seems to be still continuing until our day. Is this war, or this conflict described elsewhere in the Bible?

13. What are the issues that seem to divide the people living on this earth at the end? What could be the meaning of such statements as: "the whole world was amazed and followed the beast. Everyone worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. They worshiped the beast also . . ." (Rev 13:3, 4; GNB), "All people living on earth will worship it, except those whose names were written . . ." (Rev 13:8; GNB)? Does this suggest that the whole world will become irreligious or religious? What could possibly happen that would cause "the whole world" to worship Satan? Does this sound like Satan might actually win the "great controversy"?

14. The adherents on each side of this conflict seem to receive some kind of "mark" that identifies which side they belong to (Rev 13:16, 17; 14:1; cf. 7:1-3). What do you think these "marks" represent?

15. Do you get the impression all through Revelation that God is still in control? What does it say about God, that He would allow the opposition so much time to present its case? Wouldn't it have been more efficient to simply blot out the opposition immediately when Satan first rebelled? Could not God have blotted out the memory of the incident from the minds of heavenly beings so they would not be afraid of Him? Why would He not have done that in the beginning? Will God ever blot out any part of our memory of the past? Why did

God decide to carry out this long, costly demonstration (the great controversy) instead of simply eliminating His opposition?

16. Is it clear from Revelation who is accusing us (Rev 12:7-17) and who is defending us?

17. God's faithful people at the end of time are identified by certain statements (Rev 12:17; 14:12; 19:10). What is "the testimony of Jesus"? What would it mean to say, "those who bear testimony to Jesus are inspired like the prophets" (Rev 19:10; NEB)? Did we lose our "proof text" here?

18. Can we present the three angel's messages (Rev 14:6-12) without misrepresenting God? What are the meanings of the expressions "fire," "forever and ever," and "God's wrath"? If we cannot clearly explain these things from the rest of Scripture are we qualified to present the three angel's messages?

19. Reading the seven Last Plagues, what do they tell us about God, His love, justice? What is the purpose of the plagues, when people cannot repent any more (Rev 15-16)? Why does God exercise here His "retributive justice"?

20. Read carefully the chapters on the fall of Babylon (Rev 17-18). Do the words such as "Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done; mix her a double portion from her own cup" present God as a God of love (Rev 18:6; NIV)? If not, how does this relate to the other places where God is pictured kind and loving? Which descriptions do you prefer? Why do we need all of them for a balanced understanding of God?

21. There has been a great deal of discussion about the "lake of fire" at the end (Rev 19:20; 20:14, 15). What is this "fire," "brimstone"? Why is it called a "lake"? Where does the fire come from? Is this a natural consequence of sin? How hot is this "fire" (2 Pet 3:10-12)? How long will sinners burn? Will some burn longer than others? If so, why?

22. What is the purpose of the "lake of fire"? What is the final end of sin and sinners? What are the implications of all this for the universe-wide conflict about God and His character? What does the end mean for the future safety of the universe. Will the universe be sin-proof for eternity? If yes, on what basis? Will the freedom of all created beings be preserved?

CHAPTER VII

**INTERPRETATION OF SELECTED PORTIONS
OF THE PENTATEUCH**

The purpose of this chapter is to give a practical example of how some of the Study Guide Questions¹ can be answered and also to show the relevancy of book-by-book approach. I do not attempt to give a detailed exegesis of different passages, but, building on exegetical insights, I try to show how the cosmic conflict understood as the orientation point helps in interpreting the Bible.

The Pentateuch

The Pentateuch consists of the first five books of both Jewish and Christian Scriptures.² The present title is based on two Greek words and

¹Found in chapter 6. As already stated in the Introduction (chapter 1) we will limit our discussion to the Pentateuch only. Even there I will be very selective because of the richness of the material and the enormous quantity of literature written in this field.

²On the unity of the Pentateuch see Herbert M. Wolf, An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 18-20; cf. also William Sanford La Sor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 54-57.

signifies a "five-volume book." The term was first used by Origen about AD 200.¹ The Jews often referred to it as "the Torah" or "the Law" (Luke 24:27, 44). For us, living at the end of the twentieth century, the title "Law" for the Pentateuch could be easily misleading. Although a great deal of legal material, both civic and religious, can be found in the Pentateuch, nevertheless, it combines at least five distinct literary types: narrative, poetry, law, cultic, and genealogy. Thus the Pentateuch is an attempt to present an inherent relationship between the past and the future. The narrative texts of past events are presented as pointers to events that are yet to come. Past events foreshadow the future. Generally, it can be said that the Pentateuch is primarily a corpus² of instruction, covering most aspects of life.³

Genesis 1-11

The story of Genesis is a sad story of the human family's rapid decline,

¹R. K. Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 495.

²The books of the Pentateuch are not "books" in the modern sense of independent, self-contained entities, but were purposefully structured and intended as part of a larger unit. This unity has implications for the authorship of the Pentateuch in light of many NT quotations attributing material from it to Moses (e. g., Jesus more than 30 times, Paul more than 70 times).

³The verb meaning is to "throw," or "shoot." As a noun, "torah" signifies "law," "instruction," "direction." See R. L. Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, 2 vols., (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:403-405. On the significance of the Torah see Bernard J. Bamberger, "The Torah and the Jewish People," in The Torah: A Modern Commentary, ed. W. Gunter Plaut (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), xxix-xxxvi.

starting with sinless perfection in the Garden of Eden and concluding with a coffin in Egypt. The first eleven chapters of Genesis provide an account of the events and themes which shaped the entire course of Bible history. They introduce us to God's purpose for His creation, the devastating effects of sin upon creation, and the first glimpses of God's plan to restore harmony and bring order to the world and people He had made. In this sense, these eleven chapters are not only an introduction to the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch, as a literary unit, but also to the whole Bible.

If Moses¹ had wanted to write just a history of the nation of Israel, it would have been natural to start with Abraham. But he goes back further to show that the God of Abraham is not only the local or national God of Israel, but first of all the God who is the Creator of the whole universe.² Gen 1-11 thus becomes a critique of many commonly received notions about gods and humanity and, at the same time, presents an inspired alternate world-view to those generally accepted in the ancient Near East.³

¹On Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch see SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington: DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 201-203; and also Moses H. Segal, The Pentateuch: Its Composition and its Authorship and Other Biblical Studies (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967); Kenneth A. Kitchen, Ancient Orient and Old Testament (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1966); Gleason L. Archer, Jr., A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 109-123; Wolf, 51-78; Harrison, 495-542.

²Cf. John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis" The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:19.

³For a bibliography on the relationship between Gen 1-11 and the Ancient Near East, see Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, (Waco TX: Word Books, 1987), xlvi-xlvii. This volume is a good

In the book of Genesis, God first presents a brief sketch of the creation (chaps. 1-2) and then the corruption (chaps. 3-6) with the resultant cataclysm of the Flood (chaps. 7-9). Following this is the corruption of nations and the dispersion as its result (chaps. 10-11). The first eleven chapters show the hopeless plight of mankind without the gracious intervention of God. God then turns from nations in general to the chosen nation in particular (chaps. 12-50). The focus gradually narrows from the entire cosmos to one man, Abraham, and then begins to widen again to include "all peoples on earth" (Gen 12:3).

Genesis 1 and 2

The theme of the first two chapters of Genesis is the creation of the heavens and the earth by the one God. There are two accounts of creation. The first account (1:1-2:4a) speaks about six days of creation, followed by a seventh day on which the Creator and the creation rest.¹ Then there is a transitional

bibliographic resource introducing the immense literature that has been produced on Genesis.

¹Very few scholars would today take the story literally. But even von Rad had to admit: "The seven days are unquestionably to be understood as actual days and as a unique, unrepeatable lapse of time in the world." Gerhard von Rad, Genesis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 45. Commenting about Gen 1-2, he says, "What is said here is intended to hold true entirely and exactly as it stands. Nowhere at all is the text only allusive, 'symbolic,' or figuratively poetic." *Idem.*, 65. See also Ronald Youngblood, ed. The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions About Creation and the Flood (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 12-35; Derek Kidner Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 54-58; Wenham, 19.

statement (2:4b) that sums up the first account and introduces the second.¹ In the second account, creation is described again, but the stage is entirely the earth, with the focus on the creation of man and woman and the origins of marriage.² The goal of the narrative in both accounts is the creation of a human institution. In Gen 1, it is the Sabbath, the universal day of rest for all people; in Gen 2, it is marriage.

In the first account the Creator is Elohim who works through the commands that cause the creative acts to occur. In the second account the Creator is Yahweh-Elohim and is intimately involved in the happenings. Creation is a hands-on experience when He forms man from the dust of earth and later creates a woman from man's rib to be his helper. The two accounts together give a balanced view of the Creator, who is both transcendent and a personal God.³

The universe-wide perspective

All of the Bible books need to be studied in their setting, but how

¹Wenham sees the first creation account concluding at 2:3, not 2:4a, as commonly assumed. For a discussion of this see Wenham, 49-55. However, for my point here, it is irrelevant.

²On the literary structure and unity of the creation story see Jacques B. Doukhan, The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 5., (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978).

³For the implications of the usage of the two different names for God for the documentary hypothesis, see Umberto Cassuto, The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 15-41. For a concise theological meaning, see also Doukhan, 137-153; and Wolf, 26-30.

broad should we make the setting? The literary context that we have just considered is one important thing. But besides the immediate literary context, we need to relate this story to its context in time. We do this when studying other portions of Scripture.¹ To get the best possible understanding of what were the issues at creation and in the Garden of Eden, we must look at all the available biblical evidence on what had taken place in the universe up to this point. Scripture can always be interpreted best when we take the broadest possible context.² So we need to look elsewhere in the Bible to learn what had happened before Eden and to discover who might be looking on.

It seems clear from the Bible that there are other worlds that also had been created by God. Their inhabitants were observing the process of creation of our planet. Support for this can be found in Job 38:4-7, where it says that when God had finished creation, "the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy" over the Creator's deeds.³ Why was the entire universe watching very closely the creation week?

After sin arose in the heart of Lucifer (Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12-17), he spread his rebellious thoughts to one-third of the heavenly angels (Rev 12:4, 7),

¹For example, studying the lives of the patriarchs we look at life in that period of time generally. See the titles of General Articles in almost any academic commentary (e.g., "The Historical Background of the Patriarchal Period," "Daily Life in the Patriarchal Age").

²See chapter 3, section "Tota Scriptura."

³For personification of the stars (Job 38:7) in parallel with the sons of God, see 1:6-12, 2:1-6, Ps 104:4, and Heb 1:7.

and then there was a "war in heaven" (Rev 12:7-9). Lucifer¹ wanted to occupy the place of God and exercise the authority of God, but without using God's methods. To achieve his vicious goals, he began to accuse God's government and malign His character. He could work this way because being a "covering cherub" (Ezek 28:14) in the very presence of God, his words and explanations must have been considered authoritative with the angels.

Thus it seems that Satan's charges were not made in private, but must have occurred before the entire universe in order to have caused war in heaven. God on the other hand has gone out of His way to be condescending and gracious to His children.² Everything He does is open before the entire universe (1 Cor 4:9).³

Based on the pattern of Satan's work, as described in Job, Zechariah, and Revelation, we can presuppose that basically Satan's charges against God before the angels were the same as presented to Eve in Gen 3. There he accuses God that He is arbitrary (not respectful of freedom of His created beings),

¹Now Satan-the accuser, Rev 12:10; cf. Zech 3, Job 1, 2.

²Cf. Job 1 and 2, an example of one of the heavenly councils which God called to discuss plans with His children. See also Zech 3 and Dan 7:9, 10. God does things openly (Amos 3:7).

³Even Christ's death was not only for us, but also for the sinless heavenly beings. See Eph 1:3; 3:9, 10; and especially Col 1:20 and the discussion of this in chapter 4, section "Conflict in Paul's epistles."

vengeful, exacting, unforgiving, and severe. He is a selfish tyrant and cannot be depended upon to tell the truth.¹

Apparently God could have created our entire world just by the snap of His fingers (Ps 33:9). He did not need to take seven days to get it done. From the larger context of Scripture, it seems, that the reason for a seven-day creation is that, besides creating the natural time cycles, God wanted to give His creatures time to ponder what He was doing. As the universe was watching the creation week day by day, they could see ample evidence to counteract Satan's charges. One of the purposes of the creation week was to provide public, explicit, and tangible answers to Satan's accusations.

God did not look very selfish by Sabbath morning. He had created a beautiful place for His special new creatures. He had made them male and female. What better way for God to show His willingness to share as much as possible His creative power with us? What was this ultimately saying to the angels? The reason for their joyful singing and shouting was not only the beauty of creation, but also the answers provided as a rebuttal to Satan's charges.

The Scriptural evidence seems to indicate that humans are the only intelligent creatures in the universe that can reproduce themselves in a bisexual way.² God wanted to show the universe that He is willing to share His creative

¹For an elaboration on this, see the discussion on Gen 3:1-5 below under the heading "The serpent's words about God."

²Christ said concerning the angels: "The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage. But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain

power with His creatures as far as it is possible.¹ Why did He not do it before? Apparently, there was no need for it. Why did He do it now? Evidently it was a part of the answer that Satan's accusations were not valid. Considering what marriage and our sexuality say about God in the light of the cosmic conflict, we can better understand why Satan has worked so hard throughout the ages to pervert the power we have to procreate, and thus to destroy this beautiful gift from God and all that it says to us about God.

The Sabbath

The recognition of the cosmic conflict as the context of Gen 1 and 2 also has important implications for the way we view the Sabbath. If viewed without this cosmic perspective and seen only in the light of what has happened on this planet, the Sabbath was given *before* there was sin. It seems that God arbitrarily chose one day out of seven when any other would be as good, and

that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels and are the children of God." Luke 20:34-36, KJV; cf. Matt 22:29, 30; Mark 12:24, 25.

¹Gen 1 is structured in such a way as to show that man is a special creature, marked off from the rest of God's works and that man is like God, made in the image and likeness of God. Cf. Sailhamer, 37.

expects His creatures to obey Him only because He said to.¹ Because of this, the Sabbath has become a test of our obedience.²

In contrast, taking into consideration the rebellion of Satan in heaven and the following cosmic conflict, the Sabbath was given *after* sin entered the universe. Then the Sabbath becomes no longer an arbitrary³ test of our obedience, but an exceptional gift that God has given us to invite us into fellowship with Him. Thus He can remind us of all the things that the Bible describes as being associated with the Sabbath--the freedom and perfection that God gave us in Eden,⁴ the rescue from bondage in the Exodus,⁵ and the events

¹All other commandments seem good and reasonable to all rational people, but the Sabbath appears to be an arbitrary decree. See M. L. Andreasen, The Sanctuary Service (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1947), 268-281; *idem*, The Sabbath: Which Day and Why? (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1942).

²It is true that Sabbath later became a test of loyalty. See Exod 16 and Ezek 20. Cf. Rev 12-20 and the eschatological test in the realm of worship.

³There is definitely a sense in which the Sabbath *is* arbitrary. It is a Greek notion to reject arbitrariness completely. There is a positive side to arbitrariness; what I object to is a negative aspect of it. In accepting and honoring the Sabbath commandment, one acknowledges an authority higher than his independent reason, the authority of a Sovereign Creator. See Carsten Johnsen, Day of Destiny: The Mystery of the Seventh Day (Loma Linda, CA: The Untold Story Publishers, 1982) and also Richard C. Nies, The Sabbath: Its Meaning in History, [Sound recording] (Redlands, CA: Study Tapes, 1983).

⁴God created us free to prove that He is not an absolutistic tyrant, as accused by Satan.

⁵To prove that He cares about the well-being of His children (Isa 63:9; cf. Exod 4:31; Ps 106:44). He returns us the freedom that we have lost.

of crucifixion week.¹ The seventh-day Sabbath is connected with all these things.² In light of the conflict in the universe, only "remembering" these things can make sure we stay with God.³

After the significant events of the whole creation week came the Sabbath, rest, and a celebration for the universe (and humankind) to consider all that had taken place. After the crucifixion, the very next day was a day for the universe (and humankind) to consider and celebrate what Christ had done for us (with Christ resting in the tomb). That first Sabbath was a great day of victory for God, and helps to explain why there has been so much conflict over the Sabbath down through the ages. No wonder Satan has worked so hard to destroy the meaning of God's special day.

The Sabbath is no mere test of our obedience. It was made *for us* (Mark 2:27,28). The primary function of the Sabbath is to provide an opportunity for us to be reminded of the essential truths in the great controversy over the character of God which were revealed in creation and in the crucifixion to refute Satan's charges. No wonder most people who do not understand the issues in this

¹To prove that He is forgiving (Mic 7:18, 19).

²For a balanced theology of the Sabbath, see Richard M. Davidson, *A Love Song for the Sabbath* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988); Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1980).

³As I have already suggested, it was the author's intention to point to the past as a picture of the future. So the Sabbath not only looks "back" but it is a reminder of what yet lies ahead (Gen 2:15; 5:29; 8:4; Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:14; 12:10; 25:19; Ps 95:11; Heb 3:11; 4:1-11).

controversy find it difficult to understand why SDAs observe the Sabbath.

Without this background understanding, it is obviously often regarded merely as a legalistic hangover from Jewish times.

Genesis 3

The story in Gen 3 can be divided into three parts: account of the fall (vss.1-13), poetic discourse (vss. 14-19; the trial and the verdict) and conclusion (vss. 20-24; protection and expulsion from Eden).

In a word, harmony is the core of Gen 1-2 as a whole. As a result of divine creation, there is harmony between the Creator and his crown of creation--humankind; between humanity and nature,¹ and between male and female.² The only source of "tension" in the harmonious creation is the prohibition against eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17).

This "tension" is exploited in the next scene, which can be considered part of the Garden of Eden story which began in chap. 2. The harmony of creation is broken by the rebellion of humankind, and the result is alienation and separation between the creation and God (hiding, death) and alienation and estrangement between mankind generally (shame, blaming). Finally the harmony between humankind and the animal world (blaming the serpent, curse) and

¹Expressed, for example in the pun involved in the creation of man (*adam*) from the ground (*adamah*).

²Expressed in the unity implied in Gen 1:26 (plurality and unity in God is reflected in plurality and unity between man and woman) and even more explicitly in 2:24.

humankind and the earth is disrupted (Gen 3:17). Thus we can see that sin has devastated and corrupted all the relationships.

To understand the story properly we need to solve the identity of the serpent. Who is this "crafty" (NIV) snake, who offset the balance of trust and obedience between the man and the woman and their Creator? To understand the identity of the serpent, we need to notice what he says (vss. 1-5) and what God says to him (vss. 14-15).

The serpent's words about God

The serpent's first words are, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen 3:1). Although the serpent's long-term goal is to seduce the woman to eat the forbidden fruit, his *modus operandi* is to attack God.¹ "Did God really say . . . ?" The whole discussion from his point of view is an attack on God and an attempt to malign His character. The serpent realizes that if he reaches his goal, severing Eve's trust relationship with God, everything else in rebellion against Him will be only a matter of time. So he starts with this question which tries to insinuate doubts into woman's mind about God. He is

¹In the following few paragraphs I elaborate on the serpent's statements to show how they are meant to attack God primarily. However, to distinguish them from the serpent's literal words, I will not use quotation marks for them.

trying to alienate man from God.¹ Did God really put such harsh limitations on you? God must be rather selfish, if he has limited you in this way.

"We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it,² or you will die.'³ God is too particular. Do not take what He says so seriously.⁴ If He forbade you to eat from the tree, why did He then create it in the first place? He is not consistent. Besides this, how come this tree that is next to the tree of life can be so detrimental? Why is one so good, and the other so bad? It is illogical; God is arbitrary.

¹In Job 1-2 Satan tries to alienate God from man, impugning Job's motives in serving God. Thus he pretends to "help" God to see more clearly Job's motives. In Eden he pretends to "help" mankind to see God more clearly. In both cases an attempt to alienate is behind his wily schemes.

²A comparison with Gen 2:17 shows that God did not say this. One wonders why Eve added this. Are the implications about God's character already working in her mind? Apparently she understands and to some extent identifies with what the serpent meant by his opening question.

³Gen 3:2, 3. All quotations from Gen 3 are from the NIV.

⁴This type of reasoning is often used in popular Christianity regarding the Sabbath commandment: God is not that particular; to keep one out of seven days is enough. To counter this, the response referred to above was elucidated that the Sabbath is an arbitrary test of obedience. Although there are noble motives behind it (to make sure people take God's Word seriously), one cannot agree with it in light of the cosmic controversy. (See the discussion on Sabbath above.) It is the meaning (the message about God) which makes the seventh-day particular, not the fact that it is the seventh. Keeping the day without understanding the meaning is, besides some profitable health effects, useless. (Cf. Jews in the time of Jesus' crucifixion. Hurrying home from Calvary to keep the Sabbath, they could hardly quote Ezek 20:12, 20 to prove that they were God's people.)

"You will not surely die" (vs. 4). The serpent's next step is a blatant denial of God's specific pronouncement (2:17). The implications are clear, God is a liar. He cannot be trusted to always tell you the truth. The talk about "death" is only a threat. God does not always mean what He says. The fruit cannot hurt you. God might, if He wants to, fulfill His threat. Watch out for Him, He is capable of doing such a things. How can you regard Him as your Friend? Let me tell you something about Him.

"For God knows that . . ." The serpent after denying what God said previously is now immediately willing to do "exegesis" of God's motives and pronounce them unworthy. In his words: God is trying to withhold something from you that you have full right to have. He is hiding the fact that if you eat this fruit, you would become like Him in wisdom and power. He is afraid you will usurp His authority. He is trying to protect Himself. All He wants is your servile obedience. He wants yes-people who will dutifully do exactly as they are told without raising any questions.

With such clever innuendos and plausible falsehoods, the creature in the tree presented a distorted picture of Eve's gracious God. She and Adam chewed up his cunning words along with the fruit from the tree and believed them to be true. But the "wisdom" they obtained was darkness of mind and loss of rational discernment and sane reasoning. In the words of the author, the "wisdom" (*'arúm*) turned into a curse (*'arúr*, vs. 14).

The activity and the message of the serpent in Gen 3:1-5 is so clearly in harmony with the activities of Satan in Job 1-2, Isa 14, Ezek 28, Zech 3, and Rev 12, that we can safely presume that it was Satan who is behind the serpent, using him as his tool. This is even clearer from God's words to the serpent, to which we now turn.

God's words to the serpent

After the Fall, a judgment scene is depicted in Gen 3:8-20. Before God's act of judgment we have a picture of God's questioning: "Where are you?" (vs. 9); "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree?" (vs. 11); "What is this you have done?" (vs. 13).¹

Then God turns first to the snake in vs. 14. The snake is cursed (and the ground as well, vs. 17).² But then comes vs. 15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Did God address a mere snake here?

When God predicted that there would be war between the descendants of Eve and the "seed" of the serpent, is this to be interpreted as a mere etiology?³

Says Gordon J. Wenham:

¹Cf. 4:9-10; 11:5; 18:21; Exod 3:8; Ps 18:9; 144:5. All these verses have an important implication for the doctrine of the investigative judgment.

²On the exegesis and implication of vs. 14 see for example, Wenham, 74 and Sailhamer, 55.

³G. von Rad, 89.

This story is not just etiology, a just-so story explaining why snakes are so unpleasant; many elements in it are highly symbolic, and the dialogue between snake and woman employs ambiguity and innuendo with great subtlety. If elsewhere in the narrative we have double-entendre and symbolic language, it would be strange for it to disappear here, so that the serpent is just a snake and not an anti-God symbol.¹

A literal understanding of this text would lead one to expect a continuing war between men and snakes, with men crushing snakes' heads and snakes biting men's heels.² The natural animosity between men and snakes does indeed find its explanation here, but there must be much more.

It is interesting to note that nowhere does Scripture reveal any such battle between people and snakes. On the other hand, it does reveal, as one of its significant themes, the war between Satan, with the powers of evil, and God's forces, with Eve's descendants as both the battleground and the warriors. The serpent from Eden is identified by the NT writers as a symbol of Satan.³

So, it seems that in the account of Gen 3:15 it is not a mere animal that is the focal point, but rather the satanic power embodied in the serpent. "A

¹Wenham, 80.

²However, this is the interpretation given to it by August Dillmann, Genesis Critically and Exegetically Explained, 2 vols., (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 1:160; Sigmund Mowinckel, He that Cometh (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 11; and also Donald E. Gowan, From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 57, 58.

³"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20); "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev 12:9; 20:2); "The serpent deceived Eve by his cunning . . . for Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:3, 14).

Cosmic drama is being enacted [here]."¹ The ultimate enemy of God and mankind does not reside in the material creation.² Moreover, although the enmity will be between woman's "seed" and the serpent's "seed," the goal of the final crushing by the woman's "seed" is not the "seed" of the snake, as we would expect, but rather the snake itself. This suggests that the author of Genesis perceives the snake in terms that extend far beyond this particular snake in the Garden of Eden. The snake is representative of someone else.

It is clear that the "seed" of the woman cannot be identified simply with all her physical descendants. In the next section (Gen 4), Cain murdered his brother Abel, and Eve painfully learned that he was not "the seed."³ The New Testament explicitly determines the significance of Cain and Abel in the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. Although a descendant of Eve, as his brother Abel, Cain originates from "the evil one" (1 John 3:12) and so cannot be regarded as one belonging to the "seed" of woman. It is only those who have this "enmity" against evil supernaturally established in their hearts that they belong to the "seed" as described in Gen 3:15.

¹O. Palmer Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 95.

²"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12; NIV).

³See the discussion and bibliography on translating Gen 4:1 in Wenham, 101-102.

Besides this the "seed of the woman" ordinarily means a figure of the godly descendants of the woman. However, the final crushing will be done by "He" which is masculine and singular. This has gradually come to have a special meaning, culminating in Paul's interpretation: "He does not say, 'And to your seeds,' as referring to many; but rather to one. 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ" (Gal 3:16).¹ The promise to Eve was fulfilled in the person of the Descendant, the Man, the Deliverer who would ultimately vanquish Satan and crush his power.² So, in the larger context of Scripture, the text speaks about the conflict waging between Christ and Satan and assures us that Satan will be ultimately mortally bruised and totally defeated.

The tree of knowledge

Having established that it was Satan who was present in the Garden of Eden and worked through the serpent as his medium, we now come to the next crucial question: Why did God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the Garden near the tree of life? The answer to this question is determined once again by the angle of our perspective and how wide a context we take into consideration.

¹Cf. also the already quoted text in Rom 16:20.

²For the most recent review of interpretations of Gen 3:15, both ancient and modern, see Jack P. Lewis, "The Woman's Seed (Gen 3:15)," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 34/3 (1991): 299-319. For Messianic application see W. C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward an Old Testament Theology, 77-79; and Robertson, 93-103.

If we do not see the cosmic conflict, the tree was placed in the Garden *before* sin, and thus it could be seen just as a test of obedience. In this view, God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden in order to test the obedience of our first parents. Would they remain obedient or not? But why did God need to do this? Does He not know the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10)? Does He not know who are His (2 Tim 2:19)? If the tree was placed there before sin, maybe we would not have had all this trouble if God had not put it there. If He is omniscient, is He not somehow co-responsible for the fall of Adam and Eve?

However, in the larger view of the cosmic conflict, God placed that tree in the Garden *after* sin had entered the universe. This has some far-reaching implications for how we understand the whole issue.

By placing the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden, God shows how He respects the freedom of His creatures. He will even give His Adversary an opportunity to approach the couple with his views. God is really fair to Satan. He did not hide that tree in some dark corner of the Garden, but put it right in the middle near the tree of life, so that Adam and Even would see it every time they came to that tree.¹

This means that they had to make a conscious decision on which side of the controversy they wanted to be each time they approached the tree of life to

¹"In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:9; NIV).

eat from its fruit. Each time they came to say "Yes" to God, they were reminded that they were free creatures, that they have the other option. This shows how much God respects freedom for all His creatures (even of His Adversary).¹ He does not want to force us, nor does He appreciate allegiance that is not based on a conscious understanding of Him, His character, and His demands.

Yet God did not allow our first inexperienced parents to be tested more than they were able to resist.² Thus, Satan was only allowed to approach them at the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were warned not to risk a confrontation with their wily foe. Lucifer was not permitted to pursue them constantly through the whole Garden and harass them with his weird ideas about God. Satan could only approach them at the tree; he was limited to the tree. In this light, the tree was not given to deprive them of their freedom, but to protect their freedom.

Thus we can look on this particular tree not only as a test of their obedience but primarily as something given as a provision to protect them. Taking into consideration the cosmic conflict as the orientation point, we can see that by putting the tree there, God was fair to Satan (opportunity to present his view) and fair to the first couple as well (to protect them from exposure to

¹In contrast to many Christians today, God definitely believes in religious freedom, a freedom of conscience.

²In a sense the following verse was true even in their sinless state, "But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm" (1 Cor 10:13; GNB).

something they could not handle). This explains the silent "question mark" that the prohibition not to eat from this tree poses in the harmony of the creation story. Understanding the cosmic conflict, we see how God preserves the freedom of Satan, Adam, and Eve, and thus He does not look arbitrary in a negative sense of the word.¹

Before leaving Gen 3 a few words about death as a result of sin should be said. Satan challenged the truthfulness of God's words (Gen 3:4; cf. 2:17)² The truth is (1) that the sentence was given then,³ (2) that on that day Adam and Eve began to die--the implication is that there will be no immortal sinners,⁴ (3) that chap. 3 shows additional meaning: "You certainly will die, if there is not

¹Just in the same view, God's law can be seen as limiting our freedom, or a test of our obedience, or as something to guarantee our freedom; the "*paidagogos*" to protect us, to guard us (Gal 3:19).

²For various possibilities of translating both texts, see Wenham, 67-68, 73-75; Sailhamer, 45-52.

³They came under the verdict of the death penalty (cf. 20:7; Exod 31:14; Lev 24:16). "It is a pronouncement of a judge on one who has been condemned to die." Sailhamer, 48.

⁴"In the present narrative the verdict is carried out by expulsion from the garden and the 'tree of life' (3:22-24)." Sailhamer, 48. The expulsion was God's specific judgment/punishment of their deed, not just a natural consequence of their act. This shows that the immortality is not an inherent human quality, but rather a gift from God in the access to the tree of life (1 Tim 6:16).

a substitute,"¹ and (4) that you will die spiritually.² All four can be seen as implied in the text.

Genesis 4-11

The subsequent chapters of Genesis can be divided as follows: 4-5, 6-9 and 10-11.³ In Gen 4 the consequences of the Fall are given. Another union, that of brothers, which might have been expected to be paradigmatic of human friendship, is broken by the ultimate act of enmity, murder. Cain is further alienated from the soil by being driven out from the tillable earth (4:11). This chapter is an expanded genealogy of Adam and is connected with the genealogy of chap. 5. The Cainite genealogy (4:17-24) shows the spread and progress of civilization (arts, cattle-breeding, music, metal-working) as well as the spread of sin. In seven generations we move from an impulsive act of murder to a

¹See Gen 3:15, 21. It is God who provides skins to clothe their nakedness (Gen 3:21). The Hebrew text shows that the covering is more than physical. Here is the idea of substitution: God does for them what they cannot do for themselves. Also in Gen 3:15 a description of the actual work of the crushing of the head and the bruising of the heel is in terms of substitutionary atonement. Christ's work is described in terms of substitutionary atonement in Isa 53:1-12; Luke 22:37; 1 Cor 15:1-3; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 4:10.

²To be expelled from the Garden was to enter the realm of death, like for a leper to be expelled from the camp of Israel. In this sense Adam and Eve died on the day they ate of the tree. A parallel to this idea of death before death is in the story of Saul. As far as Samuel was concerned, Saul "died" when he rejected the word of God. Then the story states, "and Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death" (1 Sam 15:35). However, another encounter between Samuel and Saul is described in 1 Sam 19:24. Evidently this did not count, for Saul was as good as dead, though his physical death was to be delayed for some years. Similarly, the death of Adam was delayed for 930 years.

³See Wenham, 92-208, for a discussion of other suggested divisions.

deliberate reign of terror. By affixing the beginning of a Sethite genealogy (4:25-26) to the Cainite list, the author has affirmed that not all followed the Cainite lifestyle. There is a line of men who have begun to "call on the name of Yahweh" (4:26).

The thrust of the Gen 5 genealogy is toward death, even though human life continues. The diminishing life span of the people is given. Besides this, no reader of Gen 5 fails to be impressed by the recurrent phrase "and he died." The successive deaths of each descendant of Adam in Gen 5 reach the climax with the simultaneous death of all mankind in Gen 7. The genealogical list of Gen 5 has been purposefully structured to accommodate the Flood story at its conclusion.¹

The Flood story

It is not my purpose to give an exegesis of the Flood story, nor to show its structure,² similarities or differences with corresponding stories from the Ancient Near East.³ This all has been extensively and competently dealt with elsewhere.

What I want to show here is how God's dealing with mankind in the story of the Flood is geared toward establishing a recurring pattern of how He

¹See Sailhamer, 71-75, 78-79.

²See discussion and bibliography in Wenham, 148-158.

³See T. Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," Journal of Biblical Literature 100 (1981): 513-529; W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, Atrahasis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); for additional bibliography see Wenham, 159.

works and will work also in the future. In understanding the basic pattern of God's way of treating humanity, we have something to relate to today.

Deteriorating situation. The Flood comes because of man's wickedness. The Lord sees how wicked the earth has become. The problem is not only what man *does*; even his *thoughts* are evil (Gen 6:5). Sin is both extensive and intensive.¹ Gen 6 makes it clear that the earth was full of violence and corruption (*shakar*). Corruption is mentioned five times in vss. 11-13. This brings the following reaction from God.

Promise of destruction. God speaks His first intention to destroy the earth to himself without any indication of how it will be executed (vs. 7). Then He shares this information with Noah (vs. 13), just as he later tells Abraham that he intends to destroy Sodom (18:17-21; cf. Amos 3:7). The Flood does not come without proper warning. God gives a prophetic time of warning--120 years (6:3).²

There are numerous hints that the judgment will be mingled with mercy. God is reluctant to punish.³ When God says, I will "destroy"--actually the word for destroy is the same as corrupt (*shakar*)--this shows us that God simply

¹Cf. Ps 14:1-3; 51:1-12; Jer 17:9-10.

²For a discussion on the meaning of the phrase in Gen 6:3 and also other possible meanings, see Sailhamer, 76-77; Wenham, 142.

³God's "repentance" in 6:6 really means that He wept, panted bitterly, or was moved to deep anguish of heart. See Wenham, 144-145.

finishes the self-destruction that has already begun and which man has already chosen.¹

Provision for a remnant. Besides giving a prophetic warning time, God raises up a person to warn (vs. 8).² Noah stands out among his peers. He is righteous, blameless, and walks with God (vs. 9).³ Vs. 9 supplies the answer to why Noah finds favor in the Lord's eyes. Divine favor is not something Noah wins; it is something he finds. It is important to note that the same explanation that is made for Enoch's rescue from death ("he walked with God;" 5:22, 24) is the basis for Noah's rescue from death in the Flood: "he walked with God" (6:9). Thus in the story of Noah and the Flood, Moses was able to repeat the lesson: *life* comes through "walking with God." The remnant is different, and does not "corrupt his way."⁴

Noah is then told to build an ark (6:14-16).⁵ The author's purpose is not to give construction details that the reader might be able to imagine exactly what the ark looked like, but rather that we might appreciate the meticulous care

¹See also Wenham, 171, 172.

²Although Noah is called a "preacher of righteousness" in 2 Pet 2:5, he could be designated also as a prophet, the one who speaks for God.

³God confirms in 7:1 what the narrator says in 6:9.

⁴On Noah as the remnant, see Gerhard F. Hasel, The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah, 3d ed., (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980), 135-147.

⁵On similarities between building the ark and building the tabernacle in Exod 25, see Sailhamer, 82.

with which these godly men went about their task of obedience to God's will. Following the completion, Noah is told to enter the ark (7:1-10). God is concerned with the salvation of the remnant (7:23).

Two-fold judgment. The executive judgment of God has two sides, negative and positive. Moses first gave the positive. Before the Flood starts, there is an announcement of a covenant (6:18).¹ This shows that grace goes before judgment.

Describing the onset of the Flood, the author's focus is on the occupants of the ark. We are given details about the animal procession, the kinds of animals and their number, Noah's age, the exact date of the beginning of rain, and the source of the waters. All this is important because the author wants his readers to take as long a look as possible at this picture of Noah's salvation. Four times it is repeated that those who survived the Flood were those who had done "as God had commanded."² The point is clear--faith and obedience always go together.

Moreover, it is "Elohim" who commands the group to enter the ark (7:16), but it is "Yahweh" who shuts the door. It seems that this shift to God's more personal name suggests that God is the protector of the ark. Gordon J.

¹On covenant see Robertson, 109-125, and also the whole book; William J. Dumbrell, Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), 11-46. See also Wenham, 175 for additional bibliography.

²Gen 7:9, 16; 7:5, 6:22; cf. Abraham, 21:4, sons of Israel, Exod 12:28.

Wenham has also shown how the structure of the Flood centers on Gen 8:1, "But God remembered Noah."¹ All this shows that the Flood is not primarily a story of judgment, but of God's grace, God remembering the faithful.²

As the waters rise (7:13-24), vss. 13-16 focus on the action inside the ark, while vss. 17-24 focus outside the ark. Salvation inside the ark is total, and destruction outside the ark is also total.

With regard to the negative side, the destruction, the Flood account is presented as a reversal of God's work in creation. Gen 1 depicts creation as largely a matter of separation and distinction; Gen 6-9 portrays the annihilation of distinctions.³ In Gen 1 God prepared the land for man; in the Flood story God takes this land from man when he acts corruptly and does not walk in God's way. The destruction follows much the same sequence as the creation: earth, birds, livestock, wild animals, swarming creatures, and man (7:21-23).

It is of utmost importance for proper understanding of the Bible to see that the Bible authors use the language of a past action of God to describe His

¹Gordon J. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," Vetus Testamentum 28 (1978): 336-48; idem, Genesis 1-15, 156-157.

²See William H. Shea's outline in "The Structure of the Genesis Flood Narrative and Its Implications," Origins 6 (1979): 8-29. Shea agrees with Wenham on the climax in 8:1. Shea divides the story into eleven units, not thirty-one as Wenham did, and includes the prologue and epilogue into his analysis as well.

³Gen 1:6 cf. 7:11; 1:9 cf. 7:11.

present and future activity.¹ Only by understanding the pattern of God's dealings with mankind as established at the beginning, we can correctly interpret the Bible for our times.

New creation. After the Flood comes the re-creation or a new creation of God's world. This is signified by the renewed separation of sea and land, the waters receding, and the earth dries up.² What God says to Noah in 9:1 ("Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth") indicates that Noah is a "second" Adam.³ The same imperatives were addressed to Adam in 1:28. However, the world of Gen 9 is not exactly the same as the world of Gen 1. There is predictability in the natural world (8:22) and a change in diet (9:2-3). God also establishes his unilateral covenant with Noah (9:8-11).⁴

However, there is one more very important aspect of the Flood narrative brought out by the story of Babel that follows (Gen 11:1-9).⁵ When viewed from the perspective of the cosmic conflict, we can legitimately ask: Why

¹Thus Exodus is described in language of creation (see Exod 14:21-22; 4:22-23); the return from Babylon in the language of Exodus (the epitome of God's act of salvation in the OT; see Isaiah, Jeremiah); the return from anti-typical Babylon in the language of return from typical Babylon (Rev 11-19).

²Gen 8:3, 7, 13 cf. 1:9-10; 8:16 cf. 1:22.

³On "The new creation" as the theme of Gen 8 and "The new Adam" as the theme of Gen 9, see Warren Austin Gage, The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology (Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter Books, 1984), 10-12.

⁴For similarities between Noah's covenant and the covenant on Sinai, see Sailhamer, 93.

⁵For a discussion of the Babel tower story, see below.

would God interfere to such a compelling manner into the natural course using His power to destroy? Surely God would not get involved in such a terrible destruction as the Flood unless there was a very important reason. This was probably God's greatest exercise of force in the entire Bible. Why did He not just allow events to take their natural course and everything would come to a halt? It would prove the self-destructive nature of sin! Why was it not possible to finish the cosmic conflict right at that time?

It is true that before the Flood, every person's thoughts were wicked. But God had moved in to maintain contact with the human race. Why was this necessary? It seems that there were at least three reasons to maintain the course of history:

1. God wanted to show the universe what He could accomplish by using force, what kind of people He could save. The people who were saved were certainly convinced about His existence and His power (they built a tower to protect themselves), but all this did not lead them to love and trust Him. Thus the story of Babel following the Flood demonstrates that it is impossible to win people by a show of power or force.

The story of Babel graphically shows that when God indeed has used the "retributive justice" and displayed His power, He has never accomplished what He really wanted. The ancestors of those, who had survived the Flood, did not deny the existence and/or power of God. The people who built the tower believed in God; they believed He had the power to destroy. But they did not

think He could be trusted when He said, "I will never drown you again." That is why they built the tower as tall as they could.

The Flood proves that the exercise of power and force only make rebels worse, but does not change them. In this context it is important to realize that the cosmic conflict is not over who has more power. God could settle that in few seconds. Jas 2:19 says that the Devil and his angels admit God's advantage in power. But the conflict is about who is telling the truth. God has been accused of the abuse of His divine power; His character was maligned. To clear His character from slanderous accusations, to prove that God does not abuse His power, takes time and cannot be settled by use of power.

The things that God wants most--love and trust (Ps 51:10, Mich 6:8)--cannot be achieved by force (Zech 6:8). To scare people to death will not instill love in them. They may live better lives for a while, but eventually the seeds of rebellion will spring up again. Salvation does not mean primarily to save people from destruction, but to change their rebellious nature.

2. The Flood shows that there are two compatible and complementary sides to God's character. Love and justice are twin sisters for God. God's judgments always mean salvation for some and destruction for others. The alternative is not given by a capricious God, but by a free choice that people make. Although it is true that God sometimes leaves the sinners to reap the natural consequences of their choice (Rom 1:24, 26, 28), it is equally true that God sometimes actively interferes in the affairs of men in exercise of His infinite

justice. The Flood was not caused by God's abandonment of this world, nor was it a natural consequence of the world's great wickedness. It was an example of one of God's direct involvements in the destruction of the wicked (Gen 6:7; 2 Pet 2:5). God also acted this way later in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24, 25), killing the firstborn of Egypt (Exod 12: 12-30), the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their followers (Num 16:31-35, 46-49), striking 50,070 irreverent people of Beth-Shemesh (1 Sam 6:19), striking with pestilence 70,000 Israelites after David numbered them (2 Sam 24:15), killing 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 37:36), and the list could go on. God clearly shows that He is not a marshmallow God, He means what He says and says what He means. To get a balanced picture of God, we cannot overlook such incidents.

3. Before the Flood the world was wicked enough, but that was not all. When Jesus came, there was something on this earth the universe had never seen before. At last God had a group of people who seemed to be willing to obey, believe the Bible, keep the ten commandments, and do almost anything else that God required. Now God could show that if people obey Him for the wrong reason, they can actually be His enemies, and crucify their Creator. At the time of the Flood it was demonstrated what wickedness is capable of doing. At the time of Jesus' death, it was demonstrated what the most pious people were able to do--in the name of God and religion. This proved to the universe that the pious fanatics that do not understand the larger issues in the universe can be as

depraved as the wicked. This is what the Flood teaches in the context of the cosmic conflict.

The Table of Nations

An interesting feature of the structure of Gen 1-11 is that the Table of Nations in chap. 10 is not located after the story of the Tower of Babel (11:1-9), but before it. Since chap. 10 recounts the "spreading" of nations (vss. 5, 18, 32), it would be logical to expect it after 11:1-9 where the "scattering" of men "over the face of the whole earth" is narrated.

What is the reason for this? If the material of chap. 10 had followed the Babel story, it would have to be read as the sign of judgment. In the place where it stands, it shows the fulfillment of the divine command of 9:1, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." Theologically, the list affirms God's blessing on Noah's descendants. This shows that the dispersal of the nations must be viewed not only negatively (in light of chap. 11), but also positively (in light of chap. 10). The confusion of languages and the following spreading of the nations must be viewed not only as God's judgment, but also as God's grace to prevent a rapid spread of evil.

Geographically Gen 10 ranges as far east as Persia (Elam), as far south as Ethiopia (Cush), as far north as the Aegean Sea (Caphtorim), as far west as Egypt and Libya. Yet another purpose of this list is seen in the last statement: "From these the nations spread out over the earth after the Flood" (Gen 10:32). The pattern is determined by the number seventy. There are exactly seventy

nations (*goyim*) represented in the list, which is a concept of totality. In other words, all nations find their ultimate origins in Noah. This shows that Israel, or the Eberites, does not have a monopoly on attributing its existence to God. Thus it is not accidental that Jesus sends out seventy disciples into every part of the world.¹ The number of disciples is obviously reflecting Gen 10.

The tower of Babel

The final story of the first part of Genesis is located between the two lines that are traced from Shem.² The first one from Shem to Joktan ends in Babylon (10:22-29); the second from Shem to Peleg with the call of Abraham ends in the Promised Land (11:10-17; 11:27-12:10). It is not hard to see this as intentional on the part of the author, especially in the light of the interplay between the name Shem (*shem*) and the quest for making "a name" (*shem*; 11:4) of Babylonians and God's promise, "I will make your name great" (12:2), in the election of Abraham.

However, this story puts mankind's dispersal in a new light. People want to build a city and a tower, hence to be similar to Cain (4:17). Nevertheless, what is sinful is not so much the desire to build a city or a tower.³ The sin lies in

¹Only Luke, a gentile writer, mentions this detail in 10:1.

²For an interesting chiasmic structure of the tower of Babel story, see Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 234-38.

³God judges the language, not the city. However, it is true that the city Babylon, which has its roots here, becomes the symbol of rebellion against God in the Bible. But Jerusalem becomes the symbol of God's city. At the end, history closes not in a garden, but in the *city* of New Jerusalem which comes down

the purpose: "so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered." "Name" means reputation. They want to erect an edifice that will immortalize them in defiance of God. It is this human self-importance, self-reliance, and self-divinization that God judged and rejected. All the history of Gen 4-11 might lead one to wonder: "Is God's gracious forbearance now exhausted; has God rejected the nations in wrath forever?"¹ The answer comes in the following section of the Pentateuch, Gen 12-Deut 34. The connection is made through the genealogical table leading from Shem through Terah to Abram (11:10-30). This genealogy binds together what follows with what preceded.

Genesis 12:1-3 and the Rest of the Pentateuch

The Abrahamic Promise

Gen 1-11 presents the creation and the continuation of the old conflict between God and Satan that began in heaven (Rev 12:7-9). This struggle was so intense that at Babel (11:1-9) it looked as though there were no people on God's side acknowledging His leadership. In Gen 10 we can see another cycle beginning with a deteriorating situation. God's judgment comes--and the negative aspects of which are in chap. 11. But in the calling Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), we can see the clear beginnings of a new remnant people of God, a positive side of God's

from God (Rev 21-22). There is nothing inherently wrong with a city. This has very far-reaching implications for city evangelism.

¹Von Rad, 153.

judgment. Although living much later in time, Abraham is seen by the author (as far as the literary structure is concerned) as the remnant of chaps. 10 and 11.¹

Abraham is told to leave his country,² his people, and his father's household. He receives a threefold promise: land, posterity (great nation), and that he will be a source of blessing to all people on earth (12:1-3).³ The blessings are repeated in Gen 17 as land, posterity, and a very specific relationship with God, expressed in the covenant (cf. 15:1-21).⁴

Why is Abraham promised these particular blessings? The blessings of Gen 12 and 17 are closely related to Gen 3 and Gen 1. They restore what has been lost in Gen 3-11. Thus, what God is doing for Abraham is not only for him and his immediate descendants, but for the whole human race. The significance of Abraham begins in the light of Babel and goes beyond his life span. Promises made to the patriarchs fulfill God's original plan for humanity from Gen 1.

¹As the salvation of Noah meant a new beginning in the judgment of the Flood, so God provides the gift of salvation in His post-flood judgment. On parallels between God's call of Abraham and God's calling Noah out of the ark, see Sailhamer, 91, 111.

²It is clear from 11:27-32 that Ur of the Chaldeans is meant by this, although there is no mention of it in 12:1-3. On the significance that later biblical literature puts on the fact that Abraham left Ur, see Sailhamer, 109, 110.

³See David J. A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch, JSOT Supplement Series 10. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978); Thomas Edward McComiskey, The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985).

⁴For quotations and allusions to these three blessings in all the Pentateuch, see Clines, 32-43.

Man was given *land* (Gen 1), but it was cursed because of his sin, bringing forth thorns (Gen 3:17, 18). Abraham will get the Promised Land that will finally produce a bountiful harvest (Deut 28).

The promise of *posterity* goes back to Gen 9:1 after the Flood and to Gen 3:16 where the pains of childbirth are associated with posterity after the Fall. At least one nation will achieve what was commanded in the original state earlier in Gen 1:28. Abraham will become "a great nation" with a great "name," as compared with the nations of Gen 10 and their failure to make themselves "a name."¹

Man was given the Garden to be a place of intimate *relationship* with His Creator. The Fall brought separation from that fellowship. This fellowship will be partially restored and assured as God and Abraham enter into a special covenant (17:7).

After the story of Abraham (chaps. 12-25:18), the book of Genesis will continue with the stories of Isaac and Jacob (chaps. 25:19-35:29) and Joseph (37:1-50:26) to follow the line of the "seed" of Abraham,² but the story of Abraham is clearly crucial and the threefold promise is so prominent that it dominates practically all subsequent stories. Thus Gen 12:1-3 is the hinge of all the Pentateuch.³ "The juncture of Gen 1-11 and chs. 12ff. is not only one of the

¹See McComiskey, 17-38.

²On parallels of the story of Abraham with that of all other patriarchs in Genesis, see Wenham, 256-257.

³Cf. Clines, 39-43; Wenham, 267-275.

most important places in the whole Old Testament but one of the most important in the entire Bible."¹

Thus the Pentateuch can be divided into two major divisions: Gen 1-11 and Gen 12-Deut 34. This structure not only elucidates the unity of the Pentateuch, but also reveals that the structure that begins here stretches far beyond the Pentateuch itself.

The Pentateuch shows that these promises have been only partially fulfilled. Abraham is only traversing the land of promise, pitching his tent at the holy places, and building altars. One whole chapter is devoted to securing the cave of Machpelah (Gen 23). This is rather odd for a Western mind, but this small lot of land is the only thing that Abraham really owns. However, the theme of *land* will be picked up in Numbers and Deuteronomy.²

With regard to *posterity*, the wives of the patriarchs in Genesis (Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel) are barren.³ At the close of the book, the seed of Abraham at least numbered seventy (46:27; cf. Exod 1:5), as the number of nations in Gen 10. He who was taken from the nations has reached the number of the nations. The theme of posterity is highlighted in the book of Genesis.

¹La Sor, 57.

²See Clines, 53-60; McComiskey, 42-55 discusses how the promise of the land is treated also in other sections of the OT and in the NT as well.

³For Sarah see Gen 16:1; 17-15-21; for Rebekah 25:21; for Rachel 30:1.

As far as the *relationship* is concerned, all the patriarchs have their ups and downs, even falls, but a deeper moral awareness and a more mature faith can be seen in the patriarchs as the generations progress (although encounters with God are fewer). However, this theme will be picked up in the books of Exodus and Leviticus, whose main purpose is to show how the relationship with God can be maintained and further developed and deepened.¹

The theme of covenant is expanded in Deut 28. If the Israelites continue to "walk with the Lord" they will have blessings of long life, peace from enemies, good harvest, many children, and inheritance of the Promised land (28:3-15). The language is the language of Eden gradually restored and God's original intentions fulfilled, although not completely. However, if they turn away,² all the blessings will be reversed; they lose the land, go to exile and perdition.³

This chapter will become for the rest of the OT what Gen 12:1-3 was for the Pentateuch. All subsequent history will be measured against the Deuteronomistic covenant of Deut 28.⁴ Prophets will not only expose the sins of Israel (and nations), but also God's plan to redeem His people, requiring a new

¹See Clines, 47-53 and McComiskey, 57-58.

²Notice the conditionality of God's promises (Deut 28:1-2, 15).

³See Wolf, 218-22.

⁴See the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. The Wisdom literature provides the individualization of the covenant.

beginning for His people. They look to a time of total restoration and re-creation.¹

There is a contrast between Gen 11:4 ("we will make a name for ourselves") and Gen 12:2 ("I will make your name great"). At Babel we have a great scattering; in Abraham, great gathering. Abraham is not only to be a recipient of the blessing, but also a channel through which this blessing may flow to others. Through Abraham, God's blessings will be restored to "all people on earth" (Gen 12:3). The context shows that all the people on earth who will be blessed are the nations from Gen 10.² In Abraham, God's original blessings will be restored to all humanity. Abraham was called not to enjoy the privileges for himself, but to be a means of reaching the world. That is why Paul could say that Abraham was promised to be heir of the whole world (Rom 4:13, 16).

Conclusion

Gen 1-2 describes the original state of peace and unity in the world. It also describes this as the goal of redemption, to which ultimately the world and humanity will return when all God's promises are completely fulfilled. Chaps. 3-11 explain why man needs salvation and what he needs to be saved from. It shows that God's plan to save people is a part of His larger plan to fulfill His original intentions of love and harmony for all creatures of this universe.

¹Isa 36:6-10; 65:17-25; Ezek 47:1-12; Joel 3:18.

²For Messianic implications of the promise in Gen 12:3, see Kaiser, 30-32, 83-92.

The main themes from this section are the main themes throughout the whole Bible; in the last three chapters of the Bible, the same themes are found.¹

God could have created our world with a snap of His fingers, in just an instant of time. But in the dramatic and significant setting of the celestial conflict, He chose to do it in six twenty-four-hour days. In unhurried majesty and drama, God unfolded His plans for our earth. By the sixth day, the earth was a beautiful place. It was His answer to Satan's false charges that God was selfish. Then He invited the holy pair into a special communion with Him so that they could share fellowship and togetherness with their Creator.

He created mankind as free beings, in His own image with power to think and to do. He even shared as far as possible the power to create. He created us free to either love and trust Him or hate Him and reject Him. God even granted Satan the right to approach our first parents at the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden. But He did not let Satan tempt them more than they were able to bear. Thus the tree was not so much a test of obedience, but rather a protection. The tree was put there because it was primarily God's attempt to answer some of the accusations that had already been leveled against Him.

Satan's first recorded act in the Bible was to make some specific accusations against God, mainly that God is arbitrary. In Gen 3 God arbitrarily

¹The book of Revelation ends with an Eden-like scene (Rev 22:1-5).

singled out one tree as forbidden. Similarly, in Gen 4 God somehow arbitrarily accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's. In Gen 2 and Exod 20, He arbitrarily selected one day out of seven. In Job 1-2 God is accused of arbitrarily favoring Job.

Without the cosmic conflict orientation point, this seems precisely the case. However, understanding what is going on in the universe, we gain a completely different perspective. The Sabbath is not an arbitrary test of obedience, but God's precious gift, as explained above. The tree of knowledge was a protection from Satan's incessant and persistent attacks, which the first couple would not be able to withstand.

The offering in the case of Abel was not an expression of bringing something to a capricious God in order to change His attitude, but an inner expression of the relationship (or a lack of it, in the case of Cain) and a demonstration of the right perception of a larger reality.¹ In the book of Job, God is not arbitrary (limiting freedom), but a freedom-loving God, granting even His Adversary the right to attack Job, his family, and possessions. Keeping in mind the larger view of the cosmic controversy between God and Satan, God is not arbitrary in a negative sense.

¹However, the immediate text does not provide an answer to why God accepted Abel's offering. It seems, that the text shifts its concern to, How does one respond when God says no? The response depends on one's perception of God and that depends on one's perspective of the Bible.

Then comes the Flood. It establishes God's pattern for dealing with humanity. In a deteriorating situation of a wide apostasy, God gives a warning time, raises up a warning person, and calls the remnant back to a faithful walk with Him.¹ Afterwards comes His judgment, which means salvation to some and destruction to some others.

Finally, God's relationship with Abraham arose as a direct response to the events at the tower of Babel. Behind the Babel incident there is a pattern of sin and judgment stretching back to Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden. Thus Israel's roots go not only to Abraham, but back to creation. Even more precisely, the election of Israel is a part of God's larger plan to reverse the effects of mankind's sin and to create a new people who would live with Him in a close fellowship and evangelize others around them.

The end and fulfillment of God's promises described in the Pentateuch lies beyond Deut 34--indeed, beyond the whole OT. When the OT ends, Israel is still looking for the final solution and consummation of the problem poignantly portrayed in Gen 1-11.² The Pentateuch is truly open-ended, for the salvation history begun there awaits its consummation in the Son of Abraham (Matt 1:1), who draws all to Him (John 12:32). That is not only all people but all living

¹Such was also the situation in times of: Moses in response to 430 years (Gen 15:16; Ex 12:40); Daniel in response to Jeremiah's time prophecy of 70 years (Jer 25:11, 12); John the Baptist in response to Daniel's 70-weeks prophecy (Dan 9:24-27). The same pattern can be expected in the last days in response to 1260 years of Rev 12 and 2300 years of Dan 8:14.

²See Gage, 12-13; 27-47.

creatures in the vast universe, thus ending the alienation from God. Then and only then, the misunderstanding of God's character so poignantly portrayed in the prologue of Pentateuch will be ultimately cleared, and the universe will forever live in one pulse of perfect harmony.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter of this project is divided into two sections. The first part consists of a theoretical and theological summary and conclusions based on the research done in Part One of this project. The second part of this chapter consists of a practical summary and conclusions based on the subjective observations gained in the process of teaching the Biblical Theology course with materials found in Part Two.

Theological Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this project was to develop a college course in Biblical Theology based on a book-by-book study of the Bible that could be used in the SDA Theological Seminary in Zaokski, Russia.

Part One of this study established a theoretical background by exploring the biblical and theological foundations for doing Biblical Theology and teaching this subject on an undergraduate college level.

All Christian Theology claims to be Biblical Theology (i.e., to accord with the Bible). But how should it be biblical, and how biblical should it be, are questions that are answered differently in both Catholicism and Protestantism and

differently even within the large spectrum of Protestant theology. The difference lies in the *content* of Biblical Theology, that is in presuppositions we bring to studying the Bible and the methods we use, as well as in the *form* (i.e., how we organize our findings of biblical research). The aspect of content was addressed in chapters 2 and 3, the form in chapter 4.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was an attempt to develop a purely historical and descriptive Biblical Theology independent of Dogmatics (Systematic Theology). The present state of Biblical Theology is largely due to the definition given to it by J. P. Gabler in 1787. After him, Biblical Theology became a historical, purely descriptive discipline which was to give a delineation of the theological views of the biblical writings and the communities of their supposed origin explaining "what it meant" back in biblical times.

This led to an unprecedented emphasis on diversity and evolutionary development within the Scripture, and as a result the discipline split into separate Old Testament and New Testament Theologies, which in turn were succeeded by studies of the religion of ancient Israel and the early church. What is the main reason why Biblical Theology finds itself in such a pitiful impasse at the end of the twentieth century?

I have tried to show in chapter 2 that the problem lies in bringing into biblical studies the historical-critical method with presuppositions which are incompatible with Bible claims. It is astounding that biblical theologians have so

consistently assumed that there was some objective starting point, outside the Bible itself, by which they could judge the biblical materials, including and excluding various parts of the biblical message. It needs to be said that the results of such a process should not in any case be labeled "Biblical Theology," because it deliberately distorts the total biblical witness by selective elimination of parts of it and the reading of the rest of it through a preconceived normative principle.

Historical criticism has regarded the biblical text as data from which to *reconstruct* the history and religion of ancient Israel and the early church. It has looked not so much *at* the text as *through* the text to the history which lies behind it. Thus historical criticism may be profitably used as a branch of history, but can not have its legitimate place in truly *Biblical* Theology.

In chapter 3, I have defined Biblical Theology as an ordered study of the understanding of the revelation of God and especially His relations to the world and humankind. Such study has as its source the *entire* canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. *Biblical* Theology is *limited* to the canonical books of the Bible and based on the *final Christian form* of the canon.

The questions asked in Biblical Theology are: "What did the biblical author believe? Why did he express his thoughts the way he did?" The language is biblical because the time reference is determined by the writer's period. The results of Biblical Theology are not changing, because the intent of biblical authors, nor the meaning of their statements have not changed in the last two

thousand years. The significance of material is descriptive as well as prescriptive (*normative*) because the authors have been inspired by God.

In this chapter I have also explored the relationship of Biblical Theology to other related theological disciplines, mainly Exegesis and Systematic Theology. They stand together in an ongoing dialogue. They coexist in a conceptual unity; it takes all three of them to understand and apply the Word of God for today's life.

In doing exegesis we are asking, "What did the author say?" That is a descriptive discipline, using biblical language; the results of study are not changing. Systematic Theology, on the other hand, is asking, "What is God's will for the church today? What should the church believe today?" The language used is not biblical; problems are addressed in philosophical categories. The significance of findings are prescriptive; some of the results of our findings are changing, because the questions we ask are changing, and the circumstances in which we operate are changing.

I realize, of course, that there are certain dangers in admitting this. One danger is to make everything in Scripture so relative that it will allow whatever our sin-ridden nature craves for and sanction it. The other danger is to go to the other extreme of adopting the doctrine of almost verbal inspiration to demonstrate the complete absence of any ambiguity in the meaning of Scripture, so that mere mechanical compliance with its requirements, without any rational reflection, is the highest ideal to achieve.

The divine inspiration and clarity of Scripture does not mean that it is an automatic source of enlightenment for everyone, or that the meaning of Scripture is so obviously clear as to render hard and devoted labor for its understanding unnecessary. Nevertheless, the bottom line in all this is clear: God has spoken to humanity. The biblical revelation is not so relative or culturally conditioned as to be inaccessible to modern people. We can get back to the intended meaning of the original propositions, and Biblical Theology is definitely part of the process whereby we allow that authoritative message to address us today.

In chapter 4, I considered the methodology of Biblical Theology. First I classified those that have been used in the past into *systematic*, *historical*, and *thematic* approaches. Considering the structure of Biblical Theology, I came to the conclusion that the structure, or principle of organization, for a biblical theology should be determined by the literary units within the Old and New Testament themselves.

Thus I proposed for doing, and especially teaching, Biblical Theology *a book-by-book approach* because thus the structure arises from the most natural literary units in the Bible itself. This method combines the advantages of all three approaches, does justice to the diversity of Scripture topics and genres, and demonstrates the development of biblical thought. At the same time it recognizes the inherent unity of all Bible material because the individual authors have been inspired by God, the common author and mastermind behind the Scriptures.

In this chapter I also discussed and categorized the maze of numerous centers that have been proposed by various theologians. My conclusion is that we need to be on guard against the reductionist enterprise which would like to systematize the Bible by means of a central concept, formula, or literary unit, but also, on the other side, avoid the extreme point of view that would eliminate any quest of a center.

Because the word "center" is so heavily loaded and carries so much of pre-understanding in today's theological world, I prefer to use the designation "orientation point." This orientation point does not serve as an umbrella to encompass all material, but rather as a focal point to illumine the biblical material, to show its common orientation, and give it ultimate meaning. The term "center" in its usual connotation as understood by the critical scholars is an organizing principle; it is a cutting knife to distinguish between the "central" and "peripheral" parts of the Bible. The orientation point does not suggest that it encompasses all the data; but it does serve to provide ultimate reference to all the data.

I proposed the cosmic conflict between God and Satan as the basic "orientation point" of the Bible. This is based on the biblical concept of a controversy between God and His opponent, Satan, that can be clearly seen in the Bible.

When the larger picture of a cosmic struggle forms the background for understanding the Bible, it is much easier to comprehend the activities of God.

A freedom-loving God created a good world in which He placed free creatures. When they rebelled and aligned themselves with the Adversary, He allowed this as necessary evidence in the cosmic struggle between good and evil. Yet God has not abdicated completely His responsibilities and control. He has put some limits on the spread of evil and pleads with His creatures to return to Him, as He has provided a way for all of His wayward children to come home. Part One ended with the theological foundations for this orientation point as found in various Bible books.

Part Two of the project is a practical development of a college course in Biblical Theology. In chapter 5, I have provided the basic outline of the course, giving course objectives, requirements, and also an explanation of how the students are to be evaluated. A schedule for teaching of the content of the course is provided as well.

Chapter 6 is the most extensive part of this study, spreading through 220 pages. This is where the greatest emphasis of this D.Min. project was placed. The Study Guide Questions were developed for each book of the Bible's sixty-six canonical books.

The Study Guides are intended for students' home study in preparation for class discussions. The questions are aimed to help the students reflect on Bible material. Students are expected to be able to show that they have spent some time in contemplation of this material and that their conclusions are consistent with an overall understanding of the Bible. Many of these questions

are to be answered in class, but much additional material is also included in class lectures.

In chapter 7, some examples of interpretation of the Pentateuch have been given. The material covered shows how the orientation point of the cosmic conflict makes a difference in interpreting various Bible material.

Practical Summary and Conclusions

I can summarize the practical conclusions and contributions of this project as follows:

1. I further developed a wholistic approach to Scripture and more expertise in the area of Biblical Theology with a finer understanding of complicated relationships between various schools, approaches, proposals, and theologies.
2. Coherent, consistent, and Bible-based understanding of God's character and His ways of dealing with sin and sinners in the all-pervasive cosmic conflict positively influenced the spirituality of the teacher and students and their personal relationship with God, who values nothing higher than our freedom.
3. The students received a general overview of the present situation and discussions in the field of Biblical Theology along with a better understanding of the differences between Exegesis, Biblical and Systematic Theology, and their basic scope, similarities, and differences.
4. The future ministers gained an intimate knowledge of Bible books and extensive Bible material along with its relationship to basic biblical teachings

and Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. A renewed appreciation of the contribution of the "forgotten" books of the Bible and the Bible generally, as the living and powerful Word of God, was one of the results with both students and myself.

5. The course provided some opportunity to discuss various questions arising from reading the Bible material and helped students in understanding how to interpret and apply the Bible to numerous issues facing the ministry in 1990s.

6. Students had an opportunity to formulate and write out their personal philosophy of approaching the Bible and to understand the implications of one's approach for biblical hermeneutics.

7. The congregations that will be administered by the graduates of Zaokski Seminary in the future will be more Bible-oriented. The SDA Church will have a better opportunity to be perceived as a Bible-based religion, not an American cult foreign to Russian native believers. Much more emphasis will be placed on the importance and relevance of Bible study than in the past. This Bible study will be conducted in a more refined and exegetically proper way than in the past.

It needs to be stressed that this is not the last word in Biblical Theology. There is much that needs to be said and done. The approach outlined in this project needs to be pursued further. The debate about sources, centers, methodologies, and the relationships between Biblical Theology and other branches of theology is a very important hermeneutical determinant. The discussion is clearly far from being settled and needs to be elaborated on. The

Study Guide Questions deserve to be answered in full for each book of the Bible. Then this project can be of more use, not only to the present writer and his students, but also to a much wider public.

In concluding, I wish to say the following: There is a great challenge facing all biblical scholars. Until the Post-Reformation era, we had a Biblical Theology integrated with other theological disciplines. After Gabler, we have had an independent Biblical Theology. What we need now is a co-operative Biblical Theology that will be a type of bridge between Biblical Theology and all other areas of theology. The unhealthy over-specialization and compartmentalization that characterizes much of biblical scholarship today must be overcome. Such a task is a daunting one--this bridge must withstand heavy traffic in all directions. For so long Biblical Theology was the Cinderella of theological disciplines; if we do our part to get it out of the present cul-de-sac, it may come into its own.

APPENDIX

SOME RELEVANT ELLEN G. WHITE STATEMENTS REGARDING BIBLE STUDY AND THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

The plan of salvation involves the whole universe.

1. "All heaven took a deep and joyful interest in the creation of the world and of man. Human beings were a new and distinct order. They were made 'in the image of God,' and it was the Creator's design that they should populate the earth." Review and Herald, February 11, 1902; 1BC 1081.
2. "Through the plan of salvation a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and result of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated." Signs of the Times, December 22, 1914.
3. "But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice--its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man--the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: 'Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto me.' [John 12:31,32] The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God, and would reveal the nature and the results of sin." Patriarchs and Prophets, 68, 69 (1890).

4. "By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. . . Not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe." Desire of Ages, 19 (1898).

5. "To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, 'It is finished,' had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. . .

"Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion." Desire of Ages, 758 (1898).

The security of the universe was even more important than the salvation of man.

6. "It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth. By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped. . .

"Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes? -- The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels." The Signs of the Times, July 12, 1899.

Even sinless angels needed Christ's sacrifice.

7. "The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan. Angelic perfection failed in heaven. . . .

"The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb." Signs of the Times, December 30, 1889; 5BC 1132, 7aBC 252.

Why the angels needed the message of the cross?

8. "For centuries God looked with patience and forbearance upon the cruel treatment given to His ambassadors, at His holy law prostrate, despised,

trampled underfoot. He swept away the inhabitants of the Noachian world with a flood. But when the earth was again peopled, men drew away from God, and renewed their hostility to Him, manifesting bold defiance. Those whom God rescued from Egyptian bondage followed in the footsteps of those who had preceded them. Cause was followed by effect; the earth was being corrupted.

"A crisis had arrived in the government of God. . . All heaven was prepared at the word of God to move to the help of His elect. One word from Him and the bolts of heaven would have fallen upon the earth, filling it with fire and flame. God had but to speak, and there would have been thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes and destruction.

"The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth. . .

"The heavenly universe was amazed at God's patience and love. . . . To save fallen humanity the Son of God took humanity upon Himself. . . "

Review and Herald, July 17, 1900.

9. "For centuries God bore with the inhabitants of the old world. But at last guilt reached its limit. . . He came out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth, and by a flood cleansed the earth of its iniquity.

"Notwithstanding this terrible lesson, men had no sooner begun to multiply once more, than rebellion and vice became widespread. Satan seemed to have taken control of the world. The time came that a change must be made, or the image of God would be obliterated from the hearts of the beings He had created. All heaven watched the movements of God with intense interest. Would He once more manifest His wrath? Would He destroy the world by fire? The angels thought that the time had come to strike the blow of justice, when, lo, to their wondering vision was unveiled the plan of salvation." MS 22, January 10, 1890 (in The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials, 569, 570).

10. "Before Christ's first advent, the sin of refusing to conform to God's law had become widespread. Apparently Satan's power was growing; his warfare against heaven was becoming more and more determined. A crisis had been reached. With intense interest God's movements were watched by the heavenly angels. Would He come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity? Would He send fire or flood to destroy them? All heaven waited the bidding of their Commander to pour out the vials of wrath upon a rebellious world. One word from Him, one sign, and the world would have been destroyed. The worlds unfallen would have said, "Amen. Thou art righteous, O God, because Thou hast exterminated rebellion." The Signs of the Times, August 27, 1902.

The Controversy caused by Satan is over the character of God.

11. "Satan's position in heaven had been next to the Son of God. He was first among the angels." MS 50 1900; (in 1SM 341).

12. "Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ. His countenance, like those of other angels, was mild and expressive of happiness. His forehead was high and broad, showing great intelligence. His form was perfect; his bearing noble and majestic. But when God said to His Son, 'Let us make man in our image,' Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred. He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God." Early Writings, 145 (1858).

13. "From the beginning it has been Satan's studied plan to cause men to forget God, that he might secure them to himself. Hence he has sought to misrepresent the character of God, to lead men to cherish a false conception of Him. The Creator has been presented to their minds as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself,—as arbitrary, severe, and unforgiving,—that He might be feared, shunned and even hated by men. Satan hoped to so confuse the minds of those whom he had deceived that they would put God out of their knowledge." Testimonies, 5: 738 (1889).

14. "It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes millions, of skeptics and infidels." Great Controversy, 536 (1888).

15. "Heaven, looking down, and seeing the delusions into which men were led, knew that a divine Instructor must come to earth. Men in ignorance and moral darkness must have light, spiritual light; for the world knew not God, and He must be revealed to their understanding. Truth looked down from heaven, and saw not the reflection of her image; for dense clouds of moral darkness and gloom enveloped the world, and the Lord Jesus alone was able to roll back the clouds; for He was the light of the world. By His presence He could dissipate the gloomy shadow that Satan had cast between man and God. Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. Through the accumulated misrepresentations of the enemy, many were so deceived that they worshipped a false god, clothed with the attributes of the satanic character." Review and Herald, November 17, 1891; FE 176, 177.

Christ came primarily to reveal the truth about God, His character, law, and government.

16. "The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of His creatures. The very attributes that belong to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent Him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which He could set and keep men right was to make Himself visible and familiar to their eyes. . .

"Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to Him the praise, and giving to Him the credit, of the whole purpose of His own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In His prayer just before His crucifixion, He declared, 'I have manifested Thy name. I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest Me to do.' When the object of His mission was obtained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that His work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men." Signs of the Times, January 20, 1890.

17. "Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed. . . . In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father." Letter 83, 1895 (in That I May Know Him, 338).

18. "The reason why it seems so difficult to win souls for Christ, is that Satan is continually engaged in misrepresenting the character of God to the human mind. Christ came to reveal the Father to the world in His true character, that the false conceptions which men entertained of the divine character might be swept away." Review and Herald, May 31, 1892.

19. "We are not to think of God only as a judge, and to forget Him as our loving Father. Nothing can do our souls greater harm than this; for our whole spiritual life will be molded by our conceptions of God's character." Review and Herald, April 5, 1887.

20. "The law of God is the expression of his character. God possesses absolute, invariable, and immutable independence, and his law is without variable-ness, unalterable, eternal, because it is the transcript of his character. No event

can take place that will in any sense make it necessary to declare a law of a contrary nature. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Any change in the law would mar its perfection. The slightest variance in its precepts would give reason to the hosts of heaven and to unfallen worlds to think that God's counsels and declarations are not to be relied upon, but need to be remodeled, because they are of a faulty character. Should any change be made in the law of God, Satan would gain that for which he had instituted controversy." Signs of the Times, March 12, 1896.

21. "God has a controversy with those who accept the fallacies of the great apostate, which are prepared to suit every class in the Christian world, and who discard the law of God, pronounced by Inspiration to be "holy, and just, and good." By the death of Christ the changeless character of this moral standard of righteousness is shown. Christ lived the law of God's government; he was an expression of God's character; and he died to save men from the penalty of the transgression of this law. Those who reject God's law crucify the Son of God afresh. They identify themselves with those who crucified him between two thieves on the cross of Calvary." Review and Herald, January 30, 1900.

22. "Christ's most favorite theme was the paternal character and abundant love of God. The curse of every church today is that men do not adopt Christ's methods. They think they can improve on the rules given in the gospel, and so are free to define them, hoping thus to reform the churches and the workmen. Let God be our one Master, our one Lord, full of goodness, compassion, and love." Testimonies to Ministers, 192, 193 (1894).

Love and Trust--the things that God desires the most--cannot be commanded or produced by force or fear.

23. "The earth was dark through misapprehension of God. That the gloomy shadows might be lightened, that the world might be brought back to God, Satan's deceptive power was to be broken. This could not be done by force. The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan." Desire of Ages, 22 (1898).

24. "In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom." Desire of Ages, 466 (1898).

25. "The shortness of time is urged as an incentive for us to seek righteousness and to make Christ our friend. This is not the great motive. It savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God be held before us to compel us through fear to right action? This ought not to be." Review and Herald, August 2, 1881; That I May Know Him, 320.

God does not desire obedience that springs from fear or obligation.

26. "The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely--because he is required to do so--will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. . . The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right--because right doing is pleasing to God." Christ's Object Lessons, 97 (1900).

27. "A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. The service is looked upon by such a one in the light of drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul." MS 20, 1897; Signs of the Times, July 22, 1897; section in [. . .] omitted in That I May Know Him, 120.

28. "In heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry, the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery." Mount of Blessing 109 (1896); cf. 1SP 261.

God values our freedom, dignity and individuality.

29. "Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator--individuality, power to think and to do. . . It is the work of true education to develop this power; to train the youth to be thinkers, and not merely reflectors of other men's thoughts. . . . Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions." Education, 17 (1903).

30. "It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light. . . With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God." Great Controversy, 598 (1888).

God does not ask us to believe without evidence.

31. "God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth, will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith." Steps to Christ, 107,108 (1892).

32. "I am afraid of anything that would have a tendency to turn the mind from the solid evidences of the truth as revealed in God's Word. I am afraid of it; I am afraid of it. We must bring our minds within the bounds of reason, lest the enemy so come in as to set everything in a disorderly way." MS 115, 1908; Selected Messages, 2: 43; "The Ralph Mackin Story," Review and Herald, August 17, 1972.

The Holy Spirit persuades by truth and evidence.

33. "The Holy Spirit will not compel men to take a certain course of action. We are free moral agents; and when sufficient evidence has been given us as to our duty, it is left with us to decide our course." Review and Herald, July 17, 1888; FE 124.

34. "Even the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart is to be tested by the Word of God. The Spirit which inspired the Scriptures, always leads to the Scriptures." GC Daily Bulletin, April 13, 1891; ISM 43.

35. "Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily submitted. Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven. The stronghold of Satan would not be broken." Mount of Blessing, 142 (1896).

36. "It is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word. . . The Spirit was not given--nor can it ever be bestowed-- to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested." Great Controversy, vii, ix (1888).

The Bible--all of it--is the authoritative source of truth.

37. "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed." Review and Herald, December 15, 1885; ISM 416.

38. "The Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine." Review and Herald, July 17, 1888; FE 126.

39. "Every chapter and every verse of the Bible is a communication from God to men." Patriarchs and Prophets, 504 (1890).

40. "In our day, as of old, the vital truths of God's Word are set aside for human theories and speculations. Many professed ministers of the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired word. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part. They set up their judgment as superior to the word; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their own authority. Its divine authenticity is destroyed. . . . Christ . . . pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith." Christ's Object Lessons, 39 (1900).

The Bible should be studied as a whole.

41. "Make the Bible its own expositor, bringing together all that is said concerning a given subject at different times and under varied circumstances." Review and Herald, October 9, 1883; CG 511; CSS 42,43.

42. "Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts. He should gain a knowledge of its grand central theme, of God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption. . . . He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found." Education, 190 (1903); CT 65.

43. "To many the Bible is a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that brings misunderstanding and confusion. The work of higher criticism, in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives." Acts of Apostles, 474 (1911).

44. "Those who cry unto God for deliverance from the terrible spell that Satan would weave about them, will set a high estimate upon the Scriptures. Our only safety is in receiving the whole Bible, not taking merely detached portions, but believing the whole truth. Your feet are upon sliding sand if you depreciate one word that is written. The Bible is a divine communication, and is as verily a message to the soul as though a voice from heaven were heard speaking to us. With what awe and reverence and humiliation should we come to the searching of

the Scriptures, that we may learn of eternal realities. When the spell of Satan is broken, and the Bible becomes to us the living word of God, we shall be safe in following our convictions of duty; for if we watch unto prayer, they will be inspired by the Spirit of God. Let everyone study the Bible, knowing that the word of God is as enduring as the eternal throne. If you come to the study of the Scriptures in humility, with earnest prayer for guidance, angels of God will open to you its living realities; and if you cherish the precepts of truth, they will be to you as a wall of fire against the temptations, delusions, and enchantments of Satan." Signs of the Times, September 18, 1893; OHC 204.

45. "The word of God is truth and light, and is to be a lamp unto your feet, to guide you every step of the way to the gates of the city of God. It is for this reason that Satan has made such desperate efforts to obstruct the path that has been cast up for the ransomed of the Lord to walk in. You are not to take your ideas to the Bible, and make your opinions a center around which truth is to revolve. You are to lay aside your ideas at the door of investigation, and with humble, subdued hearts, with self hid in Christ, with earnest prayer, you are to seek wisdom from God. You should feel that you must know the revealed will of God, because it concerns your personal, eternal welfare. The Bible is a directory by which you may know the way to eternal life. You should desire above all things that you may know the will and ways of the Lord. You should not search for the purpose of finding texts of Scripture that you can construe to prove your theories; for the word of God declares that this is wresting the Scriptures to your own destruction. You must empty yourselves of every prejudice, and come in the spirit of prayer to the investigation of the word of God." Review and Herald, September 11, 1894; FE 307, 308.

The importance of Bible study.

46. "Merely to hear or to read the word is not enough. He who desires to be profited by the Scriptures must meditate upon the truth that has been presented to him. By earnest attention and prayerful thought he must learn the meaning of the words of truth, and drink deep of the spirit of the holy oracles.

"God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of the Scriptures." Christ's Object Lessons, 59-60 (1900).

47. "Young men should search the Scriptures for themselves. They are not to feel that it is sufficient for those older in experience to find out the truth; that the younger ones can accept it from them as authority. . .

"Young men in our ranks are watching to see in what spirit the ministers come to the investigation of the Scriptures; whether they have a teachable spirit, and are humble enough to accept evidence, and receive light from the messengers whom God chooses to send.

"We must study the truth for ourselves. No man should be relied upon to think for us. No matter who he is, or in what position he may be placed, we are not to look upon any man as a criterion for us. We are to counsel together, and to be subject one to another; but at the same time we are to exercise the ability God has given us, in order to learn what is truth. Each one of us must look to God for divine enlightenment. We must individually develop a character that will stand the test in the day of God. . ." Testimonies to Ministers, 109, 110; first published in GW 1893 ed., 128-130.

48. "A knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education and of all true service. It is the only real safeguard against temptation. It is this alone that can make us like God in character." Ministry of Healing, 409 (1905).

49. "The Bible with its precious gems of truth was not written for the scholar alone. On the contrary, it was designed for the common people; and the interpretation given by the common people, when aided by the Holy Spirit, accords best with the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. The great truths necessary for salvation are made clear as the noonday, and none will mistake and lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God." Testimonies, 5: 331 (1885).

50. "Teachers should lead students to think, and clearly to understand the truth for themselves. It is not enough for the teacher to explain or for the student to believe; inquiry must be awakened and the student must be drawn out to state the truth in his own language, thus making it evident that he sees its force and makes the application. By painstaking effort the vital truths should thus be impressed upon the mind. This may be a slow process; but it is of more value than rushing over important subjects without due consideration. . . ." Testimonies, 6: 154 (1900).

51. "Those who cannot impartially examine the evidences of a position that differs from theirs, are not fit to teach in any department of God's cause." Review and Herald, February 18, 1890.

52. "Every soul who believes present truth will be brought where he will be required to give a reason of the hope that is in him. The people of God will be called upon to stand before kings, princes, rulers, and great men of the earth, and they must know that they do know what is truth." Review and Herald, February 10, 1890; TM 119; cf. 1SM 416.

53. ". . . there are many in the church who take it for granted that they understand what they believe, but, until controversy arises, they do not know their own weakness. When separated from those of like faith, and compelled to stand singly and alone to explain their belief, they will be surprised to see how confused are their ideas of what they accepted as truth.

"I have been shown that many who profess to have a knowledge of present truth, know not what they believe. They do not understand the evidences of their faith. . . . When the time of trial shall come, there are men now preaching to others, who will find, upon examining the positions they hold, that there are many things for which they can give no satisfactory reason. Until thus tested, they knew not their great ignorance.

"Believers are not to rest in suppositions and ill-defined ideas of what constitutes truth. Their faith must be firmly founded upon the word of God, so that when the testing time shall come, and they are brought before councils to answer for their faith, they may be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them. . .

"It is important that in defending the doctrines which we consider fundamental articles of faith, we should never allow ourselves to employ arguments that are not wholly sound. These may avail to silence an opposer, but they do not honor the truth. We should present sound arguments, that will not only silence our opponents, but will bear the closest and most searching scrutiny. . . ." Testimonies, 5: 703-709 (1885); Gospel Workers, 297-300.

54. "All whom God has blessed with reasoning powers are to become intellectual Christians. They are not requested to believe without evidence; therefore Jesus has enjoined upon all to search the Scriptures. Let the ingenious inquirer, and the one who would know for himself what is truth, exert his mental powers to search out the truth as it is in Jesus. Any neglect here is at the peril of the soul. We must know individually the prescribed conditions of entering into eternal life. . . . We cannot allow these questions to be settled for us by another's mind, or another's judgment. . . . We cannot trust the salvation of our souls to ministers, to idle traditions, to human authorities, or to pretensions. . . . The Lord positively demands of every Christian an intelligent knowledge of the Scriptures." Review and Herald, March 8, 1887.

55. "Satan is constantly endeavoring to attract attention to man in the place of God. He leads the people to look to bishops, to pastors, to professors of theology, as their guides, instead of searching the Scriptures to learn their duty for themselves. . . .

"There are today thousands of professors of religion who can give no other reason for points of faith which they hold than that they were so instructed by their religious leaders. They pass by the Saviour's teachings almost unnoticed, and place implicit confidence in the words of the ministers. But are ministers

infallible? How can we trust our souls to their guidance unless we know from God's word that they are light bearers?" Great Controversy, 595-597 (1888).

56. "A little girl once asked me, . . . 'Will you please ask the minister to speak easy words that we can understand? Will you please tell him that we do not understand large words, like "justification" and "sanctification"? We do not know what these words mean.

"The little girl's complaint contains a lesson worthy of consideration by teachers and ministers. Are there not many who would do well to heed the request, 'Speak easy words, that we may know what you mean'?

"Make your explanations clear, for I know that there are many who do not understand many of the things said to them. Let the Holy Spirit mold and fashion your speech, cleansing it from all dross. Speak as little children, remembering that there are many well advanced in years who are but little children in understanding." Counsels to Teachers, 254 (1902).

57. "It is not excitement we wish to create, but deep, earnest consideration that those who hear shall do solid work, real, sound, genuine work that will be enduring as eternity. We hunger not for excitement, for the sensational; the less we have of this, the better. The calm, earnest reasoning from the Scriptures is precious and fruitful. Here is the secret of success. . . ." Letter 102, 1894; (Ev 170).

58. "We are not to encourage a spirit of enthusiasm that brings zeal for awhile, but soon fades away, leaving discouragement and depression. We need the bread of life that comes down from heaven to give life to the soul. Study the word of God. Do not be controlled by feeling. All who labor in the vineyard of the Lord must learn that feeling is not faith. To be always in a state of elevation is not required. But it is required that we have firm faith in the word of God and the flesh and blood of Christ." Letter 17, 1902; (Ev 138).

59. "It is not excitement that we need at this time, but calm, steady, devoted effort for the education of the people." Letter 17, 1902; (Ev. 131).

60. "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority--not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support." Great Controversy, 595 (1888).

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